FIGURATIVELY SPEAKING

ROBERT J. FOGELIN

REVISED EDITION

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BY ROBERT J. FOGELIN

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For Florence Fogelin

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Preface to the First Edition

Though they appear first, prefaces are always written last, often in a make-believe future tense. This preface is backward looking: It is intended to thank those who have helped bring this work to completion.

Since various parts of this essay have been presented in different stages of development to a number of audiences, it is not possible to acknowledge all my debts. I have learned a great deal from discussions that have followed these presentations, as I have from conversations with my colleagues in the Dartmouth Philosophy Department.

Throughout this work I have tried to test my ideas concerning figurative language against rich and complex literary texts, and in doing so I have come to appreciate the possibilities for alternative readings of these texts. Here I have profited particularly from conversations with Stanley Eveling and Florence Fogelin.

Ted Cohen, someone I have met only once, and then only briefly, read the complete manuscript with sympathy and care

and made important suggestions for its improvement. At various points I have tried to acknowledge his contributions, but some of his most important suggestions must remain unacknowledged since we do not have a convention for thanking people for things they have persuaded us not to say.

I also wish to thank Jane Taylor and Judith Calvert for their help in copyediting the text, and Jeanne Ferris of Yale University Press for her support in bringing this slim volume into print.

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Preface to the Revised Edition

This work is a revised edition of *Figuratively Speaking*, published in 1988. The central theme in these two editions is essentially the same: In the face of a great deal of contemporary opposition, I offer and defend a modern restatement of the traditional account of figurative language found, for example, in the works of Aristotle.

In the process of revision, I have made some useful deletions and, I hope, a number of useful additions. Because the account of figurative language that I promote relies heavily on the works of Paul Grice (aka H. P. Grice), I have offered a brief, informal summary of his notions of conversational maxims and the conversational implicatures that are based on them.

Chapter 7 has been considerably expanded. It now contains an examination of synecdoche, a trope strangely ignored in the original edition. It also applies the notion of figurative comparisons to fables and satires. Given my amateur status as a literary critic, this is risky. It is, however, important for my

purposes to show that the approach I adopt with regard to figurative language goes beyond hackneyed examples ("Sally is a block of ice.") and has direct application to rich literary works.

Since its publication, *Figuratively Speaking* has faced various criticisms. Because the targets of these criticisms remain essentially unchanged, it seemed prudent to address them. William Lycan has produced what I take to be the most probing criticisms, so I have responded directly to them. In the process I think I have implicitly responded to objections raised by others.

Though the program pursued in the original edition of *Figuratively Speaking* remains essentially unchanged, when I got the text back in my hands I could not resist making stylistic changes throughout. Bad habits formed in writing a doctoral dissertation and publishing for tenure are not easy to overcome.

I have received institutional support for this project from the Faculty Research Fund at Dartmouth College and from a generous Emeritus Grant from the Mellon Foundation. I would also like to thank Peter Ohlin of the Oxford University Press for his encouragement and support. As before, I wish to thank Florence Fogelin and Jane Taylor for their insightful suggestions and for their skill and patience in dealing with my gaffes.

1

Introduction

The central theme of this work is that figures of speech—at least those that I will consider—involve departures from the rules that govern the literal use of language. This approach, however, is limited. It has no obvious application to *hyperbation* or any of those other figures (*anaphora, symploce*, et cetera) that concern word order, patterns of repetition, and the like. Their use, for example, in the speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr., shows their lasting power, and it would be interesting to know how these syntactical, seemingly mechanical figures achieve this. I will not, however, discuss them here because they are not connected with meaning in the way that interests me.

Using current critical vocabulary, I might say that I am interested in tropes as opposed to schemes (figures of thought as opposed to figures of sound), but this could prove misleading as well. Richard Lanham describes current critical usage of the notion of a trope in this way:

> Such consensus as there is wants trope to mean a Figure that changes the meaning of a word or words, rather than

> simply arranging them in a pattern of some sort. (Lanham 1991, 154–55)

Over against this, I will argue, as others have, that in most figures traditionally called tropes, literal meaning is preserved rather than altered. Generally—and the exceptions are interesting and will be examined in detail—I am primarily concerned with those figures of speech that relate to meaning in a way that bears upon the truth of what is asserted.

Irony presents a clear example of a figure that functions in the way that concerns me. Reflecting on his government's tendency to develop oppressive institutions opposite in character from the communist ideals they were supposed to establish, a Romanian intellectual remarked, "We would have done better to seek a fascist state." It is clear what he is getting at, and he is certainly not expressing a preference for fascism. If asked bluntly "Do you really believe that?" he would probably blink in disbelief at the naiveté of the question, but still, the answer to it would be no.

Generally speaking, we are not supposed to make assertions that we take to be false, for this often amounts to lying. Yet ironic statements are often—perhaps usually—utterances that the speaker takes to be false. Why aren't they treated as lies? Borrowing (and much simplifying) ideas developed by Paul Grice, the following is a first approximation of how ironic utterances work:

> *A* says something to *B* that she (*A*) takes to be false under the assumption that *B* will recognize it to be false, and, beyond this, also recognize that *A* intends *B* to recognize that this was her intention.

At first sight, this formula may seem intimidating, but it becomes intelligible if we see how it distinguishes speaking ironically from lying. In lying:

> *A* says something to *B* that she (*A*) takes to be false under the assumption that *B* will accept it as true, and beyond this not recognize that *A* intends *B* not to recognize that this was her intention.

Both in speaking ironically and in lying, we utter a false statement, but, when we lie, we attempt to mislead our listener; when we speak ironically, we (normally) do not. When we lie, we mask our intentions; when we speak ironically we do not.

This preliminary account of irony combines two ideas: (1) a departure from the rules governing the literal use of language (here saying something false), and (2) a mutual recognition of the intentions with which something is said. These combined notions of departures from the literal and the mutual recognition of intentions were given systematic development in Paul Grice's treatment of figurative language. Because his ideas will play an important part in the discussion to follow, I will offer a broad sketch of his position on these matters.

If figurative language (of the kind examined here) involves departures from literal language, then an examination of literal uses of language should be the starting point for an examination of figurative language. Following Grice, we will start with a case of one person trying to convey literal information to another. At the start we will envisage the situation to be *cooperative*; that is, the speaker will do her best to convey the information efficiently, and the respondent will attempt to respond to it appropriately. The speaker, for example, will not employ technical terms that the respondent is not likely to understand, and the respondent will not divert the exchange with irrelevant questions. Both speaker and respondent will be governed by what Grice calls the

Cooperative Principle. It can be expressed in a one-word maxim: Cooperate![1]

Grice's approach takes on more substance when he turns to specifying sub-maxims that are intended to facilitate cooperation. I will run through them quickly. The first pair of sub-maxims concerns what Grice calls *Quantity*:

> Quantity (1). Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange).
> Quantity (2). Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (Grice 1989, 26)

Here is a simple example of how these two maxims function: *A* is driving through an unfamiliar city trying to find the hotel where she has made a reservation. She stops to ask a pedestrian for directions to the hotel. Not realizing it, she has parked directly in front of that very hotel. The pedestrian she asks knows that *A* is in front of the hotel she is asking about, but nonetheless simply gives *A* the address of the hotel. Here the pedestrian has spoken the truth, but still has violated the first rule of quantity, for telling *A* that she is already at the hotel is more usefully informative than simply giving *A* its address. Alternatively, the pedestrian might launch into a long disquisition concerning the hotel's previous locations, what changes of ownership it had passed through, what sort of hotel it is, and so on until finally telling *A* that she is parked in front of the hotel she is asking about. Even if everything the pedestrian says is true, he has violated the second rule of quantity by uselessly supplying more information than was necessary.

Another of Grice's rules is called the rule of *Quality*. In general:

1. Grice states the Cooperative Principle in these words: "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged." (Grice 1989, 26)

> Try to make your contribution one that is true.

More specifically:

> Quality (1). Do not say what you believe to be false.
> Quality (2). Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence. (27)

Quality (1) is a rule against lying. Quality (2) is a rule against talking off the top of one's head.

Grice's third rule concerns *Relevance*. Simply stated, the rule of relevance says:

> Be relevant! (27)

Though easy to state, the rule is not easy to explain, because relevance itself is a difficult notion. It is, however, easy to illustrate. If someone asks me where he can find a doctor, I might reply that there is a hospital in the next block. Though not a direct answer to his question, it does not violate the rule of relevance because it provides him with a piece of useful information. If, however, in response I tell him that I do not like his haircut, then I have violated the rule of relevance. Clear-cut violations of this principle often involve *changing the subject.* Violations of this rule are often much more subtle.

Grice's fourth general maxim concerns the *Manner* of our conversation. We are expected to be clear in what we say. Under this general rule come various special rules:

> (1) Avoid obscurity of expression.
> (2) Avoid ambiguity.
> (3) Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
> (4) Be orderly.
>
> And one might need others. (27)

Encountering Grice's conversational maxims for the first time can produce a number of responses. They may seem to be platitudes. They may seem completely out of touch with the

way people actually use language. For Grice, their seeming to be platitudes is something in their favor. Platitudinous truths can serve as a reasonably safe starting place. That they are completely out of touch with the way people actually use language is something Grice would deny. He attempts to show that these conversational maxims can be used to shed light on the way people actually speak not only in, but beyond, a cooperative context.

Grice's key idea is that these conversational maxims provide the basis for *conversational implications*—or, as he prefers to call them, *conversational implicatures*. In a cooperative context, people are supposed to abide by the conversational maxims that fall under the general maxim: Cooperate. In this cooperative context people rarely say explicitly that they are obeying these maxims, but they are expected to obey them, and their respondents have a right to suppose they are. To go back to the previous example, if the pedestrian is abiding by the cooperative principle, he will say something like, "Lady, you are parked right in front of it." It is highly unlikely that he will go on to say, "That's all you need to know; I'm telling the truth; I have given you a direct response to your question; and I have been perfectly clear and concise." Yet even if he does not explicitly say any of these things, his saying "Lady, you are parked right in front of it," conversationally implies them.

Later we will see that conversational implication plays an important role in using language figuratively. Here at the start it is crucial to see how significant a role it plays in everyday literal uses of language. More strongly, without the mutual recognition of conversational implicatures, everyday conversations would fall apart. Here is an example:

A: Do you know what time it is?
B: Not without looking at my watch.

B has answered *A*'s question, but it is hard to imagine that *A* has received the information she was looking for. Presumably she wants to know what time it is, not merely whether *B*, at that very moment, knows the time. Finding *B* rather obtuse, *A* tries again:

A: Can you tell me what time it is?
B: Oh, yes, all I have to do is look at my watch.

Undaunted, *A* gives it another try:

A: Will you tell me what time it is?
B: I suppose I will as soon as you ask me.

Finally:

A: What time is it?
B: Two o'clock. Why didn't you ask me that in the first place?

Notice that in each of these exchanges *B* gives a direct and accurate answer to *A*'s question, yet, in all but the last answer, he does not provide *A* with what she wants. Here we might say that *B* is taking *A*'s questions too literally, but we might better say that the problem is that *B* does nothing *more* than take *A*'s remarks literally. In a conversational exchange, we expect others to take our remarks in the light of the obvious purpose we have in making them. We expect them to share our commonsense understanding of why people ask questions. At the very least, we expect people to respond to us in ways that are *relevant* to our purposes. Except at the end, *B* seems totally oblivious to the point of *A*'s questions and, like a computer in a science-fiction movie, gives nothing more than the literally correct answer to each question as it is asked.

It will be important to keep in mind the power and subtlety of literal language, for figurative language, even when departing from it, relies heavily on it. Literal language is the

workhorse carrying even the most remarkable uses of figurative language.

Irony is one paradigm of the kind of figure of speech I will examine. Clustered around it are other figures, including *hyperbole* and *meiosis*, which I have collectively labeled, perhaps not well, *figurative predications*. They are the subject of chapter 2. *Similes* and *metaphors* are paradigms of a second family of figures of speech that I have labeled, somewhat tendentiously, *figurative comparisons*.[2] They are examined in their various forms in chapters 3 through 7.

2. The label is contentious, because many philosophers, as we will see in chapter 3, now deny that metaphors express comparisons.

2

Figurative Predications

IRONY

How do ironic utterances work? We have already noted briefly how Grice explains this notion. Here it is in full.

> *X*, with whom *A* has been on close terms until now, has betrayed a secret of *A*'s to a business rival. *A* and his audience both know this. *A* says *X is a fine friend.* (Gloss: It is perfectly obvious to *A* and his audience that what *A* has said or has made as if to say is something he does not believe, and the audience knows that *A* knows that this is obvious to the audience. So, unless *A*'s utterance is entirely pointless, *A* must be trying to get across some other proposition than the one he purports to be putting forward. This must be some obviously related proposition; the most obviously related proposition is the contradictory of the one he purports to be putting forward.) (Grice 1989, 34)

John Searle says much the same thing:

> Stated very crudely, the mechanism by which irony works is that the utterance, if taken literally, is obviously inappropriate

> to the situation. Since it is grossly inappropriate, the hearer is compelled to reinterpret it in such a way as to render it appropriate, and the most natural way to interpret it is as meaning the opposite of its literal form. (Searle 1979, 113)

These views are close, but not identical. Grice says that the intended meaning is the *contradictory* of the one the person purports to be putting forward, whereas Searle makes the seemingly stronger claim that the speaker intends the *opposite* of what he actually says. This seems stronger, for by the opposite we usually mean something that lies at the other end of some scale—for example, big rather than small, none rather than all, bright rather than dark, and so forth. Who is right? The answer, I think, is that neither of them is fully right. Sometimes, though perhaps rarely, in using an ironic utterance we intend the contradictory of what we actually say; sometimes we mean the opposite. In general we imply something incompatible with what we say, but, as we shall see, the strength of this incompatible proposition admits of wide variation. One task for a theory of ironic utterances is to explain what determines which of these incompatible propositions the use of an ironic sentence conveys.

An account of ironic utterances should answer a second cluster of questions as well: Why do ironic utterances carry rhetorical force; why do they have clout? Why is irony, along with other related figures of speech, often used in arguments, even serious arguments? After all, on the face of it, the pattern for an ironic utterance should strike us as exceedingly peculiar. We wish to assert *p*, and to do this we assert some other proposition, *p** (say, the opposite or contradictory of *p*). In the imagined conversational context, the parties mutually know that p* is false, because they know that *p* is true, so they infer that the speaker really meant to assert *p*. But isn't this a strange way to carry on? If someone wants to assert *p*, why not just do

it? More perplexing still, if, in the given context, it is mutually known that *p* is true, what is the point of asserting *p* at all, either directly or indirectly? Taken directly, the ironic utterance is false; taken indirectly, it is otiose.

I think we can make progress in answering both these questions by introducing the notion of a *standard* and *natural response*. By a *standard* response, I mean the kind of response that takes place in most cases and is expected to take place. By a *natural* response, I mean one that does not demand elaborate cogitation. The standard and natural response to a speech act may be an action, a speech act, or a mental act. Furthermore, what the respondent *actually says* may be chained to (or layered on) a response that is not itself expressed. The standard response to a question is, for example, an answer; the response is natural if it can be given more or less straight off.

RHETORICAL QUESTIONS

The notion of a standard and natural response fits nicely with Grice's notion of *conversational implicature*. Sometimes when we say something, we anticipate the content of what I have called the standard and natural response, and that response is precisely what we are trying to evoke. What I have in mind can be illustrated by examining the difference between *rhetorical* and *nonrhetorical* questions. Lost, I might ask someone (nonrhetorically), "Is this the road to Wellfleet?" Assuming that I am dealing with a cooperative Cape Codder, the standard and natural response will be a *yes* or a *no*. But that answer is not part of my meaning in asking the question, for, lost, I do not know the answer to my question. Again lost, I come to a dead end in the middle of a bog, and a fellow passenger asks "Is this the road to Wellfleet?" Obviously, it is not the road to Wellfleet, since Wellfleet is not a bog. Here the standard answer is a *yes*

or a *no* and, in this context, since the facts are plain, the natural response is *no*. The person who asks the question knows that this is the appropriate response, and his point in asking it is to elicit this response. Furthermore, these features are *mutually recognized* by the speaker and the respondent. Here we can say that in asking the rhetorical question the person has *conversationally implied, indirectly asserted*, or, in common parlance, *meant* that this is not the road to Wellfleet.

Let me block a possible misunderstanding of the position I am developing. Confronted with the rhetorical question "Is this the road to Wellfleet?" I might reply in a variety of ways. The standard and natural response to this question is *no*, but, reacting to the transparent rhetorical point of the question, I may not say this. Instead, I might react to the accusation implied by the question and engage in rhetoric of my own, perhaps by saying, "If you're so smart, why didn't you tell me when I made a wrong turn?" Here the reply is chained to the original rhetorical question through the standard and natural response, *no*, and even if not expressed, as is likely, its mutual recognition is needed to account for the connection between the utterances actually made.

Having concentrated on the speaker's intended meaning, I now turn to the force the rhetorical question has on the respondent. The point of the rhetorical question is to elicit the response (in speech, if possible; in thought, at least) that this emphatically is not the road to Wellfleet. Rhetorical questions gain their force by making the questioner's indirect speech act the respondent's direct speech (or, at least, thought) act. We do this for a variety of reasons. In the present case, the rhetorical question gains its force from the principle that, in general, admissions are worth more than accusations.[1]

1. There are, of course, more-benign uses of rhetorical questions. We also use them to be polite or to allow another to draw an inference.

A parallel account is possible for ironic utterances. The standard response to assertions is to accept them or reject them. For example, the standard response to what we take to be a false statement is to deny it. Furthermore, in a particular context, it is natural to provide the correct judgment in its place. If *A* falsely says, "I've paid you that money," *B* might reply, "No you haven't; you still owe me $10." The exact form of *B*'s correcting response will depend upon the setting in which the remark is made. The same situation obtains for the use of ironic utterances. *A* says something false, and *B*, given the momentum of the conversational exchange, provides (in speech or thought) the correcting judgment.

Now, to return to the difference between Grice and Searle noted at the start of this discussion, the form the correcting judgment takes depends upon the context. "Great throw" can have the force of "horrible throw" if that's the proper correcting judgment in the given context (for example, when the shortstop has just thrown the ball into the dirt, wide of first base). But endless variations are possible between the extremes of mere contradiction and the assertion of the complete opposite. Here is one illustrative case: In rehearsal an actor is stumbling over his lines and the director ironically remarks, "I see you have your lines down pat." The remark does not have the force of asserting the complete opposite, namely that he has learned *none* of his lines, for the actor has, after all, learned *some* of them. Yet it has more force than the bare contradictory claim that he has not mastered them all, for the irony would be out of place if the actor had only stumbled over a single line. More than likely, the director is indicating that the actor has a long way to go before he has learned his part. This brings me to my first conclusion about ironic utterances: *The indirect content of an ironic utterance is determined by the correcting judgment that it naturally evokes within the context in which it is made.*

More significantly, this account of irony helps explain why it can have bite. Often, though not always, irony is used as a form of criticism, and here the parallel with rhetorical questions is close. With a rhetorical question, the respondent is often led to acknowledge something (in speech or thought) that is to his or her discredit. Similarly, with an ironic utterance, the natural response is often a correcting judgment critical of the person in whom the response takes place. To the ironic claim "You're a fine friend," the natural response may be "No I'm not; I really let you down." Whether the respondent actually says this or only thinks it, it is still an acknowledgment that he might make, perhaps despite himself. What the person actually says is often chained to this natural response. Absorbing the response, he may join in the irony, saying "Yes, I was a real peach." Alternatively, he may bridle and respond aggressively, "As if you're so perfect!"

These last remarks point to a difference in emphasis between the approach taken here and that presented by Grice in his classic paper "Logic and Conversation." One of the central claims of Grice's paper is this:

> The presence of a conversational implicature must be capable of being worked out; for even if it can in fact be intuitively grasped, unless the intuition is replaceable by an argument, the implicature (if present at all) will not count as a conversational implicature; it will be a *conventional* implicature. (31)

For Grice this calculation, as he sometimes calls it (39–40), will take into account such things as the conventional meaning of the speaker's utterance, the Cooperative Principle and its maxims, the context, background knowledge, and the fact that those participating in the conversation mutually recognize all these things. Grice, as I read him, emphasizes the relationship between the conventional meaning of the utterance and the

system of rules that governs it. Sometimes we must appeal to additional contextual information in order to recognize that a conversational rule is being flouted, but, in general, conversational implication is *calculated* on the basis of two factors: conventional meaning and conversational rules. Over against this, I have suggested that the indirect content of the ironic remark is highly context-dependent, since it is provided by the correcting judgment that naturally arises in the conversational exchange.

Turning to the second question raised above—How do ironic utterances gain their force?—consider the following example. Watching a game of pool, *A* (who doesn't understand the rules) sees *B* sink the eight ball and shouts "Great shot!" In fact, *B* sank the eight ball inadvertently and, as a result, has lost. The correcting response to *A*'s remark is that it was not a great shot, but a blunder. For all that, *A*'s remark is not ironic, for it was not *intended* to elicit this correcting judgment. It's at this level that Grice's insistence on the importance of mutually recognized intentions finds its place. If it is clear that A uttered his remark without the intention of producing a correcting response, then the remark was not ironic. But if the "praise" was offered with just the intention of invoking this correcting response, where this intention is made clear, then we have irony.

Irony can be manipulative and thus humiliating. Perhaps it is for this reason that irony is often a vehicle for (or at least combined with) sarcasm. Irony is not the only vehicle for sarcasm—rhetorical questions can be asked in a sarcastic tone of voice as well. Still, for obvious reasons, irony and sarcasm go well together. In passing, this reference to sarcasm may help avert a misunderstanding. At certain places I have spoken of irony where others might say that we are dealing with sarcasm. The actor example may strike the reader this way. To the criticism "That's not irony; that's sarcasm," there are two things worth saying. First, a great deal will depend upon how we imagine the

context, including the tone of voice. The force of "Well, you've certainly got your lines down pat" can vary from light irony (perhaps intended as a mild joke) to savage criticism. Second, even in cases where a remark is plainly sarcastic, this does not show that it is not also ironic. Calling a sarcastic remark ironic may underdescribe it, but it need not misdescribe it.

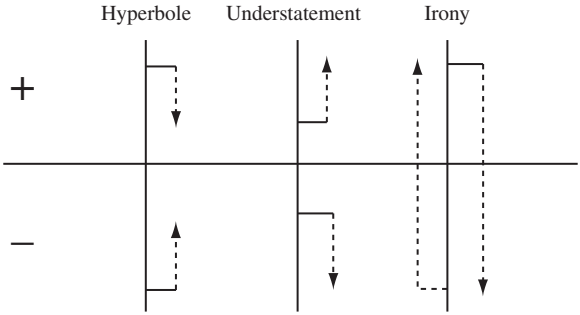
MEIOSIS AND HYPERBOLE

I hold that ironic utterances function by invoking mutually recognized correcting responses. Their *point* is to invoke mutually recognized correcting responses. But this is not a unique feature of ironic judgments, for other figures of speech function in the same way. Consider understatement (meiosis). Here someone says something weaker than she is in a position to say; for example, she says that someone else has had something to drink when, in fact, the person she is referring to is utterly intoxicated. The correcting judgment goes: "What do you mean he has had *something* to drink? He's plastered." The remark counts as meiosis when it is mutually recognized that the speaker has spoken with the intention of invoking this correcting judgment.[2]

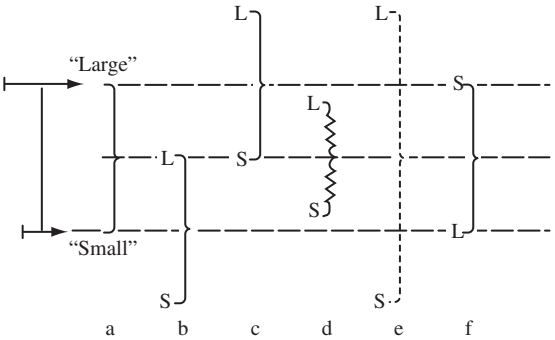
How does irony differ from meiosis? Irony reverses polarity; thus ironic "praise" becomes blame. My impression is that people will call something an understatement if, true or false, it invokes a mutually recognized correcting judgment toward the extreme (on some scale). Understatement does not reverse polarity, but instead invites *a strengthening* correction.

2. Euphemism sometimes takes a similar form, though with a different intent. *A* might describe *B*, who has passed out, as having had a bit to drink, not, as with meiosis, in order to emphasize *A*'s drunkenness, but as a way of not saying everything that might be said—as a way, that is, of not being censorious.

Hyperbole works the other way round. Here I say something stronger than what I have a right to say, with the intention of having it corrected away from the extreme, but still to something *strong* that preserves the *same polarity*. When someone claims to be famished, he is typically indicating that he is very hungry. Hyperbole is an exaggeration on the side of truth. These contrasts are reflected in the following diagrams:



In passing, this diagram looks similar to one found in Nelson Goodman's *The Languages of Art* (82).



a. Literal application b. Hyperbole c. Understatement
d. Overemphasis (over/understatement) e.Underemphasis (under/overstatement) f. Irony

Nelson Goodman's leading idea is that the figures of speech I have discussed, plus some others, are instances of *metaphor*; indeed, he discusses them under the heading "Modes of Metaphor." For Goodman, a metaphor involves the *transfer* of a *schema*. He describes a schema as a "family" or "set" of labels (Goodman 1968, 71–72). The *range* of a single label is just those objects denoted by it. And "the aggregate of the ranges of extension of the labels in a schema may be called a *realm*" (72). To use his own example, the system of labels used to classify or grade olives exemplifies such a schema, with certain olives making up the range of the label "supercolossal," and all the olives sorted by the system of labels constituting the realm of the schema. Turning next to the transfer of schemata, Goodman holds that such transfers of schemata can produce metaphorical (or figurative) language in at least two ways. At times the transfer involves a movement from one realm to another disjoint from it (as, for example, in the personification of the weather). At other times the realms are not disjoint, but, instead, "one realm intersects or is an expansion or contraction of the other" (81). Applying this second idea to figures of speech, he continues:

> In hyperbole, for instance, an ordered schema is in effect displaced downward. The large olive becomes supercolossal and the small one large.... In litotes, or understatement, exactly the opposite occurs. A superb performance becomes pretty fair and a good one passable. (81–83)

His diagram indicates that in irony an ordered schema is flip-flopped.

I have a simple objection to this elegant theory: It doesn't seem true to the facts. I think Goodman is right in saying that an entire ordered schema can be displaced hyperbolically, but this hardly seems to serve as a general account of the way hyperbole works. When I say that a particular throw was the

worst I have seen in my life (when it wasn't), I do not displace any other judgments about the game; medium-fast pitches, for example, are not now considered the fastest (or should it be the slowest?) I have ever seen delivered. In most cases, the hyperbole stops with the single remark and the correcting response it calls forth. Typically, there is no broader displacement of the kind that Goodman suggests. The same point holds against Goodman's account of irony. Although we might invert an entire schema for ironic purposes, in fact, for the most part, irony does not involve such a wholesale inversion of a schema. The problem, I think, is that Goodman adopts a broad generic sense of metaphor that applies reasonably well to some metaphors and then extends it to other figures of speech where there is a bad fit.[3]

I have spoken about meiosis, irony, and hyperbole as contrasting figures of speech. This does not mean they cannot be used to achieve similar ends. In fact, often, all three devices are simultaneously available to make the same indirect claim. At the Battle of Jutland, Admiral Beatty, on seeing two of his battle cruisers blown out of the water in rapid succession, is reported to have said: "Chatfield, there seems to be something wrong with our bloody ships today." Never has understatement better served the purposes of unflappability. Beatty might also have spoken with bitter irony, saying "Good show." And hyperbole was also available: "Chatfield, you have just witnessed the end of Western civilization as we know it." In each case, the speaker says something mutually understood to be in need of correction. The indirect content of these figures of speech is given by the form of the correcting judgment. The utterance counts as a figure of speech because the parties who are engaged

3. I also have deep reservations about Goodman's treatment of metaphors themselves, and will return to this issue when I examine various theories of metaphor in chapter 5.

mutually understand that a correcting judgment is being invoked.

SOME QUALIFICATIONS AND ELABORATIONS

On the assumption that I have offered a tolerably good account of the *routine* uses of irony and related figures of speech, I would now like to introduce some qualifications and elaborations in order to do more justice to the complexity and subtlety of these uses of language.

First, the qualifications. The leading idea is that the figures of speech I have examined function by invoking a *mutually recognized standard and natural correcting response*. Here a brief warning about the word "correcting" is in order. This word may suggest censure or criticism, and, in fact, as my examples have tended to show, irony is often used for these purposes. It might, however, be better to use it in the more neutral sense of *setting something right*. With all these figures of speech, an utterance is made with the mutually recognized intention that the respondent will naturally *adjust* the utterance in an appropriate way.

It is, however, misleading to suggest, as my examples have tended to suggest, that these corrections or adjustments always involve the truth of some utterance. We can say things in (mutually recognized) need of correction without *asserting* anything. Congratulations (even applause) can be ironic. Different kinds of speech acts will admit of different patterns of correction, but I will not examine this topic here.

Concentrating on irony, some elaborations. So far I have largely dwelled on a single, quite common, case: *A* utters something ironic to *B*, and *B*, in producing a correcting judgment, acknowledges something unpleasant about himself. Here the respondent to and the *target* of the ironic utterance

are the same. But a person can also speak with self-irony. Having betrayed *B*, *A* might say to him, "Well, I am a fine friend," where *A* and *B* mutually recognize that this utterance will invoke a correcting judgment in conflict with it. Here *A*'s ironic remark, by inviting a criticism, amounts to a confession. A can also speak ironically to *B* about some third party *C*.

It is sometimes useful to draw a distinction between the *targets* of an ironic remark and those other respondents who are not targets. (*C* has let *B* down and *A* says to *B*, in *C*'s presence, "*C* is certainly a fine friend." Here both *C* and *B* are respondents, but only *C* is the target of the irony.) Finally, out of the class of respondents, some may be naive, others informed. *A* may speak ironically to naive *B* for the amusement of a sophisticated third party *C*. Thus Mark Twain offered elaborate praise for the doggerel verse of Sarah Orne Jewett, much to the amusement of his intellectual friends. The pleasure was, of course, heightened by the thought that Sarah Orne Jewett would fail to detect the irony. Through all these cases, the same underlying mechanism appears: *A* utters something with the mutually understood intention of inducing a correcting judgment in an informed respondent. In itself, the mechanism of irony is simple; its subtlety arises from the levels of mutual recognition possible among informed participants in a linguistic exchange.

DIFFICULTIES

I do not want to give the impression that I have offered a complete analysis of irony (or any of the other related figures of speech), for there are many interesting cases that I still find baffling. For example, alone reading something I have published, I discover that it is riddled with typographical errors that I missed in proof. I say to myself, "Eagle-eye Fogelin has done it again." Here a metaphor is used ironically, but it is

not clear how the irony works. I am the utterer of the ironic remark. I am also an informed respondent and the target of the ironic remark. But as the person who produces the remark with an ironic intent, I know already that it is false, and I am not trying to produce any correcting or adjusting response in my audience (namely me!). A glib, though perhaps correct, way of dealing with such cases of privately expressed (or closet) self-irony is to say that the things we call irony form a *family*, and we consider closet self-irony a form of irony because it has so much in common with other, more standard cases of irony. I am inclined to think, however, that my analysis does fit the present case. When I use self-irony, I, of course, recognize that I am saying something false, and that drives me, as it usually drives others, to acknowledge or face up to an appropriate truth. I realize that I do not mean what I am saying, and I say it with the aim of producing a tension between what I say and what I know to be true. The oddity here does not consist in the way the ironic remark functions, but in the curious, seemingly two-part, relationship I take to myself when, for example, I engage in self-mockery, self-congratulation, or self-deception.

A second challenge to this analysis arises because we not only speak of ironic utterances, but also speak of ironic events. Given this analysis, that should seem perplexing, since in these cases there is no speech act of any kind that stands in need of correction or adjustment. By an ironic utterance I mean an utterance made with the intention of being ironic. Ironic events, like ironic utterances, exhibit significant reversals of the appropriate or expected, but they do not occur with that intention and often they exhibit no intention at all. For example, it was ironic that a survivor of the bloody landings at Omaha Beach died there twenty-five years later at a ceremony commemorating that landing. It is ironic because he did not die when he most reasonably or appropriately might have and

did die when he should not have. It may also seem ironic that he died celebrating, among other things, that he had not died in that very place. A situation that involves *poetic justice* seems to be a special case of an ironic event where vice is punished or virtue rewarded in a way that is *fitting* or *just*, as the result of an ironic reversal. The standard example is the poisoner who accidentally poisons himself. A better example is the notorious hanging judge who accidentally strangles himself while tying his cravat.

Typically, ironic events do not involve utterances, but they can, for the *fact* that someone says something can itself be ironic. An example from D. C. Meucke illustrates this: In the twenty-first book of the *Odyssey*, the suitors (who do not recognize him) are observing Odysseus examining the bow he had left behind more than twenty years earlier. One of them remarks, "Ha! Quite the expert, with a critic's eye for bows! No doubt he collects them at home or wants to start a factory, etc."[4] It is ironic that the suitor said this, though he is not speaking ironically.

Ironic events share certain features with ironic utterances. Each case brings forth the response that something that happened or was said should not have happened or should not have been said. The difference between the two cases is that the intentions (usually mutually recognized intentions) essential to ironic utterances are usually missing in ironic events. Perhaps attributions of irony to events or sequences of events always involve personification, and in that way, intention is again presupposed. (Think of the irony of fate.) And, again, the old *family resemblance* dodge is available; we call events ironic because they share many crucial features with ironic utterances. I am inclined to think that it is best to say that calling an event ironic does involve personification, but I am not sure.

4. Cited by Meucke 1982, 14.

DRAMATIC IRONY

Finally, in closing, a few programmatic things about dramatic irony. Dramatic irony can arise in two ways: *Internally*, irony can be portrayed within the text, or *externally*, the text itself can be intended ironically. Starting with portrayals of the ironic, a story may spin out the ironic unfolding of events: In "The Gift of the Magi" a husband sells his watch to buy his wife an elegant comb while she sells her hair to buy him a gold chain for his watch—that sort of thing. A text can also represent ironic exchanges, as Plato's early dialogues often do. As far as I can see, dramatic irony in the sense of portraying the ironic raises no special problems.

Ironic portrayals, as opposed to portrayals of the ironic, are more interesting. The author presents a text that is mutually recognized as in need of correction and its mutually recognized point is to call forth this recognition. Satires, parodies, and burlesques fall into this category. In each case the reader is supposed to see that the text, if read straight, is defective. Texts of this kind advertise their defects and then, by analogy, the defects are ascribed to the targets of the irony.

In writing of this kind, the author stands in an ironic relationship to his audience, and that relationship can admit of all the variations cataloged above. The audience (or some significant part of it) may be the target of the irony. In cahoots with his audience, the author may target some third party for his irony. In a marvelously subtle case of this, dissidents sometimes write disingenuously in order to slip their writing past naive government censors with the intention that sophisticated readers will recognize and appreciate this disingenuousness.

Interesting relationships can emerge between the internal irony of a text and the ironic relationship between the author and his audience. In the early Socratic dialogue the *Euthydemus*, Plato has Socrates utter ironic remarks that are wholly unappre-

ciated by the other participants in the dialogue. Internal to the dialogue, Socrates speaks ironically only for his own amusement; externally, Plato has him speak this way for our amusement. Here the target is within the dialogue, whereas the intended sophisticated respondents (that's us) are outside it.

A similar but more subtle use of irony to establish a relationship between author and reader occurs in the opening sentence of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*.

> It is a truth universally acknowledged, that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife.

The author, who is both a narrator and a commentator, knows, and expects the reader to realize that she knows, that this is not "a truth universally acknowledged." In particular, as the author herself points out in the next sentence, it is not a truth acknowledged by every "single man in possession of a good fortune." Here the author expresses ironically a view that dominates the lives of a number of characters in the narrative to come, and in doing so establishes an understanding with her readers concerning these characters.[5]

This discussion of irony, hyperbole, and meiosis has turned upon a number of simple ideas. These tropes, in being figurative modes of discourse, depart from, and often violate, our rules for normal ways of speaking. They gain their rhetor-

5. Ted Cohen has pointed out that this sentence may also play upon a possible double meaning in the expression "in want of a wife." Florence Fogelin has suggested that it might better be read as an instance of hyperbole rather than irony. The choice between a reading as irony and a reading as hyperbole turns upon the question whether the conversational point of the remark is to call attention to instances that violate it, or to call our attention to its *general* truth, even if it is not, strictly speaking, *universally* true. While the immediate context seems to favor an ironic reading, the single-minded dedication of so many of the characters in the novel to this principle makes a reading as hyperbole plausible as well.

ical force by inducing a mutually recognized correction or adjustment in the respondent, and the indirect content of each trope is determined by this mutually recognized correcting judgment. In the chapters that follow, I will offer an account of metaphors, similes, and other figurative comparisons that parallels the discussion in this chapter in stressing the respondent's participatory role in making sense of the figurative utterance. Again, I will argue that the respondent is called upon to make a correction or adjustment, but, as we will see, the patterns of correction or adjustment are significantly different from those examined in this chapter.

3

Figurative Comparisons: The Traditional View

For more than fifty years, there has been a remarkably sustained interest in metaphors. Furthermore, even though theories have come in a wide variety of competing forms and have been written from various perspectives, one doctrine has achieved a remarkable consensus: Aristotle, Quintilian, Cicero, and those who followed them for more than two thousand years were all wrong in holding that metaphors are elliptical similes. Bucking this consensus, in *Figuratively Speaking* (1988) I presented a treatment of metaphors along traditional Aristotelian lines: Similes wear their comparative form on their grammatical sleeves, and metaphors differ from similes in only a trivial grammatical fashion. Aristotle put it this way, though in a somewhat perplexing form:

> The simile is also a metaphor. The difference is but slight. When the poet says of Achilles that he
>
> Leapt on the foes as a lion
>
> this is simile; when he says of him "the lion leapt," it is metaphor. . . . [Similes] are to be employed just as metaphors are employed, since they are really the same thing except for the difference mentioned. (Aristotle 1984, 1406b)

In the literature, this view is commonly called the *elliptical-simile* account of metaphors. I think we get a better systematic understanding of the text by introducing the notion of a *figurative comparison*, saying that, on Aristotle's account, both metaphors and similes are figurative comparisons, differing only in their manner of grammatical expression. This is how I understand Aristotle, and it is, broadly speaking, the position I will defend. Unfortunately—maybe in the long run fortunately—this way of presenting Aristotle's position immediately undercuts most of the standard criticisms that have been brought against it. That, however, may make it seem question-begging. To avoid giving such an impression, I will begin by taking the critics' case against Aristotle's treatment of metaphors in their own words.

It is important to recognize the type of construction that Aristotle takes as paradigmatic in speaking of metaphors. In the example he presents, Achilles is *referred* to as a lion rather than *called* a lion. That is, the construction looks like this:

(1) The lion [i.e., Achilles] leapt

rather than this:

(2) Achilles is a lion.

Both Cicero and Quintilian, perhaps following Aristotle, also cite constructions of this first type in their discussion of metaphors. Thus Cicero says:

> A metaphor is a brief similitude contracted into a single word; which word being put in the place of another, as it were in its own place, conveys, if the resemblance is acknowledged, delight; if there is no resemblance, it is condemned. (Cicero 1942, 3.38.156–39.157)

And Quintilian tells us that a metaphor is a

> shorter form of simile, while in the latter we compare some object to the thing which we wish to describe, whereas in

> the former the object is actually substituted for the thing. (Quintilian 1922, Bk. VIII, vi, 8–9)

Cicero's reference to a "similitude contracted into a single word" seems like an unduly narrow restriction, but the point he is making, along with Aristotle and Quintilian, is clear: Metaphors provide an alternative way of expressing a simile by *referring* to something using a referring term that literally refers to something else.

Construction (2) above presents a pattern of metaphor more commonly discussed in recent literature (for example, "Juliet is the sun" and "Sally is a block of ice"). Finally, in a third pattern, we speak of something as *if it were* another thing. With apologies for the collapse of poetic diction, the following serves as an example of this:

> (3) Achilles could hardly wait to get his claws into Hector.

In all three cases, a comparison is drawn indirectly where it might have been drawn directly.

But even if these writers, as it is commonly said, treat metaphors as elliptical similes, Aristotle, at least, saw that sometimes a metaphor can have more rhetorical force than a simile.

> The simile, as has been said before, is a metaphor, differing from it only in the way it is put; and just because it is longer it is less attractive. Besides, it does not say outright that "this" *is* "that," and therefore the hearer is less interested in the idea. We see, then, that both speech and reasoning are lively in proportion as they make us seize a new idea promptly. (1410b, 11–21)

Metaphors can have more force than their counterpart similes, first, because of their brevity, and that can be more than a matter of one less word. There is not much saving in "Achilles is a lion" over "Achilles is like a lion," but considerable saving in "The lion leapt" over "Achilles leapt like a

lion." The second difference is more important: Metaphors are more startling because, on a superficial reading, they can seem false. (Imagine someone saying, "That wasn't a lion that leapt; it was the man Achilles.") The respondent must reject this reading in favor of reading it as an implicit comparison, and part of the force of a metaphor is to induce just this response.

Returning to the passage cited from Aristotle, although he obviously puts forward an elliptical-simile view of metaphors, the opening sentence seems to place the emphasis the other way around by saying not that metaphors are (elliptical) similes, but, instead, that "the simile is also a metaphor." Here Aristotle seems to be using the term "metaphor" in a broad generic sense as a way of indicating that similes are also figures of speech, differing from the metaphors just cited only by expressing their comparisons explicitly. Read this way, Aristotle's position comes to this: *Metaphors are figurative comparisons. So are similes. The difference between them is that the comparison is made explicitly in the simile, but not in the metaphor*. I think this is the most natural way of reading these passages from Aristotle, but, in any case, it is the position I will attempt to elaborate, clarify, and defend in detail. It is the position I have in mind when I speak of the *comparativist* view of metaphors.[1]

Because I will argue a number of times that attacks on the comparativist view of metaphors rest on a misrepresentation of that position, let me state, quite simply, what that position comes to. A person committed to the comparativist account of metaphors will hold at least these two theses:

1. This tendency to use the term "metaphor" in a generic way that covers a wide range of tropes and also in a specific way as the name of a particular trope is common practice in both recent and traditional literature. It was commented on explicitly by the seventeenth-century French rhetorician Bernard Lamy:

I The *literal* meaning of a metaphor of the form "*A* is a φ" is the same as the literal meaning of the counterpart simile of the form "*A* is like a φ."

II The *figurative* meaning of a metaphor of the form "*A* is a φ" is the same as the *figurative* meaning of the counterpart simile of the form "*A* is like a φ."

This specification is incomplete since, as I have shown from classical sources, metaphors come in a variety of forms and transpose into similes in different ways, but these simple patterns will serve my present purposes.

The first thesis is that metaphors and similes literally say the same thing. The basic idea is that if one expression "*A*" is elliptical for another expression "*B*," then "*A*" has the same literal meaning as "*B*." Thus if metaphors are elliptical similes, then a metaphor must have the same meaning as its counterpart simile: The metaphorical utterance "*A* is a φ" literally means that *A* is like a φ. In general, of course, sentences of the form "*A* is a φ" do not have the same literal meaning as sentences of the form "*A* is like a φ." We tend to give sentences elliptical readings when this provides a natural way of preserving the truth or the relevance of what a speaker has said. With respect to truth, if someone refers to another as a jackal, it is usually more reasonable to suppose that the speaker is comparing that person to

> Tropes are words transported from their proper significations, and applied to things that they signifie but obliquely. So that all Tropes are *Metaphors* or Translations, according to the Etymology of the Word. And yet by the Figure of *Antonomasia* we give the name of *Metaphor* to a particular Trope, and according to that definition, a *Metaphor* is a Trope by which we put a strange and remote word for a proper word, by reason of its resemblance with the thing of which we speak. (Lamy 1986, 215)

To avoid confusion, I will generally use the term "metaphor" in the broad generic sense, the term "metaphors" in the narrower specific sense. Where the context makes it clear which use is being employed, I will not be fussy about this.

a jackal rather than that he is lapsing into an inexplicable classificatory error. With respect to relevance, that no man is an island is hardly a piece of information in need of dissemination, whereas the claim that no man is like an island is (or at least was) an arresting way of commenting on the human situation.

The second thesis is more important since it is this part of the traditional view that is most often misunderstood. A simile is not simply a literal comparison but is, instead, a figure of speech. That, I have suggested, is what Aristotle was getting at when he said that a simile is also a metaphor. *In particular, metaphors and similes both present figurative comparisons*. Since, however, they are both instances of figurative language, taken literally, the comparison must exhibit a (mutually recognized) incongruity, incompatibility, inappropriateness—no single word will do here—within the context in which the comparison is made. Figurative meaning arises, *in general*, through a (mutually recognized) mismatch of literal meaning with context, and, more specifically, this is how the figurativeness of figurative comparisons arises. *How* this happens will be the subject of close examination later on; here I am only insisting, as a second thesis, that the elliptical-simile theory of metaphor not only pairs the literal meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of the counterpart simile, it also pairs the figurative meaning of a metaphor with the figurative meaning of the counterpart simile. Since metaphors and similes say the same things literally, their mismatch with context will give rise to the same figurative meaning. This, as a first approximation, is what the elliptical-simile or comparativist account of metaphors amounts to.[2]

2. In the closing chapter of this work I will reformulate these theses in a way that eliminates the potentially misleading notion of *figurative meaning* in favor of the safer notion of *meaning something figuratively*. What that difference amounts to and why it is important can only be explained later.

4

The Standard Criticisms of Comparativism

Before developing the comparativist position in more detail, I will examine, and attempt to answer, some of the standard criticisms that have been brought against it. These criticisms typically rest on two sorts of misrepresentations: (a) the basic structure of the position is misdescribed, or (b) the position is gratuitously saddled with implausible doctrines foreign to it.

The standard misdescription of the comparativist position is that it identifies the *figurative* meaning of a metaphor with the *literal* meaning of its counterpart simile. Sometimes this interpretation is openly stated, but as often as not it is simply taken for granted. As far as I know, this misreading of the comparativist position made its first appearance in Max Black's celebrated essay "Metaphor," and it has exercised a baleful influence since. I will therefore deal with it first.

BLACK AGAINST THE COMPARATIVISTS

In cataloging various theories of metaphor, Black first introduces what he calls the *substitution view of metaphor,* which,

he says, is "any view that holds that a metaphorical expression is used in place of some equivalent *literal* expression" (Black 1962, 31). Here there seems to be a vague, half-remembered echo of the view found in Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, that in a metaphor a literal reference (for example, "Achilles") is replaced by a metaphorical reference (for example, "the lion"). But, according to these ancient writers, the point of this substitution is to produce a comparison, so we can simply move along to see what Black has to say against the comparativist account of metaphor:

> If a writer holds that a metaphor consists in the *presentation* of the underlying analogy or similarity, he will be taking what I shall call a *comparison view* of metaphor.... This is the view of metaphor as a condensed or elliptical *simile.* (35)

This, in a rough approximation, is the view I wish to defend. But Black continues the passage in a remarkable way:

> It will be noticed that a "comparison view" is a special case of a "substitution view." For it holds that the metaphorical statement might be replaced by an equivalent literal *comparison.* (35)

It is hard to see how the view that treats "metaphor as a condensed or elliptical *simile*" has the consequence that "a metaphorical statement might be replaced by an equivalent literal comparison," that is, unless Black is reasoning in something like the following way:

1. A metaphor is a condensed or elliptical simile.
2. Thus, except possibly for stylistic reasons, a metaphor can always be replaced by a simile.
3. Similes are statements of literal comparison.
4. Therefore, metaphorical statements can be replaced by equivalent literal comparisons.

5. But we cannot always find an adequate literal counterpart corresponding to the meaning of a metaphor.
6. Therefore, the first premise, that a metaphor is a condensed or elliptical simile, must be false.

But this is all wrong. In accepting the claim that a metaphor is a condensed or elliptical simile, the comparativist is not committed to step three of the argument; indeed, he rejects it. Not suffering from amnesia, the comparativist, unlike many of his critics, knows that similes, as figures of speech, present figurative, not literal, comparisons. With a simile, "one thing is likened to a *dissimilar* thing by the use of *like*" (Lanham 1991, 140). Thus the treatment of metaphors as elliptical similes is not a reduction of the figurative to the nonfigurative; it is rather a specification of the kind of figurativeness metaphors possess. Metaphors are elliptical figurative *comparisons.*

As a variation on Black's argument, the comparativist might be charged with identifying the figurative meaning of a metaphor with some literal predication suggested by the comparison. On such a theory, the metaphorical utterance "Richard is a lion" might just mean that Richard is brave. The comparativist, however, is not committed to identifying the figurative meaning of metaphors and similes with *any* such descriptive claims. In saying that one thing is like another, we are not *eo ipso* saying how.

Once we see that the comparativist is not committed to the doctrine that the figurative meaning of a metaphor always admits of replacement by a literal description, other common attacks on the position are easily turned. First, the comparativist is not committed to *producing* literal paraphrases of metaphors and thus cannot be criticized for his failure to do so. Second, comparativism is not open to the charge that it reduces metaphors to mere stylistic embellishments. Here

the critics' background reasoning seems to run as follows: "If metaphors could always be replaced by literal paraphrases that capture just what they mean, then the use of metaphors to convey such meaning would, strictly speaking, be unnecessary. Given this, metaphorical language could serve no other purpose but the merely decorative." First, it is unclear how the conclusion follows from the stated premises, and, second, the argument reveals a deep intellectualist prejudice against what is called the merely decorative. Ancient writers celebrated the power of metaphor to elevate both prose and poetry, whereas modern defenders of metaphor seem embarrassed by it. However this may be, the whole line of attack against comparativism is out of whack, since comparativists are not committed to the literal reduction of metaphors that their critics attribute to them.

A further difficulty is that we often find critics of comparativism gratuitously freighting it with doctrines quite alien to the views of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian. Mark Johnson, for example, associates comparativism with logical positivism apparently by means of the following train of free association: comparativism = the reduction of the metaphorical to the literal = literal truth chauvinism = logical positivism (See Johnson 1981, 16–19). Timothy Binkley first saddles the comparativists with the doctrine that "metaphorical claims are only disguised literal claims," and then proceeds to dilate on the subject in these words:

> According to this conception of the relationships among linguistic expressions and meanings, there are certain sentences we can really mean, and then there is that large class of sentences we do not really mean but which gallivant around wildly in even the most ordinary discourse as incognitos for the sentences which do express "real" or "pure" meaning. We are presented with a picture of a realm

> where quintessential meanings subsist as demigods who can be directly approached only by the high priests of literal language: words represent meanings, only some words are on better terms with meanings than others. (Binkley 1981, 145)

Binkley continues by saying "It is difficult to know how to react to this picture of language" (145). The real difficulty is to understand how this picture of language, or rather this parody of a picture of language, gets fastened onto the comparativist view of metaphors, particularly as it appears in traditional sources.

To summarize: A comparativist treats metaphors as elliptical similes and thereby identifies the literal and figurative meaning of the one, respectively, with the literal and figurative meaning of the other. In doing so, the comparativist:

1. Need not hold that the figurative meaning of a metaphor admits of an adequate literal translation;
2. Need not demote metaphors to mere stylistic embellishments; and
3. Need not adopt a narrow, cockamamie theory of language.

A writer can be a comparativist concerning metaphors and *also* take up some of these additional positions. Perhaps some have, though I have found attempts to locate such views in ancient sources unconvincing.

In any case, in saying that I am committed to defending a comparativist view of metaphors, I am thus far committed only to the two theses presented at the beginning of this discussion. I am not committed to defending further theses that this or that comparativist may have held, and, most particularly, I wish to distance myself as much as possible from various additional doctrines attributed to comparativism by critics whose primary intention is to make the position look bad.

SEARLE'S CRITICISMS OF COMPARATIVISM

Though many writers have been content to ring changes on Black's original attack on the comparativist view of metaphors, John Searle has, in his essay titled "Metaphor," assembled a battery of arguments that do not, except perhaps in a few suspicious places, repeat Black's errors.

Searle offers three main arguments against comparativism. The first, it seems to me, depends on assigning unnecessary referential baggage to comparativism. I will dismiss it rather cavalierly. The other two arguments, on the other hand, present direct attacks on the comparativist view as I have characterized it and, I believe, as it has been historically maintained. I do not think either of these criticisms is correct, but they are searching criticisms and, unlike the criticisms I have examined thus far, have the attractive feature of relevance.

Searle says that "metaphorical meaning is always speaker's utterance meaning" (Searle 1979, 77). As we will see, Searle means something stronger than this; he might better have expressed his view by saying that metaphorical meaning is *only* speaker's utterance meaning. But the remark introduces one of his key ideas, *speaker's utterance meaning*, and that needs explaining. Searle contrasts what he calls *speaker's utterance meaning* with what he calls *sentence* or *word* meaning:

> To have a brief way of distinguishing what a speaker means by uttering words, sentences, and expressions on the one hand, and what the words, sentences, and expressions mean on the other, I shall call the former *speaker's utterance meaning*, and the other *word*, or *sentence meaning*. (77)

According to Searle, speaker's utterance meaning can be related to sentence meaning in various ways. Where *S* is *P* represents the sentence meaning of what a person says and *S*

is *R* represents the speaker's utterance meaning, we may distinguish various cases. I will concentrate on three:

> *Literal Utterance.* A speaker says *S* is *P* and means *S* is *P*. Thus the speaker places the object *S* under the concept *P*, where *P* = *R*. Sentence meaning and utterance meaning coincide.
>
> *Ironic Utterance.* A speaker means the opposite of what he says. Utterance meaning is arrived at by going through the sentence meaning and then doubling back to the opposite of the sentence meaning.
>
> *Indirect Speech Act.* A speaker means what he says, but he means something more as well. The utterance meaning includes sentence meaning but extends beyond it. (115)

Now, there seem to be two different distinctions at work in Searle's discussion: (1) whether the speaker intends his utterance to be taken literally or nonliterally, and (2) whether the point (or at least the main point) of the utterance is exhausted in what is actually said. So we can distinguish literal from nonliteral meaning and direct from indirect speech acts to get the following cross-classification:

	Literal	*Non-Literal*
Direct	Saying "The cat is on the mat," just meaning that the cat is on the mat.	Reciting nonsense poetry
Indirect	Saying "This hike is longer than I remember," meaning (primarily) that I need a rest.	Saying "You're a real friend," meaning you're a louse

Let me say a few words about each of these categories.

Literal/Direct. I think we often intend our words to be taken quite literally, but it is probably fairly rare that we intend to convey no more information than what we actually state. (Only philosophers say that the cat is on the mat and let it go

at that.) Following Grice, in standard conversational exchanges, our utterances carry with them a standard set of conversational implications generated by the rules that govern such exchanges.

Nonliteral/Direct. My first (wrong) instinct was that nothing could fall into this category, for if someone intentionally utters something without meaning the words literally, then it would seem there must be something *else* he is literally trying to get across, else why produce an utterance at all? Nonsense poetry is a counterexample to this claim.

Literal/Indirect. In the example given of this combination, the hiker who says that the hike is longer than he remembers expects his words to be taken literally. Whether the speech act is primarily direct or primarily indirect will depend on context. Bounding up the mountain in fine fettle, the hikers might be reflecting on just how hard it is to remember past hikes, how long they were, and so forth. The remark would then be both literal and direct. If, however, we imagine the hikers exhausted, hauling themselves up a seemingly endless slope, then the speaker is probably trying to make the point that the hike has been long; long hikes are tiring; and so (indirectly) it is time for a breather.

Nonliteral/Indirect. I discussed utterances that fall into this category (primarily irony, hyperbole, and meiosis) in a previous chapter, where I argued that with utterances of this kind the speaker expects the respondent to reject the actual utterance and replace it with another that corrects it or modifies it in certain ways. This stands in contrast with utterances that fall into the third category (the literal/indirect), where the speaker expects the respondent to *accept* the utterance and then *add* something further.

Given this terminology, I think the difference between Searle's view and that of the comparativists can be expressed this way: Both Searle and the comparativists hold that the use

of metaphors is an instance of an indirect speech act—that is, with metaphors we typically mean more than what we actually say and it is this "more" that really matters. Comparativists would, if asked, place metaphorical utterances in the third category: The utterance is intended literally (as a comparison), but the point is largely indirect. Searle, on the other hand, places metaphorical utterances in the fourth category: Associating them with irony, he thinks we do not intend our utterances to be taken literally. Who's right? In the end, the answer to this question will turn on a number of fine points, but before I reach these delicate issues, I have to deal with Searle's more heavy-handed way of treating them.

At first glance, it might seem that Searle is obviously right. If I say "Sam is a pig," it seems, on the assumption that Sam is a person, that I have said something that is literally false. In a context where the parties to the conversational exchange recognize this falsehood (and recognize that it is recognized, et cetera), the natural assumption is that this sentence was not intended to be taken literally. Searle provides a maxim for such occasions:

> Where the utterance is defective if taken literally, look for an utterance meaning that differs from the sentence meaning. (105)

Since, taken literally, it seems that virtually all metaphorical utterances are false, this maxim applies to them.

This, however, is not much of an argument, and, in fact, Searle does not explicitly rely on it. It is based on the curious idea that the literal meaning of an utterance is confined to the meanings of the words actually uttered. To see that this is wrong, consider the following exchange:

A: Are you coming?
B: In a little while.

I think that what B literally said can be expressed this way:

B: (I'll come) in a little while.

As grammarians put it, the "I'll come" is understood. Thus there would be nothing wrong in reporting *B*'s speech act by saying that he said he was coming in a little while. Similarly, the comparativist says that the metaphorical utterance "Sam is a pig" literally says the same thing as the simile "Sam is like a pig." The relevant respect in which Sam is said to be like a pig (for example, in behavior or appearance) will be fixed (more or less precisely) by context. This done, there would be nothing wrong with reporting the metaphorical speech act as follows: So-and-so thinks that Sam behaves like (or looks like) a pig.

With this argument from surface grammar out of the way, the easy interchangeability of metaphors and similes is so natural that it shifts the burden of proof to anyone who would deny that metaphors (like similes) make comparisons. Searle attempts to meet this burden of proof with a series of (at least) three arguments. I'll go through them one by one.

1. Attacking what he calls crude versions of the comparison view, Searle says that "in the production and understanding of metaphorical utterances, there need not be any two objects for comparison" (87). The crude version of the comparativist theory that Searle has in mind must be something like this: The metaphor "*A* is a *B*" is equivalent to the assertion that *A* exists, *B* exists, and *A* is similar to *B*. But this cannot be a correct account of metaphorical utterances, for, as Searle rightly points out, if I say that Sally is a block of ice, I am not saying that there exists something that is a block of ice and Sally is similar to it. More pointedly, if I say that Sally is a dragon, I am not committing myself to the existence of (even one) dragon (87). Against such a crude theory, Searle concludes, quite correctly, that "it is just muddled about the referential character of expressions used metaphorically" (88).

I find this criticism completely out of focus. Whatever this or that comparativist may have said (perhaps unthinkingly), it is not an essential feature of the comparison view of metaphors that metaphors assert the existence of their objects of comparison. It is not essential since, often enough, nonfigurative comparisons carry no such commitment. We can draw comparisons between existent and nonexistent entities without, in stumblebum fashion, inadvertently committing ourselves to the existence of something nonexistent. The claim that Kissinger is more like Odysseus than like Achilles does not carry with it a commitment to the historical existence of these two Greek figures. In sum, in holding that metaphors assert comparisons, the comparativist is not involved in referential muddles, since, so far at least, he has not committed his hand at all concerning reference. Of course, it is possible to combine a comparativist account of metaphors with a dumb account of comparative judgments themselves. This, in fact, is what Searle's crude version of the comparison view amounts to.

2. Searle's second argument against the comparativist view of metaphors is that a metaphor cannot assert a comparison since a metaphor can be appropriate even when the (relevant) comparison is false.[1] He imagines someone remarking that Richard is a gorilla, meaning by this that Richard is "fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth" (89). Now let's suppose, as is apparently true, that gorillas really aren't like that, but are, instead, "shy, sensitive creatures, given to bouts of sentimentality" (89). So if someone says "Richard is a gorilla," meaning that Richard, who is fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth, is similar to a gorilla, then what that person said would be false. On the other hand, if the speaker is not making a comparative judgment, then the remark, provided that

1. Monroe Beardsley presents essentially this same argument in his essay "The Metaphorical Twist" (Beardsley 1962, 294).

Richard is fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth, can be taken as true. So Searle concludes:

> My argument is starkly simple: in many cases the metaphorical statement and the corresponding similarity statement cannot be equivalent in meaning because they have different truth conditions. (90)

The first thing to say about this argument is that it relies upon a metaphor that is quite dead. On Searle's own account, with dead metaphors, what previously was a metaphorical meaning has become a new literal meaning. So, as a dead metaphor, the truth condition for "Richard is a gorilla" is just that he is fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth. Through repetition, the metaphor ceases to be a metaphor and becomes an instance of the category of direct and literal meaning.

A more subtle case lies nearby. Suppose *A* and *B* are primate anthropologists. They both know that gorillas are shy, sensitive creatures, et cetera. Now suppose, over drinks, *A* describes someone as a gorilla; how will *B* respond to him? That's hard to say. He might remark that it's unfair (to gorillas). He might also respond to it as a dead metaphor. Finally, and this is the subtle case, he might respond to it as representing the common view (though not the speaker's view) concerning gorillas. He is responding to a claim that could be paraphrased as follows:

> Richard is like what (most people think) gorillas are like.

There are two ways we might treat this case. First, we can say that the person is saying that Richard is like what most people think gorillas are like, and has simply dropped the qualifying reference to most people's beliefs. This is the way of ellipsis. In this case, everything said is literally said, but not everything literally claimed is put into words. Alternatively, we can say that the person draws the comparison from an assumed perspective. Here he speaks from the perspective of common

belief, which he and his listener know contains false beliefs they do not share. We might call them assumed-perspective statements and, as such, they are close to comparisons made between actual and fictitious beings. Such cross-comparisons, however, are not embarrassing to the comparativist.[2]

3. Under the heading "A Further Examination of the Comparison Theory," Searle presents a more interesting line of criticism.

> Yet another objection is this: It is crucial to the simile thesis [as Searle now calls it] that the simile be taken literally; yet there seem to be a great many metaphorical utterances where there is no relevant literal corresponding similarity between *S* and *P*. (95)

Taking the specimen "Sally is a block of ice," he tells us:

> There simply is no class of predicates, *R*, such that Sally is literally like a block of ice with respect to *R* where *R* is what we intended to predicate of Sally when we said she was a block of ice. (96)

The obvious response is that both Sally and blocks of ice are cold. Searle anticipates this response:

2. In discussing the gorilla example, Searle makes one of his few remarks about similes:

> Similar remarks apply incidentally to similes. If I say,
>
> (1) Sam acts like a gorilla
>
> that need not commit me to the truth of
>
> (2) Gorillas are such that their behavior resembles Sam's.
>
> For (1) need not be about gorillas at all, and we might say that "gorilla" in (1) has a metaphorical occurrence. (91–92)

The remarks I have made concerning metaphors apply here as well. In this same context, Searle lapses into pleonasm when he distinguishes *figurative* similes from literal statements of similarity. This is Searle's closest encounter with the comparativist theory of the traditional kind.

> Temperature metaphors for emotional and personal traits are in fact quite common and they are not derived from any literal underlying similarities. Thus we speak of a "heated argument," "a warm welcome," "a lukewarm friendship," and "sexual frigidity." Such metaphors are fatal for the simile thesis, unless the defenders can produce a literal *R* which *S* and *P* have in common, and which is sufficient to explain the precise metaphorical meaning which is conveyed. (98)

Let me spell this argument out in detail. A suppressed underlying premise seems to be something like this:

1. If *S* is similar to *P,* then there must be some specifiable feature *R* such that both of them literally possess it.

Notice that this is a thesis about similarity claims in general and not just about metaphorical statements and similes. Now, according to Searle:

2. There are some metaphors and similes where no such feature *R* can be found which (a) both *S* and *P* share and which (b) provides the basis for the metaphor.

He then concludes that metaphors are not assertions of similarity.

It seems to me that the first premise of this argument is just false, and I'm not the first person to see and say this. In the appendix to the *Treatise of Human Nature,* Hume remarks:

> 'Tis evident, that even different simple ideas may have a similarity or resemblance to each other; nor is it necessary, that the point or circumstance of the resemblance should be distinct or separable from that in which they differ. Blue and green are different simple ideas, but are more resembling than blue and scarlet; though their perfect simplicity excludes all possibility of separation or distinction. (Hume 1978, 637)

Unfortunately, Hume expresses himself in terms of his distinction between simple and complex ideas—a distinction that melts under scrutiny—but surely the point he is making is correct: Two different shades of blue, for example, resemble each other without there being any common distinguishable feature in virtue of which they resemble each other. Of course, they resemble each other in being different shades of *blue*, but this is what distinguishes them as well, that is, that they are *different* shades of blue. Thus, Searle's argument seems to rely on the principle that for one thing to be similar to another there must be some feature that they (nontrivially) share. That principle seems to be false.

In order to explore this issue further, let me introduce the notion of a brute similarity. I will say that a similarity is brute if there is no independently identifiable feature such that the similarity is (nontrivially) based upon sharing this feature. I'm not sure that the notion of a brute similarity will stand up to close examination, but I introduce it only to formulate a response to my criticism of Searle's argument. Someone, perhaps Searle, might argue in the following way: The similarity between two shades of blue may be brute, but the metaphor involved in calling Sally a block of ice cannot be based upon even a brute similarity because the comparison, if it exists, would be cross-categorical.

But cross-category brute similarities do seem to occur. We can say, for example, that things from different categories are simple. Mathematical proofs, recipes, designs, the way to a friend's house, the instructions for assembling a lawn chair, can all be simple. More to the point, certain colors and sounds seem hot, others cold or cool. Here Searle might respond that these temperature attributions to colors and sounds are themselves metaphorical. But why say that? The only reason that I can see is an acceptance of the principle that for one thing to resemble another, there must be some independent feature that they non-

trivially share. That principle is plainly false for many intracategorical comparisons where brute similarities (for example, between colors) plainly exist, and it doesn't seem obviously true that there are no brute cross-categorical comparisons. In sum, Searle's third argument against the comparativist account of metaphors depends upon an unstated (hence undefended) account of similarity that we are not constrained to accept.

It seems to me that I have surveyed all of Searle's arguments against the comparativist view of metaphors and none of them seems to override the presumption that metaphors, like similes, put forward comparisons, albeit figurative comparisons.

THE GOODMAN AND DAVIDSON ATTACKS ON COMPARATIVISM

Searle's attack on comparativism depends, in part at least, on a view concerning the nature of similarity claims, namely, that for one thing to be like another they must share an independently identifiable significant feature. Here, I will examine two further objections to comparativism that also turn upon special views concerning similarity claims. The first is found in Nelson Goodman's "Seven Strictures on Similarity"; the second comes from Donald Davidson's "What Metaphors Mean."

Goodman

In his splendid essay "Seven Strictures on Similarity," Nelson Goodman submits that similarity is insidious. More fully:

> Similarity, ever ready to solve philosophical problems and overcome obstacles, is a pretender, an imposter, a quack. *It has, indeed, its place and its uses,* but is more often found where it does not belong, professing powers it does not possess. (Goodman 1972, 437; emphasis added)

As the italicized passage indicates, Goodman is not proscribing all appeals to similarity, a point he had already insisted upon in *The Languages of Art:*

> Neither here nor elsewhere have I argued that there is no constant relation of resemblance; judgments of similarity in selected and familiar respects are, even though rough and fallible, as objective and categorical as any that are made in describing the world. (Goodman1968, 39n)

Appeals to similarity become insidious when they are not modestly restricted to "selected and familiar respects," and when they are not controlled, in Goodman's words, by "conceptual and perceptual habit"(39n) and embedded in "representational custom."(39n) Philosophers (theoreticians), however, often use similarity claims in the absence of these necessary constraints. They are the target of Goodman's seven strictures.

In his *first stricture,* for example, Goodman tells us that similarity does not "account for the grading of pictures as more or less realistic or naturalistic" (Goodman 1972, 437). In the first place, "We must beware of supposing that similarity constitutes any firm, invariant criterion of realism; for similarity is relative, variable, culture dependent" (438). Second, reversing the direction of explanation, he points out that our involvement in our culture's customary modes of representation may influence what strikes us as being similar or resembling. In *The Languages of Art* he makes the point this way:

> Representational customs, which govern realism, also tend to generate resemblance. (Goodman 1968, 39)

Following a similar pattern, in the *fifth stricture* Goodman tells us:

> Similarity does not account for our predictive, or more generally, our inductive practice. (Goodman 1972, 441)

The reason is that "no matter what happens, the future will be in some way like the past" (441) and therefore

> our predictions cannot be based upon the bald principle that the future will resemble the past. The question is *how* what is predicted is like what has already been found. Along which among countless lines of similarities do our predictions run? I suspect that rather than similarity providing any guidelines for inductive practice, inductive practice may provide the basis for some canons of similarity. (441)

Once more we have a double move: first, a rejection of the explanatory force of a *bald* appeal to similarity; second, a suggestion that explanation may, in part at least, run in the reverse direction.

Goodman's *fourth stricture,* which is my present concern, says:

> Similarity does not explain metaphor or metaphorical truth. (440)

Why? Goodman's answer falls into the familiar pattern. First, bald appeals to similarity are unconstrained and thus lack explanatory power:

> To proclaim that certain tones are soft because they are like soft materials, or blue because they are like colors, explains nothing. *Anything is in some ways like anything else*. (440; emphasis added)

Then, once more, he suggests that we might do better to treat similarity as an explacandum rather than as the explanans:

> Metaphorical use may serve to explain the similarity better than—or at least as well as—the similarity explains the metaphor. (440)

To begin with, let me say that I think Goodman is surely right in his first point: Bald appeals to similarity typically lack

the explanatory power that philosophers are apt to attribute to them. I think he may also be right in saying that similarity might better be explained by various phenomena that it is sometimes presented as explaining. More carefully, and Goodman's phrasing suggests this, our notions of similarity and representation, similarity and inductive practice, and similarity and metaphorical use are respectively intertwined and mutually supportive. In each case similarity demands explanation *together with* its companion.

How do these considerations bear upon the traditional comparativist account of metaphors? In what I take to be an allusion to the traditional position, Goodman remarks:

> Metaphor is . . . construed as elliptical simile, and metaphorical truths as elliptical literal truths. (440)

While the first part of this sentence is perfectly correct, the second, as I have said repeatedly, completely misrepresents the comparativist position. Metaphorical truths, if we want to use this expression, are elliptical *figurative* (not literal) truths.

This response to Goodman is too quick, for even if he misdescribes the target of his criticism, isn't it still true that the comparativists, in their explanation of metaphors, make just the kind of bald appeal to similarity that Goodman rejects? The answer is no. The comparativist identifies the literal and figurative meaning of a metaphor respectively with the literal and figurative meaning of a counterpart simile. Concentrating on the counterpart simile for a moment, two things are worth saying: (1) Similes, as they occur in daily life, in poetry, et cetera, are typically specific, determinate, and not bald assertions of resemblance of the kind that Goodman rejects; and (2) similes (to say it again) are figurative comparisons gaining their indirect content in virtue of an incongruency (of one sort or another) with the determinate

context in which they occur. Thus treating metaphors as elliptical similes has none of the bad consequences that Goodman envisages. It does not identify metaphors with (or reduce them to) empty similarity claims; it treats them as figurative comparisons.

Davidson

Part of the difficulty in understanding Davidson's essay "What Metaphors Mean" is that it is motivated, at least in part, by a background theory that is not explicitly stated in it. The theory is, however, alluded to a number of times, as in the following passage:

> Literal meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular context of use. This is why adverting to them has genuine explanatory value. (Davidson 1978, 33)

This passage falls so casually from Davidson's pen that the general reader might take it to be a commonplace. In fact, it invokes a complex and highly controversial position that Davidson and his followers have developed over decades. The leading idea is that a theory of meaning for a natural language consists of giving truth conditions for the sentences of that language.[3]

3. The primitive insight is that the meaning of a sentence is given by those conditions that make it true. Since, however, the speaker of a language can produce an unlimited number of sentences with novel meanings, the specification of these truth conditions must be done in a systematic (typically recursive) way. The technical details of this program are complex and will not be pursued here. Fortunately, there is no need to do so since, as we shall see, Davidson's central criticism of the comparativist account of metaphors turns upon a particular thesis concerning likeness or resemblance claims, namely, that they are, one and all, true.

The passage can also be misread. It may sound as if Davidson is saying that the literal meaning and literal truth conditions of a sentence are independent of context, but this is not what he means. For Davidson, the literal truth conditions (and presumably the literal meaning)[4] of a sentence containing indexicals (for example, "This was left here yesterday") will depend upon the context in which the sentence is uttered. Davidson's point is that the literal meaning of a sentence is not affected by the *use* to which it is put. A person might use the sentence "The cat is on the mat" to achieve various purposes: to tell someone where the cat is, to tell someone what a mat (or cat) is, or, more remotely, to demonstrate a command of the English language, but whatever the point of making the remark might be, the sentence "The cat is on the mat" is true if and only if the cat is, after all, on the mat. Thus Davidson is not saying that meaning and truth are independent of context, but rather, that meaning and truth are independent of the context of *use*. "I depend," he tells us, "on [this] distinction between what words mean and what they are used to do" (33).

With this background, we can turn to Davidson's leading thesis, that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (32). According to Davidson, if someone says, metaphorically, that Harold is a pig, then he is literally asserting that Harold is a *pig*. His sentence does not *mean* anything more than this. Of course, in common parlance, we might say that the person who used this sentence meant to indicate that Harold is, say, a sloppy eater. Even so, and here let me say at once that I think Davidson is absolutely right, this does not alter the meaning of the sentence uttered.

4. At one place Davidson speaks of "what a sentence literally means (given its context)" (44).

But if the person is literally saying (or saying literally) that Harold is a pig, then what he says is false and this, in general, is how it is with metaphors:

> If a sentence used metaphorically is true or false in the ordinary sense, then it is clear that it is usually false. (41)[5]

Finally, what, according to Davidson, is the point of uttering such falsehoods, which, unlike lies, are uttered with the intention that the falsehood be recognized? He answers this question in a variety of ways:

> A metaphor *makes* us attend to some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things. (33; emphasis added)
>
> When "mouth" [is] applied only metaphorically to bottles, the application [*makes*] the hearer *notice* a likeness between animal and bottle openings. (37)
>
> A simile tells us, in part, what a metaphor *nudges* us into noting. (38; emphasis added)

So, strictly speaking, a sentence has no metaphorical meaning; its meaning is just its direct, flat-footed literal meaning. On the other hand, in using a sentence metaphorically we typically employ a patent falsehood in order to make our listener notice, or nudge him into noticing, a similarity (often novel or surprising) between the things spoken of in the false utterance. In sum, Davidson has given us a causal theory of what others

5. I'm not sure how the qualifying clause, "If a sentence used metaphorically is true or false in the ordinary sense," is intended. One possibility is that it acknowledges the existence of metaphorical expressions in sentences that are not true or false—for example, in questions and imperatives. A provision should be made for such occurrences. More plausibly, as Ted Cohen suggests, the qualification leaves open the possibility that even metaphorical sentences in the indicative lack a truth value. This fits the line of Davidson's argument that the meaning of a metaphorical sentence must be its literal meaning at the pain of its having no meaning at all.

have called metaphorical meaning. At least he has sketched the outlines of such a theory.

Davidson's causal theory is, I believe, in many ways original, but in one respect his presentation of it falls in step with other recent writings on metaphor: In developing his position, he feels called upon to reject the traditional comparativist theory of metaphors. At first glance it may seem that Davidson's leading thesis, that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (32), is clearly incompatible with traditional comparativism. But, as Davidson himself sees, this is quite wrong. A person who holds the elliptical-simile theory of metaphors maintains that the metaphorical sentence "Harold is a pig" *literally* means the same thing as "Harold is like a pig." In criticizing Black's interpretation of the comparativist view, Davidson puts this just right:

> If metaphors are elliptical similes, they say *explicitly* what similes say, for ellipsis is a form of abbreviation, not of paraphrase or indirection. (39)

It strikes me as a bit odd to say that an elliptical expression says *explicitly* the same thing that its nonelliptical counterpart says, but in any case, it does *literally* say the same thing. It then follows that there is no reason why Davidson, given his leading thesis, could not accept the elliptical-simile account of metaphors. But he does not. I will now examine why.

Davidson distinguishes two versions of the comparativist view of metaphors. The first, which, for reasons that escape me, he calls the more "sophisticated variant," tells us that "the figurative meaning of a metaphor is the literal meaning of the corresponding simile" (38).[6] This, as I have argued, is the

6. This is reminiscent of Nelson Goodman's characterization of the comparativists in these words: "Metaphor is thus construed as elliptical simile, and metaphorical truths as elliptical literal truths" (Goodman 1972, 440).

worst way of interpreting the comparativist account of metaphors. Davidson then goes on to distinguish it from "the common theory that a metaphor is an elliptical simile" (38). Having gotten this right, he then offers the following curious criticism of this second version of the comparativist view.

> This theory makes no distinction in meaning between a metaphor and some related simile and does not provide any ground for speaking of figurative, metaphorical, or special meanings. (38–39)

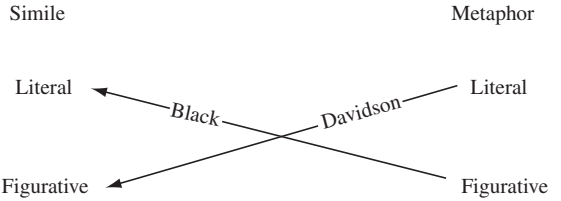
I'm not sure what Davidson is getting at here, but perhaps it comes to this: Anyone who identifies the meaning of a metaphor with the meaning of a counterpart simile, *and then goes on his way,* has hardly produced a theory of the figurative meaning of metaphors. In contrast, the person who presents the more "sophisticated variant" of the comparativist position, by identifying the figurative meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of the counterpart simile, has at least produced a theory, albeit, for Davidson, a very bad one. The obvious rejoinder is that the person who recommends an elliptical-simile account of metaphorical meaning is not constrained to stop there. The theory amounts to treating both metaphors and similes as figurative comparisons. The next step, which will be pursued in ensuing chapters, is to explain how figurative comparisons function.

Davidson's second complaint against treating metaphors as elliptical similes goes as follows:

> If we make the literal meaning of the metaphor to be the literal meaning of a matching simile, we deny access to what we originally took to be the literal meaning of the metaphor, and we agreed almost from the start that *this* meaning was essential to the working of the metaphor. (39)

This is surely odd, for how can *identifying* the meaning of "*A*" with "*B*" *deny access* to the meaning of "*A*"? Only, I suppose, if

we thought (or agreed) that we knew the meaning of "*A*" and then went on to identify it with the meaning of "*B,*" where its meaning is in doubt. Nothing like that, however, is going on in the elliptical-simile theory of metaphors. The *literal* meaning of a counterpart simile is transparent; it is just the claim that *A* is like *B*. In fact, it is hard not to think that Davidson has repeated Black's mistake, except in reverse form. Black identified the figurative meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of the counterpart simile, then complained that figurativeness was lost. Davidson identifies the literal meaning of a metaphor with the figurative meaning of the counterpart simile and then complains that the literal meaning of the metaphorical expression is lost. Schematically, the situation looks like this:



The suspicion that Davidson, despite clear texts that show he knows better, is lapsing into mistaken criticisms reminiscent of Black is further borne out by the following passage:

> Both the elliptical simile theory of metaphor and its more sophisticated variant, which equates the figurative meaning of the metaphor with the literal meaning of a simile, share a fatal defect. They make the hidden meaning of the metaphor all too obvious and accessible. In each case the hidden meaning is to be found simply by looking to the literal meaning of what is usually a painfully trivial simile. This is like that—Tolstoy is like an infant, the earth like a floor. *It is trivial because everything is like everything else.* Metaphors are often very difficult to interpret and, so it is said,

> impossible to paraphrase. But with this theory, interpretation and paraphrase typically are ready to the hand to the most callow. (39; emphasis added)

This passage contains two criticisms, both wrong, but it will take some work to sort them out. The first is that comparativism, in either form, makes the hidden meaning of a metaphor too easy to interpret; the second is that hidden meaning, when revealed, usually emerges as triviality. To say it yet again, the traditional comparativist, in contrast to his more sophisticated sidekick invented by Davidson, does not identify the figurative meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of a corresponding simile. Instead, he identifies the literal meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of the corresponding simile and the figurative meaning of the metaphor with the figurative meaning of that simile. Thus Davidson's attack on the so-called sophisticated theory of metaphor, which is sound enough, does not carry over to the normal (elliptical-simile) theory. This is the first thing wrong with Davidson's attack upon the comparativist position.

In his second criticism, Davidson claims that comparativism, in either of the forms he distinguishes, identifies the "hidden" meaning of a metaphor with "what is usually a painfully trivial simile." Later he elaborates this claim in these words:

> The most obvious semantic difference between simile and metaphor is that all similes are true and most metaphors are false. The earth is like a floor, the Assyrian did come down like a wolf on the fold, because *everything is like everything*. (41; emphasis added)[7]

7. Notice that Davidson's claim that everything is like everything is stronger than Goodman's remark that "anything is in some way like anything else"(Goodman 1972, 440). Goodman seems to hold that philosophers' similarity claims are sometimes empty truths lacking explanatory power. He does not hold that this is true of all similarity claims.

I think Davidson's intentions here are clear: All similes are true because all comparative statements, including those we would not naturally call similes, are true. They are all true because everything is like everything. Thus reducing metaphors to similes has the result that metaphors, like similes, are always boringly true.

Why should Davidson hold that everything is like everything? I suspect that it follows from a commitment to two more-primitive theses:

D1. Two things are similar if there is at least one thing that is true of both.

D2. Given any two things, it is always possible to find something (indeed, endlessly many things) true of both.

Taken together, these theses clearly imply that everything is like everything.

The first instinct of those unfamiliar with these matters is to challenge D2. It may seem implausible that given *any* two things, we can always find something (not to say endlessly many things) true of both of them. In fact, once we see how little D2 is saying, it becomes clear that it is obviously, trivially, true. For example, the Washington Monument and the fourth root of seven have endlessly many things in common since they share a property of the following kind:

> That of being identical with the Washington Monument or being identical with the fourth root of seven or being indentical with one.

Using this pattern as our guide, one can churn out endlessly many disjunctive properties, simply by replacing the number one by other numbers and, in this way, churn out endlessly many ways in which the Washington Monument is similar to the fourth root of seven.

Here someone might respond that this weird disjunctive property is perfectly stupid—altogether useless. This, I think,

is absolutely the right thing to say. In Goodman's more dignified language already cited, "judgments of similarity in selected and familiar respects are, even though rough and fallible, as objective and categorical as any that are made in describing the world" (Goodman1968, 39n). The disjunctive similarity given above certainly fails on the familiarity standard. Furthermore, a similarity claim based on this property is not controlled, again in Goodman's words, by "conceptual and perceptual habit" (39n) and embedded in "representational custom" (39n). In using figurative comparisons, poets, for example, depart from literal comparisons, but not in ways that fall under Goodman's strictures. The traditional view that treats metaphors as elliptical similes does not fall under them either.

I have dwelled on these matters because it is important to see that the Davidson view of metaphor (and, in particular, his dismissal of the comparativist approach) is driven by his special views concerning similarity claims. For him, all similarity claims are literally true because everything is similar to everything. Contra Davidson, I think that some similarity claims are true and others false. I do not deny D2—that, given any two entities (existent, nonexistent, or mixed), it is always possible to find something that is true of both; I deny Dl—that this shows they are similar. To establish this, I will challenge a seemingly safer claim, namely, that if *a* is similar to *b*, then *b* must be similar to *a*. Over against the claim that similarity is a *universal*[8] relation (that is, a relation that holds between all entities), I will argue that it is not even a *symmetrical* relation. Of course, if similarity is a universal relation, it follows trivially that it is a symmetrical relation; thus, by showing that similarity is not symmetrical, we refute the doctrine that everything is similar to everything else. This in turn forces us to

8. Goodman's phrase is "universal and hence useless" relation (Goodman 1972, 443).

reject Dl, the claim that two things are similar if at least one thing is true of both.

REVERSIBILITY

My attention was first drawn to the matter of the symmetry of similarity claims by Monroe Beardsley's fine essay "The Metaphorical Twist." There he produces an ingenious criticism of the comparativist account of metaphors. He first maintains that "a statement of likeness is equivalent to its own converse" (Beardsley 1962, 297), that is, likeness statements are symmetrical: If *a* is like (similar to) *b*, then *b* is like (similar to) *a*. But metaphors are not always (or even often) reversible in this way. Citing an example from R. P. Blackmur, he points out, quite correctly, that "This man is a lion" seems radically different in meaning from "This lion is a man." To give another example, "No man is an island" seems wholly different in significance from "No island is a man." The argument, then, comes to this: Since similarity statements are symmetrical and metaphorical statements are not, metaphorical statements are not statements of similarity.

Actually, as stated, this argument draws too strong a conclusion. There might be metaphors that are symmetrical (reversible), and these metaphors, at least, might express similarity claims. I will not, however, press this point, since I have a deeper criticism of the *reversibility argument,* as I shall now call it. The underlying assumption of the reversibility argument is that nonfigurative (or literal) similarity claims are symmetrical. I will argue that this assumption is false.

To start with a personal experience, I was once struck by the likeness (in photographs) of Pope John Paul II to Arnold Palmer. It was not difficult to identify the source of this likeness: The pope had Arnold Palmer's eyes. At the same time, I felt no compulsion to say that Arnold Palmer looked like

the pope. Why not? The answer, I think, is that the look of Arnold Palmer's eyes—that crinkled down-the-fairway squint—is one of the distinctive features of his face. It would appear, for example, in caricatures of him. On the other hand, Arnold Palmer eyes were not a distinctive feature of the pope's face. Put crudely, it seemed to me that the pope resembled Arnold Palmer, but not conversely, because the pope possessed one of Arnold Palmer's distinctive features whereas Arnold Palmer did not possess a distinctive feature of the pope. To cite another example, and they are easily multiplied, beach chairs look like clothespins (the kind with springs), but clothespins do not look like beach chairs.[9]

Where I have spoken of *distinctive features,* cognitive psychologists speak of *salience.* In his seminal paper "Features of Similarity," Amos Tversky states the matter this way:

> Similarity judgments can be regarded as extensions of similarity statements, that is, statements of the form "a is like b." Such a statement is directional; it has a subject, a, and a referent, b, and it is not equivalent in general to the converse similarity statement "b is like a." In fact, a choice of subject and referent depends, at least in part, on the relative salience of the objects. We tend to select the more salient stimulus, or the prototype, as a referent, and

9. This example comes from Florence Fogelin. Gombrich makes a similar point about likenesses in appearance by comparing a photograph taken of Bertrand Russell when he was four years old with one taken when he was ninety years old. "Those who are familiar with Bertrand Russell's striking features will inevitably . . . try to find the old man in the young child; his mother, if she could be alive, would look in the features of the old man for traces of the child" (Gombrich 1972, 7). There is no need for the striking features of the child to be the same as the striking features of the old man, and in such a case, for example, the four-year-old Russell might look like the ninety-year-old Russell, but not conversely. (This passage from Gombrich was pointed out to me by Ted Cohen.)

> the less salient stimulus, or variant, as a subject. We say "the portrait resembles the person" rather than "the person resembles the portrait." We say "the son resembles the father" rather than "the father resembles the son." We say "an ellipse is like a circle," not "a circle is like an ellipse," and we say "North Korea is like Red China" rather than "Red China is like North Korea." (Tversky 1977, 328)

This passage contains two components: (i) a list of clear examples of nonfigurative similarity claims that are not reversible, and (ii) a general claim, in terms of *salience*, intended to explain this phenomenon. It is important to see that the first point *alone* is sufficient to refute Beardsley's claim that metaphors are not similarity claims because similarity claims are symmetrical and metaphors (often) are not. And *a fortiori*, it refutes Davidson's claim that everything is, after all, similar to everything else.

It may be true that reversing metaphors and similes (typically) produces more strikingly incongruous results. Tversky suggests this:

> The directionality and asymmetry of similarity relations are particularly noticeable in similes and metaphors. We say that "Turks fight like tigers" and not "tigers fight like Turks." (328)[10]

It might be interesting to know why (if it is true) metaphors and similes have reversals that tend to be more incongruous than the reversals of nonfigurative comparisons. Nonetheless, the phenomenon of incongruous reversal cannot be used to distinguish similes and metaphors from nonfigurative comparisons, since the phenomenon is exhibited by both.

10. Notice that Tversky here takes for granted the traditional view that similes and metaphors express similarities.

Confronted with Tversky's use of the concept of salience to explain the phenomenon of incongruous reversal, the philosophical instinct is to ask for an analysis or definition of this key notion. In fact, Tversky says little that satisfies this demand. He provides a number of examples of incongruous reversals, but in a mixed bag where irreversibility arises for different reasons. Consider the appeal to *prototypes*. Prototypes are typically *set up* to be imitated, and it is therefore not surprising that saying that a prototype resembles one of its echotypes will sound peculiar.[11] The irreversibility of "an ellipse is like a circle" seems to have a wholly different source, and later, Tversky explains it this way:

> A major determinant of salience of geometric figures is goodness of form. Thus, a "good figure" is likely to be more salient than a "bad figure." (334)

The irreversibility of "North Korea is like Red China" seems to derive from yet other sources, though a further specification of context would be needed to spell this out. It seems, then, that salience can arise for a variety of heterogeneous reasons that may defy any reduction to a simple theory. This comes out in Tversky's most general characterization of salience:

> The salience . . . of a feature is determined by two types of factors: intensive and diagnostic. The former refers to factors that increase intensity or signal-to-noise ratio, such as the brightness of a light, the loudness of a tone, the saturation of a color, the size of a letter, the frequency of an item, the clarity of a picture, or the vividness of an image. The diagnostic factors refer to the classificatory signifi-

11. Although it may seem odd to say that a face serves as a prototype for a portrait, the relationship between prototype/copy and subject/portrait is close. In both cases, the first member of the pair sets the standard for the second.

> cance of features, that is, the importance or prevalence of the classifications that are based on these features. (342)

Roughly, features are salient in the first way when they stand out—when they are prominent or conspicuous. Features are salient in the second way when they play a central role in classifying or sorting things out. In bird identification, eye rings (split or unsplit) and wing bars are sometimes salient features in this second way, but, as every birder knows, often not salient in the first way.

Salience, then, is a rich and diverse concept—perhaps in need of regimentation. Salience is also highly context-bound, a point stressed by Tversky.

> Like other judgments, similarity depends on context and frame of reference. Sometimes the relevant frame of reference is specified explicitly, as in the questions, "How similar are English and French with respect to sound?" "What is the similarity of a pear and an apple with respect to taste?" In general, however, the relevant feature space is not specified explicitly but rather inferred from the general context. (340)

But even if the feature space is not always specified explicitly, judgments of similarity always take place within a space where certain features make themselves count (type one salience) or are made to count (type two salience). Because of the contextual constraints imposed by a delimiting feature space, not all claims to similarity are alike in being boringly true.

I can now draw some negative conclusions. First, metaphors cannot be distinguished from literal similarity claims, as Monroe Beardsley thought, by an appeal to the phenomenon of incongruous reversal. Second, metaphors cannot be distinguished from literal similarity claims, as Merrie Bergmann seems to suggest, by an appeal to salience. Here is what she says:

> What is distinctive of all metaphorical uses of language (whether the purpose is to assert or to do something else) is that the content of what is communicated is a *direct* function of salient characteristics associated with (at least) part of the expression—rather than of the literal meaning of that part. (Bergmann 1982, 234)

If Tversky is right—and he only has to be *generally* right, and not right *in detail*—then this feature that Bergmann finds distinctive of metaphors is a common feature of all comparisons, both figurative and nonfigurative.

To return to Davidson's criticisms that started these reflections on similarity, the comparativist does not, as Davidson would have it, make "the hidden meaning of a metaphor all too obvious and accessible" by identifying it with "the literal meaning of what is usually a painfully trivial simile" (Davidson 1978, 38). This is doubly wrong. The comparativist does not identify the hidden meaning with the literal meaning of a simile; that's Black's old mistake. Nor is there any reason to suppose that the associated simile is "usually painfully trivial";[12] that's Davidson's new mistake.

A closing comment: Donald Davidson had a wide-ranging and sophisticated understanding of literature and art. What a simile "told him in part," or what a metaphor "nudged him into noting," was a function of this rich context in which the telling or the nudging took place. In his writings on metaphors, I do not think Davidson paid sufficient attention to the literary understanding that provided the basis for his informed and sensitive interpretation of literature.

12. On his own account, Davidson should have said "*always* painfully trivial."

5

A Dilemma for Theories of Metaphor

In the previous chapter I tried to rescue the comparativist view of metaphors from the avalanche of criticism under which it has been buried. In this chapter I will look at some of the alternative theories that have been offered in its place. I will argue that theories of metaphor must solve a basic dilemma concerning metaphorical truth, and further argue that, as far as I can see, the comparativist view alone is able to solve this dilemma in a natural way.

One question that a theory of metaphor should answer is what, after all, is being said when someone produces a metaphorical utterance? For example, one version of the substitution view, which may exist only as a target of criticism, is that the metaphorical utterance "John is a lion" just means that John is brave. I will classify this as a *meaning-shift* theory of metaphor, including under this same title any theory that holds that when a sentence is used metaphorically, at least some expression it contains undergoes a shift in meaning. Later I shall show that Max Black, Monroe Beardsley,

and many others hold sophisticated versions of a meaning-shift theory.[1]

Opposed to meaning-shift theories, there are the *literalist* theories, for example, those of Davidson and Searle. For both, "John is a lion" just means that John is a lion, and is true just in case John is a lion. *Comparativists*, as I have described them, maintain that "John is a lion," when used metaphorically, is elliptical for "John is like a lion." It is important to see that this is also a *literalist* theory, since no shift in meaning takes place by treating one expression *A* as *elliptical* for another expression *B*. If *A* is elliptical for *B*, then it meant the same thing as *B* all along.

A second matter that a satisfactory account of metaphors should explain is how metaphors function, sometimes with extraordinary power, in a communicative context. It will be a strong mark against an analysis of metaphors if, under that analysis, the force of metaphors becomes unintelligible.

Davidson and Searle produce what might be called *fecund-falsehood* accounts of the force of metaphors. For both, metaphorical utterances mean just what they say, and, in the great majority of cases, what they say is false. Pressing this literalist theme is the main point of Davidson's essay, but, as we saw, he also indicates that recognizing the falsehood of the metaphorical utterance can lead us "to seek common features" or "invite us to make comparisons" (Davidson 1978, 40) that will often reveal likenesses that are "novel and surprising" (33). Here, then, is a gesture toward a causal theory of the way metaphors work. Why are metaphors sometimes so powerful? I do not

1. Nelson Goodman holds a nominalist variant of a meaning-shift theory, that is, such a theory cleansed of what Goodman considers improper references to meaning. As he says, "The treatment of metaphor in the following pages agrees in many matters with the excellent article by Max Black, 'Metaphor'" (Goodman 1968, 71n).

think Davidson addresses this question directly. His answer, I suppose, is that metaphors are sometimes powerful because they sometimes trigger the recognition of likenesses that are "novel and surprising."

Although Searle, like Davidson, is a literalist concerning what metaphors mean and adopts a fecund-falsehood theory of how they work, his emphasis and positive theory are different. Within the context of a speech-act theory, it is a commonplace that we can perform indirect speech acts using false statements as vehicles. (As shown in chapter 2, irony and hyperbole function this way.) The central task for Searle is to spell out the principles that connect the direct speech act of uttering a false statement with the indirect speech act of producing a metaphor. Unlike Davidson—and this is a crucial difference—Searle does not invoke a causal theory. For him, the recognition of an intentional falsehood (where the speaker plainly does not intend to deceive) does not simply lead the respondent to make certain associations and comparisons; instead, the respondent becomes involved in the *cognitive* task of making sense out of the remark in a way that best preserves the integrity of the conversational exchange. I think this is right, and importantly right. Making the respondent active in the comprehension of a metaphor helps explain some of its rhetorical force.[2]

Returning to Black: After spending a great deal of time attacking what he calls the substitution and comparison views of metaphor, he offers in their place a version of a meaning-shift account of metaphor. The core of this position is given in the four following propositions:

2. The rhetorical power gained by making the respondent a participant in determining the content of the indirect speech act was a central theme of chapter 2.

> A metaphorical statement has two distinct subjects—a "principal" subject and a "subsidiary" one.
>
> These subjects are best regarded as a "system" of things rather than "things."
>
> The metaphor works by applying to the principal subject a system of "associated implications" characteristic of the subsidiary subject.
>
> This involves shifts in meaning of words belonging to the same family or system as the metaphorical expression. (Black 1962, 44–45)

Roughly, when a vocabulary from one context is applied to another context, then the interaction between these two contexts induces a change in the meaning of the original vocabulary. Metaphorical meaning, then, is primary meaning displaced by the force field of the new context in which the utterance is used. At times, metaphors simply reproduce old meanings in a new and striking way. But on this approach metaphors can also produce genuinely new meanings that, sometimes at least, will not admit of an adequate paraphrase into literal language.

Monroe Beardsley presents another version of the meaning-shift view of metaphors:

> When a predicate is metaphorically adjoined to a subject, the predicate loses its ordinary extension, because it acquires a new intention—perhaps one it has in no other context. And this twist of meaning is forced by inherent tensions, or oppositions, within the metaphor itself. (Beardsley 1962, 294)

The first sentence in this passage clearly exhibits a commitment to a meaning-shift account of metaphors. I'll come back to this in a moment. The second sentence contains a more important claim. Unlike the fecund-falsehood theories of Searle and Davidson, the clash that triggers a figurative reading or, for Beardsley, generates figurative meaning, is not between

the statement and the context in which it is used; instead, the clash lies within the metaphorical utterance itself. Thus, for Beardsley, *oxymoron* becomes the model for metaphors:

> It should be counted as a merit in a theory of metaphor that it can analyze metaphor in the same terms that will do for oxymoron. (297–98)

Then, more strongly:

> The truth seems…to be that in oxymoron we have the archetype, the most apparent and intense form, of verbal opposition. (298)

To see how this works, consider the oxymoron "global village." How do we recognize that it cannot be read literally? The answer is that being global and being a village are virtually opposite notions. How do we make sense of this puzzle? Beardsley suggests that we readjust the meaning of words: Connotations that were candidates waiting to become criteria of meaning are elevated to that status, and old criteria are set (or pushed) aside. So, in the expression "global village," one or both of the words it contains takes on a new meaning—at least for a while.

There is, then, an important difference in emphasis between Black's version of the meaning-shift theory and Beardsley's. For Black, a metaphor is a mechanism for imposing a categorial scheme from one domain onto another, a view that he presents even more strongly in his later writing on metaphor:

> I am now impressed, as I was insufficiently so when composing *Metaphor*, by the tight connection between the notions of models and metaphors. Each implication-complex supported by a metaphor's secondary subject, I now think, is a *model* of the ascriptions imputed to the primary subject. Every metaphor is the tip of a submerged model. (Black 1979, 31)

Beardsley takes tension or opposition to be essential to metaphors. For both Beardsley and Black, however, metaphors are meaning-generators.

Goodman, for his part, combines the interaction and opposition theories. Sounding rather like Beardsley, he tells us:

> A metaphor is an affair between a predicate with a past and an object that yields while protesting.... Application of a term is metaphorical only if to some extent it is contra-indicated. (Goodman 1968, 69)

Yet the dominant theme of Goodman's position is close to Black's interaction theory. With a metaphor, he tells us:

> A whole set of alternative labels, a whole apparatus of organization, takes over new territory. What occurs is a transfer of a schema, a migration of concepts, an alienation of categories. Indeed, a metaphor might be regarded as a calculated category mistake—or rather as a happy and revitalizing, even if bigamous, second marriage. (73)

The imagery of rape and the metaphor of infidelity bring out the two sides of Goodman's position.

Having given a sense of these sophisticated versions of a meaning-shift theory, I would like to side with Davidson in rejecting them.[3] With him, I do not find any of them convincing, because I do not think words can be made to change meaning in the ways that Black, Beardsley, and others suggest. When I say ironically that it is cold in here, *I* might mean that it is hot in here, but the word "cold" does not thereby come to mean hot. The same is true when words are used metaphorically.

3. Although Davidson (misguidedly, as I have argued) spends some time attacking the traditional comparativist account of metaphors, the chief point of his essay "What Metaphors Mean" is to reject the meaning-shift views of Black, Beardsley, and others.

There is, however, a profound problem with Davidson's view that goes quite beyond his having spelled out the details of his own causal theory of metaphors. As Goodman has insisted against Davidson, it is a plain fact that we sometimes call sentences false when taken literally and true when taken metaphorically.[4] What, on Davidson's account, are we calling true when we say that a metaphorical utterance is true? Not the sentence literally taken, for that, after all, is (usually) false. But, on Davidson's theory, no other candidate presents itself; indeed, it is the essence of his theory to insist on this point.

> We must give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has a content or meaning (except, of course, its literal meaning). (Davidson 1978, 45)

We seem to be confronted with a dilemma. Meaning-shift theorists can give an account of the propriety of calling metaphorical utterances true.[5] What's true, they claim, is the utterance with its meaning metaphorically transformed. But Davidson insists, and I think he is right in this, that this appeal to a shift in meaning makes no sense. On the other side, if we give up the meaning-shift theory, we seem to be at a loss, as I think Davidson is, to explain our normal practice of calling certain metaphorical utterances true.

What we want may, at first sight, seem impossible to get: a theory that allows us to say that an utterance when taken literally is false, but true when taken metaphorically, even though there has been no shift in the meaning in these two ways of taking the utterance. In fact, however, the traditional elliptical-simile theory solves this dilemma in a straightforward and natural way. A metaphorical utterance of the form "*A*

4. See his "Metaphors as Moonlighting," in (Johnson 1981, 222ff.)

5. We also call metaphorical utterances false, and not simply on the basis of their literal falsehood.

is a *B*" just means, and literally means, that *A* is like a *B*. Likeness claims, however, have criteria of adequacy that shift with context. If someone says that *A* is like *B* in one context and repeats it in another, then, although he has said the same thing twice over (that *A* is like *B*), one of these utterances could be true while the other is false. If we like, we can still talk about a shift taking place, but it is not a shift in the meaning of words. It is a shift, as I will argue in the next chapter, in the modes of relevance and evaluation governing the likeness claim.

A few words of summary. Despite the infighting, much of the recent discussion of metaphors has rested on two pillars: the rejection of the comparativist account of metaphors, and the acceptance of some form of a meaning-shift theory. In the previous chapter I argued that attacks on the comparativist position are, one and all, no good. In this chapter I have sided with Davidson in rejecting meaning-shift theories. This, I think, clears the deck for a positive defense of the traditional comparativist account of metaphors.

6

A Theory of Figurative Comparisons

After a great deal of work we have arrived at the conclusion that there is no reason to abandon the traditional view that metaphors are elliptical similes. If, however, we treat similes as figurative comparisons and also treat metaphors as elliptical similes, this amounts to treating metaphors as figurative comparisons as well. So, at this point, I will no longer speak of metaphors as elliptical similes but instead treat both similes and metaphors as figurative comparisons. This, I think, puts matters at the right level of generality.

Of course, grouping metaphors and similes under the heading of figurative comparisons doesn't say much, for, by itself, it gives no account of either one. The claim is, however, systematically important in the following way: Figurative language involves a departure from literal language, and this suggests that a study of figurative comparisons should begin with an examination of nonfigurative comparisons. In line with this, I will attempt to answer three questions:

How do nonfigurative comparisons function?
What are the mechanisms that give rise to figurative comparisons?
What explains the power of figurative comparisons?

NONFIGURATIVE COMPARISONS

What are we saying when we claim that one thing is similar to (or like) another? It should be clear that we are not saying any of the following things: the two objects share at least one property; the two objects share a significantly large number of properties; the objects share at least one significant property; or the objects share a sufficiently large number of significant properties. The argument from the asymmetry of many similarity statements shows that all of these views, with their reference to the symmetrical relation of *sharing*, must be incorrect. Following Tversky, a better suggestion might look like this: To say that *A* is similar to *B* means that *A* has a sufficiently large number of *B*'s salient features. I do not, however, want to press this as an *analysis* of similarity statements, since I am suspicious of making an explicit reference to *salience* within the analysis of similarity statements. Similarity claims do not seem to be assertions *about* salient features. It might be better to say that "*A* is similar to *B*" just says that *A* has a sufficiently large number of qualities in common with *B*, with the additional side-constraint that the salient features of *B* establish the domain of features that are allowed to count. But I don't want to go into any of this in detail, since it is not necessary for my present purposes. I will simply use the formula "*A* is similar to *B*" just in case *A* has a sufficiently large number of *B*'s salient features,[1] in order to elucidate

1. Notice that on this approach, similarity is not a symmetrical relation, since the salient features of *B* that *A* shares may not be salient features of *A*.

some aspects of similarity statements that are uncontroversial in themselves.

One feature of claims that *A* is similar to *B* (or even that *A* is similar to *B* in a given respect) is that they are factually lean or content-hungry. If I do not know Sandra and Sue, and I am told Sandra is like Sue (or even that Sandra looks like Sue), I have been told something, but very little. Why, if they express so little content, do we make similarity claims at all? There are a number of answers. First, if I do know Sue and understand the point of the comparison, then being told that Sandra is like Sue may give me a great deal of detailed and valuable information in compact form. Suppose that Sue is an able scholar who has just been lost to another university, and Sandra is a candidate to replace her. In that setting, being told by someone who knows both that Sandra is like Sue can be very helpful indeed.

A second reason why likeness statements are useful is that they solve (or help solve) what might be called the ineffability problem. For example, it is often difficult to describe a face in a way that captures its particular look. Try it with Bette Davis. Yet if I say that someone looks like Bette Davis, I may succeed in giving quite a good idea of what that person looks like; and I do this even though I could not produce a particularly good word picture of either Bette Davis or the person who is said to look like her. I suspect that one reason why comparisons are so often used is precisely because they provide ways of solving problems of ineffability.[2]

2. In his essay "Why Metaphors Are Necessary and Not Just Nice" (Ortony 1975), Andrew Ortony speaks of a *Compactness Thesis,* which corresponds to the first point made above, and an *Inexpressibility Thesis,* which corresponds to my second point. Our only difference is that I do not restrict these theses to metaphors, but apply them to all comparisons, both figurative and nonfigurative.

A third use of comparative judgments is to *call attention to* likenesses and similarities.[3] This is an important activity in courts of law, where arguments often depend on the question of which precedents are similar (or most similar) to the case at hand. Connoisseurship also depends on detecting likenesses: the echoes of Ingres in Picasso, the Schubertean themes in Scott Joplin, and so forth. We could, of course, still say that comparisons of this kind provide information, namely, that two things resemble each other. The stress in pointing out likenesses is, however, different from that in the information-giving use of comparisons. In the information-giving use of comparisons, the respondent has relevant information concerning one of the objects being compared, but lacks it with respect to the other, and the comparison is invoked to transfer this information. When a comparison is used to call attention to a likeness, the speaker assumes that the respondent has relevant information about both things being compared, and is trying to get the respondent to appreciate a likeness. The information-giving and the attention-calling uses of similarity claims are not always easily separated. When an art historian calls attention to Giottesque features in a fresco by Masaccio, the student may for the first time notice the sculptural qualities of Masaccio's figures that are, indeed, similar to Giotto's. Yet the basic contrast remains unaltered: There is an important difference between comparing *A* with *B* in order to assert a similarity, and asserting a similarity between *A* and *B* in order to convey information about *A*, using *B* as a vehicle.

3. We shall see later that this use of similarity claims is rather more relevant to figurative comparisons than is the information-giving use.

EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT COMPARISONS

Many of our comparisons, both figurative and nonfigurative, are expressed elliptically by dropping the phrase "is like." But as mentioned in chapter 3, there are other ways of drawing comparisons indirectly. We can, for example, draw or evoke comparisons between *A* and *B* by referring to *A* as a *B* or by speaking about *A* as if it were a *B*. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson supply an example of this second mode of implicit comparison when they point out that we speak about *arguments* using the language of *war* and *battles* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 287–89). We *attack* the *weak points* in our *opponent's position*. We *win* and *lose* arguments. We try to *hoist an opponent with his own petard*. And so on. In the same way, Shakespeare does not say that time is (like) a person and then go on to indicate in what way. He simply personifies time:

> Time hath, my lord, a wallet at his back
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.
> *Troilus* and *Cressida* (Act III, sc. 3, l. 145)

Shakespeare could have made the implicit comparison explicit in the following way:

> Time, my lord, is like *someone* who hath a wallet at his back
> Wherein he puts alms for oblivion.

There is, of course, no need for Shakespeare to express himself in this more explicit manner, and there would be a poetic loss if he did. Time is one of the enduring mysteries of our universe, but still, no one supposes that it is the sort of thing that can have a wallet at its back—or for that matter have a back. The reader naturally treats these lines as an implicit comparison by way of personification and would be stupefied if she did not.

Actually, these last remarks, though perhaps true, are misleading in suggesting that we *begin* with independent notions of time and persons and then compare them. In fact, as Lakoff and Johnson have argued persuasively, our concept of time is shaped by the system of comparisons conventionally associated with it. For us, time is something characterized by spatial features, personal features, features of motion, et cetera. This system of conventional and standard comparisons determines, in part, at least, the literal meaning of our temporal language. (See 303–4.)

Lakoff and Johnson argue, again I think persuasively, that these conventional systems of comparisons are a pervasive feature of our language, and they both reflect and constitute elemental features of our *Lebenswelt* (Heidegger's word, not theirs). To cite one of their more striking examples, we live most of our lives upright and, with some notable exceptions, lie down only when we are inactive, sick, injured, or dead. This leads, they argue, to endless manifestations of the principle "UP IS GOOD, DOWN IS BAD" (298).

I think all of this is fascinating, for it shows, among other things, both the pervasiveness and the power of systems of comparisons. I would, however, like to raise an objection to their use of the word "metaphor" that is more than terminological. Where I have spoken of *comparisons*, Lakoff and Johnson usually speak of *metaphors*, characterizing them this way:

> The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing or experience in terms of another. (289)

On this account, any comparison, however flat-footedly literal, will count as a metaphor, and that, it seems to me, is not how the word "metaphor" is used.

But what difference does it make if we expand the notion of a metaphor to encompass all comparisons? First, it gives a

specious air of originality and paradox to the underlying thesis that Lakoff and Johnson are attempting to further. They picture other linguists and philosophers giving preference to the literal over the *merely metaphorical*, now being forced to admit that the literal is based on the metaphorical, not the other way around. This is misleading (and speciously exciting), because metaphorical language is traditionally taken to be a type of *figurative language*, and it is startling to be told that the *literal* is based on the figurative. To put it soberly, however, Lakoff and Johnson have not shown, as they claim, that most of our normal conceptual system is metaphorically structured (312) but instead, that most of our normal conceptual system is structured through comparisons. With this rephrasing, a seeming paradox is replaced by a claim that probably no one will deny, even if (as I think Lakoff and Johnson have shown) it has not been taken seriously enough.

Expanding the notion of metaphor to include all comparisons has a second, more unfortunate, consequence: Metaphors, as traditionally understood, become peripheral and largely ignored. We thus find Lakoff and Johnson contrasting "literal metaphors" (308) with metaphors that are part of "figurative" or "imaginative" language (307). And we find sentences like this:

> On the other hand, metaphorical concepts can be extended beyond the range of ordinary literal ways of thinking and talking into the range of what is called figurative, poetic, colorful, or fanciful thought and language. (294)

With the arresting thought that metaphors can also be used figuratively, Lakoff and Johnson return to explaining what they take to be the primary, that is, the literal, uses of metaphors. What this shows, I believe, is that Lakoff and Johnson share the intellectualist prejudices against metaphors—real metaphors—that they are so fond of attributing to others.

I think it worthwhile to insist on these points because it is important to unmask enemies of metaphors disguised as friends. More deeply, I think Lakoff and Johnson have said interesting things about literal (nonfigurative, nonmetaphorical) comparisons, and since figurative comparisons use nonfigurative comparisons as their base, an understanding of one will help in the understanding of the other.

FIGURATIVE COMPARISONS

In the first part of this study, we saw that a central feature of a series of tropes (including irony, hyperbole, and meiosis) is a mutually recognized intention by the speaker that the respondent not take the speaker's words at face value but, instead, replace them with a correct judgment. In all these figures of speech, the speaker is trying to induce in the respondent a (mutually recognized) adjustment or replacement of what the speaker is actually saying. I will try to show that something very similar takes place with the use of figurative comparisons.

According to one popular view of metaphors (championed by Searle and Davidson, among others), the claim that Margaret Thatcher is a bulldozer is false just because, after all, she is not a bulldozer. I have rejected this quick and easy argument, for it seems to me that the claim that Margaret Thatcher is a bulldozer should be treated as an alternative way of saying that Margaret Thatcher is like a bulldozer. How about that statement: Is *it* true or false? If we allow the standard salient features of bulldozers to fix the relevant feature space, then the judgment is surely *false*. Margaret Thatcher cannot, for example, move huge quantities of dirt in an efficient manner. Of course, if someone describes her as a bulldozer, he will not expect his respondents to interpret his remark straightforwardly

in a bulldozer-salient kind of way. The reason he does not expect this is because, in such a feature space, his remark is a pointless falsehood. He speaks, to return to the central theme of chapter 2, in order to call forth a (mutually recognized) adjustment or correction.

There are, however, important differences between the ways in which figurative predications call forth corrections and the ways in which figurative comparisons do this. With figurative predications, context is held steady and the assertion made within that context is adjusted or corrected. With figurative comparisons, the comparison is not rejected; the claim that *A* is like *B* is not withdrawn, corrected, or modified in any way. Instead, the context is adjusted to accommodate it. This idea comes from Amos Tversky, who puts it this way:

> There is a close tie between the assessment of similarity and the interpretation of metaphors. In judgments of similarity one assumes a particular feature space, or a frame of reference, and assesses the quality of the match between the subject and the referent. In the interpretation of similes, one assumes a resemblance between the subject and the referent and searches for an interpretation of the space that would maximize the quality of the match. The same pair of objects, therefore, can be viewed as similar or different depending on the choice of a frame of reference. (Tversky 1977, 349)

I think this passage may overly intellectualize the procedure of interpreting metaphors and similes, but it seems to me that its central point provides the key for a correct account of the function of figurative comparisons. To see this, consider the three following claims:

> A road grader is like a bulldozer.
> Margaret Thatcher is like a bulldozer.
> Shirley Temple was like a bulldozer.

The first statement is literally true. Like bulldozers, road graders are also used to push about large quantities of dirt, the chief difference being that road graders have their blades beneath their chassis rather than in front of them. The second sentence, I have said, is literally false, yet there are people who would consider it true if taken figuratively. How might they arrive at this opinion? Tversky has a suggestion that bears directly on this point:

> It appears that people interpret similes by scanning the feature space and selecting the features of the referent that are applicable to the subject (e.g., by selecting features of the bulldozer that are applicable to the person). (349)

Here we seem to be involved in a two-step process. By comparing a person with a bulldozer, we invoke a feature space dominated by bulldozer-salient qualities. But under that reading, the comparison seems plainly false. In order to avoid attributing a pointlessly false statement to the speaker, the respondent now prunes the feature space of the falsifying features and, if the metaphor is *sound* (I'm not saying *striking*; I'll come back to that later), then the comparison, figuratively taken, is true.

I think this account is still too simple and that qualifications and elaborations are needed, but it does seem to yield the correct result that the third statement, the one about Shirley Temple, is false taken both literally and figuratively. Taken literally, Shirley Temple's features provide a bad match with the unpruned set of bulldozer-salient features, and the bad match persists even after the feature space is pruned back to salient features relevant to humans.

Even in this simple form, this approach goes some way in answering basic questions about metaphors and similes. First, what does the figurativeness of a figurative comparison amount to? Figurativeness is a departure from the literal. In

the first part of this study, we saw that one way a speaker can depart from literalness is to say something with the mutually understood intention that the utterance not be taken at face value but instead be adjusted or corrected so that it *squares with the context*. With metaphors and similes, the respondent is given the mutually recognized task of *squaring the context with the utterance*. Though these mechanisms work in reverse fashion, they have this in common: The target thought-act or speech-act is produced in the respondent as part of his participatory response, rather than merely given to him in the form of the speaker's direct speech act. This, I think, is part of the reason that metaphors and similes often have more force than counterpart descriptions (when such are available).

Returning now to the two uses of nonfigurative comparisons—the *information-giving* and the *likeness-noting*—it seems evident that metaphors and similes most resemble, or are typically instances of, the likeness-noting use. With the likeness-noting use of a comparison, the respondent is presumed to be acquainted with both objects of comparison, and in metaphors, again, two antecedently known things are brought into comparison. There is, however, an important difference between literal likeness-noting comparisons (for example, "Churchill looked like a bulldog") and figurative likeness-noting comparisons (for example, "Churchill was [like] a bulldog"). In the first case, the characteristic physiognomy of a bulldog face establishes the criterion of comparison, and, if the comparison is correct, then Churchill's face must meet it. Here it might be objected that in making this comparison, we set aside all sorts of bulldog-face features: fur, wet nose, and so forth. These, however, are not *salient* features of a bulldog's face since they do not set it off from the faces of other dogs. That, I think, is why it can be right to say

that Churchill looked like a bulldog, but wrong to say that he looked like a dog.[4]

The situation is different if we metaphorically say that Churchill was (like) a bulldog, though the tiredness of this metaphor will somewhat mute the point. Encountering such a comparison for the first time, we would certainly be struck by its impropriety, for bulldogs possess a great many salient features that Churchill lacked: for example, having a very strong (not just square) jaw, being small enough to crawl into burrows, et cetera. It is this transparent incongruity that leads us, in Beardsley's words, to give our reading a "metaphorical twist." But over against Beardsley and the other meaning-shift theorists (Black and others), the twist does not alter the meaning of any expression. Instead, as Tversky suggests, the order of dominance in salient features is reversed. In calling Churchill a bulldog, we compare him to a bulldog (as opposed, say, to a French poodle), while at the same time trimming the feature space in terms of the subject's salient features.

At this point we can return to the dilemma raised at the close of the previous chapter: How is it possible for an utterance to be false when taken literally, but true when taken metaphorically without there being any shift in meaning? We can first note that parallel situations arise with nonfigurative language. If I say "I am James Jones," and James Jones says "I am James Jones," then, unless I happen to be named James Jones, what I say is false and what he says is true, even though there is no shift in the meanings of the words used. Less controversially, and closer to the present case, if "x is good" means

4. There could be contexts in which it would be appropriate to say that Churchill looked like a dog rather than, say, a cat. (Ted Cohen pointed this out to me.) In general, however, it is wrong to reason as follows: *f* is a salient feature of *A*; all *A*s are *B*s, therefore *f* is a salient feature of *B*. For this reason, something can look like an *A,* where all *A*s are *B*s, yet not look like a *B*.

something like "x satisfies relevant standards of evaluation," then saying that x is good could be true in some contexts, but not in others, without there being any shift in the meaning of what is said. This, it seems to me, is how likeness claims—both literal and figurative—function: What they say is that one thing is like another, and whether that's true or not will depend upon canons of similarity determined by the context. Along with its naturalness, I think one of the chief strengths of the figurative-comparison theory is that it can explain how a sentence taken literally can be false, while the sentence taken metaphorically can be true, without invoking the implausible idea that, used metaphorically, words change their meaning.

I have argued that metaphors, like similes, are figurative comparisons, and in this chapter I have tried to explain how figurative comparisons work. They function the way other likeness-noting comparisons function, with a radical difference in the character of the matching relationship between the objects compared. Before closing, I will consider two questions raised at the start of this chapter: (i) Why do figurative comparisons often carry considerable rhetorical force? and (ii) Why are they a powerful intellectual and aesthetic resource?

The answer to the first question parallels the answer to the same question concerning irony, hyperbole, and meiosis. Figurative comparisons gain rhetorical force through inducing in the respondent a mutually recognized correction. The point of a figurative comparison is to draw attention to a certain likeness or system of likenesses. Through figurativeness, the respondents are made to arrive at the result themselves. I think this is what Aristotle had in mind when he compared metaphors to puzzles. Puzzles lose a great deal when presented together with their solutions.

The second question—why figurative comparisons provide such a powerful intellectual and aesthetic resource—has a number of answers. To begin with, nonfigurative comparisons

possess these features, and figurative comparisons build on them. Comparisons, we have seen, help us overcome problems of ineffability by allowing us to make connections when there is no direct way of saying what the connection is. Metaphors extend this capacity by allowing us to make connections even when no straightforward comparison is available.[5] Metaphors are simple devices that admit of unlimited sophisticated elaboration. I think this is worth saying in order to take some of the mystery out of metaphor. The power of metaphors lies in those who can use them in creative and insightful ways. The next chapter contains reflections on how this takes place.

REPLY TO LYCAN

In *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, William Lycan offers a series of probing criticisms of the account of metaphors presented in the first edition of *Figuratively Speaking*. Because many of the things he rejects are carried over without significant change to this revised edition, a response is in order.

Lycan begins by noting, quite correctly, that the criticisms leveled against the traditional account of metaphors as elliptical similes do not apply to what he calls my "abbreviated *figurative* simile" account of metaphors.[6] Though he acknowledges this, he

5. This point may help answer a problem put to me by Stanley Eveling: How, on the present account, are we to explain the *private* use of metaphors, that is, those occasions when a person uses a metaphor simply for his own personal amusement or edification? The answer, I think, is that comparisons in general, and figurative comparisons in particular, provide a way of making manifest relations that could not—or could not easily—be made manifest in other ways.

6. Of course, for me, the standard criticisms of the traditional view held by Aristotle et al. have no force against it. My aim is not to provide an alternative to the traditional view but rather to elaborate and defend it, using contemporary resources.

goes on to argue that, in avoiding these criticisms, the position I develop encounters insuperable difficulties of its own.

Lycan begins with a general criticism:

> The explanatory work is being done by the figurative nature of the underlying similes, and so their figurative interpretations need explaining in turn. (Lycan 2000, 215)

I nowhere suggest that treating metaphors as figurative comparisons provides an account of their figurativeness. The strategy is to introduce the wider notion of a figurative comparison and then present an account—in outline at least—of how figurative comparisons emerge as departures from the rules governing literal comparisons. This invokes the old idea that figurative language involves departures from the constraints of literal language. The explanatory task is to describe how these departures take place.

Lycan goes on to offer three specific criticisms. The first is a variation of one that John Searle uses in his attack on what he takes to be the traditional account of metaphors, namely, that the metaphorical meaning of a metaphor is identical with the literal meaning of its counterpart simile. Searle, as we saw, argues that this cannot be correct, because, taken metaphorically, the utterance "Richard is a gorilla" can be true in indicating that Richard is fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so on. However, taken as a literal comparison, it is false, because gorillas are "shy, sensitive creatures, given to bouts of sentimentality" (Searle 1979, 89). As we saw, this objection carries no force against the traditional account of metaphors found in the writings of Aristotle et al., because they did not identify the figurative meaning of a metaphor with the literal meaning of a statement of similarity.

Lycan attempts to adapt this criticism to what he calls my *figurative simile theory*—a phrase I never use. Here is the criticism in full:

> But Fogelin's picture of "trimming the feature space" presupposes or at least strongly suggests that the features relevantly shared by, say, Churchill and a bulldog are possessed literally by each of the two. And in that sense, on Fogelin's theory a metaphor must still bottom out in a literal sharing of genuine properties. In examples such as Searle's (in which the stereotype is just wrong) it is far from obvious what the properties would be. (216)

Now for the life of me, I cannot see why the position I defend must "bottom out in a literal sharing of genuine properties." I am not even sure what the phrase "must still bottom out" amounts to. In my response to Searle's use of this criticism, I suggested that we sometimes speak from the assumed perspective of common belief. To say what I have said before: Comparisons made from an assumed perspective are close to comparisons made between actual and fictitious beings. I think the same response can be made to Lycan's criticism of the "figurative simile theory" of metaphor he attributes to me. Such cross-comparisons are not embarrassing to a comparativist account of metaphors. (See the first edition of *Figuratively Speaking*, 45.)

Lycan's second criticism starts out by noting correctly:

> Many sentences individually admit of either literal or metaphorical interpretation. ("Adolf is a butcher"; "The worm has turned.") . . . Very likely there has never been a sentence that does not admit of some metaphorical understanding.

From this commonplace, he goes on to draw a very strong conclusion:

> For any sentence that does bear metaphorical interpretation, even one that would almost always be heard literally rather than metaphorically (say, "Ernest is lost"), any simile theorist will have to call it semantically ambiguous, as between its literal meaning and its simile-abbreviating meaning (that Ernest resembles a lost person). But such a

> proliferation of supposedly genuine semantic ambiguities is surely implausible. (216–17)

At the start of the first edition of *Figuratively Speaking*, I fall in with others in speaking of figurative *meaning*, but I issue a warning that this can be a misleading way of speaking (31n). Later I replace the phrase "figurative meaning" with the phrase "meaning something figuratively," precisely to avoid a commitment to figurative meanings (95–96). It is a fact, as Lycan's examples show, that a given sentence that one naturally takes literally in one context can sometimes naturally be taken figuratively in another. That, however, does not yield a proliferation of supposedly genuine semantic ambiguities between literal and figurative meanings. I am not committed to figurative meanings or figurative semantic content at all.

Lycan's third objection is that "some metaphorical statements are too convoluted to be parsed as similes." It seems that Lycan has misunderstood the way the text unfolds. It begins with an examination of standard criticisms of traditional accounts of metaphors. These critiques are usually couched in terms of simple subject-predicate sentences, "Sally is a block of ice," for example. Taking these criticisms on their own terms, I argue that, one and all, they are no good. This leads Lycan to attribute a "figurative simile theory" to me. Well, I certainly defend such a theory against the standard criticisms that have been leveled against it, but I nowhere commit myself to the view that metaphors can always be directly and significantly parsed as elliptical similes. What I do instead is to introduce a wider notion of figurative comparisons. There is, in fact, a variety of ways in which comparisons can be expressed literally, and, corresponding to them, a variety of ways in which they can be expressed figuratively. The comparativist is under no obligation to reduce them to a single paradigmatic form.

At the close of his critique of *Figuratively Speaking*, Lycan adds, quite wickedly, that "it is no wonder that simile theorists have in the main stuck to simple subject-predicate examples" (219). I began by examining simple subject-predicate examples of metaphors because these are just the kinds of examples that philosophers examining metaphors typically tend to employ. *Figuratively Speaking* is an exception, where, among other things, the internal interaction of metaphors is examined in rich contexts, including lyrics by Bessie Smith, a sonnet by Shakespeare, and a sketch from Monty Python.

Before proceeding, I want to address what I take to be a fundamental misunderstanding of the position explicitly stated in *Figuratively Speaking*. Various writers have attributed to me the view that I treat metaphors as figurative similes. In fact, I nowhere use this terminology. I reject it because it strikes me as a pleonasm, just as the expression "figurative metaphor" does. Correspondingly, the expressions "literal simile" and "literal metaphor" both strike me as oxymoronic. More importantly, labeling my position a "figurative simile account" of metaphors suggests that I am attempting to ring changes on the Aristotelian view that metaphors have literal similes as their counterparts. This accusation is all out of whack. There is, I think, no textual support for the claim that Aristotle treats metaphors as elliptical *similarity* claims. There is, I think, strong textual support for the claim that Aristotle treats metaphors and similes on a par, except for a difference in grammatical form, which for him can make some difference, but only a slight difference. Taking Aristotle as my inspiration, I have introduced the notion of a figurative comparison—no pleonasm there—as a category embracing both metaphors and similes.[7]

7. For responses to further criticisms, see also my article "Metaphors, Simile, and Similarity" (Fogelin 1993).

7

Elaborations

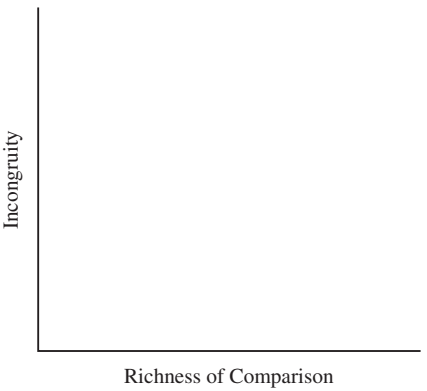
Opposed to those who ignore or play down the figurative character of metaphors, there are writers who insist, sometimes in extravagant terms, on their power. They also complain about the prejudice against metaphor that springs, they suggest, from a narrow, literalist (positivist) conception of language. The fact of the matter is that the vast majority of metaphors are routine and uninteresting. Many metaphors are lame, misleading, overblown, inaccurate, et cetera. (Listen to politicians.) Metaphors, in indicating that one thing is like another, so far say very little. Their strength, which they share with comparisons in general, is that their near-emptiness makes them adaptable for use in a wide variety of contexts. On the reverse side, the near-emptiness of metaphors also makes them serviceable for those occasions when we want to avoid saying, and perhaps thinking, what we really mean. Euphemisms are typically couched in metaphors. Metaphors can be substitutes for thought. Metaphors can be evasions—including poetic evasions. There are occasions when the poet must reject them and

> Trace the gold sun about the whitened sky
> Without evasion by a single metaphor.
> Look at it in its essential barrenness
> And say this, this is the centre that I seek.
> (From "Credences of Summer,"
> Wallace Stevens 1954, 374)

It is important, then, to calm down about metaphors. Some are good; some are bad. Some are illuminating; some are obfuscating. For the most part they are routine. Furthermore, with differences of emphasis, they all work in the same way: They present a comparison with a transparent incongruity (oddness) that admits of resolution. In Goodman's words:

> Metaphorical force requires a combination of novelty with fitness, of the odd with the obvious. (Goodman 1968, 79)

Though metaphorical force requires both novelty and fitness, the emphasis on one rather than the other can differ. This suggests that metaphors (and figurative comparisons in general) can vary along two axes:



Without the incongruity or oddness, we would not be dealing with a *figurative* comparison, and, quite obviously,

unless this oddity is resolved by a compensating comparison, we would not be dealing with a figurative *comparison*—though we might be dealing with another form of figurative language, perhaps irony, which has its own form of incongruity resolution. Though both dimensions are necessary for metaphors, the stress can vary, producing metaphors with different tonalities.[1] It will be useful to give an account of the ways in which metaphors are distributed through this two-dimensional space.

METAPHORS OF WIT

Aristotle compared metaphors to puzzles (Aristotle 1984. 1405b, 4–6), and by this he meant that the speaker presents the respondent with something to be solved. I do not know whether the Greek text supports this reading, but in English, at least, there is an important difference between a puzzle and a problem. Problems can be difficult to solve, but puzzles, at least good puzzles, are supposed to be baffling. Furthermore, solving a puzzle often depends upon seeing things in the right way, and after this is done, the solution may seem obvious. The charm of such puzzles often consists in this transition from bafflement to an ingenious, though after-the-fact obvious, solution.

What I am calling metaphors of wit work in much the same way. The strength of the metaphor need not lie in the richness of the comparison, but in the pleasure of seeing an initial conflict resolved. There are two ways this might be done. In the first, the respondents are supposed to supply the resolution themselves; in the second, the speaker (poet)

1. Corresponding to these different types of metaphors, there are two different kinds of theories of metaphor: those that stress the dimension of incongruity or oddness (for example, the verbal-opposition theory of Beardsley), and those that stress the richness of the comparison (for example, the interaction theory or model theory of metaphors championed by Black).

produces the resolution—pulls the rabbit out of the hat—to the reader's amazement. As an example of the first kind of metaphor of wit, consider Hegel's description of Schelling's system as "a night in which all cows are black." What he meant, of course, is that Schelling's system is so obscure that it is as difficult to comprehend its features as it is to distinguish black cows on a dark night. Furthermore, the force of this metaphor does not depend on an illumination gained by applying nocturnal and bovine schemata to a philosophical system. For a metaphor of this kind, and it is, after all, a good metaphor, it seems completely overblown to say, as Goodman does:

> A whole set of alternative labels, a whole apparatus of organization, takes over a new territory. What occurs is a transfer of a schema, a migration of concepts, an alienation of categories, etc. (Goodman 1968, 73)

Some metaphors may function in this way, but not all of them—and certainly not Hegel's.

In the second kind of metaphor of wit, the speaker (poet) produces a comparison so farfetched, remote, or incongruous that it seems impossible that it could be made good. Then, against all odds, the speaker does so. This example comes from Monty Python:

> WHISTLER (to the Prince of Wales): Your Majesty is like a stream of bat's piss.
> PRINCE OF WALES: What?!
> WHISTLER: It was Wilde's.
> WILDE: It certainly was not; it was Shaw's.
> PRINCE OF WALES: Well, Mr. Shaw?
> SHAW: I merely meant, your Majesty, that you shine out like a shaft of gold when all around is dark.[2]

2. *The Monty Python Instant Record Collection,* vol. 2, side A, final cut.

Metaphors of wit leap to immortality in the writings of the metaphysical poets, where the *argument* of the poem vindicates a wholly improbable comparison. These lines are from John Donne's "A Valediction: Forbidding Mourning," where he tells his lover that, though they must part, their souls will remain together:

> If they be two, they are two so
> As stiff twin compasses are two;
> Thy soul, the fixed foot, makes no show
> To move, but doth, if th' other do.
> And though it in the center sit,
> Yet when the other far doth roam,
> It leans, and hearkens after it,
> And grows erect, as that comes home.
> Such wilt thou be to me, who must
> Like th' other foot, obliquely run;
> Thy firmness make my circle just,
> And make me end where I begun.

I will not attempt to analyze this poem, but two points are worth noting. First, it contains a remarkably ingenious figurative comparison, but its poetic force is not nearly exhausted by the ingenuity with which an improbable comparison is made good. Remote comparisons, however well cashed in, can still make bad poetry. Second, although it would not be easy, and perhaps not possible, to produce an accurate paraphrase of this poem, its value does not consist in revealing truths that could not otherwise be expressed. Its value does not consist in revealing hitherto unknown or unappreciated features of erotic love by presenting them through a geometrical filter. The poem elevates and refreshes a series of commonplaces concerning the unity of separated lovers by bringing them together under a single surprising, though remarkably apt, image.

Again, because passions run high in this area, I should repeat that I am not making a claim about all metaphors, just those I have labeled metaphors of wit, that is, those figurative comparisons that gain their chief force by introducing, then resolving, deeply incongruous or unexpected comparisons. Such metaphors occur in both comic and serious poetry. They present paradigm cases of metaphors, and any complete theory of metaphors must explain them. Not surprisingly, they are well explained by a verbal opposition or tension theory of the kind that Beardsley championed, and not explained (and usually ignored) in interaction theories like those of Black and Goodman.

METAPHORS AS MODELS

By metaphors as models, I mean those metaphors that gain their chief strength by imposing a system of relations from one domain onto another. This, as we have seen, is made a definitive feature of metaphors by Black, and he is largely followed in this by Goodman. For them metaphors present models that reveal, and perhaps create, characteristics that have often gone unrecognized and, perhaps, could not have been presented in any other, more direct, mode of discourse.[3]

3. As Black realizes, his later essay "More about Metaphor" takes a stronger position than his earlier essay "Metaphor." In "Metaphor" he says, "The effect, then, of (metaphorically) calling a man a "wolf" is to evoke the wolf-system of related commonplaces" (41).

In "Metaphor" the emphasis is mainly on the *related commonplaces.* In the second essay, where metaphors are called "models" and compared with theories, the emphasis shifts to the notion of a *system.* Here I am interested in this second, stronger, position that Black and Goodman share.

Concentrating on Black and Goodman, who are the most articulate representatives of this interaction or model theory of metaphors, it is worth noting that neither chances his hand by illustrating the power of the position with a detailed examination of a genuinely rich example of poetic discourse. Black *cites* some interesting examples, for instance, Sir Thomas Browne's "Light is but the shadow of God," but prefers to concentrate on more-mundane examples such as, "The chairman ploughed through the discussion," and the old favorite, "Man is a wolf."

Actually, the metaphors Black examines often do not provide particularly apt examples for a model theory of metaphor. Speaking of the chairman *ploughing* through the discussion does not superimpose an agricultural schema on the activities of the chairman. The metaphor does not rely, for example, on fine distinctions among plowing, disking, furrowing, and so forth. All that one has to know to appreciate the force of this expired metaphor is that a plough is a relatively crude instrument that turns soil by moving straight ahead. Similarly, we might want to say that calling a man a wolf "is to invoke the wolf-system of related commonplaces," but it is, after all, quite a thin system of commonplaces.

The passage from Sir Thomas Browne, which Black cites but does not discuss, is interestingly more complex. Calling light a shadow is an oxymoron and, like many oxymorons, unpacks into a proportional metaphor:

God is to light as light is to shadow.

Here we certainly find more structure, but of a kind that illustrates the comparativist (not interactionist) view of metaphors. Of course, we could say that every comparison involves modeling one thing by another, but then, of course, it is hard to understand why defenders of interaction/model theories have spent so much time attacking the traditional position.

We find cases where the model theory finds plausible application if we move away from metaphors (narrowly conceived) and examine such extended comparisons as analogies, parables, and allegories. Shakespeare provides an example of an extended figurative comparison in *Coriolanus,* where Agrippa produces a parable of the parts of the body rebelling against the stomach as an argument against political insurrection, thus invoking the root metaphor of the organic conception of the state. In these cases, one area is understood through a system of terms drawn from another, and the model theory finds a nontrivial application.

It is worth noting, however, that in this example from Shakespeare, the level of *incongruity* is not high. There are, of course, many ways in which an individual's relationship to the state is not like the relationship of a part of the body to the total organism. Yet these comparisons are not shocking, since compensating similarities are easily found. In general, as the weight of the figurative comparison shifts to the richness and strength of the comparison itself, the level of figurativeness generated by incongruity will diminish. This is not surprising, because a rich comparison seeks a good fit, whereas incongruity cuts against it.[4] When incongruity disappears altogether, figurativeness disappears with it. Figurative comparisons, then, shade off into two different regions:

1. As incongruity dominates and the demand for a compensating rich comparison diminishes, figurative comparisons shade off into other figures of speech, for example, irony.

2. As the demand for a rich system of accurate comparisons dominates, and the incongruity (inner tension) diminishes,

4. The occasional genius can combine both dimensions to a high degree. The best example I know is Plato's presentation of the combined analogies of the divided line and the cave in the *Republic.* For an explication and celebration of these two analogies, see my "Three Platonic Analogies" (Fogelin 1971).

figurative comparisons shade off into complex literal comparisons, theories, or conceptual schemes.

Because of the first fact some philosophers (for example, Goodman) are tempted to think of irony as a mode of metaphor. The second fact has led others (for example, Black in his later writings) to suppose that a scientific theory is a kind of metaphor.

It may seem harmless, merely a verbal matter, to allow the concept of a metaphor to expand in these ways. But if metaphor is allowed to incorporate such tropes as irony, hyperbole, and meiosis on one side, and scientific and mathematical theories on the other, then the subject matter of a theory of metaphor will become so wide and disjointed that it can contain no truths beyond banalities.

THE INTERACTION OF METAPHORS

According to the interaction or model account, metaphors arise from the imposition of a system of relations from one *literal* realm onto the system of relations of another *literal* realm. I think this sometimes is right, as it is, for example, in Shakespeare's "All the world is a stage" speech. There is, however, another form of interaction that is not an interaction between two distinct literal realms of discourse, but an interaction among metaphors themselves. I will illustrate this with a series of progressively more complex examples.

These lines come from Bessie Smith's "Empty Bed Blues":

> He was the first to boil my cabbage.
> And he made it real hot.
> When he put the bacon in,
> It overflowed the pot.[5]

5. I owe this example to my colleague W. W. Cook.

Here the subject of the sustained metaphor is sexual intercourse, and the object of comparison is cooking, in particular, the old Southern recipe of cooking cabbage with bacon. This is certainly a remarkable achievement of transposing a set of relations from one domain to another, yet, as I read these lines, I do not find these cooking labels illuminate the subject matter by providing a new *framework* or *filter* for viewing it.

Let me try to illustrate these ideas with two much more complex examples. The first is Shakespeare's 73rd Sonnet.

> That time of year thou mayst in me behold
> When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang
> Upon those boughs which shake against the cold,
> Bare ruined choirs where late the sweet birds sang.
> In me thou seest the twilight of such day
> As after sunset fadeth in the west,
> Which by and by black night doth take away,
> Death's second self, that seals up all in rest.
> In me thou seest the glowing of such fire
> That on the ashes of his youth doth lie
> As the death-bed whereon it must expire,
> Consumed with that which it was nourished by.
> This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong,
> To love that well which thou must leave ere long.
>
> (Shakespeare 1988, 760)

Not trained to the task, I will not attempt a literary analysis of this poem. I will simply concentrate on the way its metaphors interact. Of course, a great deal is lost by narrowing the focus in this way; for example, the match between content and rhythm in the passage "When yellow leaves, or none, or few, do hang." The metaphorical structure is not the only, perhaps not even the chief, merit of this poem.

In broad outline, the poet compares the poet's entering into old age, in successive quatrains, to

1. the onset of winter.
2. twilight.
3. the dying of a fire.

These are all straightforward temporal comparisons, in themselves banal. The remarkable feature of the poem is that each quatrain goes on to at least double the metaphor in complex and unexpected ways. In the first quatrain, the beginning of winter is identified with trees, all (or virtually all) of whose leaves are gone, and then the *bare-limbed trees* are compared with those "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang." The pattern is repeated in the second quatrain where twilight is picked out as that which night will take away, and then *night*, not twilight, is called "death's second self." Finally, in the most complex quatrain, the dying fire is marked by its *ashes,* and the bed of ashes is then compared with a death-bed. The quatrain then returns to the dying fire and says that it will ultimately be consumed when it has itself consumed the fuel that gives it life.

This does not exhaust the system of figurative comparisons found in this poem,[6] but it does, I think, show its general metaphorical structure. Each quatrain begins with a rather routine comparison of something with the beginning of old age. Then, within each quatrain, a second metaphor is introduced that relates the initial metaphor to death. The poem is about that time of life that will soon end with death:

> This thou perceiv'st, which makes thy love more strong
> To love that well which thou must leave ere long.

Though for the most part, the individual metaphors are not particularly original, the fundamental achievement of the poem is the creation and control of a metaphorical space that gives these metaphors life.

6. See, for example, William Empson's comments on the line "Bare ruined choirs, where late the sweet birds sang" (Empson 1966, 2–3).

Let me illustrate this point about metaphorical interaction by citing a more extreme example from an untitled work by a poet now somewhat out of fashion, e. e. cummings.

> somewhere i have never travelled, gladly,beyond
> any experience, your,eyes have their silence:
> in your most frail gesture are things which enclose me,
> or which i cannot touch because they are too near
> your slightest look easily will unclose me
> though i have closed myself as fingers,
> you open always petal by petal myself as Spring opens
> (touching skillfully,mysteriously)her first rose
> or if your wish be to close me, i and
> my life will shut very beautifully, suddenly,
> as when the heart of this flower imagines
> the snow carefully everywhere descending;
> nothing which we are to perceive in this world equals
> the power of your intense fragility: whose texture
> compels me with the colour of its countries,
> rendering death and forever with each breathing
> (i do not know what it is about you that closes
> and opens; only something in me understands
> the voice of your eyes is deeper than all roses)
> nobody, not even the rain, has such small hands
>
> (Cummings 1991)

I wish to raise only two questions about this poem: What are we to make of its last line; and what contribution does it make to the poem as a whole? I think these questions are totally unanswerable outside the metaphorical space created within the poem itself. Roughly, and I will not go into this in detail, the poem is dominated by a number of interrelated leitmotivs: the oxymoron of the power that the intense fragility of his lover's eyes has to enclose him, close him, and unclose him just as spring can gently bring about these changes in a rose. This is only a first approximation of the metaphorical structure of the poem, but, even so, it excludes endlessly many readings that a

mere Davidsonian nudging might produce. The small hands are not, for example, used as a symbol for stinginess, as they might be in a poem bemoaning the niggardly provisions of step-motherly nature. Furthermore, from the other references to nature ("Spring…touching skillfully, mysteriously" and "snow carefully everywhere descending"), we know that the rain is gentle. So his lover's touch (perhaps representing the touch of her eyes) is more gentle than the touch of softly falling spring rain.

Have we then discovered what the closing line means—really means? The answer to this will depend, of course, on the plausibility of my general reading of the poem, and I realize that what I have said is superficial and unsophisticated. But even if my general reading is plausible, or could be made plausible, I think that it would still be misleading to say that we now know what *this* line means—what *it* contributes to the poem. In isolation the line is underdetermined in content and, in some respects, unintelligible. Furthermore, this underdetermination cannot be significantly resolved by reflecting on the interaction of the system of meteorological labels (rain, snow, sleet, et cetera) and anatomical labels (eyes, hands, feet, et cetera) it contains. Of course, the literal meaning of these labels makes a difference, as does their interaction. Assigning hands to raindrops (which is simply grotesque) or treating them as hands (which is better) does produce an interaction between two systems that's of moderate interest. But the significance of this line is not mainly derived from this interaction; it is fixed, instead, by the contours of the metaphorical space that encloses it. Its metaphorical meaning is determined mainly by the other metaphors in the poem, and there is no reason why *every* metaphor in the poem could not stand in this same relationship of dependence on its companion metaphors.

To return to a point made in chapter 4, similarity claims, even the most flat-footedly literal, demand constraints on the

potentially infinite range of comparisons they can invoke. Metaphors, as renegade comparisons, defy standard restraints. Yet they demand restraints from two directions. Unless the poem establishes a range of relevant comparison, metaphors will drift into the Davidsonian void, indicating nothing more than that this thing has something or other in common with that. On the other side, the poem, with its system of interacting metaphors, establishes the level of specificity at which the metaphor is to be read. In giving raindrops hands, or treating them as hands, cummings is not presenting them to us as having knuckles. There is no place in the poem for developing the metaphor in this direction. This unwanted implication of the metaphor is snuffed out by its incompatibility with the dominating implications of the surrounding metaphors. The remarkable fact is that in poetry, at least in good poetry, metaphorical significance is largely achieved through mutual support and self-policing: Each metaphor helps create the space in which it has significance. A good poem justifies its metaphors.

Jay Parini and Robert Frost, cited by Parini, say all this and say it better.

> Frost himself cautioned against finding in his poems irrelevant ambiguities, with connotations spreading like ink on blotting paper. Metaphors and symbols provide a way of delimiting (as well as opening out) meaning; thus, the poet controls the reading of a poem, sharply defining its boundaries. No one understood this better than Frost. . . . In "Education by Poetry," he warned that "unless you are at home in the metaphor, unless you have had your proper poetical education in the metaphor, you are not safe anywhere. Because you are not at ease with figurative values: you don't know the metaphor in its strength and its weakness. You don't know how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you." (Parini 1999, 458)

SYNECDOCHE

In the first edition of this work and so far in this revised edition, I have concentrated on two families of figurative expressions labeled respectively figurative predications and figurative comparisons. There is, however, an important trope that I have not considered, *synecdoche*. This is treacherous land, but I will venture into it.

Synecdoche, understood modestly, involves the "substitution of part for whole, genus for species, or vice versa." (Lanham 1991, 148). A standard example is "All hands on deck!" But on the contemporary scene, synecdoche is often given a broader, more elaborate interpretation. This description of the contemporary understanding of synecdoche comes from Lanham. He begins by citing Kenneth Burke on synecdoche:

> The more I examine both the structure of poetry and the structure of human relations outside of poetry, the more I become convinced that this is the "basic" figure of speech, and that it occurs in many modes beside that of the formal tropes. (Burke in Lanham 1991, 148)

Commenting on this, Lanham remarks:

> If this is so, at the center of figuration stands *scale-change*. To define *A*, equate it to a part of *B*, derived by magnification. Experience is described in terms of other experience, but at a different level of magnification. (Lanham 1991, 148)[7]

7. Lanham continues, I think somewhat wryly: "Scaling has certainly formed a central part of postmodern aesthetics, and of the aesthetics of computer-generated electronic text as well. And similarity of parts to whole, self-similarity as it is called, is a central characteristic of the fractal geometry introduced into modern thinking by chaos theory. The putative centrality of synecdoche is receiving at least a fair trial in the current sensorium" (148).

Synecdoche seems to have achieved centrality following a familiar pattern. Via synecdoche itself, one species of figurative language is elevated to a generic status. "Irony" has been used in this way, as has "metaphor." Both have been used as general, all-encompassing terms for figurative tropes. For many, "synecdoche" has now been assigned a similar status. Like irony and metaphor, synecdoche can be taken in a broad generic sense or in a narrow sense as one trope among others. I have for the most part avoided speaking of metaphors and irony in a broad sense and will adopt the same attitude with respect to synecdoche. Taken generically, all three tropes would suffer from an "evaporation of content."[8] I will therefore understand synecdoche more narrowly—in Lanham's words—as involving *scale change*: "To define *A*, equate it to a part of *B*, derived by magnification. Experience is described in terms of other experience, but at a different level of magnification." This is, admittedly, still vague, but it can be made more clear through application.

Synecdoche, as many have noted, is a central trope in much of Robert Frost's poetry. As Robert Bernard Hass points out, Frost once described himself as a synecdochist:

> In a 1931 comment to Elizabeth Sergeant, Frost remarked that when other writers began calling themselves "Imagists or Vorticists," he started calling himself a "synechdochist." This term . . . is an apt description of the way metaphor actually operates in Frost's mature poetry. Although he often uses the word to mean comparison or correspondence (e.g., "every thought is a feat of association"), Frost also suggests that the forms we carve out of nature extend beyond simple

8. In *Walking the Tightrope of Reason: The Precarious Life of a Rational Animal*, I make a similar point in chapter 6, titled "Matters of Taste." I conclude, somewhat tendentiously, "The evaporation of subject matter is the central threat to significant work in the humanities and, for that matter, in the social sciences as well" (Fogelin 2003, 161).

> figures and feats of association and, in some mysterious way, connect the whole of reality. (Hass 2002, 152–153)

Scaling up to the *whole of reality* may be a bit much; scaling an experience up to a full life would be sufficient, but Frost's understanding of synecdoche is reasonably clear.

Here is an example of synecdoche as Frost understands it.

> The Oven Bird
> There is a singer everyone has heard,
> Loud, a mid-summer and a mid-wood bird,
> Who makes the solid tree trunks sound again.
> He says that leaves are old and that for flowers
> Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten.
> He says the early petal-fall is past
> When pear and cherry bloom went down in showers
> On sunny days a moment overcast;
> And comes that other fall we name the fall.
> He says the highway dust is over all.
> The bird would cease and be as other birds
> But that he knows in singing not to sing.
> The question that he frames in all but words
> Is what to make of a diminished thing.
> (Frost 1979, 119)

Some facts about the ovenbird, particularly about its call, are essential for even a first-level understanding of the poem. The following terse description of the ovenbird comes from the website *All about Birds* sponsored by the Cornell Laboratory of Ornithology:

> A small, inconspicuous bird of the forest floor, the Ovenbird is one of the most characteristic birds of the eastern forests. Its loud song, "teacher, teacher, teacher," rings through the summer forest, but the bird itself is hard to see.

A bit more fully, the ovenbird is a New World warbler that lives and nests in forest underbrush and is hard to spot. It is

called the ovenbird because it builds its nest in the shape of a traditional outdoor oven. As the poem indicates, the ovenbird's song is loud—so loud that it "makes the solid tree trunks sound again." The ovenbird is a "mid-summer bird" in the sense that it continues to sing well after other songbirds have fallen silent. In addition, the ovenbird has a distinctive song that Roger Tory Peterson describes as "an emphatic teach´er, TEACH´ER, TEACH´ ER, repeated rapidly in crescendo" (Peterson 2002, 276). This is the standard mnemonic for identifying the ovenbird by its call. However, given that it occurs as a mnemonic, there is no more reason to assign a semantic content to the word "teacher" than there is for assigning a meaning to the American goldfinch's flight-call, "potato chip, potato chip," or to the barred owl's "Who cooks for you? Who cooks for you-oo?" I do not find any reference to the ovenbird as a teacher in Frost's poem, and, more strongly, I think that giving the song a pedagogical status distorts the central core of the poem.[9]

"The Oven Bird" is presented between two falls. The first is spring's fall of blossoms when the world is vibrant with life, including the mating songs of birds. The second fall is autumn, when leaves do fall. The poem itself is set in mid-summer with fall approaching. It is a worn-out time when "highway dust is over all." It is a time when the ovenbird "knows in singing not to sing." Its frantic call is transmuted "in all but words" into the piercing question, "what to make of a diminished thing."

9. I once attended a panel discussion on Frost's poetry where one of the speakers gave a rendering of the ovenbird's song in a slow, soft, mellifluous voice as: "Teeeecheeeer Teeeeheeeer Teeececheeer." It is hard to imagine a worse representation of the ovenbird's song, and, not surprisingly, the commentary that followed was equally bad.

There is more going on in the poem than this. The reference to two falls calls forth the notion of a third fall: the fall of man. That too conforms to the other metaphors at work in the poem.

If we disengage from the poem, we notice how deeply anomalous it is. At the start, the ovenbird is described as a *singer*; then, near the end, we are told "he knows in singing not to sing." The ovenbird's song does not change with the seasons. In the poem the ovenbird is involved in many complex reflections, including "Mid-summer is to spring as one to ten." It seems out of the question for a bird to entertain such thoughts. At the end, when the ovenbird asks, "in all but words," "what to make of a diminished thing," he is asking a sophisticated question indeed.

In reading "The Oven Bird," none of these seeming anomalies disturbs us. We do just what Grice says we do: To make sense of what's said, we take it figuratively. We slide with ease into the personification of the ovenbird, probably without noticing it. Assigning speech and thought to animals has been with us at least since the time of Aesop's fables. We do more than this. Because it seems implausible to locate these complex thoughts and feelings in the ovenbird, we relocate them in the narrator within the poem. Broadly speaking, this is how the synecdoche works: The poem begins with the poet vividly recording an encounter with an ovenbird's song; struck by it, he then rescales it as emblematic of his own situation in life.

How does Frost pull it off? Saying that it involves synecdoche is right. But appealing to synecdoche does not, by itself, explain the power of the poem. Synecdoche, like irony, metaphor, and other tropes, can generate banalities as well as insights. Frost's use of synecdoche works because he is a superb poet. Using his own words, he is "at home in the metaphor," "at ease with figurative values," knows "the metaphor

in its strength and its weakness," and knows "how far you may expect to ride it and when it may break down with you."

In words borrowed from Seamus Heaney, Frost commands "The very there-you-are-and-where are you?"//Of poetry itself.[10]

FIGURATIVE GENRES

In the first edition of *Figuratively Speaking*, I suggested that figurative comparisons can be applied not only to tropes, but to genres as well: fables and satires, for example. Here I will offer some reflections on both topics. Fables first.

Fables

The mention of fables usually calls to mind Aesop's fables, and if asked for an example, almost invariably the one about the boy who cried wolf will be cited.

> The Joking Shepherd
>
> A shepherd who led his flock rather far from the village frequently indulged in the following practical joke. He called to the people of the village to help him, crying that the wolves were attacking his sheep. Two or three times the villagers were alarmed and rushed forth, then returned

10. These lines come from the title poem of Heaney's collection *Electric Light* (Heaney 2001, 80). Seamus Heaney is a great admirer of Frost's poetry. This came out a number of years ago when the BBC, conducting a poll, asked its listeners to nominate what they took to be the best poem in the English language. Heaney was interviewed on the program and was asked which poem he thought was the greatest. He answered, "The *Iliad*." Reminded that the poem had to be in English, he immediately put forward Frost's "Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening." As I recall, the interviewer gave no indication of having heard of the poem. In any case, Rudyard Kipling's "If" won by a landslide.

> home having been fooled. But in the end, it happened that wolves really did appear. (Aesop 1998, 234)

We know what happens next: Thinking that the shepherd is again trying to trick them, this time none of the villagers comes to his aid. Here we have a cautionary tale, followed by a moral underscoring its point.[11]

In fact, this fable is not characteristic of most of Aesop's fables. It does not, as often happens, contain talking animals confronting each other in perfectly weird circumstances. It is not particularly figurative—it is more a parable than a fable. It is also lacking the sharp edge that most of Aesop's fables exhibit. As Temple puts it, these fables are "not the purveyors of Victorian morals that we have been led to believe. They are instead savage, coarse, brutal, lacking in all mercy and compassion" (xvi). Fable 271 is more representative of a fable in Aesop's style:

> The Ass and the Frogs
>
> An ass carrying a load of wood was crossing a bog one day. He slipped and fell. Not able to get up again, he began to groan and wail. The frogs in the bog, who heard all this moaning, said to him, "What sort of noise would you make if you had been living here for as long as we have? You who have only fallen in for a moment." (Aesop 1998, 271)

This remarkable figurative construction depends on taking the croaking of frogs as an expression of their ceaseless misery, then, by way of contrast, dismissing the ass's groans and wails as an overreaction to momentary discomfort. The comparison with people who carry on about minor difficulties is transparent.

11. I have not appended the moral because, as Robert Temple points out in his introduction to *Aesop: The Complete Fables*, such morals "are often silly and inferior in wit and interest to the fables themselves. Some of them are truly appalling" (xv) and often added later by collectors of fables.

Temple also remarks that Aesop's fables are a world "of deft wit, clever wordplay, one-upmanship, of 'I told you so'" (xvii). This provides an excuse for including a fable from James Thurber's *Further Fables for Our Time*. The following fable is lighter in satire than many of Aesop's, but scores high in describing a preposterous situation with deft wit and clever wordplay:

> The Weaver and the Worm
>
> A weaver watched in wide-eyed wonder a silkworm spinning its cocoon in a white mulberry tree.
>
> "Where do you get that stuff?" asked the admiring weaver.
>
> "Do you want to make something out of it?" inquired the silkworm, eagerly.
>
> Then the weaver and the silkworm went their separate ways, for each thought the other had insulted him. We live, man and worm, in a time when almost everything can mean almost anything, for this is the age of gobbledygook, doubletalk, and gudda.
>
> *Moral: A word to the wise is not sufficient if it doesn't make any sense.* (Thurber 1956, 129)

Thurber's moral is really a wisecrack.

Satire

Satires offer more elaborate examples of figurative comparisons. I will consider just one, Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* (*MP*), published in 1729. It has received extravagant praise, often called the finest work of irony or the finest satire in the English language.

If we rely only on our dim memories, we might think that Swift's "modest proposal" was that Ireland could solve its multiple problems by selling its infant children to landlords who would use them for food, perhaps preparing them in the

manner of suckling pigs. Seemingly, it is the ironic proposal itself that carries the weight of the satire. This, however, is not how Swift sets things up. Instead he has the modest proposal put forward by someone who describes himself as having "maturely weighed the several *Schemes of other Projectors*, [and having] always found them grossly mistaken." (Swift 2009, 230) Swift used the notion of a projector two years earlier in *Gulliver's Travels*, where Gulliver encounters projectors at what we can call the Academy for Advanced Studies located in Laputa. Here is Swift's description of the institute's most senior member:

> The Projector's Face and Beard were of a pale Yellow; his Hands and Clothes daubed over with Filth. When I was presented to him, he gave me a close Embrace (a Compliment I could well have excused). His Employment from his first coming into the Academy, was an Operation to reduce human Excrement to its original Food. (book 3, chapter 3)

In *MP*, Swift allows the Projector to speak for himself, nowhere explicitly inserting authorial comments of his own. Why does Swift adopt this rhetorical strategy? For one thing, presenting the proposal in the form of a detailed prospectus provides Swift with the opportunity to exhibit his wit over a wide range of topics. Scholars have identified numerous political references in *MP*. This standpoint also serves as a platform for Swift to exhibit his extraordinary literary skills, including, as various scholars have pointed out, his command of the Roman satirical genre. All this goes into making *MP* a complex literary achievement. Here, however, I will concentrate on one topic: Swift's use of the Projector's voice in presenting the proposal.

MP opens with the Projector noting that a large number of people in Ireland are in a desperate state, many dying of starvation. He goes on to present what he takes to be the heart of the problem: There are too many people in Ireland for it to feed. He is then

struck with a blinding insight. The problem could be solved in a single stroke by using people as food—that is, by transforming a segment of the population who are eaters into those who are eaten. Of course, some nice calculations are needed to determine who in the population and how many of them should be converted from consumers of food into food to be consumed. The Projector throws himself into the task with a will.

Who, then, should be eaten? The answer involves a number of interlocking economic factors. One factor involves the price that people sold for consumption can command. Presumably, the better they taste, the more they will be worth. This is a culinary consideration, so the Projector turns to an expert for advice:

> I HAVE been assured by a very knowing *American* of my Acquaintance in *London*; that a young healthy Child well nursed, is, at a Year old, a most delicious, nourishing, and wholesome Food; whether *stewed*, *roasted*, *baked*, or *boiled*; and, I make no doubt, that it will equally serve in a *Fricassee* or *Ragout*. (232)

The American in question is a Native American cannibal.[12]

There is a further economic reason for choosing one-year-old children that the Projector lays out before explicitly stating his proposal:

> I AM assured by our Merchants, that a Boy or a Girl before twelve Years old, is no salable Commodity; and even when they come to this Age, they will not yield above Three Pounds, or Three Pounds and half-a-Crown at most, on the

12. Even the manner in which the infants will be slaughtered turns on culinary considerations:

> Butchers we may be assured will not be wanting; although I rather recommend buying the Children alive, and dressing them hot from the Knife, as we do *roasting Pigs*. (233)

> Exchange; which cannot turn to Account either to the Parents or Kingdom; the Charge of Nutriment and Rags, having been at least four Times that Value. (232)

For the poor, raising a child to the age of twelve is a severe financial encumbrance that they would gladly abandon. The economic advantages of the Projector's proposal are beginning to fit together almost like magic.

The Projector is a micromanager willing to go into details. He is well aware of the importance of quality control. He thus rejects the suggestion of a "VERY worthy Person, [and] *true Lover of his Country*," that the "Want of Venison [caused by the destruction of deer] might be well supplied by the Bodies of young Lads and Maidens, not exceeding fourteen Years of Age, nor under twelve." (233–34) With deference, he rejects this suggestion because his American adviser has assured him "from frequent Experience, that their Flesh was generally tough and lean, like that of our School-boys, by continual Exercise; and their Taste disagreeable; and to fatten them would not answer the Charge." (234)

The Projector exhibits little sympathy for the Roman Catholic population of Ireland. In summarizing the advantages of his proposal, he tells us that "it would greatly lessen *the Number of Papists*, with whom we are yearly over-run; being the principal Breeders of the Nation, as well as our most dangerous Enemies." (235) He acknowledges that reducing the papist population by culling its infant children will still leave Ireland encumbered with a "vast Number of poor People, who are Aged, Diseased, or Maimed;" but declares that he is "not in the least Pain upon that Matter; because it is very well known, that they are every Day *dying*, and *rotting*, by *Cold* and *Famine*, and *Filth*, and Vermin, as fast as can be reasonably expected." (234–35) Always practical, our Projector will not divert his attention to problems that will, in a reasonably short time, take care of themselves.

Throughout *MP* the Projector buttresses his case with careful economic calculations. As already noted, chief among them is the calculation of the money automatically saved by not having to raise children to maturity. There are a great number of mercantile benefits as well. The project will generate upscale food markets frequented by the better members of society:

> This Food would likewise bring great *Custom to Taverns*, where the Vintners will certainly be so prudent, as to procure the best Receipts for dressing it to Perfection; and consequently have their Houses frequented by all the *fine Gentlemen*, who justly value themselves upon their Knowledge in good Eating; and a skilful Cook, who understands how to oblige his Guests, will contrive to make it as expensive as they please. (236)

MP ends with a disclaimer indicating that the Projector has nothing personal to gain from this project:

> I PROFESS, in the Sincerity of my Heart, that I have not the least personal Interest in endeavoring to promote this necessary Work; having no other Motive than the *publick Good of my Country, by advancing our Trade, providing for Infants, relieving the Poor, and giving some Pleasure to the Rich*. I have no Children, by which I can propose to get a single Penny; the youngest being nine Years old, and my Wife past Child-bearing. (238)

To engage in an oxymoron, let's take this passage at its satirical face value and suppose that Swift is presenting the Projector as being a person who is perfectly sincere.

MP has been called the best satire written in the English language; however, when we look into it, we discover that it *contains* almost no satirical remarks. In fact, it contains hardly any figurative language. The satire moves at a different level. On its face, the proposal reads like a detailed, carefully

reasoned bureaucratic prospectus soberly recommending a monstrous course of action. The Projector, however, seems oblivious to—or unconcerned with—the horrors his proposal entails. This absence of even a rudimentary moral sense also calls forth the reader's hostile response. To return to ideas found in Grice's treatment of conversational implicatures, though Swift, as author, never speaks in his own voice, it was his intention to call forth these hostile responses, and also part of his intention that his intention to do so should be recognized. It was Swift's further intention that his readers recognize the figurative similarity between the Projector's proposed solution to the "Irish problem" and the actual way that Britain was dealing—or failing to deal—with it. All this, from beginning to end, is accomplished indirectly through the ironic employment of the Projector's voice.

There are other figurative genres—parodies, caricatures, and send-ups, for example—with interesting structures of their own. There seem to be no limits to their range of application except for things so inherently ridiculous that they defy parody.

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A Concluding Note

This work has been dominated by two themes. The first is that figurative language derives its force by including the respondent in a mutually recognized task of making sense out of what is said. With figurative predications, this involves replacing the speaker's utterance with one that squares with the context. With figurative comparisons, this involves trimming the context so that it squares with the speaker's utterance. With synecdoche, the context is rescaled in one of a number of ways that enriches it, sometimes in startling fashion.

The second theme is that the underlying mechanisms of figures of speech are nothing special. They are simple, pretty much what they seem to be at first glance. If so, it is time to calm down about theory and recognize that the intellectual and aesthetic force of figurative language is derived from the opportunity it provides for unlimited elaboration and sophistication in the hands of someone gifted. Rembrandt could not have become a great painter without brushes, but the credit goes to him, not to them, for his achievements.

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