

# Metaphor

JOHN R. SEARLE

## Formulating the problem

If you hear somebody say, "Sally is a block of ice," or "Sam is a pig," you are likely to assume that the speaker does not mean what he says literally but that he is speaking metaphorically. Furthermore, you are not likely to have very much trouble figuring out what he means. If he says, "Sally is a prime number between 17 and 23," or "Bill is a barn door," you might still assume he is speaking metaphorically, but it is much harder to figure out what he means. The existence of such utterances – utterances in which the speaker means metaphorically something different from what the sentence means literally – poses a series of questions for any theory of language and communication: What is metaphor, and how does it differ from both literal and other forms of figurative utterances? Why do we use expressions metaphorically instead of saying exactly and literally what we mean? How do metaphorical utterances work, that is, how is it possible for speakers to communicate to hearers when speaking metaphorically inasmuch as they do not say what they mean? And why do some metaphors work and others not?

In my discussion, I propose to tackle this latter set of questions – those centering around the problem of how metaphors work – both because of its intrinsic interest, and because it does not seem to me that we shall get an answer to the others until this fundamental question has been answered. Before we can begin to understand it, however, we need to formulate the question more precisely.

The problem of explaining how metaphors work is a special case of the general problem of explaining how speaker meaning and sentence or word meaning come apart. It is a special case, that is, of the problem of how it is possible to say one thing and mean something else, where one succeeds in communicating what one means even though both the speaker and the hearer know that the meanings of the words uttered by the speaker do not exactly and literally express what the

speaker meant. Some other instances of the break between speaker's utterance meaning and literal sentence meaning are irony and indirect speech acts. In each of these cases, what the speaker means is not identical with what the sentence means, and yet what he means is in various ways dependent on what the sentence means.

It is essential to emphasize at the very beginning that the problem of metaphor concerns the relations between word and sentence meaning, on the one hand, and speaker's meaning or utterance meaning, on the other. Many writers on the subject try to locate the metaphorical element of a metaphorical utterance in the sentence or expressions uttered. They think there are two kinds of sentence meaning, literal and metaphorical. However, sentences and words have only the meanings that they have. Strictly speaking, whenever we talk about the metaphorical meaning of a word, expression, or sentence, we are talking about what a speaker might utter it to mean, in a way that departs from what the word, expression, or sentence actually means. We are, therefore, talking about possible speaker's intentions. Even when we discuss how a nonsense sentence, such as Chomsky's example, "Colorless green ideas sleep furiously," could be given a metaphorical interpretation, what we are talking about is how a speaker could utter the sentence and mean something by it metaphorically, even though it is literally nonsensical. 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 latter, *word, or sentence meaning*. Metaphorical meaning is always speaker's utterance meaning.

In order that the speaker can communicate using metaphorical utterances, ironical utterances, and indirect speech acts, there must be some principles according to which he is able to mean more than, or something different from, what he says, whereby the hearer, using his knowledge of them, can understand what the speaker means. The relation between the sentence meaning and the metaphorical utterance meaning is systematic rather than random or ad hoc. Our task in constructing a theory of metaphor is to try to state the principles which relate literal sentence meaning to metaphorical utterance meaning. Because the knowledge that enables people to use and understand metaphorical utterances goes beyond their knowledge of the literal meanings of words and sentences, the principles we seek are not included, or at least not entirely included, within a theory of semantic competence as traditionally conceived. From the point of view of the hearer, the

problem of a theory of metaphor is to explain how he can understand the speaker's utterance meaning given that all he hears is a sentence with its word and sentence meaning. From the point of view of the speaker, the problem is to explain how he can mean something different from the word and sentence meaning of the sentence he utters. In light of these reflections, our original question, How do metaphors work? can be recast as follows: What are the principles that enable speakers to formulate, and hearers to understand, metaphorical utterances? and How can we state these principles in a way that makes it clear how metaphorical utterances differ from other sorts of utterances in which speaker meaning does not coincide with literal meaning?

Because part of our task is to explain how metaphorical utterances differ from literal utterances, to start with we must arrive at a characterization of literal utterances. Most—indeed all—of the authors I have read on the subject of metaphor assume that we know how literal utterances work; they do not think that the problem of literal utterances is worth discussing in their account of metaphor. The price they pay for this is that their accounts often describe metaphorical utterances in ways that fail to distinguish them from literal ones.

In fact, to give an accurate account of literal predication is an extremely difficult, complex, and subtle problem. I shall not attempt anything like a thorough summary of the principles of literal utterance but shall remark on only those features which are essential for a comparison of literal utterance with metaphorical utterance. Also, for the sake of simplicity, I shall confine most of my discussion of both literal and metaphorical utterance to very simple cases, and to sentences used for the speech act of assertion.

Imagine that a speaker makes a literal utterance of a sentence such as

- (1) Sally is tall
- (2) The cat is on the mat
- (3) It's getting hot in here.

Now notice that in each of these cases, the literal meaning of the sentence determines, at least in part, a set of truth conditions; and because the only illocutionary force indicating devices (see Searle, 1969) in the sentences are assertive, the literal and serious utterance of one of these sentences will commit the speaker to the existence of the set of truth conditions determined by the meaning of that sentence, together with the other determinants of truth conditions. Notice, furthermore, that in each case the sentence only determines a definite set of truth conditions relative to a particular context. That is because each of these examples has some indexical element, such as the present tense, or the demonstrative

"here," or the occurrence of contextually dependent definite descriptions, such as "the cat" and "the mat."

In these examples, the contextually dependent elements of the sentence are explicitly realized in the semantic structure of the sentence: One can see and hear the indexical expressions. But these sentences, like most sentences, only determine a set of truth conditions against a background of assumptions that are not explicitly realized in the semantic structure of the sentence. This is most obvious for (1) and (3), because they contain the relative terms "tall" and "hot." These are what old-fashioned grammarians called "attributive" terms, and they only determine a definite set of truth conditions against a background of factual assumptions about the sort of things referred to by the speaker in the rest of the sentence. Moreover, these assumptions are not explicitly realized in the semantic structure of the sentence. Thus, a woman can be correctly described as "tall" even though she is shorter than a giraffe that could correctly be described as "short."

Though this dependence of the application of the literal meaning of the sentence on certain factual background assumptions that are not part of the literal meaning is most obvious for sentences containing attributive terms, the phenomenon is quite general. Sentence (2) only determines a definite set of truth conditions given certain assumptions about cats, mats, and the relation of being on. However, these assumptions are not part of the semantic content of the sentence. Suppose, for example, that the cat and mat are in the usual cat-on-mat spatial configuration, only both cat and mat are in outer space, outside any gravitational field relative to which one could be said to be "above" or "over" the other. Is the cat still *on* the mat? Without some further assumptions, the sentence does not determine a definite set of truth conditions in this context. Or suppose all cats suddenly became lighter than air, and the cat went flying about with the mat stuck to its belly. Is the cat still on the mat?

We know without hesitation what are the truth conditions of, "The fly is on the ceiling," but not of, "The cat is on the ceiling," and this difference is not a matter of meaning, but a matter of how our factual background information enables us to apply the meanings of sentences. In general, one can say that in most cases a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions relative to a set of assumptions that are not realized in the semantic content of the sentence. Thus, even in literal utterances, where speaker's meaning coincides with sentence meaning, the speaker must contribute more to the literal utterance than just the semantic content of the sentence, because that semantic content only determines a set of truth conditions relative to a set of assumptions

made by the speaker, and if communication is to be successful, his assumptions must be shared by the hearer (for further discussion of this point, see Searle, 1978).

Notice finally that the notion of similarity plays a crucial role in any account of literal utterance. This is because the literal meaning of any general term, by determining a set of truth conditions, also determines a criterion of similarity between objects. To know that a general term is true of a set of objects is to know that they are similar with respect to the property specified by that term. All tall women are similar with respect to being tall, all hot rooms similar with respect to being hot, all square objects similar with respect to being square, and so on.

To summarize this brief discussion of some aspects of literal utterance, there are three features we shall need to keep in mind in our account of metaphorical utterance. First, in literal utterance the speaker means what he says; that is, literal sentence meaning and speaker's utterance meaning are the same; second, in general the literal meaning of a sentence only determines a set of truth conditions relative to a set of background assumptions which are not part of the semantic content of the sentence; and third, the notion of similarity plays an essential role in any account of literal predication.

When we turn to cases where utterance meaning and sentence meaning are different, we find them quite various. Thus, for example, (3) could be uttered not only to tell somebody that it is getting hot in the place of utterance (literal utterance), but it could also be used to request somebody to open a window (indirect speech act), to complain about how cold it is (ironical utterance), or to remark on the increasing vituperation of an argument that is in progress (metaphorical utterance). In our account of metaphorical utterance, we shall need to distinguish it not only from literal utterance, but also from these other forms in which literal utterance is departed from, or exceeded, in some way.

Because in metaphorical utterances what the speaker means differs from what he says (in one sense of "say"), in general we shall need two sentences for our examples of metaphor—first the sentence uttered metaphorically, and second a sentence that expresses literally what the speaker means when he utters the first sentence and means it metaphorically. Thus (3), the metaphor (MET):

(3) (MET) It's getting hot in here.

corresponds to (3), the paraphrase (PAR):

(3) (PAR) The argument that is going on is becoming more vituperative and similarly with the pairs:

(4) (MET) Sally is a block of ice

(4) (PAR) Sally is an extremely unemotional and unresponsive person

(5) (MET) I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole (Disraeli)

(5) (PAR) I have after great difficulty become prime minister

(6) (MET) Richard is a gorilla

(6) (PAR) Richard is fierce, nasty, and prone to violence.

Notice that in each case we feel that the paraphrase is somehow inadequate, that something is lost. One of our tasks will be to explain this sense of dissatisfaction that we have with paraphrases of even feeble metaphors. Still, in some sense, the paraphrases must approximate what the speaker meant, because in each case the speaker's metaphorical assertion will be true if, and only if, the corresponding assertion using the PAR sentence is true. When we get to more elaborate examples, our sense of the inadequacy of the paraphrase becomes more acute. How would we paraphrase

(7) (MET) My Life had stood – a Loaded Gun –

In Corners – till a Day

The Owner passes – identified

And carried Me away – (Emily Dickinson)?

Clearly a good deal is lost by

(7) (PAR) My life was one of unrealized but readily realizable potential (a loaded gun) in mediocre surroundings (corners) until such time (a day) when my destined lover (the owner) came (passed), recognized my potential (identified), and took (carried) me away.

Yet, even in this case, the paraphrase or something like it must express a large part of speaker's utterance meaning, because the truth conditions are the same.

Sometimes we feel that we know exactly what the metaphor means and yet would not be able to formulate a literal PAR sentence because there are no literal expressions that convey what it means. Thus even for such a simple case as

(8) (MET) The ship ploughed the sea,

we may not be able to construct a simple paraphrase sentence even though there is no obscurity in the metaphorical utterance. And indeed metaphors often serve to plug such semantic gaps as this. In other cases, there may be an indefinite range of paraphrases. For example, when Romeo says:

(9) (MET) Juliet is the sun,

there may be a range of things he might mean. But while lamenting the inadequacy of paraphrases, let us also recall that paraphrase is symmetrical relation. To say that the paraphrase is a poor paraphrase

of the metaphor is also to say that the metaphor is a poor paraphrase of its paraphrase. Furthermore, we should not feel apologetic about the fact that some of our examples are trite or dead metaphors. Dead metaphors are especially interesting for our study, because, to speak oxymorically, dead metaphors have lived on. They have become dead through continual use, but their continual use is a clue that they satisfy some semantic need.

Confining ourselves to the simplest subject-predicate cases, we can say that the general form of the metaphorical utterance is that a speaker utters a sentence of the form "S is P" and means metaphorically that S is R. In analyzing metaphorical predication, we need to distinguish, therefore, between three sets of elements. Firstly, there is the subject expression "S" and the object or objects it is used to refer to. Secondly, there is the predicate expression "P" that is uttered and the literal meaning of that expression with its corresponding truth conditions, plus the denotation if there is any. And thirdly, there is the speaker's utterance meaning "S is R" and the truth conditions determined by that meaning. In its simplest form, the problem of metaphor is to try to get a characterization of the relations between the three sets, S, P, and R<sup>1</sup>, together with a specification of other information and principles used by speakers and hearers, so as to explain how it is possible to utter "S is P" and mean "S is R," and how it is possible to communicate that meaning from speaker to hearer. Now, obviously, that is not all there is to understand about metaphorical utterances; the speaker does more than just assert that S is R, and the peculiar effectiveness of metaphor will have to be explained in terms of how he does more than just assert that S is R and why he should choose this round-about way of asserting that S is R in the first place. But at this stage we are starting at the beginning. At the very minimum, a theory of metaphor must explain how it is possible to utter "S is P" and both mean and communicate that S is R.

We can now state one of the differences between literal and metaphorical utterances as applied to these simple examples: In the case of literal utterance, speaker's meaning and sentence meaning are the same; therefore the assertion made about the object referred to will be true if and only if it satisfies the truth conditions determined by the meaning of the general term as applied against a set of shared background assumptions. In order to understand the utterance, the hearer does not require any extra knowledge beyond his knowledge of the rules of language, his awareness of the conditions of utterance, and a set of shared background assumptions. But, in the case of the metaphorical utterance, the truth conditions of the assertion are not deter-

mined by the truth conditions of the sentence and its general term. In order to understand the metaphorical utterance, the hearer requires something more than his knowledge of the language, his awareness of the conditions of the utterance, and background assumptions that he shares with the speaker. He must have some other principles, or some other factual information, or some combination of principles and information that enables him to figure out that when the speaker says, "S is P," he means "S is R." What is this extra element?

I believe that at the most general level, the question has a fairly simple answer, but it will take me much of the rest of this discussion to work it out in any detail. The basic principle on which all metaphor works is that the utterance of an expression with its literal meaning and corresponding truth conditions can, in various ways that are specific to metaphor, call to mind another meaning and corresponding set of truth conditions. The hard problem of the theory of metaphor is to explain what exactly are the principles according to which the utterance of an expression can metaphorically call to mind a different set of truth conditions from the one determined by its literal meaning, and to state those principles precisely and without using metaphorical expressions like "call to mind."

#### Some common mistakes about metaphor

Before attempting to sketch a theory of metaphor, I want in this section and the next to backtrack a bit and examine some existing theories. Roughly speaking, theories of metaphor from Aristotle to the present can be divided into two types.<sup>2</sup> Comparison theories assert that metaphorical utterances involve a *comparison* or *similarity* between two or more *objects* (e.g., Aristotle, 1952a, 1952b; Henle, 1965), and semantic interaction theories claim that metaphor involves a *verbal opposition* (Beardsley, 1962) or *interaction* (Black, 1962b) between two *semantic contents*, that of the expression used metaphorically, and that of the surrounding literal context. I think that both of these theories, if one tries to take them quite literally, are in various ways inadequate; nonetheless, they are both trying to say something true, and we ought to try to extract what is true in them. But first I want to show some of the common mistakes they contain and some further common mistakes made in discussions of metaphor. My aim here is not polemical; rather, I am trying to clear the ground for the development of a theory of metaphor. One might say the endemic vice of the comparison theories is that they fail to distinguish between the claim that the statement of the comparison is part of the *meaning*, and hence the *truth*

conditions, of the metaphorical statement, and the claim that the statement of the similarity is the *principle of inference*, or a step in the process of *comprehending*, on the basis of which speakers produce and hearers understand metaphor. (More about this distinction later.) The semantic interaction theories were developed in response to the weaknesses of the comparison theories, and they have little independent argument to recommend them other than the weakness of their rivals: Their endemic vice is the failure to appreciate the distinction between sentence or word meaning, which is never metaphorical, and speaker or utterance meaning, which can be metaphorical. They usually try to locate metaphorical meaning in the sentence or some set of associations with the sentence. In any event, here are half a dozen mistakes, which I believe should be noted:

It is often said that in metaphorical utterances there is a change in meaning of at least one expression. I wish to say that on the contrary, strictly speaking, in metaphor there is never a change of meaning; diachronically speaking, metaphors do indeed initiate semantic changes, but to the extent that there has been a genuine change in meaning, so that a word or expression no longer means what it previously did, to precisely that extent the locution is no longer metaphorical. We are all familiar with the processes whereby an expression becomes a dead metaphor, and then finally becomes an idiom or acquires a new meaning different from the original meaning. But in a genuine metaphorical utterance, it is only because the expressions have not changed their meaning that there is a metaphorical utterance at all. The people who make this claim seem to be confusing *sentence meaning* with *speaker's meaning*. The metaphorical utterance does indeed mean something different from the meaning of the words and sentences, but that is not because there has been any change in the meanings of the lexical elements, but because the speaker means something different by them; speaker meaning does not coincide with sentence or word meaning. It is essential to see this point, because the main problem of metaphor is to explain how speaker meaning and sentence meaning are different and how they are, nevertheless, related. Such an explanation is impossible if we suppose that sentence or word meaning has changed in the metaphorical utterance.

The simplest way to show that the crude versions of the comparison view are false is to show that, in the production and understanding of metaphorical utterances, there need not be any two objects for comparison. When I say metaphorically

(4) (MET) Sally is a block of ice,  
I am not necessarily quantifying over blocks of ice at all. My utterance does not entail literally that

(10)  $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a block of ice})$ ,  
and such that I am comparing Sally to  $x$ . This point is even more obvious if we take expressions used as metaphors which have a null extension. If I say

(11) Sally is a dragon  
that does not entail literally

(12)  $(\exists x)(x \text{ is a dragon})$ .  
Or, another way to see the same thing is to note that the negative sentence is just as metaphorical as the affirmative. If I say

(13) Sally is not a block of ice,  
that, I take it, does not invite the absurd question: Which block of ice is it that you are comparing Sally with, in order to say that she is not like it? At its *crudest*, the comparison theory is just muddled about the referential character of expressions used metaphorically.

Now, this might seem a somewhat minor objection to the comparison theorists, but it paves the way for a much more radical objection. Comparison theories which are explicit on the point at all, generally treat the statement of the comparison as part of the meaning and hence as part of the truth conditions of the metaphorical statement. For example, Miller (this volume) is quite explicit in regarding metaphorical statements as statements of similarity, and indeed for such theorists the meaning of a *metaphorical statement* is always given by an explicit *statement of similarity*. Thus, in their view, I have not even formulated the problem correctly. According to me, the problem of explaining (simple subject-predicate) metaphors is to explain how the speaker and hearer go from the literal sentence meaning " $S$  is  $P$ " to the metaphorical utterance meaning " $S$  is  $R$ ." But, according to them, that is not the utterance meaning; rather the utterance meaning must be expressible by an explicit statement of similarity, such as " $S$  is like  $P$  with respect to  $R$ ," or in Miller's case, the metaphorical statement " $S$  is  $P$ " is to be analyzed as, "There is some property  $F$  and some property  $G$  such that  $S$ 's being  $F$  is similar to  $P$ 's being  $G$ ." I will have more to say about this thesis and its exact formulation later, but at present I want to claim that though similarity often plays a role in the *comprehension* of metaphor, the metaphorical assertion is not necessarily an *assertion of similarity*. The simplest argument that metaphorical assertions are not always assertions of similarity is that there are true metaphorical assertions for which there are no objects to be designated by the  $P$  term, hence the true metaphorical statement cannot possibly presuppose the existence of an object of comparison. But even where there are objects of comparison, the metaphorical assertion is not necessarily an assertion of similarity. Similarity, I shall argue, has to do with the production and understanding of metaphor, not with its meaning.

$S \text{ is } B \text{ of } I \Rightarrow (\exists x)(x \text{ is } B \text{ of } I)$

A second simple argument to show that metaphorical assertions are not necessarily assertions of similarity is that often the metaphorical assertion can remain true even though it turns out that the statement of similarity on which the inference to the metaphorical meaning is based is false. Thus, suppose I say,

(6) (MET) Richard is a gorilla  
meaning

(6) (PAR) Richard is fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth.  
And suppose the hearer's inference to (6 PAR) is based on the belief that

(14) Gorillas are fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth,  
and hence (6 MET) and (14), on the comparison view, would justify the inference to

(15) Richard and gorillas are similar in several respects; *viz*, they are fierce, nasty, prone to violence, and so forth,  
and this in turn would be part of the inference pattern that enabled the hearer to conclude that when I uttered (6 MET) I meant (6 PAR). But suppose ethological investigation shows, as I am told it has, that gorillas are not at all fierce and nasty, but are in fact shy, sensitive creatures, given to bouts of sentimentality. This would definitely show that (15) is false, for (15) is as much an assertion about gorillas as about Richard. But would it show that when I uttered (6 MET), what I said was false? Clearly not, for what I meant was (6 PAR), and (6 PAR) is an assertion about Richard. It can remain true regardless of the actual facts about gorillas; though, of course, what expressions we use to convey metaphorically certain semantic contents will normally depend on what we take the facts to be.

To put it crudely, "Richard is a gorilla," is just about Richard; it is not literally about gorillas at all. The word "gorilla" here serves to convey a certain semantic content other than its own meaning by a set of principles I have yet to state. But (15) is literally about both Richard and gorillas, and it is true if and only if they both share the properties it claims they do. Now, it may well be true that the hearer employs something like (15) as a step in the procedures that get him from (6 MET) to (6 PAR), but it does not follow from this fact about his *procedures of comprehension* that this is part of the *speaker's utterance meaning* of (6 MET); and, indeed, that it is not part of the utterance meaning is shown by the fact that the metaphorical statement can be *true* even if it turns out that gorillas do not have the traits that the metaphorical occurrence of "gorilla" served to convey. I am not saying that a metaphorical assertion can *never* be equivalent in meaning to a statement of similarity—whether or not it is would depend on the

intentions of the speaker; but I am saying that it is not a necessary feature of metaphor—and is certainly not the point of having metaphor—that metaphorical assertions are equivalent in meaning to statements of similarity. 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. The difference between the view I am attacking and the one I shall espouse is this. According to the view I am attacking, (6 MET) means Richard and gorillas are similar in certain respects. According to the view I shall espouse, similarity functions as a comprehension strategy, not as a component of meaning: (6 MET) says that Richard has certain traits (and to figure out what they are, look for features associated with gorillas). On my account the *P* term need not figure literally in the statement of the truth conditions of the metaphorical statement at all.

Similar remarks apply incidentally to similes. If I say,

(16) Sam acts like a gorilla  
that need not commit me to the truth of

(17) Gorillas are such that their behavior resembles Sam's.  
For (16) need not be about gorillas at all, and we might say that "gorilla" in (16) has a metaphorical occurrence. Perhaps this is one way we might distinguish between figurative similes and literal statements of similarity. Figurative similes need not necessarily commit the speaker to a literal statement of similarity.

The semantic interaction view, it seems to me, is equally defective. One of the assumptions behind the view that metaphorical meaning is a result of an interaction between an expression used metaphorically and other expressions used literally, is that all metaphorical uses of expressions must occur in sentences containing literal uses of expressions, and that assumption seems to me plainly false. It is, incidentally, the assumption behind the terminology of many of the contemporary discussions of metaphor. We are told, for example, that every metaphorical sentence contains a "tenor" and a "vehicle" (Richards, 1936a) or a "frame" and a "focus" (Black, 1962b). But it is not the case that every metaphorical use of an expression is surrounded by literal uses of other expressions. Consider again our example (4): In uttering, "Sally is a block of ice," we referred to Sally using her proper name literally, but we need not have. Suppose, to use a mixed metaphor, we refer to Sally as "the bad news." We would then say, using a mixed metaphor

(18) The bad news is a block of ice.  
If you insist that the "is" is still literal, it is easy enough to construct

but in  
interact  
some  
Black

examples of a dramatic change on Sally's part where we would be inclined, in another mixed metaphor, to say

(19) The bad news congealed into a block of ice.

Mixed metaphors may be stylistically objectionable, but I cannot see that they are necessarily logically incoherent. Of course, most metaphors do occur in contexts of expressions used literally. It would be very hard to understand them if they did not. But it is not a logical necessity that every metaphorical use of an expression occurs surrounded by literal occurrences of other expressions and, indeed, many famous examples of metaphor are not. Thus Russell's example of a completely nonsensical sentence, "Quadrilaterality drinks procrastination," is often given a metaphorical interpretation as a description of any postwar four-power disarmament conference, but none of the words, so interpreted, has a literal occurrence; that is, for every word the speaker's utterance meaning differs from the literal word meaning.

However, the most serious objection to the semantic interaction view is not that it falsely presupposes that all metaphorical occurrences of words must be surrounded by literal occurrence of other words, but rather, that even where the metaphorical occurrence is within the context of literal occurrences, it is not in general the case that the metaphorical speaker's meaning is a result of any interaction among the elements of the sentence in any literal sense of "interaction." Consider again our example (4). In its metaphorical utterances, there is no question of any interaction between the meaning of the "principal subject" ("Sally") and the "subsidiary subject" ("block of ice"). "Sally" is a proper name; it does not have a meaning in quite the way in which "block of ice" has a meaning. Indeed, other expressions could have been used to produce the same metaphorical predication. Thus,

(20) Miss Jones is a block of ice

or

(21) That girl over there in the corner is a block of ice could have been uttered with the same metaphorical utterance meaning.

I conclude that, as general theories, both the object comparison view and the semantic interaction view are inadequate. If we were to diagnose their failure in Fregean terms, we might say that the comparison view tries to explain metaphor as a relation between references, and the interaction view tries to explain it as a relation between senses and beliefs associated with references. The proponents of the interaction view see correctly that the mental processes and the semantic processes involved in producing and understanding metaphorical utterances cannot involve references themselves, but must be at the level of inten-

tionality, that is, they must involve relations at the level of beliefs, meanings, associations, and so on. However, they then say incorrectly that the relations in question must be some unexplained, but metaphorically described, relations of "interaction"<sup>3</sup> between a literal frame and a metaphorical focus.

Two final mistakes I wish to note are not cases of saying something false about metaphors but of saying something true which fails to distinguish metaphor from literal utterance. Thus it is sometimes said that the notion of similarity plays a crucial role in the analysis of metaphor, or that metaphorical utterances are dependent on the context for their interpretation. But, as we saw earlier, both of these features are true of literal utterances as well. An analysis of metaphor must show how similarity and context play a role in metaphor different from their role in literal utterance.

### A further examination of the comparison theory

One way to work up to a theory of metaphor would be to examine the strengths and weaknesses of one of the existing theories. The obvious candidate for this role of stalking horse is a version of the comparison theory that goes back to Aristotle and can, indeed, probably be considered the common-sense view—the theory that says all metaphor is really literal simile with the "like" or "as" deleted and the respect of the similarity left unspecified. Thus, according to this view, the metaphorical utterance, "Man is a wolf," means "Man is like a wolf in certain unspecified ways"; the utterance, "You are my sunshine," means "You are like sunshine to me in certain respects," and "Sally is a block of ice," means "Sally is like a block of ice in certain but so far unspecified ways."

The principles on which metaphors function, then, according to this theory are the same as those for literal statements of similarity together with the principle of ellipsis. We understand the metaphor as a shortened version of the literal simile.<sup>4</sup> Since literal simile requires no special extralinguistic knowledge for its comprehension, most of the knowledge necessary for the comprehension of metaphor is already contained in the speaker's and hearer's semantic competence, together with the general background knowledge of the world that makes literal meaning comprehensible.

We have already seen certain defects of this view, most notably that metaphorical statements cannot be equivalent in meaning to literal statements of similarity because the truth conditions of the two sorts of statements are frequently different. Furthermore, we must emphasize

that even as a theory of metaphorical comprehension – as opposed to a theory of metaphorical meaning – it is important for the simile theory that the alleged underlying similes be literal statements of similarity. If the simile statements which are supposed to explain metaphor are themselves metaphorical or otherwise figurative, our explanation will be circular.

Still, treated as theory of comprehension, there does seem to be a large number of cases where for the metaphorical utterance we can construct a simile sentence that does seem in some way to explain how its metaphorical meaning is comprehended. And, indeed, the fact that the specification of the values of  $R$  is left vague by the simile statement may, in fact, be an advantage of the theory, inasmuch as metaphorical utterances are often vague in precisely that way: it is not made *exactly* clear what the  $R$  is supposed to be when we say that  $S$  is  $P$ , meaning metaphorically that  $S$  is  $R$ . Thus, for example, in analyzing Romeo's metaphorical statement, "Juliet is the sun," Cavell (1976, pp. 78–9) gives as part of its explanation that Romeo means that his day begins with Juliet. Now, apart from the special context of the play, that reading would never occur to me. I would look for other properties of the sun to fill in the values of  $R$  in the formula. In saying this I am not objecting to either Shakespeare or Cavell, because the metaphor in question, like most metaphors, is open-ended in precisely that way.

Nonetheless, the simile theory, in spite of its attractiveness, has serious difficulties. First, the theory does more – or rather, less – than fail to tell us how to compute the value of  $R$  exactly: So far it fails to tell us how to compute it at all. That is, the theory still has almost no explanatory power, because the task of a theory of metaphor is to explain how the speaker and hearer are able to go from " $S$  is  $P$ " to " $S$  is  $R$ ," and it does not explain that process to tell us that they go from " $S$  is  $P$ " to " $S$  is  $R$ " by first going through the stage " $S$  is like  $P$  with respect to  $R$ " because we are not told how we are supposed to figure out which values to assign to  $R$ . Similarity is a vacuous predicate: any two things are similar in some respect or other. Saying that the metaphorical " $S$  is  $P$ " implies the literal " $S$  is like  $P$ " does not solve our problem. It only pushes it back a step. The problem of understanding literal similes with the respect of the similarity left unspecified is only a part of the problem of understanding metaphor. How are we supposed to know, for example, that the utterance, "Juliet is the sun," does not mean "Juliet is for the most part gaseous," or "Juliet is 90 million miles from the earth," both of which properties are salient and well-known features of the sun.

Yet another objection is this: It is crucial to the simile thesis 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  $P$ . If we insist that there are always such similes, it looks as if we would have to interpret them metaphorically, and thus our account would be circular. Consider our example (4), "Sally is a block of ice." If we were to enumerate quite literally the various distinctive qualities of blocks of ice, none of them would be true of Sally. Even if we were to throw in the various beliefs that people have about blocks of ice, they still would not be literally true of Sally. 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 metaphorically of Sally when we said she was a block of ice. Being unemotional is not a feature of blocks of ice because blocks of ice are not in that line of business at all, and if one wants to insist that blocks of ice are literally unresponsive, then we need only point out that that feature is still insufficient to explain the metaphorical utterance meaning of (4), because in that sense bonfires are "unresponsive" as well, but

(22) Sally is a bonfire

has a quite different metaphorical utterance meaning from (4). Furthermore, there are many similes that are not intended literally. For example, an utterance of "My love is like a red, red rose" does not mean that there is a class of literal predicates that are true both of my love and red, red roses and that express what the speaker was driving at when he said his love was like a red, red rose.

The defender of the simile thesis, however, need not give up so easily. He might say that many metaphors are also examples of other figures as well. Thus, "Sally is a block of ice" is not only an example of metaphor, but of hyperbole as well.<sup>5</sup> The metaphorical utterance meaning is indeed derived from the simile, "Sally is like a block of ice," but then both the metaphor and the simile are cases of *hyperbole*; they are exaggerations, and indeed, many metaphors are exaggerations. According to this reply, if we interpret both the metaphor and the simile hyperbolically, they are equivalent.

Furthermore, the defender of the simile thesis might add that it is not an objection to the simile account to say that some of the respects in which Sally is like a block of ice will be specified metaphorically, because for each of these metaphorical similes we can specify another underlying simile until eventually we reach the rock bottom of literal similes on which the whole edifice rests. Thus "Sally is a block of ice" means "Sally is like a block of ice," which means "She shares certain traits with a block of ice, in particular she is very cold." But since



"cold" in "Sally is very cold" is also metaphorical, there must be an underlying similarity in which Sally's emotional state is like coldness, and when we finally specify these respects, the metaphor will be completely analyzed.

There are really two stages to this reply: First, it points out that other figures such as hyperbole sometimes combine with metaphor, and, secondly, it concedes that some of the similes that we can offer as translations of the metaphor are still metaphorical, but insists that some recursive procedure of analyzing metaphorical similes will eventually lead us to literal similes.

Is this reply really adequate? I think not. The trouble is that there do not seem to be any literal similarities between objects which are cold and people who are unemotional that would justify the view that when we say metaphorically that someone is cold what we mean is that he or she is unemotional. In what respects exactly are unemotional people like cold objects? Well, there are some things that one can say in answer to this, but they all leave us feeling somewhat dissatisfied.

We can say, for example, that when someone is physically cold it places severe restrictions on their emotions. But even if that is true, it is not what we meant by the metaphorical utterance. I think the only answer to the question, "What is the relation between cold things and unemotional people?" that would justify the use of "cold" as a metaphor for lack of emotion is simply that as a matter of perceptions, sensibilities, and linguistic practices, people find the notion of coldness associated in their minds with lack of emotion. The notion of being cold just is associated with being unemotional.

There is some evidence, incidentally, that this metaphor works across several different cultures: It is not confined to English speakers (cf. Asch, 1958). Moreover, it is even becoming, or has become, a dead metaphor. Some dictionaries (for example, the *O.E.D.*) list lack of emotion as one of the meanings of "cold." 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.

Because this point is bound to be contested, it is well to emphasize exactly what is at stake. In claiming that there are no sufficient similarities to explain utterance meaning, I am making a negative existential claim, and thus not one which is demonstrable from an examination of

a finite number of instances. The onus is rather on the similarity theorist to state the similarities and show how they exhaust utterance meaning. But it is not at all easy to see how he could do that in a way that would satisfy the constraints of his own theory.

Of course, one can think of lots of ways in which any *S* is like any *P*, e.g., ways in which Sally is like a block of ice, and one can think of lots of *F*'s and *G*'s such that Sally's being *F* is like a block of ice's being *G*. But that is not enough. Such similarities as one can name do not exhaust utterance meaning and if there are others that do, they are certainly not obvious.

But suppose with some ingenuity one could think up a similarity that would exhaust utterance meaning. The very fact that it takes so much ingenuity to think it up makes it unlikely that it is the underlying principle of the metaphorical interpretation, inasmuch as the metaphor is obvious: There is no difficulty for any native speaker to explain what it means. In "Sam is a pig," both utterance meaning and similarities are obvious, but in "Sally is a block of ice," only the utterance meaning is obvious. The simpler hypothesis, then, is that this metaphor, like several others I shall now discuss, functions on principles other than similarity.

Once we start looking for them, this class of metaphors turns out to be quite large. For example, the numerous spatial metaphors for temporal duration are not based on literal similarities. In "time flies," or "the hours crawled by," what is it that time does and the hours did which is literally like flying or crawling? We are tempted to say they went rapidly or slowly respectively, but of course "went rapidly" and "went slowly" are further spatial metaphors. Similarly, taste metaphors for personal traits are not based on properties in common. We speak of a "sweet disposition" or a "bitter person," without implying that the sweet disposition and the bitter person have literal traits in common with sweet and bitter tastes which exhaust the utterance meaning of the metaphorical utterance. Of course, sweet dispositions and sweet things are both pleasant, but much more is conveyed by the metaphor than mere pleasantness.

So deeply embedded in our whole mode of sensibility are certain metaphorical associations that we tend to think there *must* be a similarity, or even that the association itself is a form of similarity. Thus, we feel inclined to say that the passage of time *just is like* spatial movement, but when we say this we forget that "passage" is only yet another spatial metaphor for time and that the bald assertion of similarity, with no specification of the respect of similarity, is without content.

The most sophisticated version of the simile thesis I have seen is by

George Miller (this volume), and I shall digress briefly to consider some of its special features. Miller, like other simile theorists, believes that the meanings of metaphorical statements can be expressed as statements of similarity, but he offers a special kind of similarity statement (rather like one of Aristotle's formulations, by the way) as the form of "reconstruction" of metaphorical statements. According to Miller, metaphors of the form "*S* is *P*", where both *S* and *P* are noun phrases, are equivalent to sentences of the form

(23)  $(\exists F)(\exists G)\{\text{SIM}[F(S), G(P)]\}$ .

Thus, for example, "Man is a wolf," according to Miller would be analyzed as

(24) There is some property *F* and some property *G* such that man's being *F* is similar to a wolf's being *G*.

And when we have metaphors where a verb or predicate adjective *F* is used metaphorically in a sentence of the form "*x* is *F*" or "*xF*'s", the analysis is of the form

(25)  $(\exists G)(\exists y)\{\text{SIM}[G(x), F(y)]\}$ .

Thus, for example, "The problem is thorny" would be analyzed as

(26) There is some property *G* and some object *y* such that the problem's being *G* is similar to *y*'s being thorny.

I believe this account has all the difficulties of the other simile theories—namely, it mistakenly supposes that the use of a metaphorical predicate commits the speaker to the existence of objects of which that predicate is literally true; it confuses the truth conditions of the metaphorical statement with the principles under which it is comprehended; it fails to tell us how to compute the values of the variables (Miller is aware of this problem, he calls it the problem of "interpretation" and sees it as different from the problem of "reconstruction"); and it is refuted by the fact that not all metaphors have literal statements of similarity underlying them. But it has some additional problems of its own. In my view, the most serious weakness of Miller's account is that according to it the semantic contents of most metaphorical utterances have too many predicates, and, in fact, rather few metaphors really satisfy the formal structure he provides us with. Consider, for example, "Man is a wolf." On what I believe is the most plausible version of the simile thesis, it means something of the form

(27) Man is like a wolf in certain respects *R*.

We could represent this as

(28)  $\text{SIM}_R(\text{man}, \text{wolf})$ .

The hearer is required to compute only one set of predicates, the values for *R*. But according to Miller's account, the hearer is required

to compute no less than three sets of predicates. Inasmuch as similarity is a vacuous predicate, we need to be told in which respect two things are similar for the statement that they are similar to have any informative content. His formalization of the above metaphorical utterance is

(29)  $(\exists F)(\exists G)\{\text{SIM}[F(\text{man}), G(\text{wolf})]\}$ .

In order to complete this formula in a way that would specify the respect of the similarity we would have to rewrite it as

(30)  $(\exists F)(\exists G)(\exists H)\{\text{SIM}_H[F(\text{man}), G(\text{wolf})]\}$ .

But both the reformulation (30), and Miller's original (29), contain too many predicate variables: When I say, "Man is a wolf," I am not saying that there are some *different* sets of properties that men have from those that wolves have, I am saying they have the *same* set of properties (at least on a sympathetic construal of the simile thesis, that is what I am saying). But according to Miller's account, I am saying that man has one set of properties *F*, wolves have a different set of properties *G*, and man's having *F* is similar to wolves having *G* with respect to some other properties *H*. I argue that this "reconstruction" is (a) counterintuitive, (b) unmotivated, and (c) assigns an impossible computing task to the speaker and hearer. What are these *F*'s, *G*'s and *H*'s supposed to be? and, How is the hearer supposed to figure them out? It is not surprising that his treatment of the interpretation problem is very sketchy. Similar objections apply to his accounts of other syntactical forms of metaphorical utterances.

There is a class of metaphors, that I shall call "relational metaphors," for which something like his analysis might be more appropriate. Thus, if I say

(8) The ship ploughed the sea

or

(31) Washington is the father of his country, these might be interpreted using something like his forms. We might treat (8) as equivalent to

(32) There is some relation *R* which the ship has to the sea and which is similar to the relation that ploughs have to fields when they plough fields;

and (31) as

(33) There is some relation *R* which Washington has to his country and which is like the relation that fathers have to their offspring.

And (32) and (33) are fairly easily formalized *à la* Miller. However, even these analyses seem to me to concede too much to his approach:

(8) makes no reference either implicitly or explicitly to fields and

(31) makes no reference to offspring. On the simplest and most plausible version of the simile thesis (8) and (31) are equivalent to:

(34) The ship does something to the sea which is like ploughing and

(35) Washington stands in a relation to his country which is like the relation of being a father.

And the hearer's task is simply to compute the intended relations in the two cases. By my account, which I shall develop in the next section, similarity does not, in general, function as part of the truth conditions either in Miller's manner or in the simpler version; rather, when it functions, it functions as a strategy for interpretation. Thus, very crudely, the way that similarity figures in the interpretation of (8) and (31) is given by

(36) The ship does something to the sea (to figure out what it is, find a relationship like ploughing) and

(37) Washington stands in a certain relationship to his country (to figure out what it is, find a relationship like that of being a father).

But the hearer does not have to compute any respects in which these relations are similar, inasmuch as that is not what is being asserted. Rather, what is being asserted is that the ship is doing something to the sea and that Washington stands in a certain set of relations to his country, and the hearer is to figure out what it is that the ship does and what the relations are that Washington stands in by looking for relations similar to ploughing and being a father of.

To conclude this section: The problem of metaphor is either very difficult or very easy. If the simile theory were true, it would be very easy, because there would be no separate semantic category of *metaphors*—only a category of *elliptical utterances* where “like” or “as” had been deleted from the uttered sentence. But alas, the simile theory is not right, and the problem of metaphor remains very difficult. I hope our rather lengthy discussion of the simile theory has been illuminating in at least these respects. First, there are many metaphors in which there is no underlying literal similarity adequate to explain the metaphorical utterance meaning. Second, even where there is a correlated literal statement of similarity, the truth conditions, and hence the meaning of the metaphorical statement and the similarity statement, are not, in general, the same. Third, what we should salvage from the simile theory is a set of strategies for producing and understanding metaphorical utterances, using similarity. And fourth, even so con-

strued, that is, construed as a theory of interpretation rather than of meaning, the simile theory does not tell us how to compute the respects of similarity or which similarities are metaphorically intended by the speaker.

### The principles of metaphorical interpretation

The time has now come to try to state the principles according to which metaphors are produced and understood. To reiterate, in its simplest form, the question we are trying to answer is, How is it possible for the speaker to say metaphorically “*S* is *P*” and mean “*S* is *R*,” when *P* plainly does not mean *R*; furthermore, How is it possible for the hearer who hears the utterance “*S* is *P*” to know that the speaker means “*S* is *R*”? The short and uninformative answer is that the utterance of *P* calls to mind the meaning and, hence, truth conditions associated with *R*, in the special ways that metaphorical utterances have of calling other things to mind. But that answer remains uninformative until we know what are the principles according to which the utterance calls the metaphorical meaning to mind, and until we can state these principles in a way which does not rely on metaphorical expressions like “calls to mind.” I believe that there is no single principle on which metaphor works.

The question, “How do metaphors work?” is a bit like the question, “How does one thing remind us of another thing?” There is no single answer to either question, though similarity obviously plays a major role in answering both. Two important differences between them are that metaphors are both restricted and systematic; restricted in the sense that not every way that one thing can remind us of something else will provide a basis for metaphor, and systematic in the sense that metaphors must be communicable from speaker to hearer in virtue of a shared system of principles.

Let us approach the problem from the hearer's point of view. If we can figure out the principles according to which hearers understand metaphorical utterances, we shall be a long way toward understanding how it is possible for speakers to make metaphorical utterances, because for communication to be possible, speaker and hearer must share a common set of principles. Suppose a hearer hears an utterance such as, “Sally is a block of ice,” or “Richard is a gorilla,” or “Bill is a barn door.” What are the steps he must go through in order to comprehend the metaphorical meaning of such utterances? Obviously an answer to that question need not specify a set of steps that he goes

through consciously; instead it must provide a rational reconstruction of the inference patterns that underlie our ability to understand such metaphors. Furthermore, not all metaphors will be as simple as the cases we shall be discussing; nonetheless, a model designed to account for the simple cases should prove to be of more general application.

I believe that for the simple sorts of cases we have been discussing, the hearer must go through at least three sets of steps. First, he must have some strategy for determining whether or not he has to seek a metaphorical interpretation of the utterance in the first place. Secondly, when he has decided to look for a metaphorical interpretation, he must have some set of strategies, or principles, for computing possible values of *R*, and third, he must have a set of strategies, or principles, for restricting the range of *R*'s – for deciding which *R*'s are likely to be the ones the speaker is asserting of *S*.

Suppose he hears the utterance, "Sam is a pig." He knows that that cannot be literally true, that the utterance, if he tries to take it literally, is radically defective. And, indeed, such defectiveness is a feature of nearly all of the examples that we have considered so far. The defects which cue the hearer may be obvious falsehood, semantic nonsense, violations of the rules of speech acts, or violations of conversational principles of communication. This suggests a strategy that underlies the first step: *Where the utterance is defective if taken literally, look for an utterance meaning that differs from sentence meaning.*

This is not the only strategy on which a hearer can tell that an utterance probably has a metaphorical meaning, but it is by far the most common. (It is also common to the interpretation of poetry. If I hear a figure on a Grecian Urn being addressed as a "still unravish'd bride of quietness," I know I had better look for alternative meanings.) But it is certainly not a necessary condition of a metaphorical utterance that it be in any way defective if construed literally. Disraeli might have said metaphorically

(5) (MET) I have climbed to the top of the greasy pole, though he had in fact climbed to the top of a greasy pole. There are various other cues that we employ to spot metaphorical utterances. For example, when reading Romantic poets, we are on the lookout for metaphors, and some people we know are simply more prone to metaphorical utterances than others.

Once our hearer has established that he is to look for an alternative meaning, he has a number of principles by which he can compute possible values of *R*. I will give a list of these shortly, but one of them is this: *When you hear "S is P," to find possible values of R look for ways*

*in which S might be like P, and to fill in the respect in which S might be like P, look for salient, well known, and distinctive feature of P things.*

In this case, the hearer might invoke his factual knowledge to come up with such features as that pigs are fat, gluttonous, slovenly, filthy, and so on. This indefinite range of features provides possible values of *R*. However, lots of other features of pigs are equally distinctive and well known, for example, pigs have a distinctive shape and distinctive bristles. So, in order to understand the utterance, the hearer needs to go through the third step where he restricts the range of possible *R*'s. Here again the hearer may employ various strategies for doing that but the one that is most commonly used is this: *Go back to the S term and see which of the many candidates for the values of R are likely or even possible properties of S.*

Thus, if the hearer is told, "Sam's car is a pig," he will interpret that metaphor differently from the utterance, "Sam is a pig." The former, he might take to mean that Sam's car consumes gas the way pigs consume food, or that Sam's car is shaped like a pig. Though, in one sense, the metaphor is the same in the two cases, in each case it is restricted by the *S* term in a different way. The hearer has to use his knowledge of *S* things and *P* things to know which of the possible values of *R* are plausible candidates for metaphorical predication.

Now, much of the dispute between the interaction theories and the object comparison theories derives from the fact that they can be construed as answers to different questions. The object comparison theories are best construed as attempts to answer the question of stage two: "How do we compute the possible values of *R*?" The interaction theories are best construed as answers to the question of stage three: "Given a range of possible values of *R*, how does the relationship between the *S* term and the *P* term restrict that range?" I think it is misleading to describe these relations as "interactions," but it seems correct to suppose that the *S* term must play a role in metaphors of the sort we have been considering. In order to show that the interaction theory was also an answer to the question of stage two, we would have to show that there are values of *R* that are specifiable, given *S* and *P* together, that are not specifiable given *P* alone; one would have to show that *S* does not restrict the range of *R*'s but in fact, creates new *R*'s. I do not believe that can be shown, but I shall mention some possibilities later.

I said that there was a variety of principles for computing *R*, given *P* – that is, a variety of principles according to which the utterance of

*P* can call to mind the meaning *R* in ways that are peculiar to metaphor. I am sure I do not know all of the principles that do this, but here are several (not necessarily independent) for a start.

#### Principle 1

Things which are *P* are by definition *R*. Usually, if the metaphor works, *R* will be one of the salient defining characteristics of *P*. Thus, for example,

(38) (MET) Sam is a giant  
will be taken to mean

(38) (PAR) Sam is big,  
because giants are by definition big. That is what is special about them.

#### Principle 2

Things which are *P* are contingently *R*. Again, if the metaphor works, the property *R* should be a salient or well known property of *P* things.

(39) (MET) Sam is a pig  
will be taken to mean

(39) (PAR) Sam is filthy, gluttonous, sloppy, and so on.

Both principles 1 and 2 correlate metaphorical utterances with literal similes, "Sam is like a giant," "Sam is like a pig," etc. Notice in connection with this principle and the next that small variations in the *P* term can create big differences in the *R* terms. Consider the differences between "Sam is a pig," "Sam is a hog," and "Sam is a swine."

#### Principle 3

Things which are *P* are often said or believed to be *R*, even though both speaker and hearer may know that *R* is false of *P*. Thus,

(7) (MET) Richard is a gorilla  
can be uttered to mean

(7) (PAR) Richard is mean, nasty, prone to violence, and so on, even though both speaker and hearer know that in fact gorillas are shy, timid, and sensitive creatures, but generations of gorilla mythology have set up associations that will enable the metaphor to work even though both speaker and hearer know these beliefs to be false.

#### Principle 4

Things which are *P* are not *R*, nor are they like *R* things, nor are they believed to be *R*, nonetheless it is a fact about our sensibility, whether

culturally or naturally determined, that we just do perceive a connection, so that utterance of *P* is associated in our minds with *R* properties.

Thus,

- (4) (MET) Sally is a block of ice
- (40) (MET) I am in a black mood
- (41) (MET) Mary is sweet
- (42) (MET) John is bitter

(43) (MET) The hours 

}	crept
	crawled
	dragged
	sped
	whizzed

 by as we waited for the plane

are sentences that could be uttered to mean metaphorically that: Sally is unemotional; I am angry and depressed; Mary is gentle, kind, pleasant, and so on; John is resentful; and the hours seemed (of varying degrees of duration) as we waited for the plane; even though there are no literal similarities on which these metaphors are based. Notice that the associations tend to be scalar: degrees of temperature with ranges of emotion, degrees of speed with temporal duration, and so forth.

#### Principle 5

*P* things are not like *R* things, and are not believed to be like *R* things, nonetheless the condition of being *P* is like the condition of being *R*. Thus, I might say to someone who has just received a huge promotion

(44) You have become an aristocrat,  
meaning not that he has personally become *like* an aristocrat, but that his new status or condition is like that of being an aristocrat.

#### Principle 6

There are cases where *P* and *R* are the same or similar in meaning, but where one, usually *P*, is restricted in its application, and does not literally apply to *S*. Thus, "addled" is only said literally of eggs, but we can metaphorically say

- (45) This soufflé is addled
  - (46) That parliament was addled
- and
- (47) His brain is addled.

### Principle 7

This is not a separate principle but a way of applying principles 1 through 6 to simple cases which are not of the form "S is P" but relational metaphors, and metaphors of other syntactical forms such as those involving verbs and predicate adjectives. Consider such relational metaphors as

- (48) Sam devours books
- (8) The ship ploughs the sea
- (31) Washington was the father of his country.

In each case, we have a literal utterance of two noun phrases surrounding a metaphorical utterance of a relational term (it can be a transitive verb, as in (48) and (8) but it need not be, as in (31)). The hearer's task is not to go from "S is P" to "S is R" but to go from "S P-relation S'" to "S R-relation S'" and the latter task is formally rather different from the former because, for example, our similarity principles in the former case will enable him to find a property that S and P things have in common, namely, R. But in the latter, he cannot find a relation in common, instead he has to find a relation R which is different from relation P but similar to it in some respect. So, as applied to these cases, principle 1, for example, would read

*P*-relations are by definition *R*-relations.

For example, *ploughing* is by definition partly a matter of moving a substance to either side of a pointed object while the object moves forward; and though this definitional similarity between the *P*-relation and the *R*-relation would provide the principle that enables the hearer to infer the *R*-relation, the respect of similarity does not exhaust the context of the *R*-relation, as the similarity exhausts the content of the *R* term in the simplest of the "S is P" cases. In these cases, the hearer's job is to find a relation (or property) that is similar to, or otherwise associated with, the relation or property literally expressed by the metaphorical expression *P*; and the principles function to enable him to select that relation or property by giving him a respect in which the *P*-relation and the *R*-relation might be similar or otherwise associated.

### Principle 8

According to my account of metaphor, it becomes a matter of terminology whether we want to construe metonymy and synecdoche as special cases of metaphor or as independent tropes. When one says, "S is P," and means that "S is R," P and R may be associated by such relations as the part-whole relation, the container-contained relation, or even

the clothing and wearer relation. In each case, as in metaphor proper, the semantic content of the *P* term conveys the semantic content of the *R* term by some principle of association. Since the principles of metaphor are rather various anyway, I am inclined to treat metonymy and synecdoche as special cases of metaphor and add their principles to my list of metaphorical principles. I can, for example, refer to the British monarch as "the Crown," and the executive branch of the U.S. government as "the White House" by exploiting systematic principles of association. However, as I said, the claim that these are special cases of metaphor seems to me purely a matter of terminology, and if purists insist that the principles of metaphor be kept separate from those of metonymy and synecdoche, I can have no nontaxonomical objections.

In addition to these eight principles, one might wonder if there is a ninth. Are there cases where an association between P and R that did not previously exist can be created by the juxtaposition of S and P in the original sentence? This, I take it, is the thesis of the interaction theorists. However, I have never seen any convincing examples, nor any even halfway clear account, of what "interaction" is supposed to mean. Let us try to construct some examples. Consider the differences between

(49) Sam's voice is  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{mud} \\ \text{gravel} \\ \text{sandpaper} \end{array} \right\}$

and

(50) Kant's second argument for the transcendental deduction is so

much  $\left\{ \begin{array}{l} \text{mud} \\ \text{gravel} \\ \text{sandpaper} \end{array} \right\}$

The second set clearly gives us different metaphorical meanings—different values for *R*—than the first trio, and one might argue that this is due not to the fact that the different *S* terms restrict the range of possible *R*'s generated by the *P* terms, but to the fact that the different combinations of *S* and *P* create new *R*'s. But that explanation seems implausible. The more plausible explanation is this. One has a set of associations with the *P* terms, "mud," "gravel," and "sandpaper." The principles of these associations are those of principles 1 through 7. The different *S* terms restrict the values of *R* differently, because different *R*'s can be true of voices than can be true of arguments for transcendental deductions. Where is the interaction?

Because this section contains my account of metaphorical predication, it may be well to summarize its main points. Given that a speaker and a hearer have shared linguistic and factual knowledge sufficient to enable them to communicate literal utterance, the following principles are individually necessary and collectively sufficient to enable speaker and hearer to form and comprehend utterances of the form " $S$  is  $P$ ," where the speaker means metaphorically that  $S$  is  $R$  (where  $P \neq R$ ).

First, there must be some shared strategies on the basis of which the hearer can recognize that the utterance is not intended literally. The most common, but not the only strategy, is based on the fact that the utterance is obviously defective if taken literally.

Second, there must be some shared principles that associate the  $P$  term (whether the meaning, the truth conditions, or the denotation if there is any) with a set of possible values of  $R$ . The heart of the problem of metaphor is to state these principles. I have tried to state several of them, but I feel confident that there must be more.

Third, there must be some shared strategies that enable the speaker and the hearer, given their knowledge of the  $S$  term (whether the meaning of the expression, or the nature of the referent, or both), to restrict the range of possible values of  $R$  to the actual value of  $R$ . The basic principle of this step is that only those possible values of  $R$  which determine possible properties of  $S$  can be actual values of  $R$ .

### Metaphor, irony, and indirect speech acts

To conclude, I wish to compare briefly the principles on which metaphor works with those on which irony and indirect speech acts work. Consider first a case of irony. Suppose you have just broken a priceless K'ang Hsi vase and I say ironically, "That was a brilliant thing to do." Here, as in metaphor, the speaker's meaning and sentence meaning are different. What are the principles by which the hearer is able to infer that the speaker meant, "That was a stupid thing to do," when what he heard was the sentence, "That was a brilliant thing to do"? 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.

I am not suggesting that this is by any means the whole story about irony. Cultures and subcultures vary enormously in the extent and degree of the linguistic and extralinguistic cues provided for ironical utterances. In English, in fact, there are certain characteristic intona-

tional contours that go with ironical utterances. However, it is important to see that irony, like metaphor, does not require any conventions, extralinguistic or otherwise. The principles of conversation and the general rules for performing speech acts are sufficient to provide the basic principles of irony.

Now consider a case of an indirect speech act. Suppose that in the usual dinner-table situation, I say to you, "Can you pass the salt?" In this situation you will normally take that as meaning, "Please pass the salt." That is, you will take the question about your ability as a request to perform an action. What are the principles on which this inference works? There is a radical difference between indirect speech acts, on the one hand, and irony and metaphor, on the other. In the indirect speech act, the speaker means what he says. However, in addition, he means something more. Sentence meaning is part of utterance meaning, but it does not exhaust utterance meaning. In a very simplified form (for a more detailed account, see Searle, 1975), the principles on which the inference works in this case are: First, the hearer must have some device for recognizing that the utterance might be an indirect speech act. This requirement is satisfied by the fact that in the context, a question about the hearer's ability lacks any conversational point. The hearer, therefore, is led to seek an alternative meaning. Second, since the hearer knows the rules of speech acts, he knows that the ability to pass the salt is a preparatory condition on the speech act of requesting him to do so. Therefore, he is able to infer that the question about his ability is likely to be a polite request to perform the act. The differences and similarities between literal utterances, metaphorical utterances, ironical utterances, and indirect speech acts are illustrated in Figure 4.

The question of whether all metaphorical utterances can be given a literal paraphrase is one that must have a trivial answer. Interpreted one way, the answer is trivially yes; interpreted another way, it is trivially no. If we interpret the question as, "Is it possible to find or to invent an expression that will exactly express the intended metaphorical meaning  $R$ , in the sense of the truth conditions of  $R$ , for any metaphorical utterance of ' $S$  is  $P$ ,' where what is meant is that  $S$  is  $R$ ?" the answer to that question must surely be yes. It follows trivially from the Principle of Expressibility (see Searle, 1969) that any meaning whatever can be given an exact expression in the language.

If the question is interpreted as meaning, "Does every existing language provide us exact devices for expressing literally whatever we wish to express in any given metaphor?" then the answer is obviously no. It is often the case that we use metaphor precisely because there is

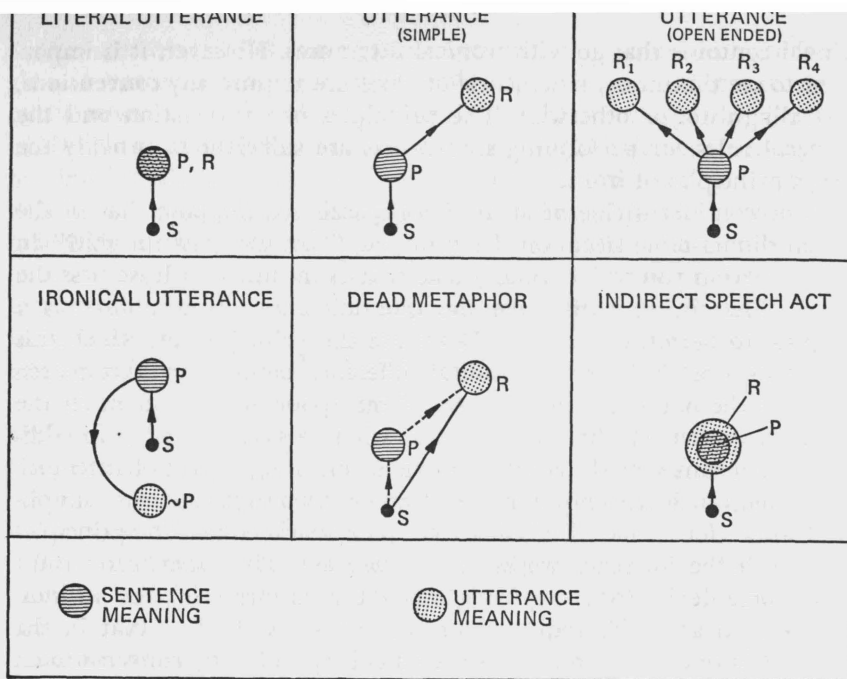


Figure 4. A graphical comparison of the relations between sentence meaning and utterance meaning where the sentence meaning is  $S$  is  $P$  and the utterance meaning is  $S$  is  $R$ , that is, where the speaker utters a sentence that means literally that the object  $S$  falls under the concept  $P$ , but where the speaker means by his utterance that the object  $S$  falls under the concept  $R$ .

- a. *Literal Utterance*. A speaker says  $S$  is  $P$  and he means  $S$  is  $P$ . Thus the speaker places object  $S$  under the concept  $P$ , where  $P = R$ . Sentence meaning and utterance meaning coincide.
- b. *Metaphorical Utterance (simple)*. A speaker says  $S$  is  $P$  but means metaphorically that  $S$  is  $R$ . Utterance meaning is arrived at by going through literal sentence meaning.
- c. *Metaphorical Utterance (open ended)*. A speaker says  $S$  is  $P$ , but means metaphorically an indefinite range of meanings,  $S$  is  $R_1$ ,  $S$  is  $R_2$ , etc. As in the simple case, utterance meaning is arrived at by going through literal meaning.
- d. *Ironical Utterance*. A speaker means the opposite of what he says. Utterance meaning is arrived at by going through sentence meaning and then doubling back to the opposite of sentence meaning.
- e. *Dead Metaphor*. The original sentence meaning is bypassed and the sentence acquires a new literal meaning identical with the former metaphorical utterance meaning. This is a shift from the metaphorical utterance (simple), *b* above, to the literal utterance, diagram *a*.
- f. *Indirect Speech Act*. A speaker means what he says, but he means something more as well. Thus utterance meaning includes sentence meaning but extends beyond it.

no literal expression that expresses exactly what we mean. Furthermore, in metaphorical utterances, we do more than just state that  $S$  is  $R$ ; as figure 4 shows, we state that  $S$  is  $R$  by way of going through the meaning of " $S$  is  $P$ ." It is in this sense that we feel that metaphors somehow are intrinsically not paraphrasable. They are not paraphrasable, because without using the metaphorical expression, we will not reproduce the semantic content which occurred in the hearer's comprehension of the utterance.

The best we can do in the paraphrase is reproduce the truth conditions of the metaphorical utterance, but the metaphorical utterance does more than just convey its truth conditions. It conveys its truth conditions by way of another semantic content, whose truth conditions are not part of the truth conditions of the utterance. The expressive power that we feel is part of good metaphors is largely a matter of two features. The hearer has to figure out what the speaker means – he has to contribute more to the communication than just passive uptake – and he has to do that by going through another and related semantic content from the one which is communicated. And that, I take it, is what Dr. Johnson meant when he said metaphor gives us two ideas for one.

## NOTES

- I am indebted to several people for helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article, and I especially want to thank Jerry Morgan, Andrew Ortony, Paul Rauber, and Dagmar Searle.
- 1 It is essential to avoid any use-mention confusions when talking about these sets. Sometimes we will be talking about the words, other times about meanings, other times about references and denotations, and still other times about truth conditions.
- 2 I follow Beardsley (1962) in this classification.
- 3 Even in Black's clarification (this volume) of interaction in terms of "implication-complexes" there still does not seem to be any precise statement of the principles on which interaction works. And the actual example he gives, "Marriage is a zero-sum game," looks distressingly like a comparison metaphor: "Marriage is like a zero-sum game in that it is an adversary relationship between two parties in which one side can benefit only at the expense of the other." It is hard to see what the talk about interaction is supposed to add to this analysis.
- 4 By "literal simile," I mean literal statement of similarity. It is arguable that one should confine "simile" to nonliteral comparisons, but that is not the usage I follow here.
- 5 Furthermore, it is at least arguable that "block of ice" functions metonymously in this example.