
Preface

The last twenty-five years have witnessed an explosion of books, anthologies, and journal articles on the subject of metaphor. Exactly what ignited this intellectual outburst is anyone's guess. It has gone off not only among philosophers, whose fascination with metaphor was first sparked by Aristotle, and among literary theorists, metaphor's native consumers, but on every intellectual front: among linguists, psychologists, anthropologists, historians of science, art historians, and theologians. What was once a specialized topic in rhetoric and poetics has now also come to be fertile ground for interdisciplinary research. Yet when we survey the plethora of offspring of all this crossbreeding, it is difficult not to wonder about their species. What about metaphor are all these theories of metaphor theories of? What problem(s) posed by metaphor are they trying to solve?

We might begin by distinguishing two main kinds of interest that have drawn thinkers to metaphor over the course of its long history. (At this point I'll retreat to philosophy, the discipline I know best, but most of what I say also applies elsewhere.) The first of these interests is older and, since the Romantics and Nietzsche, it has also achieved a certain prominence. For thinkers of this persuasion metaphor is an "intrinsically interesting" phenomenon, something on the order of human love or a complex moral problem or the origin of the physical universe, subjects that do, or should, command our direct attention. Some philosophers find this intrinsic interest in metaphor because they take it to be exemplary of human creativity, or the fundamental mode of expression in thought and language, or a window into the imagination. Others view a metaphor as the basic unit, or work, of art or of poetry, and still others as a central tool of scientific explanation or as an essential element of theological discourse. In short, for everyone with this first kind of interest, metaphor belongs up there with The Big Questions. Mark Johnson puts the view well: "the ex-

amination of metaphor is one of the more fruitful ways of approaching fundamental logical, epistemological, and ontological issues central to any philosophical understanding of human experience.”¹

Thinkers with the second kind of interest do not find any such intrinsic philosophical value in metaphor, or at least no more than they find in, say, slips of the tongue or hyperbole. These phenomena may raise interesting empirical or descriptive questions but they sound no deep philosophical chords. Nonetheless metaphor *is* interesting for these philosophers (as well as linguists and cognitive scientists) because it bears on other issues or questions that are themselves intrinsically interesting. Metaphor excites these inquirers for the same reason “exotic” phenomena draw physicists: because of their admittedly remote but potentially significant implications for general explanatory principles that are of primary interest to the field.

To draw a comparison closer to home, consider the interest that certain oddly ungrammatical strings hold for contemporary theoretical linguists, strings like ‘We try John to win’ or ‘Himself left’. As phenomena in their own right, these strings should have no intrinsic interest: They are never uttered and, therefore, they need no explanation. However, against a theoretical background they stand out in virtue of the particular ways in which they are ungrammatical. The bizarre ways in which they are deviant have the power to confirm or falsify hypotheses concerning abstract principles of grammar, which, in turn, do explain the grammatical properties of strings that *are* uttered and, therefore, call out for explanation.

In recent years metaphor has assumed an analogous kind of *non*-intrinsic interest for philosophers—as well as linguists and cognitive scientists—developing semantic theories of natural language. As increasing attention has been paid to the nuances, complications, and apparently irregular aspects of natural language, metaphor has been one case that has tested and tried our ability to give precise, systematic characterizations of the ordinary notions we use to describe its ordinary functioning, notions like meaning (or change of meaning), truth, or significance. Suppose, for example, we distinguish between an individual’s knowledge of language—including his knowledge of semantic rules that assign interpretations to strings of words—and his ability to *use* that knowledge to make utterances with other meanings and effects. On which side of the divide should metaphor fall? If metaphorical interpretations of strings are not predicted by specific proposed semantic rules, what conclusion should we draw? That the fault lies with the semantic rules? Or that the failure is proof that metaphor does not fall in semantics and language proper? That it is instead just one among many ways of using (or misusing) our knowledge of

language? The conclusion we draw will obviously carry serious implications for our background semantic theory. Within such a theoretical context, metaphor acquires important albeit derivative interest.

I do not intend to fall into the trap of trying to classify all philosophers who have written on metaphor into one or the other of these two categories of interest. For one thing, the categories are not mutually exclusive. For another, there is the danger that one might be tempted to identify philosophers with the first kind of intrinsic interest as the “friends” of metaphor and those with a derivative interest as its “enemies.” As much as these labels make any sense at all, friends and enemies of metaphor are to be found among thinkers with either kind of interest. Hobbes and Locke, two of the greatest detractors of metaphor in its history, no less than Nietzsche and Coleridge, two of its greatest inflators, share an intrinsic interest in metaphor. And who is to say whether someone who takes metaphor to be a use of language rather than a type of semantic interpretation is a “friend” or “enemy”?²

So long as we heed these warnings not to abuse the distinction, it can be helpful to know which kind of interest motivates an author if only because it will put the problems and topics he addresses in perspective. In this essay, for example, I am guided in the first place by a derivative interest of the second kind. Throughout the last two decades’ abundant writing on metaphor, one assumption has been typically taken for granted (although it is occasionally given a supportive argument and, less occasionally, challenged): that metaphor lies outside, if not in opposition to, our received conceptions of semantics and grammar, semantics in the classical sense of the Frege-Tarski tradition and grammar as linguists conceive it as a speaker’s knowledge of language. Some authors (e.g., Jerry Sadock, Paul Grice, John Searle, Robert Fogelin, Ted Cohen, Daniel Sperber, and Dierde Wilson) think that we must *supplement* semantics with theories of pragmatics, conversation, or speech acts in order to deal with metaphor. Others (e.g., Donald Davidson, Richard Rorty, David Cooper) think that the significance of a metaphor being a use of language is that it resists *any* kind of general theoretical explanation, semantic or pragmatic; at best, they hold, we can tell detailed but ad hoc stories for individual utterances of metaphor. And for yet a third group (George Lakoff and his school, and Paul Ricoeur), the fact that metaphor lies outside the purview of classical semantics is one more example of the poverty of the tradition, one more symptom that what is really needed is nothing less than a radical revision—or wholesale rejection—of classical semantics, which, they charge, was framed on the model of literal lan-

guage with a built-in bias against “nonscientific” or “nonmathematical” language.³ Despite the many differences between these views, they all assume (generally without argument) that metaphor cannot be explained by or within semantics. By the same token, it is also taken for granted that metaphor has little if anything to teach us about semantic theory. One aim of this book is to challenge these two assumptions: I hope to show how semantic theory can constructively inform our understanding of metaphor and how metaphor can illuminate semantic theory in general and the role of context in theories of meaning in particular.

To be more specific, I am concerned primarily with one question: Given the (more or less) received conception of the form and goals of semantic theory, does metaphorical interpretation, in whole or part, fall within its scope? Or in more material terms: What (if anything) does a speaker-hearer know as part of his semantic competence when he knows the interpretation of a metaphor? These questions are not entirely new to discussions of metaphor, but using the theoretical apparatus of current semantics we can bring powerful and relatively well-tuned explanatory tools to bear on them. For example, it is often said that a defining characteristic of a metaphor is that its interpretation “depends” on its literal meaning, but what is the nature of that “dependence”? Is it a kind of functionality and, if so, is it semantic or pragmatic? And if the metaphorical interpretation of an expression “depends” on its literal meaning, then the expression must still “have” its literal meaning. In what sense? And how is the literal meaning that the expression has, even while it is interpreted metaphorically, different from its metaphorical interpretation or meaning? As these questions are usually formulated, terms like “meaning,” “interpretation,” and “dependency” are left in a vague, unexplicated, pretheoretical state, making it almost impossible to give them definite answers. But the pay-off need not be only for metaphor. If we can show that features heretofore thought to be peculiar to metaphor are instances of more general semantic regularities that hold throughout natural language, we can also enrich the explanatory power of our general semantic theories.

In addition to these semantic problems raised by metaphor, I shall also try to throw some light on a spectrum of questions that have heretofore been addressed mainly by writers concerned with metaphor as an intrinsically interesting phenomenon, especially questions concerning the cognitive significance of a metaphor. However, my approach will differ from that of most previous metaphor theorists who have taken these problems to be *sui generis* to metaphor. Instead I shall try to show how, by em-

ploying our semantic theory, these puzzling aspects of the behavior of metaphors can be given a diagnosis, or description, that does not deny their distinctiveness, yet subsumes them under the same rubric as other semantic facts that hold for nonmetaphorical language.

I cannot, of course, simply assume, as if it needs no defense, that metaphor lies within the scope of semantics. But the best defense is sometimes a good offense. Although I shall address various objections to the semantic status of metaphor in chapters 2, 7, and 8, my strongest evidence will consist in the semantic explanations I propose as working hypotheses. Yet, I should emphasize that, despite my sympathetic stance toward classical semantics, I do not mean to suggest that I think that the specific claims of the current semantic theories I employ are the final whole truth. Along with (I would imagine) most contemporary philosophers of language, I readily concede that we are still at the very beginning of our understanding of natural language and that our available semantic theories are far from finished. This is especially true for our theories of demonstratives and the semantic treatment of context—those parts of semantics that will matter most for our account. To the degree to which my account of metaphor rests on these notions, it is also no more than a first approximation to a final answer. It would be better, then, to view this essay not as an attempt to give a *theory* of metaphor but, more modestly, as an attempt to “map out” the semantic topography of metaphor. Even if all I accomplish is to *locate* metaphor relative to some of the other landmarks of current semantics or, a bit better, if I persuade you that the attempt to *situate* metaphor in relation to current semantics is a project worth pursuing, this essay will have succeeded.

The proximate stimulus for this book was the 1974 Linguistics Institute at University of Massachusetts, Amherst where I took a course on pragmatics with Robert Stalnaker who introduced me both to his own seminal essays on presuppositions and to David Kaplan’s (then unpublished) “Dthat.” My debt to the writings of Stalnaker and Kaplan will be obvious to the reader. Kaplan’s work in particular has been a rich source of stimulation for my own philosophical imagination, and I hope this application of his semantics for demonstratives to metaphor will be a small contribution to his own program.

It was around the same time that I noticed the failure of substitutivity of (literally) co-extensive expressions interpreted metaphorically and, when I returned to Columbia from Amherst in the fall of 1974, the basic idea of this book—to treat metaphors as demonstratives—occurred to

me. My first sustained attempt to work out the idea was my 1979 Columbia dissertation, written under the direction of Charles Parsons, Sidney Morgenbesser, and James Higginbotham. I am deeply grateful to all three of them, not only for their help with the thesis, but for a superb philosophical education in general. I should also single out Jim Higginbotham who first taught me philosophy of language and linguistics and then lavished endless hours on the dissertation, generously sharing his own ideas as well as criticisms. From that same era, I also want to thank for discussions and comments the late Monroe Beardsley, Merrie Bergmann, Arthur Danto, Robert Fiengo, Richard Kuhns, Isaac Levi, Robert Matthews, Georges Rey, Israel Scheffler, Robert Schwartz, Ted Talbot, and Ellen Winner.

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In Hebrew, *aharon aharon haviv*: Last is dearest. I want to thank my parents, Kurt Stern and the late Florence Sherman Stern, for their continual love and support. David Stern, my unliteral identical other half, constantly mistaken for me just as I am for him, has graciously agreed to accept full responsibility for all blunders in what follows. From Amitai, Rafi, and Yoni, my own Stern Gang, I have learned how many metaphors resist literal expression; my thanks to them also for use of the computer in their spare time. Finally, not only can't literal words express what I owe Cheryl Newman for the love and devotion that made this book possible and continue to make most everything else in my life worthwhile; even metaphor can't say it all.

A final disclaimer: Any resemblance between characters mentioned in examples and actual persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.