

Metaphor and Implicit Awareness

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Rhonda Anderson

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Head of the Department of Philosophy
University of Saskatchewan
Saskatoon, Canada.

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Abstract

A copious amount has been written on the subject of metaphor, and, although individual writers have presented extremely varying views of metaphor, much of this writing has been provocative and insightful. However, these diverse views have often foundered on the issue of accounting for the diversity of metaphor. Views which reject the notion of metaphorical meaning have difficulty explaining what it is we communicate to others when we use a metaphor. Views which accept the notion of metaphorical meaning are unable to explain adequately how we can understand the same metaphor yet paraphrase it in different ways.

I have attempted to incorporate these previous insights within one theory of metaphor. In order to achieve this consistency, I have relied heavily on the writings of Michael Polanyi.

Michael Polanyi's view of metaphor is informed by his notion of tacit or implicit awareness. He holds that there are two types of awareness, focal and implicit, and that both are needed for knowledge. Focal awareness is knowledge by 'attending to' and implicit awareness is knowledge by 'relying on.' In metaphor, although we focally attend to the meanings of the words which comprise the metaphor, we cannot make adequate sense of it unless we emphasize the implicit dimension contained

in our understanding of the figure. For Polanyi, metaphorical meaning depends on this exploration of implicit items.

He accounts for the diversity of metaphor by claiming that metaphor, forcing it as it does to concentrate on implicit items, is a matter of the way in which we understand. He accounts for multiple paraphrases of a single metaphor by suggesting that although the metaphor remains the same, the implicit items which we bring to any understanding of that metaphor will be different.

What is conveyed by a metaphor is its metaphorical meaning. Yet this metaphorical meaning will depend, in part, on the implicit items from which we attend to the metaphor.

CHAPTER ONE:
THE PROBLEM OF METAPHOR
"Fancy's maze and clue"¹

The difficulty facing any theory of metaphor is that of accounting for the diversity of metaphor while accepting that the general term can nevertheless apply to any and all such diverse instances. This diversity complicates explanations of how we recognize and understand metaphors as well as casts doubt on our ability to paraphrase particular metaphors. Just as we manage to develop a seemingly comprehensive explanation of metaphor, we discover a kind of metaphor for which this explanation does not hold. Max Black, in "Metaphor," accepts the possibility that a singular explanation is not forthcoming and suggests that we classify metaphors as "instances of substitution, comparison, or interaction" (292). Instances of the first two categories can be replaced by literal paraphrases whereas the third cannot; hence, Black suggests that only the latter is of interest to philosophy. Not everyone is as willing as Black to give up the notion that a singular account of metaphor

¹ from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "On Donne's Poetry":
With Donne, whose muse on dromedary trots,
Wreathe iron pokers into true-love knots;
Rhyme's sturdy cripple, fancy's maze and clue,
Wit's forge and fire-blast, meaning's press and screw.

can cover all instances. Ina Lowenberg, in "Identifying Metaphors," contends that "there appears to be an underlying unity to all metaphors," and that theories of metaphor are searches for this unity (155). In his essay "Metaphor," John Searle concurs; he believes that, although many metaphors are more complicated, "a model designed to account for the simple cases should prove to be of more general application" (422). The very simplicity of such metaphors has led other writers to suggest that metaphors are literally false or that they always involve category mistakes. However, metaphors such as 'no man is an island' or 'Moscow is cold' quickly show that a more complicated account of metaphor is needed. The first shows that not all metaphors are false and the second suggests that not all involve category mistakes.

When we leave simple metaphors behind by taking poetic metaphors into account, no singular explanation of metaphor seems possible. One class of poetic metaphor appears to work in accordance with a convention of use. These metaphors rely on an established system of metaphor; for instance, the conventional connection between the moon, lunacy, and foolish love has spawned myriad metaphors that are understood by recognizing the convention. However, another class of poetic metaphor contains those instances which are strikingly original,

as when e.e. cummings evokes the carpe diem motif by writing, "life is not a paragraph/and death i think is no parentheses."² Such metaphors deliberately avoid or work against conventional systems of metaphor.

Northrop Frye, in his Anatomy of Criticism, discusses metaphors which are so common that their status as metaphors is often overlooked. These metaphors, according to Mark Johnson and George Lakoff's Metaphors We Live By, form a part of metaphorical systems such as 'an argument is a journey' or 'up is good'. These systemic metaphors can be replaced by literal paraphrases but the connection between a particular individual metaphor and its paraphrase is not always clear because such systemic metaphors structure rather than describe our experience. Moreover, there are phrases which were once considered literal but, having been proved false, nevertheless retain a use by becoming metaphorical. We might consider, for instance, the theory of correspondence which spawned many examples that we now regard as metaphors.

Finally, but not exhaustively, there appears to be another class of metaphors which resists any attempt at paraphrase. Stanley Cavell discusses an instance of this type in his essay "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy." Citing the line, "The mind is brushed by

² e.e. cummings, "since feeling is first."

sparrow wings," Cavell suggests that its aptness has something to do with the attitude of the speaker and that, while some readers know what it means, they cannot say what it means. Such metaphors are reminiscent of those which, according to Graham Dunstan Martin, may be meant to evoke sensory experience, an essentially private thing. This last class of metaphors may be what Donald Davidson has in mind when he concludes that metaphors are not governed by rules nor can they be paraphrased.

Metaphors are also problematic because instances of metaphor can be difficult to identify. The following line by Pope, "Or stain her honour, or her new brocade," appears to be a metaphor. On the other hand, it is clearly an instance of zeugma. Can a single phrase be an instance of both, or are these categories mutually exclusive? Some philosophers see these distinctions as crucial. Jaakko Hintikka and Gabriel Sandu, in their essay "Metaphor and Other Kinds of Nonliteral Meaning," contend that "one of the acid test [sic] of any putative theory of metaphor is whether it can account for the differences between metaphor and other types of nonliteral lexical meaning, such as metonymy" (159). According to them, metaphorical meaning "is nonliteral meaning which utilizes meaning lines drawn by similarity in contradistinction to meaning lines based on other

considerations" (156-7). Their theory, which employs the notion of possible worlds, holds that "the methods of drawing meaning lines shift towards a greater reliance on similarity" in a metaphor whereas in metonymy, "they shift towards a greater reliance on continuity" (158). In other words, the phrase 'I enjoy reading Shakespeare' is not a metaphor whereas, according to them, the Dickinson line "the mountain sat upon the plain in his eternal chair" is an instance of metaphor.³ Nevertheless, it is unclear whether their insistence on these categories is meant to identify or merely limit the variety of metaphor.

Dickinson's poetic line is not an instance of metonymy; but can it be an instance of metaphor given that it is also an instance of personification? Certainly, other cases of personification, such as 'the sky wept' or 'don't slam the door on the face of opportunity,' seem to be instances of metaphor. Similarly, phrases such as 'the spendthrift crocus' appear to be metaphors, even though they are also cases

³ R.J. Fogelin makes a similar point in his essay "Metaphors, Similes, and Similarity." Metaphor can be seen as coextensive with 'figure' or, more narrowly, as one trope among others such as simile, hyperbole, irony, metonymy, synecdoche, and so on. He contends that "it will make a great deal of difference whether the notion of a metaphor is taken generically or specifically. If we take metaphorical language to be coextensive with figurative language, then no plausibility attaches to the claim that all metaphorical expressions can be treated as explicit comparisons" (30-1).

of pathetic fallacy. Such cases have often been classed as metaphors. John Searle uses the phrases 'Sally is a block of ice' and 'Sam is a gorilla' as instances of metaphor. These phrases do not fall under any other term yet their status as pure metaphors seems almost accidental. The metaphor 'Sally is a block of ice' can be seen as the opposite of personification just as 'Sam is a gorilla' is the opposite of the pathetic fallacy. In the first case, instead of an inanimate object being endowed with human attributes, a human subject is endowed with inanimate attributes. In the second case, rather than attributing human actions and feelings to a natural object, the phrase attributes natural capacities to a human subject. Given these similarities, we can surely be forgiven for doubting that personification and pathetic fallacy are separate rather than overlapping categories.

Not all philosophers are as strict as Hintikka and Sandu about separating metaphor from metonymy. David E. Cooper, in his review "Davies on Recent Theories of Metaphor," cites a phrase from Ludwig Wittgenstein, 'for me the vowel e is yellow,' as an instance of metaphor. Yet this phrase clearly falls under the trope synaesthesia, in which one kind of sensation is described in terms of another. Nevertheless, accusing Cooper of misapplying categories would be pedantic rather than

helpful. In his book Metaphor, Cooper suggests that a broad notion of metaphor is more productive than a narrow view; "it may be unclear how the meaning of metonymical utterances is to be fitted into a semantic theory, but the unclarity is surely not going to be of a different order from the one surrounding the meaning of metaphorical utterances" (16).

Donald Davidson implies a stricter notion of metaphor when he rejects ambiguity as a possible explanation of metaphor because he contends that ambiguous words result in pun rather than metaphor. He uses the line, "Our general doth salute you with a kiss," from William Shakespeare's Troilus and Cressida to illustrate his point. Yet the majority of puns are homonyms; his example is actually a sub-class of pun called equivoque, in which a single word having two disparate meanings is used in a context which makes both meanings equally relevant. The Shakespearean line is an instance of both equivoque and pun; consequently, according to Davidson, it cannot be a metaphor. Yet Davidson is less precise when he uses, as an example of metaphor, the phrase 'Hemingway lost in Africa.' Here, the word 'lost' makes the phrase a metaphor but it could equally make it a euphemism. Davidson does not say why euphemisms can but puns cannot be instances of metaphor.

My discussion of these figures of speech is not

meant to take issue with the examples of metaphor used by various philosophers. I do want to suggest, however, that a theory of metaphor is incomplete if it addresses the diversity of metaphor by denying that stubborn cases might be instances of metaphor. The problem of metaphor has traditionally been characterized by opposing literal and metaphorical language (or uses of language).⁴ These broad categories do not entail that other nonliteral figures of speech be subsumed under the general heading of metaphor. However, neither do they preclude the possibility that some instances of pun, personification, metonymy, pathetic fallacy, and so on, are also instances of metaphor.

A major difficulty facing any theory of metaphor lies in explaining how we distinguish metaphor both from literal language and from other kinds of non-literal language. The difference could depend on the words used, but then we are left with the problem of explaining those cases in which the same words are used to make a literal statement on one occasion and a metaphorical statement on another. Alternatively, we could say that to understand a metaphor is to understand the intention

⁴ Like most writers on the subject of metaphor, I do not explicate the notion of literal language. Instead, I assume that there is a body of uncontroversial cases of literal words. I proceed from this premise rather than giving an account an account of literal language. Such an account should be undertaken, but this project is beyond the scope of my thesis.

of the speaker. Yet the intention of the speaker is not always easy to identify. Moreover, this solution does not explain our willingness to contend that we understand a particular instance of metaphor even when, as individuals, we paraphrase it in different ways.

Michael Polanyi suggests a theory of metaphor which avoids these dilemmas. In Meaning, he contends that understanding a metaphorical statement is a matter of understanding its metaphorical meaning. Many philosophers have distinguished metaphor from other figures of speech by employing the notion of metaphorical meaning. They contend that a metaphorical statement possesses, in addition to its literal meaning, an additional propositional content which allows it to be the bearer of knowledge. However, their accounts raise the questions of what constitutes this meaning and how this metaphorical meaning arises. Polanyi's account answers these questions by suggesting that metaphorical meaning is a matter of the way in which we understand as well as of what we understand. According to his account, we must, when understanding a metaphorical statement, consider not only the words used and the intention of the speaker, but also other items that are tacit in the context.

When examining particular instances of metaphor, it appears obvious that a word having one or more literal

meanings can, when used in a metaphor, also have a metaphorical meaning. For example, John Donne's poem "Sonnet XIV" seems to exploit the tension between literal and metaphorical meaning. This sonnet, structured on a series of paradoxes, begins with the line "Batter my heart, three person'd God," and ends with a couplet containing two paradoxes:

Except you'enthrall mee, never shall be free,

Nor ever chaste, except you ravish mee.

In the intervening lines, the persona begs God to save him from sin because he lacks the ability to do so. Throughout the poem, Donne uses words associated with the body to discuss the spirit, and the concluding lines are understandable only if we recognize them as metaphorical. The point of this poem depends on our ability to make sense of the seeming paradoxes contained in the couplet. If the reader can resolve these paradoxes, then he must conclude that there is also a way of resolving the paradox of a three-personed God. The poem's cleverness rests on the knowledge that these two cases are not the same; indeed, the disparity between them appears to hinge on the difference between metaphorical and literal meaning.

Donald Davidson, however, denies this difference when he contends that the concept of metaphorical meaning is misguided. His theory of metaphor attempts to

account for the way in which particular metaphors are both understood yet interpreted in different ways. Because we obviously do recognize and understand instances of metaphor, Davidson contends that the meaning of any particular metaphor consists of the literal meaning of the words which comprise it. On the other hand, we often paraphrase the same metaphor in many different ways. He consequently concludes that these interpretations are not the meaning but the effect of the metaphor. Such effects are subjective and, as such, they are not governed by rules.

In Chapter Two, I summarize Donald Davidson's view of metaphor while paying particular attention to his implied distinction between context and context of use. I argue that the meanings of many words depend on the contexts in which they occur, and that context must involve more than the intention of the speaker. Further, I suggest that Davidson's view of ambiguity is too narrow. An expanded notion of ambiguity allows for the possibility that words can have metaphorical as well as literal meanings.

In Chapter Three, I consider two objections to the concept of metaphorical meaning. Donald Davidson suggests that if there were such a thing as metaphorical meaning, metaphor, contrary to experience, would be easy to paraphrase. David E. Cooper contends that there are

no rules or conventions by which we might discover a metaphorical meaning. I argue that Michael Polanyi's view of metaphor meets the challenge posed by these objections. According to Polanyi, metaphors are difficult to paraphrase because they involve tacit items, including the tacit items involved in our position in relation to a particular metaphor. Further, understanding metaphors is a skill one learns and, as such, is governed by ability and personal judgement rather than by rules.

In Chapter Four, I further explore the notion of metaphorical meaning by discussing metaphor in relation to context. Graham Dunstan Martin, relying on Polanyi's notion of tacit awareness, contends that the content of metaphorical meaning is unconscious and, consequently, is the evocation of subjective and private experience. I argue that Martin's interpretation of Polanyi's notion is flawed. Polanyi says that tacit awareness is personal rather than subjective. The self is involved in making and understanding metaphor; however, as a tacit item, the self becomes part of the context of the metaphor. In turn, the context of a metaphor conditions its meaning. The concept of personal knowing complicates the scheme by which the subjective and the private is opposed to the objective and public.

In Chapter Five, I discuss some metaphors which

pose a problem for Polanyi's view of metaphor. I suggest that, in spite of the problems, his view is best able to account for the diverse questions surrounding the issue of metaphor. I conclude with a brief discussion of some difficulties surrounding metaphor which are solved or avoided by Polanyi's account.

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CHAPTER TWO:
DAVIDSON'S VIEW OF METAPHOR
"Not mean But be"¹

In this chapter, I summarize Donald Davidson's view of metaphor while paying particular attention to his implied distinction between context and context of use. Davidson believes that literal sentences are transparent and have fixed meanings. He tries to reconcile our ability to make and understand metaphors with the way in which different hearers appear to understand the same metaphor in different ways. He does so by suggesting that metaphors have a literal meaning and a metaphorical effect.

In examining his implied distinction between context and context of use, I question whether all literal language has the lucidity Davidson claims for it. If much of language is (in a broad sense) ambiguous, then context becomes necessary for determining the meanings of many words. Moreover, the possibility exists that some of these meanings are metaphorical. However, this still leaves the problem of what elements make up

¹ from Archibald Macleish's poem "Ars Poetica":

...A poem should be equal to:

Not true.

For all the history of grief

An empty doorway and a maple leaf.

For love

The leaning grasses and two lights above the sea

A poem should not mean

But be.

context. Davidson suggests that the most important element is the intention of the speaker. I suggest that this element is not sufficient for understanding any particular, individual metaphor.

Donald Davidson, in his essay "What Metaphors Mean," argues that there is no metaphorical meaning because meaning consists only in what is said. He divorces the meaning of a sentence from its connotations and the like in that the meaning of a sentence depends strictly on the ordinary meanings of the words which comprise it, and these ordinary meanings remain unaffected by the context in which the sentence is used. Consequently, words do not have two meanings, one literal and the other figurative. He accounts for metaphor by distinguishing between what words mean and how they are used, and assigning metaphor to the domain of use. A sentence has a given truth-value, but it can be uttered for many reasons and can function in many different speech acts. Nevertheless, a sentence is true or false independently of its intended use. A literal utterance is the plain assertion of the truth conditions which obtain. A metaphorical utterance is most often false; however, it is not mistaken because it is meant to be taken metaphorically. Because meaning is independent of the context of use, whatever a particular metaphor means depends entirely on the literal meanings

of the words which compose it. The metaphorical and literal do not differ in meaning; instead, they differ in the force with which they are used. A metaphor has force because it involves 'seeing as' rather than 'seeing that'; consequently, a use of words is metaphorical not because it has a figurative meaning but because it has the unique effect of making us think deep thoughts and of noticing that which we might not otherwise have noticed. This effect, however, cannot be confused with meaning (either literal or metaphorical) because much of what a metaphor causes us to notice "is not propositional in character" (440).

In spite of Davidson's insistence on the importance of metaphor, his theory of meaning has the consequence of being unable to account adequately for how we recognize or understand particular metaphors. When hearing a sentence that is false, we must recognize that the speaker is not mistaken, and that the statement is an invitation to be inspired by visions, thoughts, and feelings, and to notice what might not otherwise be noticed. However, we sometimes do speak nonsense and utter banal phrases. If Davidson is correct when he asserts that the meanings of metaphors depend entirely on the ordinary meanings of words, then he has difficulty in accounting for how a hearer might know what a word means, understand what it is being used to

do (that is, being used metaphorically), and yet not understand the metaphor. The meaning of a metaphor ought to be transparent once we understand the meanings of the ordinary words which comprise it. That many metaphors remain problematic suggests that recognition and understanding require some further step. The concept of metaphorical meaning has been used, with varying degrees of success, to address the question of why we use, and how we judge the efficacy of, particular metaphors. Davidson insists on the importance of metaphor but the tools which he gives us, such as the force and the effect of metaphors, are inadequate for deciding these questions.

Here, someone might object that my reading of Davidson is too strict. Although he says that the meaning of a metaphor depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of the words which comprise it, his statement does not preclude the possibility that factors other than meaning may play a role. Nevertheless, I stand by my reading: other factors certainly do play a role in the force and effect of metaphor but Davidson warns us against conflating force and effect with the meaning of metaphor. Not only does he not identify these other factors, but he also suggests that metaphors are governed by very few rules. As Mark Johnson points out in The Body in the Mind, "Davidson has no account

whatever of how it is that the literal sentence used [in a metaphor] is in any way connected up with what the hearer comes to notice" (72).

At times, Davidson appears to acknowledge that his theory of meaning is unable to account for all cases. He briefly considers the notion that the meanings of some words gets fixed by context, and suggests that however this indeterminacy² is illustrated or explained, it 'cannot erase the line between what a sentence literally means (given its context) and what it "draws our attention to" (given its literal meaning as fixed by the context)' (438, emphasis mine). While a particular use of the language can produce an effect, only literal statements have meaning. The interesting thing about this statement is his acknowledgement that the literal meaning of a particular sentence might depend on its context. This acknowledgement becomes more curious when, elsewhere in the same essay, he contends that "literal meaning and literal truth conditions can be assigned to words and sentences apart from particular contexts of use" (431, emphasis mine). There is a difficulty in reconciling these two statements because his first claim

² By indeterminacy, I mean only that some words do not seem to have a singular and lucid meaning. Indeterminacy is not ambiguity in Davidson's sense of the term; that is, it does not apply to words which have multiple yet strictly fixed meanings. Rather, it applies to words which seem to lack a clearly defined meaning.

suggests that the literal meanings of some sentences are fixed by the context in which they appear whereas in the second, he asserts that the literal meanings of sentences are fixed apart from their particular context of use. These two claims can be reconciled only if Davidson can be construed as making a distinction between a context and a context of use. His explanation of metaphor depends on his distinction between meaning and effect, and this, in turn, would seem to depend on his separating context from context of use. However, such a separation is never clearly articulated. If the meanings of some words are fixed by context, then the ordinary meaning of a word is not always, as Davidson suggests, singular, fixed, and transparent. Further, if ordinary words do not have determinate meanings, then it is possible that some of these meanings are figurative rather than literal.

Traditionally, philosophers have seen metaphorical meaning as being different from literal meaning; indeed, a phrase can often be considered as having two meanings. For instance, the phrase 'tomorrow is another day' literally means that tomorrow is not the same as this day but is, instead, a different one. Metaphorically, the phrase means that life is a series of new beginnings. Davidson, however, breaks with tradition by contending that there is only one kind of meaning, and

that a metaphor is simply a particular use to which the literal statement is put. Metaphorical phrases, rather than differing from the class of literal phrases per se, actually differ from the other uses such as asserting, lying, promising, criticizing, and so on to which literal phrases are put. More precisely, Davidson contends that "metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (430). Davidson, believing as he does that metaphors mean nothing more than the literally interpreted words which compose them, argues that metaphors cannot be paraphrased because "there is nothing there to paraphrase" (431). What is commonly called paraphrase in such a situation is not an expression of a metaphor's meaning; instead, it is an evocation of what the metaphor brings to our attention. Davidson, then, appears to be suggesting that when we consider paraphrase as the meaning of a metaphor, we are actually committing a variation of the affective fallacy. That is, our paraphrase concentrates on the effect that the metaphor has on us, yet we assume that we are concentrating on the metaphor itself.³ What a metaphor

³ from W.K. Wimsatt and Monroe C. Beardsley, "The Affective Fallacy," reprinted in The Verbal Icon (1954). The affective fallacy is the error of evaluating a poem by its effects--especially its emotional effects--upon the reader. As a result of this fallacy, the poem tends to disappear and criticism is based on impressionism and relativism. The literary work is invested with publicly available meanings; on the other hand, critical

brings to our attention is a function of the interpreter as much as it is of the maker of the metaphor. We cannot explain metaphor but we can interpret and elucidate it.

Davidson believes that metaphor "is something brought off by the imaginative employment of words and sentences and depends entirely on the ordinary meanings of those words and hence on the ordinary meanings of the sentences they comprise" (431). His view is surprising in that, on the face of it, many metaphorical expressions go beyond fixed meanings. For instance, knowing the meaning of 'nickel' and 'dime' would seem to be of little help in understanding what it is to 'nickel-and-dime' someone. For understanding this metaphorical phrase, one needs a modicum of cultural detail, and such detail would bring in the context that Davidson is anxious to preclude. On the other hand, he allows for the possibility that the ordinary meanings of words are not sharply fixed when he, elsewhere in his essay, discusses "what a sentence means (given its context)."

It is not entirely clear what Davidson means by context. He is not speaking of what words mean in the context of a sentence because he is discussing what

evaluation cannot be done except in relation to certain kinds of effects. To overcome the affective fallacy, the critic does not describe the effect that the work has had on himself; instead, he concentrates on analysis of the attributes, devices, and form of work by which such effects are achieved.

sentences mean in a context. He might be speaking of what a sentence means in the context of language itself. However, this would be, strictly speaking, a system rather than a context. Moreover, it would be unnecessary because words are themselves part of this system. Robert J. Fogelin, in Figuratively Speaking, suggests that Davidson is only contending that "the literal meaning of a sentence containing indexicals will depend on the context in which the sentence is uttered" (53). If so, Davidson has already allowed that the meaning of sentences extends beyond the words used. On the other hand, it is not entirely clear that context can fully solve the difficulty with indexicals. John Perry, in "The Problem of the Essential Indexical," contends that the replacement of such an indexical by different terms destroys the force of the explanation or requires other assumptions to support it. The sentence is no longer in the same way explanatory because the phrase 'I am making a mess' would become 'John Perry is making a mess;' however, this second phrase would have to include the assumption '...and I am John Perry,' thereby re-introducing the indexical. Perry says that "anyone at any time can have access to any proposition. But not in any way. Anyone can believe of John Perry that he is making a mess. And anyone can be in the belief state classified by the sentence "I am making a mess." But

only I can have that belief by being in that state" (19).

Fogelin, in any case, could be mistaken. Davidson does not mention indexicals; rather, his remark is a response to the contention, contained in the article "Metaphoric Comprehension: Studies in Reminding and Resembling," that some words have fuzzy meanings or what I previously called indeterminacy. Robert Verbrugge and Nancy McCarrell, the authors of this article, conducted experiments designed to test how subjects understand and remember metaphors. They conclude from their study that words are not always functionally separable. That is, separate entities (features, concepts, predicates, meanings, and associations) cannot be attributed to individual words. Thus, "the cognitive impacts of component words may be only partially separable" (517). All language use occurs in novel situations, and these situations are related by sufficient resemblance rather than by identity of "invariant criterial features" (498). Rather than relying on the separable meaning of individual words, "the process of comprehension involves a more global transformation of the topic domain" (518).

Since Davidson uses the notion of context in connection with ordinary words that have 'fuzzy' meanings, he is perhaps thinking of more than indexicals and ambiguous terms. He might include words that have

technical meaning or even general terms. For instance, one might consider the sentences 'Eating apples is good' and 'Giving to the poor is good.' There appears to be no singular meaning of the word 'good' which would work equally well in both sentences. We might equate the notion that something is good with the notion that it is approved of. Certainly, it would be strange to say that something is good but we do not approve of it, or that we approve of something but it is not good. Nevertheless, Renford Bambrough, in Reason, Truth, and God, suggests that a parallel case makes the difficulty clearer. We might identify the claim that a proposition is true with the claim that it is believed. It would be equally strange to say that something is true but we do not believe it, or that we believe something but it is not true. In both cases, the priority is the same; that is, "we hope that we shall believe only what is true, and we ought equally to hope that we shall approve only what is good" (87). Alternately, we might define the word 'good' as that which is beneficial. Yet meaning involves but is not identical to the way in which we come to know that something is true. Consequently, "where there is a radical change in mode of verification there is also a radical change in meaning" (52).⁴

⁴ Bambrough, by using the word 'verification,' is not advocating a variant of logical positivism. He is only suggesting that people understand words in different ways, depending on how

Similarly, we may understand and use words such as 'virtue,' 'bravery,' 'justice,' and so on but, depending on the context in which these words are uttered, their content and meaning change accordingly.

A further difficulty arises in that the distinction he seems to make between context and context of use is never articulated. Indeed, Davidson's example of the headline "Hemingway Lost in Africa" suggests the difficulty in separating them. This example concerns a newspaper that, believing Hemingway was dead, used this headline to metaphorically convey this information. When it discovered that Hemingway was alive, it left the headline intact in order to literally indicate his status. Davidson takes this headline to mean (in one context) that Hemingway is literally lost in Africa whereas, presumably in a context of use, it metaphorically suggests that Hemingway is dead. However, the OED cites many meanings for the word 'lost': it can mean perished or destroyed, as when a man or ship is lost at sea or in battle; alternately, a lost soul is one who is ruined morally or spiritually; a wallet not retained in possession is not misplaced but lost; a lost

they come to know them. V.S. Naipaul, in his essay "Jasmine," discusses how, as a young boy in Trinidad, he learned Wordsworth's poem about daffodils although he did not see a daffodil until he went to England. At that time, he then understood the word 'daffodil,' and consequently the poem, in a different way. Thus, Bambrough's notion of meaning is not Davidson's.

sheep is one which has gone astray; on the other hand, time, labour, and space, if not used advantageously, can be lost; an opportunity, if missed, is lost; a battle or game, in which one has been defeated, is lost just as a person, defeated, lost. Some, or perhaps all, of these meanings might have once been metaphorical but, according to the OED, they are now ordinary uses of the word. To privilege one of these meanings over the others as the literal meaning of 'lost' is, like Davidson in this instance, to ignore his apparent differentiation between context and context of use. That one utterance of this statement 'means' whereas the other 'suggests' depends only on Davidson's labelling one literal and the other metaphorical.

As the example of the word 'lost' shows, ambiguity is a more complex concept than Davidson allows. The various literal meanings of a word often have relations to one another that he does not acknowledge. Davidson only recognizes ambiguity on those occasions when these relations, over time, have been forgotten or suppressed so that a word may seem to have two or more independent meanings. Yet, as this example suggests, the various meanings of ambiguous expressions can be dependent on one another in various ways. His refusal to see metaphor as similar to ambiguity is acceptable only if we also

accept his restricted notion of ambiguity.⁵

Davidson's apparent distinction between context and context of use remains elusive. His examples suggest that the difference between these two appearances of the word 'lost' hinges on a belief about our world. Our beliefs about the world are perhaps part of the context of use rather than the context. However, as John Searle points out, a sentence "may determine different truth conditions relative to different assumptions in ways that have nothing to do with ambiguity, indexical dependence on context, presupposition failure, vagueness or change of meaning" (214, "Literal Meaning"). Hence, our beliefs about the world appear to be part of the context in which a literal statement is understood. The statement 'Hemingway lost in Africa' is thus true in one context but false in another. As Renford Bambrough argues in Reason, Truth, and God, an unchanged form of words may mask a change in meaning. Bambrough uses the example of Poseidon to elucidate his point. Homer and a contemporary person may look at a rough sea. Homer would say that 'Poseidon is angry' and the contemporary person

⁵ As a further point, it is unlikely that Davidson allows context to be a factor only when deciding on the particular, ordinary meaning of an ambiguous term. This might be the case if all ambiguous words were of the nature of, for instance, the word 'fair.' One would need a context only in order to decide if the word meant blond or just. As the example 'lost' shows, however, many ambiguous words are more complex than Davidson imagines, and context (as opposed to context of use) will not always determine a singular, transparent meaning.

would agree, but for Homer, this would be an explanation of the sea's roughness whereas for the contemporary person, this would be a fanciful description of the sea. The form of the assertion remains static but each person, while understanding the assertion, does so in a different way. Bambrough suggests that "our experience is sufficiently different from [the Ancient Greeks'] to change our relation to the basis of the stories they tell" (34). The way we understand a statement is dependent on our relation to it, yet our experience is sufficiently familiar to allow understanding of other points of view. In this way, Bambrough unintentionally suggests how literal statements now shown to be false can nevertheless retain their significance by becoming metaphorical.

Davidson's two statements about Hemingway are not the same because we understand them in a different way. Not being certain that Hemingway is dead, we might assume that the headline was simply being cautious. If we accept the headline as metaphorical, we do so only because the words 'lost' and 'loss' have frequently been used as euphemisms for death. The difference depends not just on what we are viewing but the way in which we are viewing it. How we understand the headline depends on our point-of-view. If we believe that Hemingway is dead, we are distanced from him and, consequently, he is lost

to us as an object might be. If we believe he is alive, then we identify with him by seeing that he is the one who has lost something; that is, his bearings.

Davidson denies that making or understanding a metaphor depends on rules. That is, "Max Black is wrong when he says, 'The rules of our language determine that some expressions must count as metaphors'" (n. 1). Yet Davidson considers metaphor to be a use of literal language, and suggests that other uses are governed by rules. For instance, "telling a lie requires not that what you say be false but that you think it false" (437). That telling a lie coincides with a falsehood is, according to Davidson, accidental. Unless there is a subtle distinction between a requirement and a rule, Davidson believes that this is a rule governing lying. If this rule exhausts the context of use, then the rule for metaphor would simply be that the speaker intends to speak metaphorically. As an example, he uses the phrase 'she is a witch,' spoken first as a metaphor and then as a lie. Since, according to Davidson, "the same sentence can be used, with meaning unchanged for either purpose," the only differences between the two utterances would be the intention of the speaker and the effect (437). If one lies, one intends the hearer to accept the statement as true. If one speaks metaphorically, one intends the statement to have a different effect, such as thinking

deep thoughts. However, the effect surely depends, then, on understanding the intention of the speaker, and, in this case, Davidson has left us no method for deciding this. If the statement is not false, the effect in the case of both lying (as construed by Davidson, that is) and speaking metaphorically would be the same. Because metaphors lack any other rules, our understanding of the phrase 'she is a witch' becomes a matter of arbitrarily guessing at the intention of the speaker. What effect the phrase has on us would depend entirely on how we choose to construe the intention of the speaker. Consequently, if the context of use is exhausted by the intention of the speaker, and there are no public clues as to what this intention might be, then one can only wonder why "we are seldom in doubt that what we have here is a metaphor" (432).

Davidson, however, may be mistaken as to the requirement for a particular use of the language. In the case of lying, he makes no distinction between telling a lie and intending to tell a lie. His failure to distinguish between them undermines his concept of lying in that intention can only be discovered by outward criteria. If one's statement is not a falsehood, hearers would be unable to discover that one intended to tell a lie. If one insisted that one was, on Davidson's reading, telling a lie, hearers would say that one might

have intended to lie but that one did not accomplish it. To obey a rule presupposes that it is possible to disobey a rule, that there is a difference between intending to obey a rule and obeying a rule. If one realized that one's statement was true, one would discover that one had not told a lie but had only intended to do so.

The intention of the speaker is inaccessible to others unless there are public clues by which we can infer such intention. Because we know that humans are not other animals, we understand metaphors which assert that they are. We might say that people are, for instance, rats. However, such metaphors rely on the tradition of explaining animal behaviour in terms of human behaviour; only later, as our stance toward other animals changed, did we regard the statements arising from this practice as metaphorical. We might think of Aesop's Fables in connection with this practice. Later, we composed metaphors asserting that humans were other animals but did so only because we had earlier explained animal behaviour in terms of human behaviour. Consequently, we assert identity between the two in that humans are other animals only in so far as other animals are human. Davidson would perhaps answer that he was right in the first instance; that is, there are no rules for metaphor or for any other use of language. If so,

the distinction between context and context of use has no relevance.

Davidson's argument that a metaphor means nothing more than what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean hinges on differentiating the meaning of a metaphor from its effect. However, his description of metaphor's effect never becomes clear. He begins by insisting that "understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavour as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules" (430). Davidson's remark suggests that metaphor is a chaotic and free-wheeling enterprise, that there can be no quarrel between two different elucidations of a metaphor's effect because both are equally valid. As Davidson puts it, any critic is simply trying "to produce in others some of the effects that the original had on him" (440). Yet Davidson later denies the licentious nature of metaphor when he insists that elucidating a metaphor is important because "many of us need help if we are to see what the author of a metaphor wants us to see" (440). According to Davidson, the author of 'Sam is a wolf' wants us, because he says so, to see that Sam is a wolf but the way in which we see Sam is a wolf is not guided by any rules. Nevertheless, without rules, we are still supposed to see Sam in the way in which the author wants us to. However, as Monroe C. Beardsley points out, "we

do not decide that a word in a poem is used metaphorically because we know what the poet was thinking; rather, we know what he was thinking because we see that the word is used metaphorically" (111). Davidson's intermediary remarks do not lessen the confusion. He insists that "whatever meanings we assign the words [used in a metaphor], they keep through every correct reading of the passage" (433). However, Davidson leaves us no way of knowing what criteria constitute a correct reading if there are, in fact, no rules and no limits to metaphor.

Since, according to Davidson, much of what metaphor causes us to notice is not propositional in character, the question of truth or falsity often does not arise. Nevertheless, some metaphors are clearly better than others. To account for this, Davidson evokes the notions of taste, beauty, aptness, and hidden power. These terms, however, appear to rest on largely subjective criteria so that a discussion of a particular metaphor seems to be at least unlikely, if not impossible. To say that metaphors have the causal power of making us think deep thoughts and notice things we might not otherwise have noticed is, in the end, too general.

If Davidson allows that context fixes the meanings of some words, then his concept of literal meaning allows for ambiguity and hence for metaphorical meaning.

If, however, his account of meaning is independent of context, then he has shifted the ground of his argument from what Black, Beardsley and others conceive of as meaning. His notion of literal meaning consequently becomes too narrow to account for what it is to make or understand a metaphorical phrase.

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CHAPTER THREE:
MICHAEL POLANYI'S VIEW OF METAPHOR

"Meaning's Press and Screw"¹

Many philosophers deny that the force of metaphor relies on metaphorical meaning. Donald Davidson, too, in his essay "What Metaphors Mean," rejects this concept by asking why, "if a metaphor has a special cognitive content, [...it should] be so difficult or impossible to set it out" (438). David E. Cooper, for different reasons, also rejects the notion of metaphorical meaning. In Metaphor, he differentiates between established and novel metaphors, and argues that although they work differently, neither has a special, figurative meaning. In the case of established metaphors, the meaning of a metaphor is as common and as recognizable as the many alternate meanings of ambiguous words. However, such meaning is not, strictly speaking, metaphorical because established metaphors often become second literal uses of the word. Novel metaphors are different in that they do not rely on convention; indeed, such metaphors often contradict convention. Consequently, the metaphorical meaning of a novel metaphor "is not a function, even in part, of mutually

¹ from Samuel Taylor Coleridge's poem "On Donne's Poetry."

recognized use among speakers" (55). Metaphorical meaning is an uninteresting concept because "a grasp of such meaning plays no role in our understanding of the word's use" (55). Their concerns suggest that writers who do argue for the notion of metaphorical meaning such as Max Black, Nelson Goodman, and Monroe C. Beardsley, are merely begging the question.² No one denies that we recognize and understand metaphors; nevertheless, according to Davidson and Cooper, to say that what we understand is, and that how we understand a metaphor depends on, metaphorical meaning is to suppress rather than answer the concerns they raise.

Michael Polanyi appears to save the notion of metaphorical meaning by delineating its role. Using the concept of metaphor outlined by Max Black, he contends that to understand a metaphor is to understand its metaphorical meaning. Unlike Black, Polanyi's notion of metaphorical meaning is based primarily on his distinction between subsidiary and focal awareness. What we know focally is explicit whereas what we know subsidiarily is tacit. If his account is correct, then it can answer Davidson's question by explaining how we can know something without being able to say exactly

² In Davidson's "What Metaphors Mean," for instance, he likens the role played by metaphorical meaning in explaining metaphor to "explaining why a pill puts you to sleep by saying it has a dormative power" (431).

what it is we know. Moreover, his account can also address Cooper's concern by explaining how metaphor can rest on conventions which cannot be articulated.

That Michael Polanyi finds Max Black's view of metaphor attractive is not surprising. Like Polanyi, Black warns us against attributing strict rules to the use of metaphor. In his essay "Metaphor," Black acknowledges that general rules of usage govern language and that "the rules of our language determine that some expressions must count as metaphors" (277). Yet any part of speech can, in certain contexts, be used metaphorically. Moreover, rules of usage are helpful but too general to specify the meaning of a particular metaphor.

Black contends that a metaphor cannot be substituted by a literal equivalent because metaphor "has its own distinctive capacities and achievements" (284, Black's emphasis). He believes that the interaction theory of metaphor best accounts for the unique features of metaphor. According to this theory, a metaphor is a single word (or phrase) that supports two thoughts of different things. These two thoughts interact to produce a meaning that is the result of this interaction. The word (or phrase) thereby gets a new meaning which is neither its literal meaning nor the meaning of any literal substitute. Indeed, the meaning

of the word (or phrase) is extended, and to understand the metaphor, one must connect both the old and the new meanings together.

Black hones the interaction view by replacing the two thoughts interacting in a metaphor with a principal subject and a subsidiary subject. These are roughly equivalent to I.A. Richards' 'vehicle' and 'tenor.' Black rejects Richards' terminology because Richards is inconsistent in his use of these terms. Also, Black deviates from Richards in that Black sees these subjects as systems of things rather than as things. According to Black, literal uses of a word commit the speaker to acceptance of a set of standard beliefs about the subject. To use the word is to evoke these commonplaces. In order to understand the meaning of a metaphor, the reader must be aware of the "system of associated commonplaces" connected to the subsidiary subject (287). For instance, we can only understand the metaphor 'Richard is a lion' if we also understand the commonplaces associated with the subsidiary subject 'lion.' A hearer is led by a system of implications "to construct a corresponding system of implication about the principal subject" (288). The metaphor suggests a new pattern of seeing by organizing our view of the principal subject; 'we can think of a metaphor as...a screen, and the system of "associated commonplaces" of

the focal word³ as the network of lines upon the screen' (288). A corresponding shift in attitude occurs by excluding or highlighting the emotionally disturbing aspects of the commonplace associations.

Although Michael Polanyi retains the terminology of 'tenor' and 'vehicle' for 'primary subject' and 'subsidiary subject', he nevertheless, in the main, adopts Black's account of metaphor. However, Polanyi finds this account unsatisfactory for three reasons: Black does not explain how the reader connects the two ideas present in a metaphor; his view cannot explain why many metaphors possess the capacity to move us emotionally; and, even though he acknowledges that metaphors communicate a cognitive content, he dismisses the notion that a literal paraphrase can represent this content. Polanyi's account of metaphor attempts to overcome these purported inadequacies inherent in Black's view. Polanyi's account of metaphor begins with his conception of tacit knowing. He contends that particulars can be noticed in different ways; we can be aware of them in themselves or we can understand them in their participation in a comprehensive entity. When we are aware of them in themselves, particulars can be

³ In Black's scheme, the word being used metaphorically is the 'focus' whereas the remainder of the sentence (in which at least one of the remaining words is used literally) is the 'frame.'

identified because they are the object of our focal awareness. When we are aware of them in their participation in a comprehensive entity, they are the objects of our subsidiary or tacit awareness and, consequently, these particulars are less clear than the relation between them.

In his essay "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," he identifies four types of tacit awareness, and distinguishes each by using an example: the process of tacit awareness can be evidenced by a skill (for example, riding a bicycle); a physiognomy (for example, how we recognize a particular face); a tool (for instance, a blindfolded man using a stick); and a speculative skill (for example, a chess player seeing how the positions of chess pieces jointly bear on her chances of winning a game). When riding a bicycle, we perform a set of elementary motions integrated to fulfill a joint performance. We attend from the subsidiaries to the focal act. We are able to ride a bicycle because our imagination fixes on the result and such effort evokes an observance of the rules which achieve the result. Such rules (as, for instance, those involved in keeping one's balance) would be useless if explicitly formulated because "this kind of rule can be acquired tacitly and only tacitly, and it can be practiced only tacitly" (200). These rules are not

restricted to physical skills. Polanyi asks us to consider the grammar of ideal speakers; such rules are instantly applied to new situations. We use grammar to compose meaningful sentences yet most of us can give only the crudest account of grammar (185).

To form a pattern of tacit knowing is to create meaning. The particulars of which one is tacitly aware have meaning only insofar as they bear on our focal awareness; indeed, "when something is seen as subsidiary to a whole, this implies that it participates in sustaining the whole, and we may now regard this function as its meaning, within the whole" (Meaning, 58). The meaning of a string of words lies in the sentence they form, but the sentence is more meaningful than the mere collection of words which form it.⁴ There are consecutive levels of meaning with each lower level functioning as subsidiary to the next higher level. The marks on a page (or the sounds that we hear) have meaning only insofar as they are involved in our focal awareness of words. In turn, these words have subsidiary meaning because they are involved in our focal awareness of sentences, and so on.

Polanyi's notion of tacit awareness is relevant to

⁴ Here, I am suggesting that a sentence taken out of context means no more than the meanings of the words which comprise it. On the other hand, a sentence in context, used in an actual situation, means more than the meanings of the words which comprise it because such a sentence relates to the world.

all practices, including that of making and understanding metaphor. He contends that all knowledge involves tacit awareness, and that tacit awareness works at many levels. Consequently, understanding both literal and metaphorical phrases involves subsidiary items; however, the way in which these items are involved to create meaning is unique to each enterprise.

According to Polanyi, our experience of the world is a chaotic and meaningless jumble of sense perceptions until we bring organizing principles to it. Meaning is achieved when persons in a community perform an integration, giving rise to a focally intended whole or unity. For Polanyi, meaning, pattern, order, whole, and coherence are roughly synonymous. We rely heavily, but not completely, on other members of our community in order to accomplish this ordering.

In Personal Knowledge, Polanyi contends that all knowledge has a personal base; "the arts of doing and knowing, the valuation and the understanding of meanings, are...only different aspects of the act of extending our person into the subsidiary awareness of particulars which compose a whole" (65). There is no case in which we can look at the world as it is apart from our means of construing it. Yet some patterns are better than others. Intellectual commitment is involved in that the structure of personal knowing makes us

"participate in its shaping and acknowledge its results with universal intent" (65). We constantly modify our anticipatory framework in an effort to achieve closer contact with reality.

Polanyi contends that the personal is distinct from both the subjective and the objective:

...I think we may distinguish between the personal in us, which actively enters into our commitments, and our subjective states, in which we merely endure our feelings. This distinction establishes the conception of the personal, which is neither subjective nor objective. In so far as the personal submits to requirements acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but in so far as it is an action guided by individual passions, it is not objective either. It transcends the disjunction between the subjective and the objective. (300)

Nevertheless, our personal involvement varies according to the acts we are performing. Understanding a literal statement involves minimal personal involvement. On the other hand, a higher degree of personal involvement is required for understanding a metaphorical statement.

Polanyi sees words as tools, and he often uses the simile of a word or sign indicating a signified as a finger pointing to an object. We attend to the finger by following its direction to the object. The object is the focus of our intention whereas we have only subsidiary awareness of the finger. Forming a pattern of tacit

knowing creates meaning and, in Meaning, Polanyi calls this kind of structure indicative meaning. He contends that the literal use of language is structured in this way. The literal use of language is a from-to relation in that the integration of tacit clues into a focal whole is "made from the self as centre (which includes all subsidiary clues in which we dwell) to the object of our focal attention" (71, Polanyi's emphasis). Words indicate the focal integration on which they bear. Our intrinsic interest is captured by the word's meaning rather than by the word itself. If we merely focus on the word, the process is reversed. As the word acquires externality, it loses its meaning. More simply, our intrinsic interest is engaged in the focal meaning of a word and the word, as sound or object, functions subsidiarily as an indicator of such meaning. For instance, the word 'moon' is subsidiary to the meaning of the word.

However, not all uses of language follow this pattern. With some meanings, the subsidiary clues function as more than indicators. In the case of symbolic meaning, the subsidiary clues, rather than the focal object, are of intrinsic interest to us, "and they enter into meanings in such a way that we are carried away by these meanings" (71).

Polanyi is not entirely forthcoming about what he

means by intrinsic interest. Partially, he is speaking about the interest we bring to a project. He accepts as given that the human condition entails a search for understanding and meaning. Visual perception, for instance, is possible because of the contrast between the figure, an identifiable object, and the background, its accidental surroundings. The background is seen as random as opposed to the order of the object. Understanding, he says in Personal Knowledge, "includes an appreciation both of order contrasted to randomness and of the degree of this order" (38). This appreciation is intrinsic interest. Such interest is not pressed upon us. In The Study of Man, Polanyi contends that possibility precedes discovery. One can only discover or create something that is, in some sense, already there in that "you cannot discover or invent anything unless you are convinced that it is there, ready to be found" (35).

In relation to a metaphor, we may not, in the usual sense, be interested in every commonplace metaphor we hear or make. However, our intrinsic interest is involved in that we desire to make sense of what we hear. Our intrinsic interest is captured by the tacit items involved in a metaphor because accepting the words in a literal way does not allow us to make sense of or understand the phrase.

In order to explain his concept of symbolic meaning, Polanyi uses the example of a flag. He suggests that a flag, as an object, holds little interest for us. Instead, what functions subsidiarily in our focal awareness of the flag is of great interest "for it includes our total awareness of membership in a nation" (72). The nation's existence, and our memories of it, become embodied in the flag. The flag does not indicate these feelings, as a word does its signified object; rather, it stands for or symbolizes them. According to Polanyi, "what bears upon the flag, as a word bears upon its meaning, is the integration of our whole existence as lived in our country" (72).

If we once again use the example of the word 'moon', the difference between the literal and the symbolic should be clearer. If clues in a context suggest a symbolic rather than a literal reading of the word 'moon' (if, for instance, it were part of the phrase 'chaste moon'), then our intrinsic interest would not be captured by the focal meaning of the word 'moon'. Our interest would not be on the moon's shape, size, colour, distance from the earth, or even its status as an object. Instead, our intrinsic interest would rest on subsidiary clues such as the many ways in which this word has been used before, and the place this word has in our culture. Its proximity to the word 'chaste' might

suggest to us that the word is a symbol for the goddess, Diana. The word 'moon' does not indicate the mythological figure of or the legends surrounding Diana; rather, it symbolizes or stands for her. In the case of symbolism, the subsidiary clues (ideas, concepts, feelings for and about Diana) are more important than the focal object (the moon).

Thus, according to Polanyi, a literal use of the language indicates whereas a symbolic use stands for or embodies its subsidiary clues. The difference between indication and symbolization "lies in the relation of the self to the whole process" (74). In indication, the from-to relation ensures that the clues project away from the self as centre. In symbolization, the self (as conditioned by culture), because of intrinsic interest, becomes part of the object (or meaning), and awareness of the object includes awareness of self.

The subsidiaries become embodied in as well as indicate the focal object. In a symbolic use of the language, "our perception of the focal object also carries us back toward (and so provides us with a perceptual embodiment of) those diffuse memories of our own lives (i.e., of ourselves) which bore upon the focal object to begin with" (73).

The "movement of language," as Ludwig Wittgenstein puts it, is not exhausted by symbolic and literal uses.

Polanyi also discusses metaphor as being distinct from both the symbolic and the literal. Although Polanyi finds difficulties with the interaction view of metaphor, he nevertheless uses this account as his basis. A metaphor consists of two parts--the tenor and the vehicle--and the differences as well as the likenesses between these two parts account for the way in which metaphor works.

In his essay "Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," Polanyi characterizes the understanding of words as an act of sense-reading. The reader must make sense of both a text and the experience therein described. We rely for doing so on previous understanding of familiar experiences.⁵ However, we often have to understand language for which this does not hold. Polanyi argues that "our education is largely based on absorbing communications about experiences that are novel to us and are recorded in a language we don't [sic] understand" (188). The meanings of things and terms are discovered simultaneously, following an alternating pattern of analysis and integration. Both aspects guide us and will be solved jointly by understanding the

⁵ Robert E. Innis, in "Meaning, Thought, and Language in Polanyi's Epistemology," argues that "only because you and I share the same conceptual scheme or categories does language become a means of communication between us...[Moreover,] the generation of concepts is dependent upon available linguistic resources and the relation between the linguistic and the conceptual realms is...strictly dialectical" (51).

object referred to and the words referring to it.

Most spoken sentences are unprecedented and hence are novel creations. Even though we may not be able to give a clear account of the rules of grammar, provided it is grammatical, it will be possible for us to make some sense of a sentence no matter how absurd the words which compose it. We easily understand new sentences and can, with effort, interpret seemingly absurd ones. What is usual functions tacitly as a background for deciding when an unusual use of the language has occurred. A reader looks for a metaphorical meaning when a literal meaning would be not false so much as banal or absurd.⁶ Yet the claim advanced in a metaphor, if understood metaphorically, is pregnant and forceful.

A metaphor is more complicated than both a literal and a symbolic use though it contains elements of both. Polanyi explains that "when a symbol embodying a significant matter has a significance of its own and this is akin to the matter that it embodies, the result is a metaphor" (Meaning, 78). More simply put, both parts of a metaphor--tenor and vehicle--are significant ideas or expressions in themselves and, together, they create a meaning which exceeds these two parts. The

⁶ It could be argued that most empirical claims are banal. However, such claims escape this charge because they convey information. Philosophical examples which use the same form of words ('my pen is red') are banal but only because their usefulness as examples relies on their banality.

initial focal object (the vehicle) returns back to the subsidiary element (the tenor) and enhances its meaning so that the subsidiary element bears on and becomes embodied in the focal object. A word having a literal meaning is used to bear an additional meaning by functioning as a symbol. Yet metaphor is even more complicated in that it also has a level which includes ourselves. The subsidiary clues (that is, our tacit awareness) "are integrated into the meaning of the tenor and a vehicle as they are related to each other in a focal object (a metaphor)" (79). There is metaphorical meaning in that "the two constituent parts of a metaphor [the tenor and the vehicle] are made to bear a joint meaning of them," and we are aware of them subsidiarily in their joint focal appearance (80). Polanyi's delineation of metaphor will perhaps be clearer if we consider a specific metaphor. In William Shakespeare's play A Midsummer Night's Dream, the character of Oberon makes a veiled reference to Elizabeth I by suggesting that she is immune to the emotion of love:

But I might see young Cupid's fiery shaft
Quenched in the chaste beams of the wat'ry moon,
And the imperial vot'ress passed on,

In maiden meditation, fancy-free. (2,1,161-4)

Metaphors abound in this passage, but all seem to centre on the word 'moon'. In Polanyi's scheme, Elizabeth would

be the (implied) tenor and the moon would be the vehicle. The word 'moon' is used symbolically to stand for Diana, the virgin goddess. The reference to the moon's "chaste beams" suggests this symbolic reading. Yet the symbol becomes metaphorical in that, as a metaphor, it alludes to Elizabeth's reputation as the Virgin Queen for she is the "imperial vot'ress" who worships not the moon, but Diana. The figure is even more complicated in that love, symbolized as a fiery arrow shot from Cupid's bow, is thwarted by the actual nature of the moon. The figure relies on the way in which water quenches fire, though the way in which the moon is "wat'ry" is not clearly stated. If this adjective means that the moon is composed of water, then it is obviously false; so obviously false as to be absurd. Therefore, in order to understand it, we must look for a metaphorical meaning. It is a "wat'ry moon" in that the moon influences the tides and inundations generally. This adjective further flatters Elizabeth because England is a maritime nation and Elizabeth, as its ruler, governs the seas.

This metaphor consequently means more than the literal meaning of the sentence which comprises it. The vehicle (the moon) is related to the tenor (Elizabeth I) in a focal object (the metaphor), and our understanding of its joint meaning relies on our tacit awareness (our

knowledge of both moons and the flattering of queens, among other things) for its meaning.

It is unclear whether David E. Cooper would consider this a novel or an established metaphor. Diana might be a second literal use of the term if we see it as a technical meaning; that is, this meaning applies in certain circumstances, though it would not in more general circumstances. Alternatively, we might consider the division between established and novel metaphors to be a hazy one. Metaphors are not always easily recognized or understood. Dead metaphors often have to be pointed out; some, however, signal their appearance and, in these cases, recognition and understanding appear to be simultaneous. A metaphor is characterized as 'dead' when frequent use (or perhaps, convention) moves it from the metaphorical to the literal category (for example, 'pinpoint' and 'tail-light'), or when a literal phrase is unwieldy or absent. The difference between established and novel metaphors is more problematic. Recognition and understanding are automatic in the case of established metaphors whereas novel metaphors require a greater effort of interpretation.

Historical associations do not exhaust the meanings of particular metaphors. If a metaphor is to remain complex or interesting, other allusions and associations will accrue either simultaneously or as the older ones

drop away. The possibility therefore exists that any simple, conventional metaphor can suddenly become more complex and interesting. What is lost in the paraphrase of a metaphor is its dynamic nature. Dead metaphors are 'dead' not because they are now literal but because they are no longer seen as having this fluctuating nature; that is, they are no longer seen as being open to further paraphrases.

Cooper argues that to say we understand a metaphor by grasping its metaphorical meaning is pointless because there are no established conventions which can aid one in grasping such a meaning. Polanyi, however, would disagree because understanding metaphors is an ability one acquires, and he contends that one can use this ability without being able to fully articulate the rules on which it depends. In Personal Knowledge, he says that acts (or skills) are subject to rules but often, such rules are what he calls "rules of art" (30). Such rules can guide a performance but they cannot replace the skill because rules "cannot be understood, still less applied by anyone not already possessing a good practical knowledge of the art" (31). He concludes that the rules of art can only function within a framework of personal judgement. Consequently, he concludes that "the aim of a skilful performance is achieved by the observance of a set of rules which are

not known as such to the person following them" (49). These rules are tacit rather than non-existent; it should be possible to make such rules at least partially explicit though doing so may not improve our ability to make or understand particular metaphors.⁷ As Robert E. Innis puts it, in his article "Meaning, Thought, and Language in Polanyi's Epistemology," "even though it is possible to bring much behaviour under rules, there is no rule for following rules; there is only the effective and conscious following of them, the performance itself" (55).

That fully articulated rules may not be readily forthcoming does not mean that we should abandon the search for boundaries, guidelines, and patterns. Understanding is a process, and the meaning of a particular metaphorical phrase depends on many things: how the phrase has previously been used in similar contexts; the context of its present use; its association with similar metaphors; and our assumption, because the sentence is grammatically correct, that the speaker intends a particular meaning. A metaphor may make us attend to a likeness between two or more things, but metaphor is more discursive than comparison. Understanding a metaphor also encompasses context,

⁷ Here, we might consider John Searle's rules for metaphor which balance uneasily between being descriptive and prescriptive.

allusion, association, nuance, and point-of-view.

We are aware of such conventions even if we cannot isolate any one in particular. In his Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough', Ludwig Wittgenstein suggests the prevalence of such conventions; he writes, "...when I read Frazer I keep wanting to say: All these processes, these changes of meaning--we have them still in our word language. If what they call the "corn-wolf" is what is hidden in the last sheaf; but also the last sheaf itself and also the man who binds it, we recognize in this a movement of language with which we are perfectly familiar" (10-1). If, in certain circumstances, we call a man a corn-wolf, we are using a metaphor and it will be understood as such because the hearer is tacitly aware of this "movement of language."

The notion of personal knowledge, with the attendant possibility of a subjective element, appears to lend weight to Donald Davidson's objection that the concept of a metaphor's metaphorical meaning, or cognitive content, is suspect if it is difficult or even impossible to articulate. For instance, I cannot claim that my paraphrase of the metaphor from A Midsummer Night's Dream is exhaustive. I may have missed any number of allusions or associations so that its metaphorical meaning is dangerously incomplete. Nevertheless, we might examine the ground on which this

difficulty is based. A literal statement has cognitive content, and a metaphor, obviously, is not a literal statement; however, it does not then follow that a metaphor has no cognitive content.

There is a sense in which a metaphor can only be understood if it tells us what we already know. Not only is all knowledge contextual (although this is not the same as saying that all knowledge is relative), but any knowledge which I possess relies on my tacit awareness. Monroe C. Beardsley, in his essay "The Metaphorical Twist," contends that what a particular metaphor "does mean, or can mean, at a given time must depend to some extent on what other contexts the words have appeared in, and what analogous or parallel expressions appear in the language" (114). His remark suggests that a full paraphrase of a metaphor's meaning is possible but, given the amount of knowledge which would be needed, unlikely to be forthcoming.

Polanyi would agree with Beardsley's claim in that, when paraphrasing a metaphor, we must also consider where we stand in relation to the metaphor. Our intrinsic interest is engaged both by the focus of our attention and by that of which we are only tacitly aware. If we consider tacit items as part of the context in which a metaphor is understood, then any context must include both the speaker and the hearer of metaphor. A

metaphor's effectiveness or its ability to stand as an explanation is not, as either words or a sentence, contained within itself. Instead, it is the relationship between the metaphor and the hearer which, in part, conditions the meaning of the metaphor.

Not every metaphor can be paraphrased without losing something of what it was because where we stand in relation to the metaphor is an important part of the explanation. Even members of the same culture do not always stand in the same relation to a particular metaphor. Davidson is thus correct when he declares that a metaphor's "interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator" (430). He is mistaken, however, in assuming that this fact supports his contention that the notion of metaphorical meaning is misguided.

Polanyi's delineation of metaphor is descriptive and, although detailed, it allows for the variety as well as the underlying unity of metaphor. A phrase is metaphorical not just because of what we understand but because of the way in which we understand it. He explains not only how we recognize, understand, and use metaphor, but he also accounts for both the virtues and vices of metaphor. Metaphors suggest an eccentric pattern of seeing, connecting items which do not commonly belong together. Metaphor's power and

pervasiveness depend on its telling us what we already know without allowing us to say that we knew it all before. Moreover, he accounts for the way in which many metaphors appear misleading or chronically subjective. Metaphors are sometimes suspect because they seem to say as much about the maker as they do about the subject she is discussing. When, for instance, Nietzsche tells us that truth is a woman, what he is saying about truth is less clear than what he is saying about his attitude toward women. Polanyi's concepts of tacit knowing and intrinsic interest explain this shifting of focus. Similarly, a particular metaphor's meaning is not always clear because one is unsure about how wide a field of association can be included. Such indecision can lead to the claim that there is no stable meaning. Nevertheless, if Polanyi is correct, understanding metaphors is an ability one learns after one is able to understand literal language, and personal judgment is needed in order to decide on the meaning of a particular metaphor.

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CHAPTER FOUR:

TACIT AWARENESS AS CONTEXT

"the filament on which to hang a phrase"¹

In this chapter, I explore the concept of personal understanding, as opposed to subjective or objective understanding, in relation to metaphor. In an objective model, language is seen as reflecting concepts which map onto "objects, properties, and relations in a literal, univocal, context independent fashion."² On this model, paraphrasing the meaning of a metaphor (given that there is metaphorical meaning) should be a simple matter because of all potential paraphrases of a metaphorical statement, only one is correct. I believe that such is Donald Davidson's underlying assumption, and that this assumption ultimately leads him to the conclusion that we subjectively interpret metaphorical statements. Because Davidson believes that a metaphorical statement has only one literal meaning, what we call paraphrases of a metaphor are actually explications of the effect a particular metaphorical statement has on us. Paraphrasing a metaphor is difficult, or even

¹ Derek Walcott, "Letter from England"

² This is how Mark Johnson partially characterizes what he calls the Objectivist Orientation in his book The Body in the Mind (x). In his text, he argues for a recognition of the imaginative dimension of epistemology.

impossible, because such subjective interpretation is not governed by rules. I argue that, contrary to objective and subjective knowing, understanding a metaphorical statement is, in Polanyi's sense, personal. On the personal model, there can be multiple interpretations of a particular metaphorical statement, but paraphrasing that statement is still possible because these various paraphrases are parts of the same whole.

In order to show the way in which understanding a metaphor is personal, I discuss whether or not the tacit knowing necessary for understanding a metaphorical statement is unconscious. Because the self becomes involved in a metaphor, the tacit items needed for understanding a metaphor could be seen as subconscious. Indeed, if such items are chronically subconscious, they could, as Graham Dunstan Martin claims in "The Tacit Dimension of Poetic Imagery," be seen as unconscious. If so, then metaphorical 'meaning,' resting on essentially private experiences, has slipped into the subjective realm.

I disagree with Martin's position by arguing, instead, that the tacit knowing involved in understanding a metaphorical statement is not unconscious. The tacit items used in this process chronicle where we stand in relation to the metaphor

and, as such, they form part of the context which conditions the meaning of a metaphor.

Because understanding a word or phrase in a literal way relies on a from-to relation, such understanding can be characterized as personal but not necessarily as subjective. However, in Personal Knowledge, Michael Polanyi contends that "the degree of our personal participation varies greatly within our various acts of knowing" (36). Understanding a metaphor is different because, instead of a from-to relation, the self becomes involved in the metaphor. This involvement of the self could suggest that understanding a metaphor is subjective as well as personal. Certainly, a fine line separates the personal from the subjective. Polanyi nevertheless maintains that such a line exists, at least in the case of literal meaning. I argue that this line also holds in the case of metaphor.

Michael Polanyi's remarks on the exact nature of tacit awareness can appear contradictory. He insists that all knowledge is personal because it is either tacit or rooted in tacit awareness. Moreover, "if all knowledge is fundamentally tacit, as it is if it rests on our subsidiary awareness of particulars in terms of a comprehensive entity, then our knowledge may include far more than we can tell" ("Knowing and Being," 133). We could make part of our tacit knowing explicit, but not

all, because in doing so we would still depend on some further subsidiary awareness to bring it into focus. Nevertheless, subsidiary awareness (or tacit knowing) is neither pre-conscious nor subconscious. While being focally aware of a comprehensive entity one may reduce some once explicit particulars to the tacit, but this does not mean that one's awareness of them becomes subconscious. Polanyi does not deny that "the clues of tacit knowing and the elements of tacit performing are usually difficult to identify and sometimes they are quite unspecifiable" ("Sense-Giving and Sense-Reading," 194); nevertheless, these items are not subconscious in that an item becomes subsidiary only if it is its logical function to do so. For instance, our knowledge of linguistic rules is subsidiary because of their function; that is, these rules bear on the meaning of a sentence which is actually the focus of our attention. We are not always fully aware of the linguistic rules we are using. Indeed, "the level of consciousness at which we are aware of a subsidiary particular may vary over a whole range of possible levels" (197). This brief collection of Polanyi's remarks on this subject suggests the difficulty. He forthrightly denies that tacit items are subconscious. Yet if we are conscious but not aware of such items, and if subsidiary awareness ranges over a great many possible levels of consciousness, then it is

unclear why they cannot be characterized as subconscious. A decision on this question is important because it has serious consequences for Polanyi's theory of metaphor.

Michael Polanyi notes that there are two kinds of tacit awareness, the subliminal and the marginal. In The Tacit Dimension, Polanyi also distinguishes between practical activity and theoretical discovery, but insists that "these two aspects of knowing have a similar structure and neither is ever present without the other" (7). Tacit knowing is hierarchical, ranging from the subliminal to the marginal and, as such, it "form[s] the bridge between the higher creative powers of man and the bodily processes which are prominent in the operation of perception" (7). The subliminal is basic to practical activity. When we exercise a skill, we are aware of the muscular movements needed in terms of the skill performed. However, we are aware of these movements only insofar as they relate to the performance to which our attention is directed. When the performance ceases, so does this aspect of our awareness. Subliminal awareness is essentially unspecifiable because this awareness "functions inside our body, at levels inaccessible to us through direct experience" (Meaning, 39).

That of which we are tacitly aware in a marginal

way can be influenced by that which we have become used to seeing in the past. What we perceive of as normal, usual, or expected functions as a background for perception. As Harry Prosch, in Michael Polanyi: A Critical Exposition, puts it, "what we perceive becomes...not only a function of simple automatic visual mechanisms, but also a function of what we could say we know--what has sunk into our minds as a result of past integrations and the general forms and principles taken by us from them" (58). Such marginal awareness becomes part of our point of view. That on which we are focusing "will actually be perceived differently, depending on what else is seen marginally as filling out the edges of our field of vision and so serving as background" (60). If metaphor involves those items of which we are marginally aware, a form of words, such as 'Moscow is cold,' may thus be taken either literally or metaphorically, depending on what items make up its tacit dimension. Moreover, that such items are tacit does not preclude our being able to examine and make them explicit. Unlike that of which we are aware in a subliminal way, what we are tacitly aware of in a marginal way can, in principle, be expressed in terms of propositions.

Martin, however, would quarrel with this interpretation. For him, the kind of tacit awareness

involved in metaphor is subliminal rather than marginal. He argues that there is a tacit dimension in perception and that words are neither able to express this tacit dimension nor represent perception itself. In his essay, Martin contends that "words are in many cases inadequate to describe certain forms of experience" (101). His argument gains support from his definition of tacit knowing as comprising "everything in our experience that we either do not or cannot make explicit" (101). He asks whether we can describe the scent of roses or the exact tonality of a clarinet, and he echoes Ludwig Wittgenstein in wondering whether we can describe the aroma of coffee. We cannot make the sensory quality of a perception explicit even though we concentrate on that very quality when we talk about it. He concludes that "explicit perception is...a tacit element of talking about it" and that "there is, in short, a radical loss of experience in language" (102). Language cannot fully represent experience, but it can evoke it.

According to Martin, the sensory experience, through our reliance on memory, can be evoked at the tacit level by metaphor. Memory is an important element because "a poetic image may force us to contemplate, not just the classifications into which we put experience, classifying a particular experience of roughness as just 'rough,' or a particular experience of sweetness as just

'sweet,' but fragments of our memories of actual rough or sweet experience" (104-5). In this way, metaphor involves our emotions because such emotions are attached to our memories of sensory experiences. Through metaphor, we are "forced to contemplate the connotations of words, and are brought face to face with tacit experience" (107).

Martin contends that this confrontation explains why poems do not provide us with revelations about the world. Poetry (that is, metaphor) evokes the explicit perception which is a tacit element in talking about the perception. As a result, "the propositional content of poetry is so minimal because it is not concerned with true statements about reality, but with true statements [constitutive] of reality" (108). Martin's insight is shared by many disparate writers. As Archibald Macleish, in his poem "Ars Poetica" puts it, "A poem should not mean/But be." More prosaically, Donald Davidson argues that much of what a metaphor causes us to notice is not propositional in character. He contrasts "learning a new use for an old word with using a word already understood; in one case...our attention is directed toward language, in the other, to what language is about. Metaphor...belongs in the second category" (434).

However, Martin confesses that his own

characterization of metaphor is not problem-free: "if the effect of metaphors is dependent on their touching some memory, evoking some past experience, or even some amalgam of past experiences, then [he wonders where] the sense of freshness come[s] from that we customarily feel in poetry" (109). He suggests that the tacit dimension of the metaphor is unconscious, that "there are within us things that we never knew were there" (109). Metaphor is creative and startling because it evokes tacit elements from one's own unconscious. If Martin is correct, then Davidson's phrasing is particularly apt when he describes metaphor as "the dreamwork of language" (430).

I disagree with Martin's position for many reasons. Martin's characterization appears to describe some instances of metaphor adequately but others remain problematic. For instance, Cavell's example, 'the mind is brushed by sparrow's wings,' cannot be explained by this view of metaphor; although the phrase suggests a sense experience, the memory of such an experience is not available as a tacit element. Martin's scheme, by concentrating on a certain type of non-cognitive experience, neatly describes instances of synaesthesia but other metaphors lack the sensory quality Martin needs. One can only wonder what experience would need to be remembered in order to understand a metaphor such as

'life is not a paragraph.'

Moreover, commentators on Polanyi (other than Prosch above) would quarrel with Martin's view of tacit awareness. Martin avers that "for Polanyi, tacit knowing ranges all the way from conscious to unconscious, though he does not speak of this in psychoanalytical terms" (n. 36). Yet Martin may be too hasty in assuming that Polanyi would be comfortable speaking of the unconscious. Marjorie Grene would certainly disagree with this reading of tacit awareness. In her essay "Tacit Knowing: Grounds for a Revolution in Philosophy," she notes that Polanyi's characterization of tacit items as either marginal or subliminal often causes critics to assume that tacit knowing is subconscious. According to Grene, Polanyi insists that the relation between the focal and the subsidiary can be reversed by moving from detailing to integrating and then using the integration to focus more clearly on the details and, finally, to reintegrating the clarified, heightened details. Hence, the concept of tacit knowing is, according to Grene, "a case of two kinds of awareness, not of 'consciousness' as against something of which we are in no way 'conscious'" (170). What is important is the relation of the tacit to the explicit. She denies that the notion of tacit awareness is "some kind of 'subjectivism', or the principle that for any given cognitive statement or body

of knowledge there is some residue which resists formulation" (165).

Greene's remarks have, I think, consequences for Polanyi's conception of metaphor.³ For Greene, the importance of tacit knowing resides in its "formulation of the two aspects of cognition, subsidiary and focal, as 'knowledge by relying on' and 'knowledge by attending to'" (169). Consequently, she contends that "the tacit component is not a residuum, but an indispensable foundation" (165). If we cannot explicitly or fully articulate the meaning of a metaphor, what is left out is not subconscious or unconscious tacit awareness. Rather, this residuum consists of the subsidiary element related to one's position vis-a-vis the metaphor.

Polanyi, in Personal Knowledge, contends that one can become focally aware of tacit elements. He believes that "the kind of clumsiness which is due to the fact that focal attention is directed to the subsidiary elements of an action is commonly known as self-consciousness." Such self-consciousness "destroys one's sense of the context" which is necessary for exercising the skill (56). That one can become self-conscious about these tacit elements suggests that Martin's placement of

³ I do not want to misrepresent Greene's article. She sees his work on metaphor as "tragically misguided, a betrayal, in its separation of art and science, of his own best insights" (168). I do not, however, share her view about the discontinuity between Polanyi's view of metaphor and his earlier thought.

them is in error.

In Meaning, Polanyi and Prosch re-iterate this point by denying that tacit awareness is subconscious; they only insist that "we can be aware of certain things in a way that is quite different from focusing our attention on them" (38). Because awareness is both focal and subsidiary, some subsidiaries are essentially unspecifiable. However, this unspecifiability is "not due to the fact that we cannot become focally aware of all the subsidiary clues entering into an integrated meaning" (39). They contend that if we focus our attention on a subsidiary item, it becomes deprived of the meaning it had when it was a subsidiary because it will no longer be an integrated item. Thus, our inability to exhaustively paraphrase a metaphor is not due to its tacit dimension being subconscious or unconscious. Some tacit items resist being brought into focus but "to assert that [we have] knowledge which is ineffable is not to deny that [we] can speak of it, but only that [we] can speak of it adequately, the assertion itself being an appraisal of this inadequacy" (91 Personal Knowledge).

Polanyi's contention that self-consciousness "destroys one's sense of the context" suggests the place of tacit awareness in his theory of metaphor. He sees the self as forming part of any context; in the context

of literal statements, this involvement is minimal because intrinsic interest moves away from the self in a from-to relation. The involvement of the self is more important in the context surrounding a metaphor. Which items form part of any context are, in part, chosen tacitly. Yet the tacit items that are part of the context by which a metaphor gets its meaning are more personal. Hence, there can be multiple paraphrases of a single metaphor. Such plurality is not merely a choice of alternative aspects. Rather, these various paraphrases reveal parts of a whole.

A change of context can make the same statement either literal or metaphorical. Sometimes, a situation can make the same phrase both literal and metaphorical. At such times, the difference between the literal and metaphorical interpretations is the result of intrinsic interest; the metaphorical understanding involves the self whereas the literal understanding does not. In other words, the phrase is metaphorical or literal depending on whether the self is included in the context. When Polanyi contends that the self is involved in a metaphor, he is not talking about the unconscious. He is, in part, speaking of the cultural ground from which we form our thoughts and beliefs. Yet he also wants to say that metaphor goes beyond our cultural assumptions. Metaphorical language focuses our attention

on the relation between the self and world rather than between humans and their world. In this latter relation, the human is objectified and, as such, is outside the self. A metaphor is more personal in that it involves our individual attitudes toward these cultural items.

The self can be involved in a metaphor in two ways. First, how one interprets a metaphor depends on which tacit items are deemed relevant. For example, one speaker may say 'justice is blind' and intend to imply the objectivity of the judicial system. A second speaker may say 'justice is blind' and intend to express the claim that dispensing justice is an impossible task. These speakers are not using two different metaphors. Rather, they are using the same metaphor although they are bringing to it two different assumptions. In other words, the items of which they are tacitly aware differ, and we could say that although the contexts they are using are not different, what they view as relevant items in that context are. What the metaphor means, then, is not one or the other, but both. What they focally 'attend to' remains the same but what they subsidiarily 'rely on' is different. A metaphor is indeterminate or ambiguous (though not necessarily a pun) to the extent that while a particular speaker can control the focus of her audience by using a particular metaphor, she is unable to control the subsidiary items

brought to it. A paraphrase can make such items explicit; some items can be missed but their exclusion does not make such items subconscious.

Secondly, the involvement of the self in a metaphor is evidenced by the way in which many metaphors are self-revealing. Often, a metaphor can tell us more about the attitude of the speaker than it can the subject being spoken of. For instance, if a man is being aloof or insensitive, I might excuse his behaviour to a third party by saying that 'he is a man.' That he is a man is patently obvious; therefore, the third party would recognize my statement as metaphorical. Another example: if a man is afraid to go to the dentist, I might express my impatience with him by telling him to 'be a man.' Again, this phrase would be recognized as metaphorical given that it would be absurd to exhort someone to be something he already is.⁴ Although both metaphors are loosely based on the cultural assumption that men do not give expression to their feelings, these metaphors reveal little about their subjects. However, each reveals a different emotional attitude that I, as the speaker, have toward the male gender.

Renford Bambrough, while arguing in Reason, Truth,

⁴ Some might quarrel with my characterization of these phrases as metaphors. A different phrase with a similar structure can make this point equally well. If two speakers use the phrase 'he is a Napoleon,' one speaker might mean it slightly whereas the other speaker might mean it in a complimentary way.

and God that we know more than we can say, uses the example of a man who spends his life studying information about the Rocky Mountains. When he finally sees these mountains, he may "find that he has nothing to say about them that has not been said a hundred times before, even if he now sees much that he had not seen when those words were said to him" (120). Bamrough suggests that the man would be unable to articulate his new knowledge. However, we need not acquiesce in Bamrough's acceptance of defeat; it is possible that the man could communicate some of this knowledge by using a metaphor. Such knowledge is not merely his emotional reaction to the mountains. The mountains have not changed but his relation to them has; accordingly, the context in which and by which he perceives the mountains is now different. The metaphor conveys this new knowledge by shifting intrinsic interest from the mountains to the relation between the viewer and the mountains.⁵

Other explanations of metaphor have employed the concept of context but, very often, their notion of context encompasses little more than the intention of the speaker. Making the meaning of a metaphor too

⁵ Ludwig Wittgenstein makes a similar point in his Remarks on Frazer's 'Golden Bough'. He discusses how "we might say 'every view has its charm,' but this would be wrong. What is true is that every view is significant for him who sees it so (but that does not mean 'sees it as something other than it is')" (11).

dependent on the intention of the speaker is wrong because it suggests that the speaker has a control over a particular metaphor which she does not have. My previous examples show the ways in which the meaning of a metaphor can extend beyond the intention of a particular speaker. Understanding is a process, and the meaning of a metaphorical word or phrase depends on many things: how the word has previously been used in similar situations; the context of its present use; and our assumption that the speaker intends a particular meaning. When we hear a phrase, we assume that the speaker intends us to understand its meaning, that she is not speaking nonsense. We initially try to interpret the phrase literally; that is, as it has most often been interpreted in similar situations. If, in its present context, the phrase seems nonsensical or trite when taken literally, we do not necessarily assume that the speaker has got it wrong. Sometimes, we assume that the speaker is using a metaphorical expression. Yet we must still puzzle out the meaning of the metaphor. We recognize the phrase as metaphorical and, by widening our intrinsic interest, increase the relevant items in our context accordingly.

A metaphor may make us attend to a likeness between two or more things, but metaphor is more discursive than comparison. Polanyi's theory allows for the digressive

movement involved in metaphor. In order to understand a metaphor, one must take account of nuances inherent in the context. The effect that metaphor has on us depends on our tacit awareness of the devices by which this effect is achieved. Further, metaphor fosters an intrinsic interest in both what is tacit and what is focal. Metaphor does give us with an alternate way of seeing items; it provides us with a pattern of attention rather than a description. The hearer can only understand the metaphor if she orders the context in a way that will make the metaphor understandable. However, this context need not involve 'seeing as' rather than 'seeing that.' Such a formulation suggests that the hearer is objectively distanced from that which she is hearing. Tacit awareness closes the gap between objective and subjective.

David E. Cooper, in Metaphor, comes close to this view of metaphor when he describes understanding a metaphor as the "attempt to extract something of value from the metaphor, to find whatever riches of imagery, analogy or suggestiveness it can yield" (110-11). He further acknowledges that the self becomes part of the metaphor's context. However, he assumes that this inclusion of the self allows for a corresponding subjectivity. He writes, "On the one hand the reader lets himself be swept along by the words, surrendering

himself to the power of the words to conjure up images. But, on the other, he also presses the words into service, using them as pegs on which to hang a chain of fantasies or as spurs to speculations which may have no relation to anything entertained by the poet" (110). His reference to "fantasies" and "speculations" suggests that he sees the understanding of metaphor as private, in some way immune to the public meanings of words and the way in which they are embedded in our culture. Polanyi provides a corrective to this subjective picture by concentrating on the way in which our understanding of a metaphor is conditioned by context. Our interpretation is bound by the tacit items in a particular context, and our interpretation expands only as those tacit items are pointed out and, through a process of reasoning, deemed relevant.

Polanyi's account of metaphor rests on Max Black's account, yet Polanyi manages to avoid many of the perceived difficulties connected with the interaction theory of metaphor. Unlike Black, Polanyi is able to explain how the reader connects the two ideas present in a metaphor. He contends that these two systems of things are connected, at least in part, by tacit items. Moreover, these tacit items include where we stand in relation to the metaphor. This involvement of the self suggests that emotion and personal taste cannot be left

out of the account. Nevertheless, an odd phrase which is too personal will not be understood as a metaphor, just as a phrase which loses this personal involvement is often on its way to becoming literal.

Literal and metaphorical phrases can be distinguished by the breadth of intrinsic interest involved. A literal phrase indicates because it relies on a from-to relation. We attend from the word to its meaning. Polanyi contends, in "Knowing and Being," that "whenever we are focusing our attention on a particular object, we are relying for doing so on our awareness of many things to which we are not attending directly at the moment, but which are yet functioning as compelling clues for the way the object of our attention will appear to our senses" (113). As John Searle points out, both literal and metaphorical phrases rely on background assumptions, but if one is to understand a statement literally, then one limits the background assumptions that are relevant. Polanyi would add that this occurs even though not all parts of this process are explicit. A metaphor does not merely indicate; it also embodies in that we are involved in the joint meaning of the metaphor. What differentiates the literal from the metaphorical is not just what we understand but the way in which we understand it. If, in a particular situation, a phrase suggests both a literal and a

metaphorical reading, the tacit items needed for focal awareness of its metaphorical meaning will not be those needed for a focal awareness of its literal meaning. More simply, a metaphor is an invitation to explore our point-of-view in relation to a particular part of our world.

The items of which we are tacitly aware become part of the context in which the metaphor is understood. Such a context is much wider than the context in which literal statements are understood because metaphor is reflexive in that it also has a level of tacit awareness that includes ourselves. The understanding of a metaphor is consequently more personal than understanding a literal phrase. Wittgenstein approaches this point when he discusses the effect that stories such as the Beltane festival have on us.⁶ He concludes that what he sees in these stories "is something they acquire, after all, from the evidence, including such evidence as does not seem directly connected with them--from the thought of man and his past, from the strangeness of what [he] see[s] in [him]self and in others, what [he has] seen and [has] heard" (18). He is focally aware of the Beltane festival whereas he is only tacitly aware of

⁶ Here, I am not suggesting that metaphor is a rite. I do want to suggest, however, that it is not only metaphor which appears to have many meanings and to serve many purposes. Polanyi, in Meaning, connects metaphor to art and myth, but this discussion is beyond the scope of my thesis.

those items which do not seem directly connected to it.

Understanding a metaphor is an integration of the tacit items in a context by which one comes to see the phrase as metaphorical rather than nonsensical or trite. As in understanding a literal phrase, this process includes an awareness of both focal and tacit items, but understanding a metaphorical phrase differs from understanding a literal phrase in that our intrinsic interest takes account of both kinds of items. We recognize and understand a metaphor by taking account of where we stand in relation to the metaphorical phrase. Metaphor allows us to confront and employ much of what, in ordinary language, we habitually suppress or ignore.

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CHAPTER FIVE:

CONCLUSION

"why these giddy metaphors"¹

Unlike many other writers who deal with the subject of metaphor, Michael Polanyi uses poetic rather than simple metaphors as his examples. Because he concentrates on only one kind of metaphor, his view, like other views of metaphor, initially appears to have difficulty in accounting for all instances. His scheme, I think, is helpful when discussing how we make and understand novel metaphors. Simple, conventional metaphors, however, seem to resist his explanation.

There appears to be a continuum between metaphoric and literal language, with novel metaphors standing in stark opposition to literal language. However, as some metaphors decay and once literal terms come to be regarded as metaphorical, many instances fall between these two poles. One such class contains phrases which are easily recognizable as metaphors and, though we have lost the ability to construct an equivalent paraphrase of them, we nevertheless comprehend their meaning. According to David E. Cooper, some of these instances

¹ from Michael Drayton's Sonnet 12 which begins
"As other men, so I myself do muse
Why in this sort I wrest invention so,
And why these giddy metaphors I use..."

could be moved from the category of metaphor to that of idiom. In Metaphor, he describes an idiom as a phrase whose "meaning is not a function of the meanings of its components" (10). Stanley Cavell, in "Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy," rejects this definition; he claims that words in metaphors function as they do in idioms in that we must understand both their ordinary meanings and that they are not being used in an ordinary way. For Cavell, idioms are different from metaphors in that metaphors can be paraphrased whereas, in the case of an idiom, "to explain its meaning is simply to tell it--one might say you don't [sic] explain it at all; either you know what it means or you don't [sic]; there is no richer or poorer among its explanations; you need imagine nothing special in the mind of the person using it" (79-80). Briefly, metaphors are pregnant with meaning whereas idioms, in Cooper's sense, are not. For instance, I know that calling something the 'cat's pajamas' is to express strong approval of it but I have no sense of why this is so. Nevertheless, there is a connection between idioms and simple, conventional metaphors, so much so that one is often in doubt as to whether a particular phrase is one or the other.

When a (dead) metaphor turns on a word rather than a phrase, it becomes difficult to separate its metaphorical meaning from a second, literal meaning of

the term. To separate them, we must rely on plausible reanimation or sheer speculation. Personal judgement is needed for deciding the plausibility of the paraphrase. For instance, Donald Davidson suggests that the mouth of a bottle or river is a dead metaphor which relies on personification. Although we do not normally recognize this phrase as metaphorical, its status seems plausible. Similarly, Susan Langer suggests that the phrase 'a road runs through her property' might also be a metaphor relying on personification. The status claimed for this phrase seems less plausible.

Metaphors close to idiom and dead metaphors appear to escape Polanyi's description of how metaphor works. At first glance, neither type exhibits the widening of intrinsic interest or the emotional involvement which is fostered by, in Polanyi's sense, the involvement of the self.

It could be argued that Polanyi's view of metaphor is perhaps not meant to describe all instances. Like Max Black, he may have concluded that there are radically different types of metaphor, and that simple, conventional metaphors are best captured by the substitution or comparison view of metaphor; consequently, his view is intended to explain only how we understand interactive metaphors. Such a conclusion, however, is merely expedient unless a further

explanation is offered. Through use and convention, we may come to regard metaphors as being of separate types but there is no reason to suppose that some metaphors are inherently different. I have been suggesting throughout that Polanyi's view of metaphor is more complete than many others because it is able to account for a wider range of metaphor. To now insist that several different accounts of metaphor are needed would be to arbitrarily limit the efficacy of Polanyi's account. Polanyi's view can explain most, if not all, the instances of metaphor along the continuum.

Some simple, conventional metaphors are more complicated than initially supposed. Carol A. Kates, in Pragmatics and Semantics, objects to the interaction theory and, more specifically, to Black's explication of the example 'man is a wolf.' She finds a shortcoming in his theory in that it never makes clear "why one should say things metaphorically rather than literally, or how one is to explain the felt difference between living and dead metaphors" (213). Black's explanation, that the similarities between men and wolves are created rather than discovered, she characterizes as a "vague distinction between objective and subjective," and she reduces Black's account to a variation of the comparison view of metaphor (213). Even if Black stipulated that 'man is a wolf' is only "a genuine or living metaphor on

condition that one does think of wolves in uttering it,...this requirement does not avoid the problem of explaining why anyone should think of wolves at all, if it is possible to say something more direct such as 'Man is vicious'" (213).

Kates obviously believes that this metaphor is dead but she does not recount her reasons for thinking this. Contrary to her perception, Polanyi would maintain that the meaning of this phrase is not fully captured by her paraphrase. This phrase is a living metaphor because its tenor and vehicle retain their independence despite their joint meaning. One could, as Kates does, reduce this metaphor to the literal statement that 'man is vicious' but the two statements are not equivalent. Our culture equates wolves with viciousness so that it is hardly surprising that this tacit item is involved in the meaning of the metaphor. However, that one tacit item is obvious does not mean that it is the only one available.

As the cultural content of 'wolf' changes, so do the tacit items involved. In such a metaphor, what we think of wolves is as important as what we think of man. Depending on the context, this metaphor could as easily mean that 'man acts in a group' or that 'man is a mixture of predatory and familial impulses.' Indeed, if we choose to privilege the mythic dimension of wolves,

this phrase could even mean that 'man is a sexual predator,' though this last paraphrase would change the meaning of the word 'man.' The possibility exists that the cultural context of 'wolf' could change to the extent that we would have difficulty in understanding the metaphor. Such a metaphor is living to the extent that our intrinsic interest is still captured by such tacit items and so one must "think of wolves" when uttering or understanding the statement. If the speaker were to insist that all she meant by the metaphor was that man is vicious, then we could quite justly reply by asking why she did not just say so instead of using a metaphor.

By Polanyi's account, dead metaphors become second, literal meanings of a word when our intrinsic interest has narrowed to the point at which its joint components--tenor and vehicle--are lost to us. For instance, the phrase 'the mouth of the river' can be reanimated through paraphrase because the personification seems plausible. One can see the similarity between a human mouth and the area from which water flows, especially if one recognizes its historical reliance on the theory of correspondence. However, when we come to phrases such as 'the river runs downhill' or 'the road runs through her property,' identification of the tenor and vehicle becomes more tenuous. We seem to be left with a from-to

relation. When a metaphor loses its reflexive movement, the word has surely acquired a second, literal meaning and its metaphorical meaning is lost.

Consequently, Polanyi's view can account for dead metaphors which turn on a single word. Dead metaphorical phrases, however, remain problematic. Such phrases are recognized as metaphors, retain a rough meaning, but we can no longer identify the relation between their tenor and vehicle. Indeed, we sometimes lose sight of their vehicle as well. George Orwell, in "Politics and the English Language," cites such an instance when he explains that writers who intend to use the metaphor 'toe the line' sometimes write it as 'tow the line.' In this situation, it is unclear whether or not Polanyi would say that the metaphor has a meaning. Such a writer could not explain why 'toe the line' means 'follow the rules closely.' The metaphor does not have a from-to relation; that is, it is not understood literally. Yet one has difficulty saying that one's understanding of it is metaphorical given that the vehicle has been misidentified. This instance is different from other metaphorical phrases which lack plausible paraphrases. Unlike a phrase such as 'happiness is up,' the phrase 'toe the line' is not a systemic metaphor structuring experience. Polanyi's theory cannot account for such a metaphor. Any theory of metaphor would have difficulty,

I think, in accounting for this instance.

Although it cannot explain every instance, Michael Polanyi's view nevertheless addresses many of the problems connected to metaphor. His theory acknowledges the importance of literary criticism; he accounts for the multiple paraphrases of a particular metaphorical statement without thereby concluding that either only one paraphrase is correct or that such diversity is evidence of subjective interpretation rather than metaphorical meaning. By his account, multiple paraphrases are possible but not all of them are equal. Some paraphrases are better than others. While the interpretation of metaphor is not bound by strict rules, it is nevertheless governed by rules of art. According to Polanyi, we understand a metaphorical statement by understanding its metaphorical meaning; and this meaning depends on the way in which we understand the statement.

By describing metaphorical meaning as the result of a process, Polanyi is able to account for a wide variety of statements that some writers accept as metaphors while others do not. Our understanding of a metaphorical phrase depends on its context: the situation of its present use; the thoughts and feelings the speaker and hearer bring to the statement; and the cultural fabric that conditions the connotations associated with the

phrase. He accounts for the hesitancy we bring to discussions of particular metaphors. Given that a phrase is metaphorical because of the way in which we understand it, his view makes sense of those occasions when we encounter a word or phrase yet lack an immediate way of telling whether it is meant to be understood metaphorically or literally.

The chief virtue of Polanyi's account is his insight in recognizing that metaphors rely on our awareness of a personal point-of-view. Some metaphors appear to have a clear propositional content whereas others do not. Metaphors vary in their descriptive power because our intrinsic interest is captured by the relation between ourselves and the world. Some tell us about ourselves whereas others tell us more about the world. Men are not wolves but we sometimes regard men in the same way we regard wolves. The metaphorical meaning of a phrase relies on the literal meanings of the words which compose the phrase but it does so by making explicit that which is latent in literal language. Through metaphor, we discover much that, in one sense, we already know, but which we have not examined in a focal way.

At the beginning of this chapter, I suggested that there is a continuum between literal and metaphorical language. A more apt metaphor, however, might be that of

a kaleidoscope. Metaphor allows us a different perspective from which to perceive patterns and connections between well-known facts or circumstances. As we look at objects in different ways by perceiving them in different relationships or patterns, they appear different to us. Yet, while an object will appear different when looked at from different angles, a particular aspect is nevertheless part of what the object is like. These aspects are part of the same whole, and they have meaning only insofar as they are part of that whole.

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