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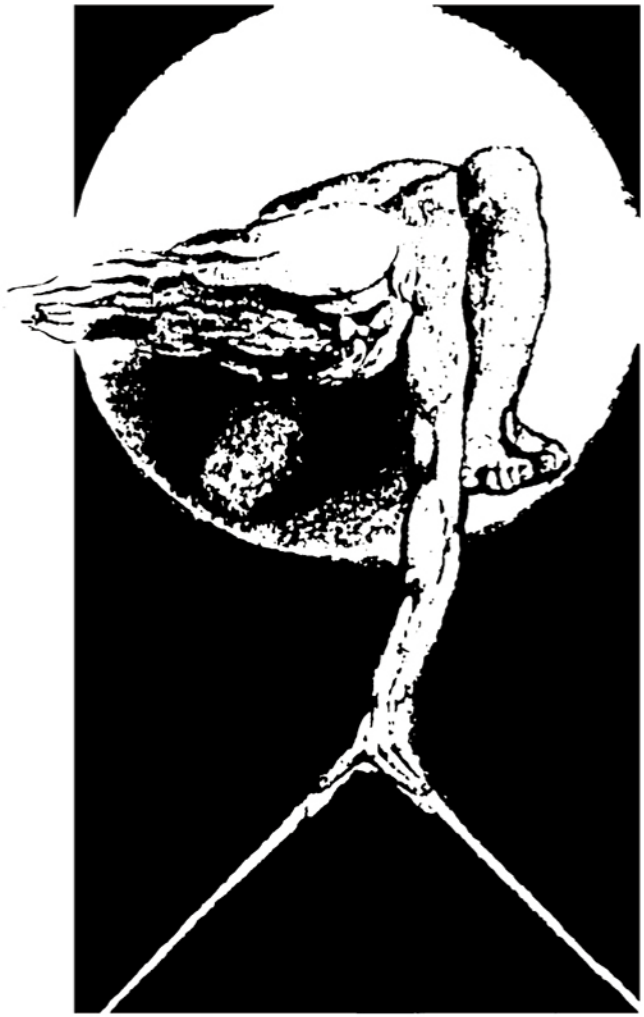

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SPECIAL ISSUE: METAPHOR AND PHILOSOPHY

Introduction: Why Metaphor Matters to Philosophy

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Over the last 15 years, cognitive scientists have discovered things about the nature and importance of metaphor that are startling because of their radical implications for metaphor research and because they require us to rethink some of our most fundamental received notions of meaning, concepts, and reason. This new body of work on metaphor has profound implications for philosophy. Many of the theoretical assumptions that guided earlier generations who worked on metaphor have been undermined by this new research, much of which appeared first in *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity.* When I speak of startling advances in metaphor research, I have principally two kinds of results in mind: (a) The level of methodological sophistication of empirical studies of metaphor has increased markedly; this has made possible rigorous, detailed analyses of how metaphors actually structure our conceptualization and reasoning, and (b) we learned that metaphor is not merely a linguistic phenomenon, but more fundamentally, a conceptual and experiential process that structures our world. We have gained deep insights into the ways in which our conceptual system and all forms of symbolic interaction are grounded in our bodily experience and yet imaginatively structured.

The first of these advances (i.e., the methodological developments) is particularly striking when compared with work on metaphor from 2 or 3 decades ago. We can acknowledge the importance and philosophical insight of seminal essays from the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, and yet there can be no question that there is a qualitative difference between that body of research

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and what is going on today. In my opinion, the principal advances are the use of empirical evidence and the depth of analysis that has been made possible by recent developments in the cognitive sciences. The study of metaphor has now become much more a matter of seeking empirical generalizations to explain the phenomena based on various kinds of converging evidence concerning conceptual and inferential structure.

It is not too great an exaggeration, I think, to say that most of the work of these earlier generations was spun out of prior assumptions about concepts and language, that it relied chiefly on our intuitions about the cognitive content of metaphors, and that its argument was based typically on only one or two allegedly representative examples that were supposed to underwrite sweeping claims about all metaphor. For the most part, these kinds of arguments are no longer regarded as rigorous and convincing. If one wants to make a claim about how a certain kind of metaphor works, for example, it is necessary to analyze several examples of such metaphors, providing generalizations in the form of detailed conceptual mappings that apply for each one. One must then trace out the ways in which these mappings constrain the conceptual inferences we make. In other words, a strong argument depends on the empirical evidence that can be brought to bear in support of one's generalizations about metaphor or about any other form of imaginative activity. The standards for what counts as evidence and argument have changed for the better.

The second area of impressive advances lies in our emerging understanding of the philosophical importance of metaphor and other imaginative structures. When I first began to study metaphor back in 1971, there was a relatively small and easily manageable literature on the subject that was, for the most part, based on a set of assumptions about meaning that have since been thoroughly criticized from several philosophical perspectives. I refer to such assumptions as an objectivist theory of meaning, a rigid literal versus metaphorical dichotomy, the association of metaphor with semantic indeterminacy and conceptual creativity, and the attendant view of imagination as unfettered and free of rules. Moreover, at that time the comparison theory was still dominant, and there was not an extensive body of evidence for the pervasiveness of metaphor in all thought. Consequently, the philosophical importance of metaphor was not fully appreciated.

All that has changed. There can be no doubt for anyone who has seriously studied human conceptual systems that they are pervasively and ineliminably structured by metaphor, metonymy, and other kinds of imaginative structure. We now have the benefit of 15 years of detailed analyses of how the conceptual mappings work and how we reason on the basis of them. These analyses include the use of metaphor in virtually every aspect of human thought: physical science, biological science, economics, law, political theory, psychology, art, philosophy, business, morality, and even poetry. In short,

whatever else we are, we humans are metaphorizing animals.

Furthermore, we are now beginning to learn how metaphors are constrained and motivated by structures of our embodied experience and how these metaphors, in turn, constrain our reasoning. We have a growing body of empirical research on the way in which metaphor source domains typically come from basic-level experiences that are shared by human beings because of their shared bodily and cognitive makeup and because of the common features of the environments with which people interact. Metaphors tend to be grounded in common patterns of our bodily experience that have their own corporeal or spatial logic, which are the bases for most of our abstract conceptualization and inference.

Perhaps the most significant and far-reaching philosophical consequence of this research is that our meaning, concepts, and reasoning are grounded in our embodied experience, yet flexible and open-ended, which allows us to transform ourselves and our experiences in modest but highly useful ways. This new view of thought as embodied and imaginative undercuts the literalist and absolutist pretensions of objectivist theories of meaning and knowledge, but it does not lead to radical conceptual relativism because it recognizes constraints on our concepts and their imaginative elaborations. Thus, it challenges popular postmodernist claims about the arbitrariness of meaning and the absence of grounding for our conceptual systems.

These negative and critical conclusions have as their counterpart a new positive and constructive view of the embodied and imaginative character of human understanding. We have only just begun to sketch the outlines of this new position. It is a position that will require a new metaphysics that is nondualistic, nonreductionistic, and sensitive to the temporal nature of all experience. It will give a view of the person as emerging, developing, and in an ongoing process of interactions within changing environments. It will entail nonabsolutistic, pluralistic views of morality, politics, law, art, and every other form of institutional practice without leading to extreme forms of relativism. At present, we do not know all of the philosophical ramifications of deep conceptual metaphor. Moreover, there is considerable debate and disagreement about what really follows from various claims about metaphor. But there is widespread agreement among those who work on metaphor that the consequences will raise questions about our received views of many traditional philosophical problems, including the very definitions of those problems themselves.

The articles in this issue make significant contributions to the two kinds of advances I described. The articles are exemplary of the methodological and philosophical sophistication, rigor, and depth of which I spoke.

Michele Emanatian's study of metaphors for lust and sex in Chagga, a Bantu language of Tanzania, raises the fundamental question of whether there is a universal basis for certain cross-cultural conceptual metaphors. Are

there shared bodily experiences that provide source domains and that constrain metaphorical mappings for our most basic concepts such as sex? Or are these concepts only cultural constructs that vary radically across cultures? Emanatian uses her study of metaphors for lust and sex to suggest that there are at least some universal bases for metaphorically constructing these concepts, although there is wide cultural variation concerning what parts of the source domains get mapped onto the target domain and how those mappings are developed and used in reasoning.

Emanatian's essay is exemplary because it shows us the kinds of detailed cross-cultural analyses that are required to deal seriously with the questions of how metaphors are grounded and whether there are, indeed, universal metaphorical concepts. She does not presume to draw definitive conclusions on these issues; rather, she shows how we could go about examining these issues by making use of linguistic methodologies that are empirically rigorous and criticizable. The small amount of cross-cultural research that has been done to date supports Emanatian's general conclusion that our common embodiment motivates some universally shared source domains for certain concepts even though we are subject to culturally varying elaborations.

The article by Gilles Fauconnier and Mark Turner presents a hitherto unpublished hypothesis that situates treatments of metaphor within a larger framework of cognitive operations to which they have given the metaphorical name *"conceptual blending."* Fauconnier's (1985) earlier work in *Mental Spaces: Aspects of Meaning Construction* in *Natural Language* showed that a large number of conceptual phenomena such as metonymy, coreference, counterfactuals, and presupposition require us to construct mental spaces in which entities and relations are mapped, correlated, and transformed to yield meanings and inferences. In his *Death is the Mother of Beauty: Mind, Metaphor, Criticism* (1987), *More Than Cool Reason: A Field Guide to Poetic Metaphor* (with George Lakoff, 1989), and most recently in *Reading Minds: The Study of English in the Age of Cognitive Science* (1991), Turner used research in cognitive science and cognitive semantics to construct key parts of a general theory of the embodied, imaginative character of thought. He showed how the ordinary conceptual resources of the embodied mind give rise to our most original and imaginative creations.

Fauconnier and Turner integrate this work to sketch the outlines of a theory of conceptual blending, arguing that conceptual metaphor (and many other imaginative devices) can only be understood fully as specific instances of various types of conceptual blending. This exciting work reveals some of the amazing complexity and richness of our imaginative capacities. It is illustrative of the fact that we are constantly having to revise our understanding of how the mind works as we discover new and more complex layers of imaginative structure.

The discovery of metaphor as a deep phenomenon, that is, as a structure

of our experience itself and not merely of our thought and communication about that experience, raises the most basic ontological question, one that Tom Leddy addresses head-on. This profoundly difficult problem is to determine the metaphysical picture required to account for the existence of deep conceptual metaphor. In other words, what metaphysical view could explain how it is possible for metaphor to be not merely a cognitive principle but an ontological principle or structure? If conceptual metaphors really are constitutive of our experience and reasoning, how is this possible?

Leddy's answer is that the very essences of things are themselves metaphoric. Philosophical definitions seek essences and these essences are metaphoric in nature. It is crucial to understand that Leddy is not using the traditional sense of the term *essence.* Essences are not eternal, fixed, absolute forms that define what a thing is once and for all time. Instead, Leddy sketches an ontology (of a vaguely Deweyan sort) that sees an essence as an emerging structure of ongoing experience that is relatively stable, yet subject to transformation. Essences exist only in the context of developing experience, and relative to our purposes, interests and institutions. The metaphysics is one that stresses process, interaction, nonduality, and relative stability. Leddy's *"ESSENCES ARE METAPHORS"* metaphor is a way of understanding the constitutive nature of metaphor as actually making and giving form to our experience.

The article by Steven Winter is last because it most clearly and palpably shows why it makes a difference to our lives that human understanding is metaphoric. One of the most difficult issues to resolve about metaphor from a philosophical perspective is how, if at all, one would live differently after recognizing that we are metaphoric animals and that our thought is pervasively embodied and imaginative. Nobody has yet answered this question adequately, but Winter gives us a hint of what this would mean for our self-understanding and practice. He does this by focusing on law and legal reasoning, not for their own sakes, but as representative of human reasoning in general.

Winter beautifully thematizes the results of a vast body of work on metaphor (and on cognition in general) when he identifies three major theses: (a) human thought is irreducibly imaginative; (b) imagination is embodied, interactive, and grounded; and (c) imagination operates in a regular, orderly, and systematic fashion. Assimilating these theses into our self-understanding changes the way we view ourselves and others. It denies absolute foundations (for knowledge of any sort—scientific, moral, aesthetic, political) and at the same time identifies major constraints on our conceptualization and reasoning. It gives us a view of our freedom as modest rather than radical and as focused on mundane transformation of our experience rather than on arbitrary, willful, unpredictable change. To get an existentially robust sense of how such an understanding humanizes and sensitizes us, it is necessary to

look at Winter's previous articles on the communal grounding of legal reasoning. There one gets the strongest sense of how knowing about the metaphorical nature of our understanding is enabling rather than paralyzing. In this article one can at least get a sense of how it makes a difference to our lives to understand that our most basic concepts such as law, freedom, and rights are defined by multiple, often inconsistent conceptual metaphors and to understand how these metaphors are grounded in our communal and personal experience.

These are exciting times to be working on metaphor. The next 10 years of *Metaphor and Symbolic Activity* promise to open even more horizons of our imaginative activity and to show us in amazing detail what the structures of this imagination are and how they work. For me as a philosopher, what is most exciting is that we are going to get a much clearer view of how metaphor changes philosophy, not just as a theoretical discipline, but as philosophy as we live it in our lives.

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Metaphor and the Expression of Emotion: The Value of Cross-Cultural Perspectives

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Examination of the metaphors used in colloquial speech for expressing and talking about emotions suggests that there are limits on the communicative resources employed. This article explores the metaphoric expression of sexual desire and the articulation of feelings about sex. I describe the principal metaphors in Chagga, a Bantu language of Tanzania; consider English parallels; and propose that the two semantic domains of *eating* and *heat* may be favored cross-culturally as vehicles for conceptualizing lust and sex. This close investigation of sexual metaphor in a less studied language highlights the role of embodiment in inspiring and constraining how people understand and articulate experience. Cross-cultural similarities in the metaphorical expression of sexual feeling appear to be motivated specifically by perceived isomorphism in the salient schemas of the source and target domains and by significant psychological and physical associations between the two domains. The similarities are nevertheless tempered by particular culture histories.

One might think that when it comes to expressing emotion, just about anything goes. The passions, of course, inspire passionate discourse. Social context affects the permissibility of certain modes of expression, leading to indirection, euphemism, and taboo. But when considering the *metaphors* employed for expressing feelings (or indeed, expressing anything), why should there be any limits on their range? Are there any limits on their range? Research on the role of metaphor in the everyday expression of emotion suggests that there are.

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