

METAPHORS We Live By

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merely INFLATION IS A PERSON. It is much more specific, namely, INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY. It not only gives us a very specific way of thinking about inflation but also a way of acting toward it. We think of inflation as an adversary that can attack us, hurt us, steal from us, even destroy us. The INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY metaphor therefore gives rise to and justifies political and economic actions on the part of our government: declaring war on inflation, setting targets, calling for sacrifices, installing a new chain of command, etc.

The point here is that personification is a general category that covers a very wide range of metaphors, each picking out different aspects of a person or ways of looking at a person. What they all have in common is that they are extensions of ontological metaphors and that they allow us to make sense of phenomena in the world in human terms—terms that we can understand on the basis of our own motivations, goals, actions, and characteristics. Viewing something as abstract as inflation in human terms has an explanatory power of the only sort that makes sense to most people. When we are suffering substantial economic losses due to complex economic and political factors that no one really understands, the INFLATION IS AN ADVERSARY metaphor at least gives us a coherent account of why we're suffering these losses.

Metonymy

In the cases of personification that we have looked at we are imputing human qualities to things that are not human—theories, diseases, inflation, etc. In such cases there are no actual human beings referred to. When we say "Inflation robbed me of my savings," we are not using the term "inflation" to refer to a person. Cases like this must be distinguished from cases like

The *ham sandwich* is waiting for his check.

where the expression "the ham sandwich" is being used to refer to an actual person, the person who ordered the ham sandwich. Such cases are not instances of personification metaphors, since we do not understand "the ham sandwich" by imputing human qualities to it. Instead, we are using one entity to refer to another that is related to it. This is a case of what we will call *metonymy*. Here are some further examples:

He likes to read the *Marquis de Sade*. (= the writings of the marquis)

He's in *dance*. (= the dancing profession)

Acrylic has taken over the art world. (= the use of acrylic paint)

The *Times* hasn't arrived at the press conference yet. (= the reporter from the *Times*)

Mrs. Grundy frowns on *blue jeans*. (= the wearing of blue jeans)

New windshield wipers will satisfy him. (= the state of having new wipers)

We are including as a special case of metonymy what traditional rhetoricians have called *synecdoche*, where the part stands for the whole, as in the following.

THE PART FOR THE WHOLE

The *automobile* is clogging our highways. (= the collection of automobiles)

We need a couple of *strong bodies* for our team. (= strong people)

There are a lot of *good heads* in the university. (= intelligent people)

I've got a new *set of wheels*. (= car, motorcycle, etc.)

We need some *new blood* in the organization. (= new people)

In these cases, as in the other cases of metonymy, one entity is being used to refer to another. Metaphor and metonymy are different *kinds* of processes. Metaphor is principally a way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to *stand for* another. But metonymy is not merely a referential device. It also serves the function of providing understanding. For example, in the case of the metonymy THE PART FOR THE WHOLE there are many parts that can stand for the whole. Which part we pick out determines which aspect of the whole we are focusing on. When we say that we need some *good heads* on the project, we are using "good heads" to refer to "intelligent people." The point is not just to use a part (head) to stand for a whole (person) but rather to pick out a particular characteristic of the person, namely, intelligence, which is associated with the head. The same is true of other kinds of metonymies. When we say "The *Times* hasn't arrived at the press conference yet," we are using "The *Times*" not merely to refer to some reporter or other but also to suggest the importance of the institution the reporter represents. So "The *Times* has not yet arrived for the press conference" means something different from

"Steve Roberts has not yet arrived for the press conference," even though Steve Roberts may be the *Times* reporter in question.

Thus metonymy serves some of the same purposes that metaphor does, and in somewhat the same way, but it allows us to focus more specifically on certain aspects of what is being referred to. It is also like metaphor in that it is not just a poetic or rhetorical device. Nor is it just a matter of language. Metonymic concepts (like THE PART FOR THE WHOLE) are part of the ordinary, everyday way we think and act as well as talk.

For example, we have in our conceptual system a special case of the metonymy THE PART FOR THE WHOLE, namely, THE FACE FOR THE PERSON. For example:

She's just a *pretty face*.

There are an *awful lot of faces* out there in the audience.

We need some *new faces* around here.

This metonymy functions actively in our culture. The tradition of portraits, in both painting and photography, is based on it. If you ask me to show you a picture of my son and I show you a picture of his face, you will be satisfied. You will consider yourself to have seen a picture of him. But if I show you a picture of his body without his face, you will consider it strange and will not be satisfied. You might even ask, "But what does he look like?" Thus the metonymy THE FACE FOR THE PERSON is not merely a matter of language. In our culture we look at a person's face—rather than his posture or his movements—to get our basic information about what the person is like. We function in terms of a metonymy when we perceive the person in terms of his face and act on those perceptions.

Like metaphors, metonymies are not random or arbitrary occurrences, to be treated as isolated instances. Metonymic concepts are also systematic, as can be seen in the following representative examples that exist in our culture.

THE PART FOR THE WHOLE

Get *your butt* over here!
 We don't hire *longhairs*.
 The Giants need a *stronger arm* in right field.
 I've got a new *four-on-the-floor V-8*.

PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT

I'll have a *Löwenbräu*.
 He bought a *Ford*.
 He's got a *Picasso* in his den.
 I hate to read *Heidegger*.

OBJECT USED FOR USER

The *sax* has the flu today.
 The *BLT* is a lousy tipper.
 The *gun* he hired wanted fifty grand.
 We need a better *glove* at third base.
 The *buses* are on strike.

CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED

Nixon bombed Hanoi.
Ozawa gave a terrible concert last night.
Napoleon lost at Waterloo.
Casey Stengel won a lot of pennants.
 A Mercedes rear-ended *me*.

INSTITUTION FOR PEOPLE RESPONSIBLE

Exxon has raised its prices again.
 You'll never get the *university* to agree to that.
 The *Army* wants to reinstitute the draft.
 The *Senate* thinks abortion is immoral.
 I don't approve of the *government's* actions.

THE PLACE FOR THE INSTITUTION

The *White House* isn't saying anything.
Washington is insensitive to the needs of the people.
 The *Kremlin* threatened to boycott the next round of SALT talks.
Paris is introducing longer skirts this season.
Hollywood isn't what it used to be.
Wall Street is in a panic.

THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT

Let's not let Thailand become another *Vietnam*.
 Remember *the Alamo*.
Pearl Harbor still has an effect on our foreign policy.
Watergate changed our politics.
 It's been *Grand Central Station* here all day.

Metonymic concepts like these are systematic in the same way that metaphoric concepts are. The sentences given above are not random. They are instances of certain general metonymic concepts in terms of which we organize our thoughts and actions. Metonymic concepts allow us to conceptualize one thing by means of its relation to something else. When we think of *a Picasso*, we are not just thinking of a work of art alone, in and of itself. We think of it in terms of its relation to the artist, that is, his conception of art, his technique, his role in art history, etc. We act with reverence toward *a Picasso*, even a sketch he made as a teen-ager, because of its relation to the artist. This is a way in which the PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT metonymy affects both our thought and our action. Similarly, when a waitress says "The ham sandwich wants his check," she is not interested in the person as a person but only as a customer, which is why the use of such a sentence is dehumanizing. Nixon himself may not have dropped the bombs on Hanoi, but via the CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED metonymy we not only say "Nixon bombed Hanoi" but also think of him as doing the bombing and hold him responsible for it. Again this is possible because of the nature of the metonymic relationship in the CONTROLLER FOR CONTROLLED metonymy, where responsibility is what is focused on.

Thus, like metaphors, metonymic concepts structure not just our language but our thoughts, attitudes, and actions. And, like metaphoric concepts, metonymic concepts are grounded in our experience. In fact, the grounding of metonymic concepts is in general more obvious than is the case with metaphoric concepts, since it usually involves direct physical or causal associations. The PART FOR

WHOLE metonymy, for example, emerges from our experiences with the way parts in general are related to wholes. PRODUCER FOR PRODUCT is based on the causal (and typically physical) relationship between a producer and his product. THE PLACE FOR THE EVENT is grounded in our experience with the physical location of events. And so on.

Cultural and religious symbolism are special cases of metonymy. Within Christianity, for example, there is the metonymy DOVE FOR HOLY SPIRIT. As is typical with metonymies, this symbolism is not arbitrary. It is grounded in the conception of the dove in Western culture and the conception of the Holy Spirit in Christian theology. There is a reason why the dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit and not, say, the chicken, the vulture, or the ostrich. The dove is conceived of as beautiful, friendly, gentle, and, above all, peaceful. As a bird, its natural habitat is the sky, which metonymically stands for heaven, the natural habitat of the Holy Spirit. The dove is a bird that flies gracefully, glides silently, and is typically seen coming out of the sky and landing among people.

The conceptual systems of cultures and religions are metaphorical in nature. Symbolic metonymies are critical links between everyday experience and the coherent metaphorical systems that characterize religions and cultures. Symbolic metonymies that are grounded in our physical experience provide an essential means of comprehending religious and cultural concepts.

Challenges to Metaphorical Coherence

We have offered evidence that metaphors and metonymies are not random but instead form coherent systems in terms of which we conceptualize our experience. But it is easy to find apparent incoherences in everyday metaphorical expressions. We have not made a complete study of these, but those that we have looked at in detail have turned out not to be incoherent at all, though they appeared that way at first. Let us consider two examples.

An Apparent Metaphorical Contradiction

Charles Fillmore has observed (in conversation) that English appears to have two contradictory organizations of time. In the first, the future is in front and the past is behind:

In the weeks ahead of us . . . (future)

That's all behind us now. (past)

In the second, the future is behind and the past is in front:

In the following weeks . . . (future)

In the preceding weeks . . . (past)

This appears to be a contradiction in the metaphorical organization of time. Moreover, the apparently contradictory metaphors can mix with no ill effect, as in

We're looking *ahead* to the *following* weeks.

Here it appears that *ahead* organizes the future in front, while *following* organizes it behind.

To see that there is, in fact, a coherence here, we first