

# **A Davidsonian Response to the Dead Metaphor Problem**

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## **(ABSTRACT)**

In his article, "What Metaphors Mean," Donald Davidson presented his own unique theory of metaphor. While this theory has proved to be influential, there seems to be one problem which a Davidsonian theory cannot account for: the dead metaphor problem.

Due to certain aspects of Davidson's theory of metaphor, critics argue that it is impossible for Davidson to explain how dead metaphors form. In this thesis, I will show why Davidson's account should be chosen over other prominent theories of metaphor, and how a Davidsonian might be able to bypass the dead metaphor problem.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

Metaphor is a deceptively simple speech act. Metaphors, like jokes, are quickly identified and understood as being metaphors, so it seems that people must know a lot about metaphors if they are easily able to identify when a metaphor is a metaphor. There are a few general propositions which one might call an intuitive theory of metaphor. First, the objective of the metaphor is to show a resemblance between the subject and object. For example, in the metaphor “Richard is a lion,” the speaker intends for the hearer to notice a resemblance between Richard and a lion, and thus recognize something about Richard through this comparison. Second, metaphors and their corresponding similes are practically identical, besides the grammatical difference between the two. While metaphors and similes are figurative modes of speech which show a resemblance between sentence object and sentence subject, similes use the words ‘like’ or ‘as’ to compare the two. Third, most metaphors are recognized as metaphors by the fact that they are literally false. This is a simple and common description of metaphors, but there are a few things wrong with this it.

First, while there is still much debate on this issue, metaphors are not necessarily related to similes. It is usually thought that the difference between metaphors and similes is only one of grammar, i.e. the only difference between the two is the use of ‘like’ or ‘as’ in a simile, but there have been various criticisms to this idea, which are at least convincing enough that one cannot assume this necessary connection.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I will review some of these criticisms in detail in Chapter 3 when I examine the metaphorical theory, comparativism, which does assert that there is no difference in content between metaphors and similes.

Second, while it is true that metaphors are for the most part literally false, with “Richard is a lion,” “Jeff is an ape,” and “Juliet is the sun,” are just three of countless metaphors which are literally false, there are some cases where the metaphors are literally true. “Business is business” is one such example. One might recognize that this metaphor is trivially true, so a caveat might be made that all metaphors are either false or trivially true. Yet, this is also wrong. There are metaphors that, while true, are not trivially true. One example is “No man is an island.” This metaphor is neither false nor trivially true, so it would not seem that the truth-value of the metaphor can be any indication of its being a metaphor, since all metaphors can be both false or true (in a trivial and non-trivial sense).

However, one might argue that this isn’t exactly right. The truth value of the metaphor might not be important, but all the metaphors listed above do share one quality which will allow them to be easily recognizable as metaphors. They all cause tension within normal conversations. For example, metaphors which are literally false cause tension because people do not tend to assert easily identifiable false propositions. Likewise, trivially true propositions cause tension because they do not need to be said. Everyone knows that “Business is business,” just like everyone knows  $a = a$ . Even in cases where a metaphor is literally true but not trivially true, like “No man is an island,” this also causes tension within a conversation, as there are very few conversational contexts where “No man is an island” would ‘fit.’ If someone utters such a proposition in conversation, its literal meaning would be so absurd compared to whatever is being talked about that it would immediately cause confusion among the hearer if interpreted literally. This tension from the literal readings of metaphor would then cause the hearer

to interpret the metaphor differently from its literal meaning, in order to give a more charitable interpretation of the speaker's utterances.<sup>2</sup>

Yet, there are even problems with this, as not all metaphors cause this conversational tension. David Hills explains of a type of metaphor where “we’ll only fully understand the utterance (and the speaker) if we take the utterance both ways and take it (and her) to be making both assertions. I call this phenomenon *twice-aptness*, and it’s a rare but striking feature of the human metaphorical landscape.”<sup>3</sup> The following could be considered an example of a twice-apt metaphor, which is from a proposed inscription for Thomas Hobbes’ tombstone, “Here lies the true Philosopher’s stone.” On a literal meaning, it would be an assertion that this is the (head)stone of the true philosopher, while in a metaphorical sense, “as an assertion to the effect that a headstone, any headstone, is a philosopher’s stone in the alchemical sense, with the power to transform the base metal of this-worldly humanity into the pure gold of the next world.”<sup>4</sup> Now, in this case there is no conversational tension to speak of, so recognizing a metaphor cannot always be due to recognizing tension. While this might be a good explanatory device for many cases of metaphor, it does not seem to work for all cases, and there doesn’t seem to be a clear way in explaining how those difficult cases such as twice-apt metaphors are determined.

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<sup>2</sup> One familiar with H.P. Grice’s work on natural language might find this to be familiar in that Grice gives maxims that most people tend to follow in everyday conversations. When these maxims are exploited, it is often because it is a signal to the hearer that he must go beyond the literal meaning of the sentence in order to find out what the speaker truly means. Grice applied his theory to metaphor, and Gricean theory of metaphor has become one of the most prominent theories of metaphor. I will detail Grice’s theory of metaphor, along with his conversational maxims that are the basis for this theory, in Chapter 2.

<sup>3</sup> David Hills, “The Pleasure of Ulteriority: Four Essays on Verbal Metaphor,” (Ph. D. diss., Princeton University, 2004), 185.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 187-188.

So far, there seems to be very little left that one can definitively say is a property of a metaphor. Yet, it seems that there is still one property I mentioned of metaphor which there is no argument against, that metaphors are used to show a resemblance between a subject and object. Or to put it in another way, metaphors are used in order to get the hearer to see the subject "in a different light." I think this is the main aspect of any theory of metaphor, and it is one that should be accepted. This feature is what a metaphor actually does, so one would be hard-pressed to find someone who didn't agree with this particular aspect.

Much philosophical work is currently being done on this particular aspect of metaphor. This is not surprising, given that people are more interested in what a metaphor is doing rather than its relation to other figurative speech acts or how people discern a metaphor as being a metaphor when they hear them. This is not to say that these aren't important aspects of metaphor; I hope to shed some light at certain points in this paper on a metaphor's relation to similes and how one might go about interpreting a metaphor. However, much of the work being done here will be on issues which derive from the purpose of metaphors, i.e. what one does when he utters a metaphor.

It is generally thought that when one utters a metaphor, he does so to communicate to the hearer, and much work is presently being done in philosophy examining the communicable aspects of metaphor. Such research has only been done relatively recently in contemporary philosophy as metaphors were not always thought to be communicable. According to Ted Cohen, logical positivists thought that metaphors did not have any communicable aspects. As he states, logical positivists thought

metaphors incapable of “(1) any capacity to contain or transmit knowledge; (2) any direct connection with facts; or (3) any genuine meaning.”<sup>5</sup>

With the rejection of logical positivism in contemporary philosophy, theories of metaphor have been proposed which acknowledge metaphors as having the qualities 1-3 mentioned above. Now metaphor is being studied by philosophers of language and aesthetics to determine just how they function. With the increased interest in metaphors, a variety of theories have been proposed which purport to explain how exactly metaphors work, attempting to mold a coherent theory of metaphor which accounts for qualities 1-3.

Donald Davidson’s brute force theory of metaphor doesn’t follow most contemporary metaphorical theorists as he denies the third aspect—that metaphors have meaning.<sup>6</sup> What Davidson is not denying is that metaphors have a literal meaning. Rather, he’s denying that they have an extra non-literal meaning, something which conveys the message, the true purpose, of the metaphor. Davidson explains this basic idea in his article “What Metaphors Mean,” (hereafter WMM), which has been very influential. Davidson’s thesis is that “metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more.”<sup>7</sup> As Max Black states, Davidson’s thesis leads him to adopt three interconnected propositions. The first two are negative claims, in that they focus on what metaphor is *not*, while the last one is Davidson’s positive claim

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<sup>5</sup> Ted Cohen, “Metaphor and the Cultivation of Intimacy,” *On Metaphor*, ed. Sheldon Sacks, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1979), 3. Cohen believes that these attitudes of the logical positivists might stem from writings of modern philosophers such as Locke and Hobbes, both of whom derided metaphor’s communication qualities. Hobbes claimed that metaphors deceived the hearer and therefore could not be considered “true grounds of any ratiocination (Hobbes, pt. 1 ch. 4).” Likewise, Locke believed that metaphor, being an aspect of rhetoric, does nothing but “insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the passion. (Locke, bk. 3, Ch. 10).”

<sup>6</sup> It’s possible Davidson would also disagree with 1, depending on how it’s interpreted. He’d accept the point that we can gain knowledge via a metaphor after interpreting it, but he’d dispute the point that there would be something like a meaning in the metaphor which would contain or transmit knowledge.

<sup>7</sup> Donald Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001), 245.

about what metaphor *is*. First, a speaker says nothing more by the metaphor beyond its literal meaning. Second, the sentence itself contains nothing more than its literal meaning, i.e. there is no ‘metaphorical meaning.’ Finally, the metaphor is simply used by the speaker to draw attention “to a resemblance of two or more things.”<sup>8</sup>

However, Davidson’s article has led theorists to argue that Davidson’s rejection of metaphorical meaning leaves him open to certain criticisms. The most notable example of this is the dead metaphor problem. In order to explain the dead metaphor problem, I need to first explain the standard account of dead metaphor which the problem is based on. A dead metaphor is a metaphor that has acquired an explicit literal meaning, with this new literal meaning being derived from the non-literal of the live metaphor. For example, “*X* is a lion,” is a dead metaphor, as lion has taken on the literal meaning of ‘brave,’ and this meaning was derived from the metaphorical interpretation of the metaphor while it was alive. The standard account of dead metaphors is that what is derived from the metaphorical interpretation that eventually becomes the literal meaning for the dead metaphor just is the non-literal meaning of the metaphor. This then leads into what I am calling the dead metaphor problem. The problem is that given the standard account, the non-literal meaning of the live metaphor becomes the literal meaning of the dead metaphor. Any account that denies that metaphors have non-literal meanings then are unable to explain how dead metaphors form. As Elisabeth Camp and Marga Reimer state, Davidson’s theory is problematic “because it seems as if dead metaphors could acquire their secondary literal meanings if they were previously used to communicate those very meanings. And this would seem to conflict with [Davidson’s]

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<sup>8</sup> Max Black, “How Metaphors Work: A Reply to Donald Davidson,” *Critical Inquiry* 6 (1979): 131-143, 136. I will explain these propositions further in Chapter 2 when I explicate Davidson’s brute force theory of metaphor.

basic commitment: that speakers do not mean anything by metaphors.”<sup>9</sup> This is the predicament Davidson himself then finds himself in. There is nothing in Davidson’s theory of metaphor that can account for metaphors such as “Richard is a lion.”

Metaphors such as these are dead. There is a substantial amount of dead metaphors that are used in conversation, and if Davidson’s account cannot explain how these metaphors acquire a meaning, which seems to presently be the case, then one would have to have serious reservations in adopting his theory of metaphor.

My thesis is that the dead metaphor problem cannot be considered a problem for Davidson’s brute force theory, and it is rather a problem for theorists who posit metaphors having any type of non-literal meaning. Furthermore, once this is shown, I will explain that the dead metaphor problem is evidence that any type of account that advocates a non-literal meaning will be flawed. This is due to the dead metaphor problem being based on the standard account of metaphor. The standard account of dead metaphor is problematic in that it is a substantial systemic account which attempts to encompass the entire range of metaphors; something which I will argue cannot be done, as metaphors as a whole are non-systemic. I will then explain how the other prominent theories of metaphor mentioned here also fail as reasonable theories of metaphor due to this same problem, i.e. applying systemic features to something that is non-systemic.

In order to show why the reader should be interested in a brute force account of metaphor to begin with, I will first give background on other prominent theories of metaphor along with Davidson’s. I will then explain why these other theories do not work. Finally, I will explain how Davidson’s theory bypasses the dead metaphor

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<sup>9</sup> Elisabeth Camp and Marga Reimer, “Metaphor,” *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Language*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 845-863, 858.

problem. In Chapter 2, I will explain the four theories of metaphor which I find to be the most prominent: comparativism, interaction theory, Gricean theory, and Davidson's brute force theory. In Chapter 3, I will put forth criticisms to each theory and will show how all but Davidson's theory succumb to the problems posed against them. In Chapter 4, I will explain how Davidson can get around the dead metaphor problem. In Chapter 5, I will take an argument from Chapter 4, that the standard account of dead metaphor is flawed because it attempts to provide a substantial systemic account of how metaphors become dead, and show that the reason the other metaphorical theories ultimately fail is due to them being substantially systemic. I will conclude that only a theory which places minimal constraints on metaphorical interpretation, like Davidson's, is sufficient.

## Chapter 2: Prominent Theories of Metaphor

In order to properly put Davidson's theory into context of the surrounding literature on metaphor, I first need to explain the two theories which have dominated the philosophical discussion on metaphor in the latter half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. There are two distinct types of metaphorical theories, both of which contain multiple sub-theories. These are semantic and use theories. The essential idea of semantic theory is that the metaphor itself means something, while a use theory proposes that a speaker *uses* the metaphor to show or mean something else. There are two types of semantic theories I will be examining in this paper: comparativism and interaction theory. Likewise, there are two types of use theories I will examine in this paper: Gricean theory and Davidson's brute force theory.

### 2.1. Semantic Theories of Metaphor

In a semantic theory of metaphor, there is a specific meaning of a metaphor, and that meaning is located within the metaphorical sentence itself. While the non-literal meaning of the metaphor might be hard to explain or even comprehend, the metaphor itself has a determinate non-literal meaning. In essence, a metaphorical *sentence* has two meanings: a literal meaning and a non-literal meaning. I like to think of this theory of metaphor as being where the speaker of the metaphor, even if he is creating the metaphor, recognizes that it has a certain non-literal meaning, and uses that particular metaphor because it means what he wants to convey. In order to discuss the smaller details of these theories it

would be better to explain them as they show up in their theories. There are two main semantic theories of metaphor which need to be discussed.

### 2.1.1. Comparativism

The first theory is what Camp and Reimer call *simile theory*<sup>10</sup> and what David Hills calls *comparativism*.<sup>11</sup> It is the oldest theory of metaphor, with supporters dating back to Aristotle<sup>12</sup> and Quintilian.<sup>13</sup> There are two types of comparativism which I will be discussing in this section: literal comparativism and Fogelin's comparativism. The main difference between the two is that for literal comparativism, what the figurative (non-literal meaning) is the same as the literal meaning of the simile. There is no figurative meaning of the simile. However, in Fogelin's comparativism, both metaphors and similes have figurative and literal meanings. This is the main difference between the two. Fogelin contends that the flaw in literal comparativism is due to Black misunderstanding comparativism in his book *Models and Metaphors*, one of the earliest contemporary writings which provides a substantial account for how metaphor works.<sup>14</sup>

Literal comparativism, as it is usually construed within the contemporary literature, is a relatively simple theory of metaphor, as it purports that metaphor functions like a simile but as a compressed form of it. Therefore, *A is B* (metaphor) functions in exactly the same way as *A is like B* (simile). The use of metaphor seems to be stylistic as metaphors and their corresponding similes have identical content.

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<sup>10</sup> Camp and Reimer, 851.

<sup>11</sup> Hills, 123.

<sup>12</sup> See Aristotle, *Poetics* 1410b, 11-21. Citation from David Hills.

<sup>13</sup> See Quintilian, *Institutio Oratoria* VIII, vi, 8-9. Citation from David Hills.

<sup>14</sup> Robert Fogelin, *Figuratively Speaking*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 33.

Under this theory, by reducing metaphors to a type of simile, metaphorical meaning and metaphorical truth are explained “in terms of literal meaning and truth.”<sup>15</sup> Similes have literal meanings and truth conditions because they are making an explicit connection. As authors on metaphor have often noted, similes are trivially true because everything is like everything in some fashion. The difference between metaphors and similes is that metaphors are conveyed in a sentence which interpreted literally is typically false, which makes the connection between *A* and *B* implicit, while the connection between *A* and *B* in a simile is explicitly stated.

Fogelin’s theory is more complex, and needs more explanation. Fogelin contends that similes, like metaphors, have *figurative* meanings which are distinct from their literal meanings. Fogelin’s problem with literal comparativism is that it takes the fact that similes are always literally true, since everything is like everything else, and conflates that with the simile’s figurative meaning. However, Fogelin contends the *literal* meaning of the simile only says as much as a literal meaning of a metaphor. The literal meaning of “Juliet is like the sun,” simply is that Juliet is like the sun in some way. *How* Juliet is like the sun is not part of the literal meaning. Fogelin’s main objection with his account of comparativism is to correct the flaw he perceives in literal comparativism and show that metaphors and similes both have figurative meanings. However, Fogelin will assert that the difference between a metaphor and simile is merely aesthetic. There is no difference in content between the figurative meaning of a metaphor and simile. If one recalls the intuitive theory of metaphor mentioned in the introduction, Fogelin is intent on arguing for the intuitive idea that the only difference between metaphors and similes is the use of ‘like’ or ‘as’ in a simile, i.e. only a grammatical difference.

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<sup>15</sup> Camp and Reimer, 851.

Because Fogelin gives an account of metaphor and similes that focus on figurative rather than literal meanings, he needs to explain how these meanings are to be discerned. His solution is to posit a system whereby the salient features of object *B* in the simile *A* is like *B* (or the metaphor *A* is *B*) is compared to object *A*.<sup>16</sup> He suggests that the features of *B* which are important to determining the simile's meaning are the salient features of *B*. Fogelin admits that salience isn't a well-defined concept. He likens the idea of salience to the "distinctive features" of an object.<sup>17</sup> Fogelin mentions Amos Tversky describing two important ways in which an object's features might be salient, intensive and diagnostic. Intensive might be described as the prominent features of an object, while diagnostic focuses more on those features used to classify an object. Fogelin concludes with saying that salience can also be context-driven.<sup>18</sup> This means that not all the salient features of *B* necessarily must be compared to *A*. Take the simile "Juliet is like the sun." The meaning would be found by taking the salient characteristics of the sun and relating them to Juliet. Certain characteristics, like being a gigantic gaseous body located millions of miles away from Earth are disregarded, while other characteristics, like Juliet making Romeo happy, are kept. The meaning of the simile would be these salient characteristics. Therefore, the metaphor, "Juliet is the sun," would then be interpreted as the simile "Juliet is like the sun."

Comparativism has certain advantages as a metaphorical theory, and both literal and Fogelin's comparativism have unique advantages, as well. First, comparativism supports the intuition that metaphors mean something, and that they have a truth value. After all, when someone states that "Juliet is the sun," the hearer feels inclined to say that

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<sup>16</sup> Ibid., 78-83.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 64.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., 67.

this metaphor means something and that “Yes, it is true,” or “No, it is false.” Metaphors are seen as quite able of not only communicating truthful propositions but also certain meanings which can only be conveyed through metaphors. This intuition seems to be a driving force for many metaphor scholars, and any theory which can account for this metaphor is one that is likely to be held by many.

Another positive aspect of comparativism, regardless of which type, is that it reflects the intuition that metaphors and similes are not that different. After all, it looks like metaphor and simile have the same goal, which is to show similarities between two objects or to put it in another way, to get someone to notice something about one object by comparing it to another. Furthermore, metaphor and simile are separated by only one word, whether it be ‘like’ or ‘as.’ There does not seem like there is much of a difference between “Juliet is the sun,” and “Juliet is *like* the sun.” This often leads to accounts where the difference between metaphor and simile is simply aesthetic. For example, Fogelin states that the difference between similes and metaphors is that metaphors generally have more of a ‘force’ than do similes. What Fogelin means by ‘force’ here can be a vague concept, but it has something to do with the aesthetics of the metaphor, i.e., force relates to the emotive aspect of recognizing and comprehending a metaphor rather than what it is someone comprehends after recognizing a metaphor. This idea can be seen in the reasons Fogelin gives for why metaphors have more ‘force’ than do similes.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> Fogelin’s use of the word force as meaning ‘metaphorical force’ should not be confused with the use of force in terms like ‘illocutionary force’ or ‘perlocutionary force.’ Metaphorical force here simply is how a person appreciates the aesthetic qualities of a simile or metaphor. It does sound similar to the ‘perlocutionary force’ since this, like metaphorical force, is based on an utterance’s effects on the hearer. However, similes and metaphors have the same cognitive content in Fogelin’s view, so they should have the same perlocutionary force on the hearer. For example, a hearer who was frightened by a particular speech act (which would be the perlocutionary force) should still be frightened by the speech act if there is

First, metaphors have more 'force' than similes because of the brevity of the metaphor. This is because metaphors can be reformulated into many different grammatical sentences while a simile cannot. As Fogelin mentions, even though there is not much difference between "Achilles is a lion" (metaphor) and "Achilles is like a lion" (simile), there is a big difference between "The lion leapt" (metaphor) and "Achilles is like lion" (simile).<sup>20</sup> Due to its use of 'like' or 'as,' a simile is contained within a certain grammatical structure which metaphor is not, and this allows one to form metaphors in such a way that give them a 'force' not present in similes.

Second, Fogelin contends that metaphors are more startling, and this is due to the fact that the vast majority of metaphors are false.<sup>21</sup> Fogelin asserts that the reader recognizing the metaphor will find it more startling because he must reject the literal reading of a metaphor "in favor of a reading as an implicit comparison."<sup>22</sup> Essentially, the metaphor is startling because it's recognized that it is literally false and must be interpreted in another way. This point seems to imply that it is not the contents of the metaphor itself that are startling, but rather our realization that a metaphor must be interpreted some other way than literally.

An added advantage of literal comparativism is that it can bypass a particular problem that can affect all theories of metaphor. This is the paraphrase problem.<sup>23</sup> The paraphrase problem is where metaphors cannot be concisely paraphrased without losing their 'metaphorical meaning.' This is considered to be a problem because as Davidson

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a slight change in grammatical content without any change in cognitive content. However, it is because there is a change in grammatical content between metaphors and similes that give metaphors more 'force' than similes.

<sup>20</sup> Fogelin, 27.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>23</sup> I will discuss in Chapter 3 how the paraphrase problem negatively affects many of the prominent theories of metaphor.

points out, if a metaphor really does have a metaphorical meaning, it should be possible that we should be able to convey the meaning in other words.<sup>24</sup> Essentially, it is problematic that we can know the meaning of the metaphor, but yet be unable to convey or explain this meaning through any other means than by the metaphor. For example, take the metaphor “Juliet is the sun.” Now, try to say what the metaphor means. Proponents of the paraphrase problem will explain that one will start listing off what they notice due to the metaphor, given that this seems to be what the metaphor means. However, what one notices due to the metaphor can go on ‘forever,’ and therefore, metaphors are not amenable to paraphrase. If metaphors really did have a meaning, then they should be open to paraphrase, as paraphrase is merely re-stating something (something with meaning) in a different way.

Literal comparativism does not have trouble with the paraphrase problem because it explicitly states the connection between *A* and *B*, and therefore is literally true because “everything is like everything [else].”<sup>25</sup> Essentially, the ‘metaphorical meaning’ of the metaphor is the literal meaning of the simile. Therefore, we don’t have two types of meanings from a metaphor, where one (metaphorical meaning) is irreducible to another (literal) because in comparativism, there is only the literal meaning of the simile.

Considering that Fogelin doesn’t hold that the figurative meaning of the metaphor is the same as the literal meaning of the simile, he attempts to bypass the paraphrase problem by contending that the figurative meaning of the metaphor can be irreducible to a literal paraphrase, thus making a distinction between the two types of meaning, i.e.

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<sup>24</sup> Davidson “What Metaphors Mean,” 261.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 254.

there is something different between the figurative meaning of the metaphor and a literal meaning that accounts for the irreducibility of the figurative to the literal.<sup>26</sup>

### 2.1.2. Interaction Theory

I will now turn to the second semantic theory under consideration, which is also has a couple different names. The first is interaction theory, a term coined by Max Black,<sup>27</sup> and semantic twist theory.<sup>28</sup> Hills describes interaction theory as follows:

When we resort to metaphor, some salient word or phrase, the *focus*, undergoes a reconstrual that is induced and in some sense demanded by its immediate verbal surroundings, the *frame*...Metaphor results from some kind of tension between the literal meaning or content of the focus and the literal meaning or content of the frame, a tension which is relieved or at least lessened when the focus undergoes metaphorical reconstrual.<sup>29</sup>

Under this theory, there is a tension between the literal meaning of the metaphor and the focus of the metaphor, which is the part of the sentence which is reconstrued metaphorically.

Camp and Reimer explain that there are two central theses to this theory. First, metaphors have a ‘cognitive content.’ Cognitive content is a term that is often used in the literature of metaphor as another way of stating that metaphors have a metaphorical meaning, although cognitive content is not necessarily the same as metaphorical meaning. Cognitive content can be anything which is perceived or learned, and metaphors are one type of vehicle which supposedly conveys cognitive content.

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<sup>26</sup> Fogelin, 37.

<sup>27</sup> See Max Black, *Models and Metaphors: Studies in Language and Philosophy*, (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966).

<sup>28</sup> Hills, 147. I’ll refer to this as interaction theory or semantic interaction theory throughout the paper, since it seems to be the more commonly used name of the two.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 147-48.

Second, this meaning is ‘produced’ by the interaction between “different cognitive systems.”<sup>30</sup> Given this, it is easy to combine Black’s thoughts on interaction theory along with Camp and Reimer’s in order to give a fuller account of interaction theory. In a metaphor, there is a tension between the *focus*, the literal utterance reconstrued metaphorically, and the *frame*, the literal utterance that surrounds the focus. In order to resolve this tension, the focus and frame ‘interact,’ and while the frame preserves its literal meaning, the focus takes on a new metaphorical meaning which is a result of this interaction.<sup>31</sup> For example, in “Juliet is the sun,” the focus would be “the sun,” while the frame would be the literal phrase which surrounds the focus. Upon hearing “Juliet is the sun,” the hearer would notice the tension between the focus and the frame of the metaphor, as the metaphor literally construed would be absurd.<sup>32</sup> In order to relieve the tension between the focus and the frame, the two ‘interact’ where the focus is reconstrued metaphorically in order to relieve the tension within the metaphorical sentence itself. Therefore, in order to relieve the tension caused by the focus in “Juliet is the sun,” the hearer reinterprets the focus metaphorically.

Of course, the question remains how the hearer should reinterpret the focus, i.e. how does the interaction between frame and focus work. Black states there are three ways in which the focus and the frame interact with each other. First, the tension between the frame and focus will cause the hearer to think of other properties that belong to the focus. Second, he will then construct an interpretation of the metaphor by using

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<sup>30</sup> Camp and Reimer, 853.

<sup>31</sup> Hills, 153.

<sup>32</sup> In the case of “Juliet is the sun,” the tension the metaphor produces is caused because the metaphor is literally false, which is the case with most metaphors. However, as mentioned in Chapter 1, metaphors that are literally true could also have this tension in that the hearer would recognize such a metaphor literally construed to be trite or uninformative in a conversation, such as the metaphor “Business is business.”

the metaphorical properties of the focus, which allows the hearer to ‘fit’ a group of implications based on the reconstrual of the focus onto the metaphorical sentence, i.e., this is what is generally considered to be interpreting the metaphorical utterance ‘metaphorically.’ Finally, this change in the view on metaphor also causes the hearer to see the literal meaning of the focus itself differently.<sup>33</sup> To sum up, the tension between the frame and the focus causes the hearer to pick out certain qualities to use to reinterpret the focus in order to make the metaphor make sense. This reconstrual of the metaphor also then leads to the hearer to see the focus itself in a new light, with the qualities of the primary subject (the frame) ‘rubbing off’ on the secondary subject (the focus).

Yet, how does the interaction as mentioned in the second step work? Black's answer is that it occurs through the interaction of conceptual systems whereby the conceptual system associated with *B* in “*A* is *B*” interacts with the system associated with *A*. Black calls these conceptual systems the *system of associated commonplaces*.<sup>34</sup> This system of associated commonplaces is a system whereby *B* acts as a filter on *A*,<sup>35</sup> and “filters our thoughts about the ‘system’ associated with *A*, thereby generating a metaphorical meaning for the whole sentence.”<sup>36</sup>

An example might better illustrate how this works. Consider again the metaphor “Juliet is the sun.” Here's how one might go through the process of figuring out what “Juliet is the sun” in an interaction theory of metaphor:

- (S1) The sun is very bright;
- (S2) whose brightness outshines everything;
- (S3) and lights up everything it touches.

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<sup>33</sup> Max Black, “More About Metaphor,” *Metaphor and Thought*, ed. Andrew Ortony, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed., (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 28.

<sup>34</sup> Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 40.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>36</sup> Camp and Reimer, 853.

First, certain properties of the sun are brought to mind by the speaker, as seen above, who then takes these new properties and uses them to interpret what the metaphor means, by combining the properties mentioned above with the primary subject of the metaphor.

- (J1) Juliet is a joyful person;
- (J2) more so than those around her;
- (J3) and makes her loved ones happy.<sup>37</sup>

Then, these properties are compared back to the primary subject, which then gives us the metaphorical meaning of "Juliet is the sun." Black's belief that the primary and secondary subjects being recognized as *systems* is shown in the example above. The hearer takes the system of commonplaces he's associated with *B* (the sun) and then synthesizes it with the system he has associated with *A* (Juliet); he is not just taking the qualities of the sun and matching them onto Juliet. If this was the case, the hearer would be matching up qualities indiscriminately, e.g., Juliet might be said to have the quality of being large and gaseous, something she is assuredly not, or Romeo might have been more reluctant to proclaim his love for Juliet. Essentially, the interaction of the systems explains the contextual meaning of the metaphor. Once the systems interact, they produce the appropriate metaphorical meaning. That is why "Juliet is the sun," cannot mean "Juliet is large and gaseous," for the system "Juliet," does not contain these qualities; however, only those pertinent qualities which both *A* and *B* share will be given as the metaphorical meaning.

To explain Black's third criterion, that the frame of the metaphor also bestows some of its qualities onto the focus after the metaphor has been interpreted, I will use the

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<sup>37</sup> This method of metaphorical interpretation taken from Black, "More About Metaphor," 29.

metaphor “Man is a wolf.” Immediately, certain commonplaces will come to mind. Wolves are apex predators, work together, vicious, intimidating, etc. These are the ‘commonplaces,’ of wolves. We will then use these to filter our system of *A*, so that we then come upon the metaphorical meaning of such a metaphor being something like “Man is an apex predator, he works together with other men, and can at times be vicious and intimidating.” However, Black would then go on to say that our use of the metaphor has not only changed the way we see the primary subject, man, but also the way we see the secondary subject, the wolf. The wolf will take on human qualities, as well, as the comparer won't be able to help but see both subjects in a different light.

This last phase of interaction mentioned by Black I do not find problematic, but I also do not find it essential to interaction theory. Interaction theory sets out to find the meaning of the metaphor, and this last phase of interaction, where the secondary subject 'receives' properties from the physical subject, does nothing to bring out the meaning. At best, it is an aftereffect of the interpretation of the metaphor which is given by the hearer. It is simply something he notices once he discerns the meaning of the metaphor. At worst, it is nonexistent. Consider the case of "Juliet is the sun." It is quite easy to see under the interaction theory how Juliet *is* the sun, but it is unclear why then the sun must then be seen as having taken on qualities from Juliet.

More needs to be said on "associated commonplaces." What can be considered to be called a ‘commonplace’ for an object has to be something ‘cultural,’ in that these must be commonly held beliefs by members of the same culture. It does not matter whether these beliefs be wrong, overstated, etc., it only matters that these are the expressions that are commonly thought of when such a metaphor is evoked. As John Searle notes, even

though gorillas are in fact docile creatures, the metaphor “Richard is a gorilla,” might mean something like “Richard is nasty and violent,” even though gorillas are not nasty or violent.<sup>38</sup> This metaphor would be comprehensible because these ‘commonplaces’ of nastiness and violence are what are “freely and readily evoked” when such a metaphor is uttered.<sup>39</sup>

Interaction theory has many of the same advantages that comparativism has. Like comparativism, interaction theory accounts for the intuition that metaphors are capable of conveying cognitive content to the hearer. Like Fogelin’s comparativism, it also bypasses the paraphrase problem by holding metaphorical meaning to be irreducible to a literal paraphrase. Black seems to have realized the predicament the paraphrase problem put his theory in. So his solution was simply to delineate his non-literal (metaphorical) meaning from literal meaning. Therefore, it’s no surprise that metaphors cannot be paraphrased because paraphrasing has to do with rephrasing one literal statement with another literal statement. One cannot paraphrase a non-literal meaning with literal statements because non-literal meanings are different from literal meanings. Essentially, non-literal meanings are not amenable to *literal* paraphrase. It also boasts the added advantage that since it does not consider metaphors to be similes, it does not need to account for the criticism of comparativism that some metaphors cannot be put into simile form.

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<sup>38</sup> John Searle, “Metaphor,” *Pragmatics: A Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 519-539, 535.

<sup>39</sup> Black (1966), 40.

## 2.2. Use Theories of Metaphor

In the second half of Chapter 2, I will now focus on the two prominent use theories of metaphor: Gricean Theory and Davidson's Brute Force theory. As I mentioned earlier, the definition of a use theory is that the metaphor is used to get the hearer to notice something else. In the case of Gricean theory, the metaphor is used to get the hearer to notice something else, namely what the speaker means in uttering the metaphor. In brute force theory, the metaphor is used to get the hearer to notice a resemblance between the subject and the object of the metaphor.

### 2.2.1. Gricean Theory of Metaphor

Gricean has been referred to as “Gricean Theory,” (due to it being based on the work of H.P. Grice)<sup>40</sup> “Pragmatic Twist”,<sup>41</sup> or simply “pragmatic theory of metaphor.”<sup>42</sup> Camp and Reimer state that its “central claim is that understanding a metaphor just is understanding what a speaker intends to communicate by means of it, where communication is analyzed in Gricean terms.”<sup>43</sup> Essentially, this pragmatic theory of metaphor focuses solely on what the speaker meant by the metaphor, and how he *uses* it to mean something else. Under this theory, the non-literal meaning of the metaphor is located within the *speaker*, rather than the sentence.

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<sup>40</sup> Camp and Reimer, 855.

<sup>41</sup> Hills, 122. I'll refer to it here as Gricean Theory after its creator.

<sup>42</sup> Gricean theory is actually a type of pragmatic theory of metaphor, which is itself a type of use theory of metaphor. I do not mention pragmatic theories of metaphor in this thesis because a) I am only discussing Grice's theory and b) Grice's theory is by far the most prominent pragmatic theory, which is why it is often called the 'pragmatic theory of metaphor.'

<sup>43</sup> Camp and Reimer, 855.

The Gricean terms that Camp and Reimer refer to are from Grice's seminal article entitled "Logic and Conversation," which is centered on Grice explaining conversational implicature and the rules which govern it. Essentially, conversational implicature is the speaker's attempt to convey something to the reader without explicitly stating it. In order to determine whether there is something to be implied in a speaker's words, we use the Cooperative Principle (CP).

There are four main maxims in the CP which speakers adhere to in conversation in order that they come across as clear and concise to the hearer. These four maxims are quantity, quality, relation, and manner.<sup>44</sup> The maxim of quantity is to give as much information as required, no more or less. Quality is to say what you believe to be true and do not say anything "for which you lack adequate evidence."<sup>45</sup> Relation is to say something relevant to the conversation. Manner means a variety of things, but most importantly, "be perspicuous," "avoid obscurity of expression," "avoid ambiguity," "be brief," and "be orderly."<sup>46</sup>

If any of these four maxims are broken, then the hearer recognizes that the speaker was attempting to imply something that he had not explicitly stated. Once the hearer realizes that one of these maxims has been seemingly flouted, she then must see what the speaker was attempting to imply. This is because the CP is a 'two-way street.' The hearer also plays a fundamental role in the CP. While the speaker abides by the CP in order that the hearer finds him clear and concise, the hearer also *expects* the speaker to be clear and concise, and the speaker knows the hearer expects this. That's why it's

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<sup>44</sup> H.P. Grice, "Logic and Conversation," *Pragmatics: A Reader*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 305-315, 309.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

possible for the hearer to imply certain things when the maxims of the CP have been exploited.<sup>47</sup>

To show how Grice's system works, I will use an example. Two executives at a company, John and Tom, are discussing the possible promotion to management of an employee, Bill, who John happens to be good friends with. John knows Bill is not yet qualified for the position which he is seeking, but at the same time, does not want to outright dismiss a good friend as a candidate. Instead of telling Tom that Bill is not ready to have the job, John might say "Bill always dresses sharply, and he is very sociable." Now, not dressing appropriately to work or being rude to one's colleagues can certainly stop somebody from getting a promotion, as looking presentable and being sociable are qualities one wants an employee, especially one in a management position. However, if these are one's *only* good qualities, then the person is not obviously capable of holding a management position. Instead of saying something negative about his friend, John implies that Bill is not yet suitable for a management position. He does this by exploiting the maxim of quality, assuming that Tom will realize that John did not give him enough pertinent information regarding Bill's management capabilities, thus assuming that Bill does not have them.

Grice then uses his theory on conversational implicature to explain how metaphor works. Metaphors most often exploit the maxim of quality, "Don't speak anything which you know is false."<sup>48</sup> Grice states:

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<sup>47</sup> Hills points out that the maxims aren't flouted but exploited, because if they are flouted that means we are just breaking them without communicating anything else. When we take part in conversational implicature, we only make it *look* as if we are flouting them, and by doing this we exploit the maxim which enables us to imply something which we had not explicitly stated. See Hills, 215.

<sup>48</sup> This is not the case with metaphors which are literally true (e.g., "No man is an island.") In such cases as this one, this metaphor could violate either the maxim of relation or manner. It could violate the maxim of relation because if a hermit explains how much he enjoys his life of solitude, and his friend's response is

Examples like *You are the cream in my coffee* characteristically involve categorical falsity, so the contradictory of what the speaker has made as if to say will, strictly speaking, be a truism; so it cannot be *that* that such a speaker is trying to get across. The most likely supposition is that the speaker is attributing to his audience some feature or features in respect of which the audience resembles (more or less fancifully) the mentioned substance.<sup>49</sup>

A further example might better show how Grice's theory works. Take the metaphor "Richard is a lion." When this uttered in the context of a conversation, the speaker realizes that such an utterance should not be taken at face-value and realizes that the hearer wanted the speaker to recognize this. In this case, the hearer will recognize that the speaker is exploiting the maxim of quality, as the speaker is obviously not saying what he believes to be true. The hearer then recognizes that she must interpret the speaker as meaning something else beyond the literal interpretation of the metaphorical utterance. From here, she will make a comparison between 'Richard' and 'lions' and determine exactly how Richard is a lion in the sense the speaker was attempting to convey.

The essential difference of Grice's account compared to semantic accounts is that, while all hold metaphors as having a non-literal meaning, Grice focuses on speaker meaning<sup>50</sup> to determine metaphorical meaning rather than sentence meaning. The difference is that semantic theories locate the meaning of a metaphor *within* the sentence, just like a literal meaning. Their contention is that the sentence *itself* takes on this metaphorical meaning. Pragmatic theories locate meaning only within the speaker.

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"No man is an island," then the hermit would know to interpret this metaphorically since such a sentence would not be relevant to the current conversation. Likewise, other cases could be found where a literally true metaphor exploits the maxim of manner.

<sup>49</sup> Grice, 312.

<sup>50</sup> I would like to clarify that when I use the word 'meaning,' in this paper, I mean something a public meaning (e.g. literal meaning), rather than 'speaker meaning,' which I will refer to as such throughout this paper.

While the speaker certainly means something with a metaphor, the metaphorical *sentence* does not have any other meaning other than the literal one.

There are three notable advantages in adopting a Gricean theory of metaphor. First, like semantic accounts, Gricean theory of metaphor also accounts for the intuition that metaphors can be used as communicative devices capable of delivering cognitive content to the hearer. Second, it is able to account for this intuition while being arguably a simpler theory than interaction theory. Interaction theory relies on a complex, vague theory involving a shift in meaning from the literal to the metaphorical. Gricean theory is able to account for the cognitive content of a metaphor by holding it to be whatever the intentions of the speaker are. This leads to the final advantage. Gricean theory of metaphor is situated within a large theory of public language and conversational implicature, as described above, an account which has proven to be largely influential ever since its conception by Grice.

### 2.2.2. Davidson's Brute Force Theory

It is now time to turn to Davidson's theory of metaphor, which Hills also calls the *brute force* theory of metaphor,<sup>51</sup> and which Camp and Reimer call a non-cognitivist theory of metaphor.<sup>52</sup> As mentioned in the introduction, there are three main points in WMM. First, a speaker says nothing more by the metaphor beyond its literal meaning. Second, metaphorical meanings do not exist. Finally, the metaphor is used to get the reader to notice resemblances between *A* and *B*. What should be noted here is that

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<sup>51</sup> Hills, 118.

<sup>52</sup> Camp and Reimer, 857.

relative to the other theories of metaphor already mentioned, Davidson's theory is much simpler. While there may be three main *points* that Davidson wishes to convey in WMM, his *theory* of metaphor is essentially one thing: the third proposition mentioned above. The reason the other two propositions are important to explicate is due to every other prominent theory of metaphor having some type of non-literal meaning, something which Davidson steadfastly denies.

Davidson's first proposition has caused differing accounts regarding its meaning due to its ambiguity. Now, Davidson can be thought to be saying either one of two things with the first proposition. He can be making the strong claim that the metaphor can't and doesn't *mean* anything, or he could be making the weaker claim that the metaphor can't and doesn't have a *truth value*.

While believing that Davidson advocates the strong claim is certainly a feasible option, it doesn't hold up to much scrutiny. The evidence that Davidson denies that a *speaker* can convey propositional content is from a few remarks throughout the article where Davidson seemingly implies that speaker meaning has no place in metaphor.<sup>53</sup> One such comment is where Davidson states "A metaphor doesn't say anything beyond its literal meaning (nor does its maker say anything, in using the metaphor, beyond the literal)."<sup>54</sup> As McGuire notes, the parenthetical remark above can be taken to mean that Davidson does not believe that speaker meaning is part of metaphor, since Davidson states that the speaker 'says nothing' when uttering a metaphor, beyond its literal meaning.

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<sup>53</sup> John Michael McGuire, "Davidson on Meaning and Metaphor: Reply to Rehat," *Philosophia* 31 (2004): 543-556, 547.

<sup>54</sup> Davidson (2001), 247.

The ambiguity of the phrase above rests on the meaning of the word ‘say.’ If one intends to argue that Davidson really denied that the *speaker* cannot mean something when he says a metaphor, one would have to take ‘say’ as being analogous to a speaker’s intention. However, Max Black gives a simpler explanation of what Davidson means when he uses ‘say’ in phrases such as the one above. Black believes that Davidson’s use of ‘say’ here is ‘making a truth-claim’.<sup>55</sup> Under this idea, when someone says a metaphor like “Juliet is the sun” they are not saying that “Juliet is the sun” is true.

Black’s explanation seems to be correct because if Davidson truly meant that ‘say’ was analogous to intention, this is not something he would have left ambiguous. Denying that a speaker means something when uttering a metaphor is an extreme idea, and it is one that would need to be backed up with argument. To casually say this in a passing sentence, as Davidson would have done with the quote above, would be unlikely. If Davidson really was arguing against speaker meaning, one would assume that he’d mention it explicitly and have more than a few vague references to it. Considering the context of WMM, Davidson was not arguing against the concept of speaker meaning, he was simply ignoring it.

Davidson, perhaps aware of this criticism, briefly mentions the role of speaker meaning in a metaphor in a later article. In an article he published after WMM, “Locating Literary Language,” Davidson debunks the idea that he thinks speaker meaning has no place in metaphor. Davidson describes himself as having been ‘stubborn’ in WMM about the word ‘meaning,’ when he really only cared about the “primacy of first meaning,” with first meaning being roughly analogous to literal

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<sup>55</sup> Black, 136.

meaning.<sup>56</sup> Given Davidson's own account, it's hard to say that he advocates the idea that speaker meaning plays no role in metaphor. Davidson's point with this first proposition is whatever the speaker intends to say with the metaphor, it does not have a truth-value, and the reason it does not have a truth-value is directly tied to Davidson's second proposition, that metaphors do not have a meaning.

To understand Davidson's second proposition, background on Davidson's theory of language is needed first. In his book, *Metaphor in Context*, Josef Stern explains why Davidson rejects metaphorical meaning. Stern explains that "Davidson proposes a complex account of communication in terms of speakers' and interpreters' mutual intentions and beliefs,"<sup>57</sup> which leaves no place for secondary meanings such as metaphorical meaning. It might be best to explain why Davidson holds this view by seeing how he got it.

Davidson's theory of language starts with a concept he adopted from W.V. Quine, inscrutability of reference. In explaining Quine's indeterminacy of reference, I will use the same examples and methods he used in his own explication of the concept in his article "Ontological Relativity." Quine starts from a position of radical interpretation, where a field linguist is attempting to interpret an unfamiliar language. The field linguist happens upon an individual, *X*, who represents a heretofore unknown culture. *X* points in the vicinity of a rabbit while exclaiming 'gavagai.' The field linguist, who knows no words in language *y*, would then attempt to learn the word through ostensive definition. Yet, in this particular case of rabbits, the field linguist could just as well interpret 'gavagai' as meaning something like 'rabbit stage' or 'undetached rabbit part,' both also

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<sup>56</sup> Donald Davidson, "Locating Literary Language," *Truth, Language, and History*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 167-181, 173n.

<sup>57</sup> Josef Stern, *Metaphor in Context*, (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 40.

being definitions of 'gavagai' which, along with 'rabbit,' could be ascertained by ostensive means, as every time *X* points at a rabbit, he could also be pointing at a 'rabbit stage,' or an 'undetached rabbit part.' In such a case, we cannot settle the definition of the word 'gavagai' by ostension alone, as there is a problem of individuation, i.e. whatever applies to 'rabbit,' can also be taken to apply to 'rabbit stages' or 'undetached rabbit part.'<sup>58</sup> Quine's point here is that we cannot *know* that 'gavagai' means 'rabbit' rather than something like 'undetached rabbit part,' or 'rabbit stage.'

Quine's inscrutability of reference does not just apply to reference but also to meaning. In the case of above, the field linguist is unsure as to what *X* is referring to in the case of 'gavagai.' Consequently, the meaning of the word 'gavagai' is also indeterminate as since the reference of 'gavagai' is indeterminate, then it follows that the meaning of 'gavagai' is indeterminate since, if we cannot know what *X* is referring to, then we cannot know what he means by 'gavagai.'

Quine's inscrutability of reference also leads into what is termed 'indeterminacy of translation.' Indeterminacy of translation is where there is not one 'true' translation that can be given for a speaker's actions, and depending on the interpretative theory the interpreter chooses to use, multiple translations can be given of the speaker's sentences which are equally reasonable.

Although Quine admits his example is quite contrived and involves a case of radical translation, indeterminacy of translation appears in one's home language, as well.

On this point, Quine states:

Must we equate our neighbor's English words with the same strings of phonemes in our own mouths? Certainly not; for sometimes we do not thus equate them.

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<sup>58</sup> Willard Van Orman Quine, "Ontological Relativity," *Ontological Relativity & Other Essays*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1969), 30.

Sometimes we find it to be in the interests of communication to recognize that our neighbor's use of some word, such as "cool" or "square" or "hopefully," differs from ours, and so we translate that word of his into a different string of phonemes in our idiolect.<sup>59</sup>

Quine's point here is that there are cases where the utterance of some phrases would prove to be indeterminate, whether it is reference or meaning, the latter of which can be seen in cases in words like 'cool' or 'square.' Due to the indeterminate meaning here, the translation of the speaker's utterance is also indeterminate. Quine explains that in such cases, in order to interpret the speaker, we will use what is called "The Principle of Charity."<sup>60</sup> Quine's version of the Principle of Charity is essentially a way to maximize communication between the hearer and the speaker.

Davidson then took Quine's ideas on inscrutability of reference and Principle of Charity and used them to develop his own ideas on language further.<sup>61</sup> Davidson's central theme on language stems from the Principle of Charity, which under Davidson, has two central purposes.

First, one will assume that whatever the speaker utters, he takes his own utterances to be true. Without this first step, communication is impossible, since we would not be able to ascertain the meaning of the speaker's utterances if we did not assume the speaker believed what he himself was saying.<sup>62</sup> As Davidson states, "whether

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 46.

<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 46

<sup>61</sup> For the differences between Davidson and Quine on ideas like inscrutability of reference and Principle of Charity, see Donald Davidson, "The Inscrutability of Reference," *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 227-241.

<sup>62</sup> This is also part of Davidson's conception of truth. For more, see the first three chapters in Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005).

we like or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters.”<sup>63</sup>

Second, the interpreter will maximize understanding between himself and the speaker. To do this, he will interpret the words and thoughts of others in a way that “optimizes agreement” between interpreter and speaker.<sup>64</sup> Davidson believes that the way to do this is for the interpreter to assume that the speaker thinks about the world in the same way that the interpreter herself does. This is not to say that Davidson advocates that speaker and interpreter must agree on beliefs on politics, philosophy, etc. Rather, his point on agreement of beliefs is much more primitive.<sup>65</sup> He believes we must have agreement on beliefs on how we interact with the world around us. A quote might help draw out this point. Davidson states:

The possibility of thought as well as of communication depends, in my view, on the fact that two or more creatures are responding, more or less simultaneously, to input from a shared world, and from each other. We are apt to say that someone responds in ‘the same way’ to, say, wolves. But of course, ‘same’ here means ‘similar.’ Our grounds for claiming that a person finds one wolf similar to another is the fact that the person responds in similar ways to wolves...it is this triangular nexus of causal relations involving the reactions of two (or more) creatures to each other and to shared stimuli in the world that supplies the conditions necessary for the concept of truth to have application.<sup>66</sup>

This “triangular nexus of causal relations” is based on what Davidson has called “Triangulation.” Triangulation is Davidson’s way to explain which kinds of beliefs the interpreter will extrapolate onto the speaker. Imagine a triangle, and at each angle there

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<sup>63</sup> Donald Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme,” *Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001, 183-198, 197.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>65</sup> On this point, J.J.C. Smart states, “Charity in interpretation should initially be applied to rather basic beliefs and desires that we think would be almost universal among humans or, at any rate, are free of either theory or mythology.” See J.J.C. Smart, “Correspondence, Coherence, and Realism,” *The Philosophy of Donald Davidson*, ed. Lewis Hahn, (Chicago: Open Court Publishing, 1999), 119.

<sup>66</sup> Donald Davidson, “Indeterminism and Antirealism,” *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 69-84, 83.

is the interpreter, the speaker, and the world. This symbolizes the way Davidson sees communication and reality. The reason the interpreter and speaker have similar beliefs of the world is because they both share the same world, and consequently the same stimuli. Each of them must also realize that they share similar beliefs on the world around them.<sup>67</sup> By sharing and knowing they share similar beliefs, communication is then possible between speaker and interpreter since both of them will know what the speaker is talking about when he attempts to communicate with the interpreter.

Now, this is the basic understanding of how people communicate with each other in Davidson's account, which leads into his account of meaning. He states:

A theory of truth for a speaker is a theory of meaning in this sense, that explicit knowledge of the theory would suffice for understanding the utterances of that speaker. It accomplishes this by describing the critical core of the speaker's potential and actual linguistic behavior—in effect, how the speaker intends his utterances to be interpreted. The sort of understanding involved is restricted to what we may as well call the literal meaning of the words, by which I mean, roughly, the meaning the speaker intends the interpreter to grasp, whatever further force or significance the speaker may want the interpreter to fathom.<sup>68</sup>

Now, as Josef Stern recognizes, Davidson's account of meaning is based on "mutual intentions and beliefs."<sup>69</sup> In order for a speaker to get his point across to an interpreter, he must get his point across using language that signifies beliefs of which both share. The interpreter, likewise, knows that the speaker will attempt to communicate in such a way as to get the interpreter to understand what the speaker is attempting to convey. Essentially, the speaker knows the interpreter knows that the

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<sup>67</sup> Donald Davidson, "The Second Person," *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 107-121, 121. This could probably be found in a variety of ways, although one important way might be because they share similar responses to stimuli, which Davidson explains in the quote above. This particular aspect of Davidson's account is derived from Dewey's idea that meaning is a property of behavior, which was referenced in Quine, "Ontological Relativity," 27. For the original reference, see John Dewey, *Experience and Nature*, (La Salle: Open Court, 1925), 179.

<sup>68</sup> Donald Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, 53.

<sup>69</sup> Stern, 40.

speaker wants him to understand what the speaker says, and the interpreter knows that the speaker knows this. In order to convey his message, the speaker will use words which have a public meaning (i.e. the literal meanings of words). The literal meanings of language are necessarily tied into the shared beliefs of the interpreter and the speaker. Metaphors do not mean anything beyond its literal meaning, for the supposed meaning of a metaphor is not publicly shared between the speaker and the hearer. What is often called ‘metaphorical meaning’ is simply what the speaker was attempting to convey to the interpreter, by getting him to understand the literal utterance itself, while hoping that the interpreter caught on that he is attempting to use this literal utterance to get the interpreter to notice something else.<sup>70</sup>

Essentially, the problem with non-literal meaning from a Davidsonian standpoint is that the non-literal meaning in a metaphor is private, i.e., it is only known by the speaker himself. Private meanings are problematic as meaning should be a public phenomenon. Therefore, one should be hesitant, as Davidson is, to call anything like the non-literal private meanings that many theorists believe metaphor to be *meaning* anything.

Davidson’s third proposition is the only positive proposition among the three of the article, and it is what Davidson considers metaphor to be. He states “metaphors make us notice aspects of things we did not before; no doubt they bring surprising analogies and similarities to our attention”<sup>71</sup> and “metaphor makes us see one thing as another by

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<sup>70</sup> Of course, one does not need to accept Davidson’s thoughts on language mentioned here to accept his idea that metaphors do not have a non-literal meaning. However, I thought it important to mention it here in order to show the reader how Davidson’s ideas on language affect his ideas on metaphor.

<sup>71</sup> Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” 261.

making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight.”<sup>72</sup> This proposition is directly related to the second proposition, as once Davidson rejects the notion of metaphorical meaning, he must then explain the effects metaphor have on us, which is normally explained by metaphorical meaning.

This third aspect of Davidson’s account also explains how Davidson’s account is also a use theory, albeit different from a pragmatic theory. Unlike pragmatic theory, where the metaphor is used to convey a speaker’s meaning, Davidson believes that metaphor is used to get the hearer to notice something that he had not before. Davidson is not arguing that what the metaphor gets one to notice is not what the speaker intends. Rather, he is arguing that what the metaphor gets one to notice is not *only* what the speaker means. Essentially, Davidson takes the focal point of the metaphor away from the speaker or the sentence and places it squarely with the hearer.

I find the difference between pragmatic and semantic theories with Davidson’s brute force account is that the former theories both define some type of meaning, either metaphorical or speaker, as being essential to understanding a metaphor. Davidson’s theory is not like this. There is nothing to understanding a metaphor beyond its literal meaning. There is nothing essential to a metaphor beyond recognizing this as well as that the metaphorical utterance is being used as a metaphor. Davidson disagrees with Gricean theories in that metaphor is simply “saying one thing and meaning another.”<sup>73</sup> Camp and Reimer explain that Davidson’s account of metaphor resembles “Griceans in denying that the words uttered themselves have any special meaning. They depart from Griceans,

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<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 263.

<sup>73</sup> At least this is true in WMM, although Davidson’s views on metaphor are somewhat different in two later articles, “A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs,” and “Locating Literary Language.” See McGuire.

though, in also denying that there is any determinate propositional thought which the speaker intends to communicate by means of those words.”<sup>74</sup>

Having listed Davidson’s main points in his article, a comprehensive view of his theory on metaphor is still lacking. In order to give such a view, I will examine an analogy Davidson had used in order to explain his conception of metaphor. He states:

There are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor 'means' or 'says'; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste. A metaphor implies a kind and degree of artistic success; there are no unsuccessful metaphors, just as there are no unfunny jokes. There are tasteless metaphors, but these are turns that nevertheless have brought something off, even if it were not worth bringing off or could have been brought off better.<sup>75</sup>

I find the comparison Davidson makes between metaphors and jokes quite revealing on his ideas of what metaphor is like. One of the more interesting points Davidson makes is that all metaphors 'are successful,' in that if someone merely recognizes a metaphor, it is successful. The analogy between it and jokes seems to be as follows. Metaphors by their very nature get us to notice something. Therefore, if we recognize something as a metaphor, it has gotten us to notice something, and is therefore successful. In a similar way, a joke is by definition something that is supposed to be funny. Therefore, if someone recognizes something as a joke, he must then also have thought it to be funny. I think spelling out this analogy further is important.

I believe what Davidson means here is that a joke can certainly be considered unfunny; people can find a joke to be of poor taste and would find it unfunny. Once people figure out a joke, they will also realize what it intended to ‘pull off,’ i.e. an attempt to convey something funny. Davidson’s point is that while one may not find a joke funny, by recognizing a joke as a joke, one must realize that it attempted to convey

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<sup>74</sup> Camp and Reimer, 857.

<sup>75</sup> Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," 245.

something funny. Davidson's point here is that when by recognizing a joke, a person recognizes that it is supposed to be funny, and this is the same with metaphor. By recognizing a metaphor, a person notices a resemblance between the objects in the metaphor.

Davidson is right on his point on metaphors; metaphors by their very definition get us to notice something, although what we might come to notice due to the metaphor we very could find to be tasteless, inane, etc. Not all metaphors are going to be profound. Metaphors are like jokes here in that even if one does not like what the metaphor 'shows' him, he cannot claim he did not notice anything by it, just like someone cannot say a joke is not a joke just because he didn't find it funny.

Now, whatever the metaphors might get us to notice is indeterminate, but once a hearer recognizes a metaphor as a metaphor, he will likewise notice something due to the metaphor. An equally apt analogy Davidson might have used rather than comparing metaphors to jokes was comparing understanding a metaphor to looking at a painting. Both will get us to notice many things, and the amount of things we may notice is limitless. Under Davidson's conception of metaphor, a metaphor might be seen more as a work of art rather than merely a linguistic act.

### Chapter 3: Critical Analysis of Prominent Theories of Metaphor

Now that a basic exposition of the main points of Davidson's article has been given along with other relevant (and competing) theories of metaphor, I will now analyze Davidson's brute force theory alongside the other competing theories of metaphor. I will split each theory up into sections and examine the problems that each theory of metaphor has. The problems I present the other theories besides Davidson's as having are problems I feel cannot be solved or bypassed for holders of those respective theories, unless mentioned otherwise. Consequently, after this section I hope to have persuaded the reader that Davidson's theory seems to be the most promising theory on metaphor. This will then make solving the dead metaphor problem all the more pertinent, given that this is the biggest obstacle facing the most promising theory of metaphor that has so far been given.

#### 3.1. Interaction Theory

Interaction theory has quite a few problems. To begin with, the theory itself is very vague. Many of the terms which Black uses are themselves metaphorical, such as 'interaction,' and 'filtering.'<sup>76</sup> This makes it harder to understand the process by which metaphors are interpreted, as it is then difficult to understand how metaphors 'interact,' and how the 'filtering' process works.

Fogelin offers a scathing criticism of interaction theory which might be partially due to interaction theory's vagueness. Fogelin's criticism of interaction theory is

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<sup>76</sup> Camp and Reimer, 854.

reminiscent of the criticism that comparativism cannot account for all metaphors as not all metaphors can be put into corresponding simile form. Fogelin contends that there are certain metaphors which are unable to be put into Black's 'filtering' process, thus the focus and frame cannot 'interact' with each other.<sup>77</sup> For example, an interaction theorist would be hard-pressed to explain exactly the conceptual systems in John Keats' metaphor "O for a beaker full of the warm south."<sup>78</sup> Although interaction theory seems to be able to cover simpler metaphors, it seems incapable of accounting for more complex metaphors.

In a different criticism, Davidson argues that Black's interaction theory has no explanatory value in clarifying how metaphor works. Davidson explains this point through analogy. "Once we understand a metaphor we can call what we grasp the 'metaphorical truth' and (up to a point) say what the 'metaphorical meaning' is. But simply to lodge this meaning in the metaphor is like explaining why a pill puts you to sleep by saying it has a dormative power."<sup>79</sup> Metaphorical meaning does not have any explanatory value because it can't explain how the metaphor works. The analogy of the sleeping pill is a good one. The problem with saying that a sleeping pill has a dormative power as a way to explain why it works is simply a way of describing the effects of the pill; it is not explaining why it works. Similarly, metaphorical meaning as proposed by Black has no explanatory value. What happens is that the metaphor is interpreted in a particular way; the hearer labels his interpretation to be the meaning of the metaphor. This doesn't *explain* anything about the meaning of the metaphor. Like 'dormative power,' 'metaphorical meaning,' is a *descriptive* phrase, not an *explanatory* phrase. It's

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<sup>77</sup> Fogelin, 104-105.

<sup>78</sup> Example taken from Camp and Reimer, 855.

<sup>79</sup> Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean, 247.

simply another way to describe the effects of the metaphor. But it does nothing to explain these effects. Therefore, the concept of metaphor meaning is one that is vacuous.<sup>80</sup>

Another criticism that needs to be mentioned is a very novel one given by David Hills, which might be called the problem of twice-aptness. I mentioned this type of metaphors in Chapter 1, but I will explain them again here in further detail. Under interaction theory, metaphorical interpretation is originally caused as a ‘last resort,’<sup>81</sup> as the realization that the metaphor must be interpreted metaphorically in order for the utterance to make sense. We interpret a sentence metaphorically because the sentence cannot be interpreted literally. However, Hills states that all metaphors are not interpreted in this manner:

But sometimes a single utterance of a single declarative sentence serves to make two different assertions at the same time. It makes one assertion when we take it in some conversationally pertinent, purely literal way. And it makes a second different assertion when we take it in some conversationally pertinent metaphorical way. We’ll only fully understand the utterance (and the speaker) if we take the utterance both ways and take it (and her) to be making both assertions. I call this phenomenon *twice-aptness*, and it’s a rare but striking feature of the human metaphorical landscape.<sup>82</sup>

There are two types of twice-apt metaphors: punning and non-punning. The example of “This is the true philosopher’s stone” in Chapter 1 is a non-punning type, which I mentioned in the introduction. A great example of the non-punning type is from the Alfred Hitchcock movie *Vertigo*.<sup>83</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> This criticism would also apply to Fogelin’s comparativism, but not to literal comparativism. I place it as a criticism due to interaction theory being the main focus of this criticism in WMM.

<sup>81</sup> Hills, 187.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>83</sup> This example is taken from Hills, 186-187.

In order to understand the metaphor, I'll give the basic plot of the movie. The main character, former cop turned private detective Scotty (Jimmy Stewart), has been hired by a college friend, Gavin Elster (Tom Helmore) to keep tabs on his wife, Madeleine (Kim Novak), who Elster believes is suffering from mental illness. While following Madeleine to the part of San Francisco Bay near the Golden Gate Bridge, he witnesses her jump in the bay in an apparent suicide attempt. After rescuing her, the two eventually fall in love.

However, Scotty eventually takes Madeleine to a mission which she had dreamt of, hoping that by doing so he will be able to stop the nightmares she's been having. After telling Scotty that she loves him, Madeleine rushes to the top of the chapel bell tower. Scotty, who has suffered vertigo due to a traumatic incident from the beginning of the film, is unable to keep up with her. While climbing halfway up the tower, Scotty sees Madeleine plummet from the top of the tower to her death. Scotty is in depression over Madeleine's death for a good deal of time until he sees a woman, Judy Barton (Kim Novak), who looks identical to the now deceased Madeleine. Scotty cajoles her into dating him, and Scotty slowly starts transforming her appearance to become identical to Madeleine's, much to Judy's disgust. Judy goes along with it, however, because who Scotty thought was Madeleine was actually Judy the whole time, and she is willing to put up with this behavior as she fell in love with Scotty while impersonation Madeleine. Elster had hired her to act as a mentally unstable Madeleine, so that when "Madeleine" committed suicide, there would be no questions to the cause of death. Elster had in fact already killed Madeleine. Scotty really did see Madeleine's body plummet from the chapel roof; she was just already dead at the time.

Scotty eventually realizes this deceit when he catches Judy wearing a necklace that had been worn by “Madeleine.” Scotty realizes the deception and takes Judy back to the chapel tower where “Madeleine” jumped to her death. As he takes Judy to the top, Scotty says to her, “You shouldn’t have kept souvenirs from a killing. You shouldn’t have been that...sentimental.” Hills concludes:

On a perfectly acceptable, perfectly pertinent literal reading of Scotty’s sentence the souvenir Judy shouldn’t have kept is the necklace, on a more metaphorical reading of the same sentence it’s Scotty himself. The pertinence of the literal reading in no way prevents the construction of a metaphorical reading based upon it, with the result that Scotty ends up making two different assertions, involving two different assignments of content to the predicate *souvenir*, by means of one and the same sentence.<sup>84</sup>

I do find it essential, as Hill does, that the non-punning type of twice-apt metaphor be understood as both a literal and metaphorical assertion; one cannot simply understand the assertion as only being metaphorical. Of course, it will be harder to determine these types of metaphors as being metaphorical (I doubt I would’ve caught Scotty’s twice-apt metaphor had I watched *Vertigo* before I read Hills).

The final problem I will mention here is that interaction really cannot bypass the paraphrase problem, no matter what solution an interaction theorist provides. Interaction theorists like Black are willing to admit that there is no literal paraphrase of the metaphor which is often a criticism of semantic theories because it is thought that if metaphors have meaning, then we should be able to state this meaning, which is not often the case, since there is no limit to what metaphors bring to our attention.<sup>85</sup> Instead, interaction

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>85</sup> Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” 263. Although the following criticism mentions only interaction theory, it also applies to Fogelin’s comparativism, since it holds the metaphorical (and simile) sentence has a non-literal meaning and that this meaning is irreducible to paraphrase. As mentioned earlier, literal comparativism is immune to the paraphrase problem, but given the other criticisms leveled against it in the previous chapter, is hardly a satisfactory theory. I am of Fogelin’s position that the figurative meaning of

theorists try to turn this point around by saying that metaphorical meaning is “irreducible” to a literal paraphrase.<sup>86</sup> On this point, Black states that a paraphrase of literal statements “will not have the same power to inform and enlighten” as the metaphor in its original form” and that “the literal paraphrase inevitably says too much—and with the wrong emphasis.” This is because the implications of a metaphor “previously left for a suitable reader to educe for himself, with a nice feeling for their relative priorities and degrees of importance, are now presented explicitly as though having equal weight.”<sup>87</sup>

This solution seems problematic considering that meaning is a public phenomenon, and as such, anything that has meaning should be easily paraphrased. Regarding Black’s solution, Davidson states, “why should it be that when we try to get explicit about what [the metaphor] means, the effect is so much weaker...Why does Black think a literal paraphrase ‘inevitably says too much’...Why inevitably? Can’t we, if we are clever enough, come as close as we please?”<sup>88</sup>

Davidson’s questioning of Black’s solution to the problem of paraphrase implies a substantial criticism to Black’s account. Black’s solution is problematic in that it is too vague. It explains that metaphorical meaning is irreducible, but it does not describe how this is possible. For a word to be able to mean something, it must be in the ‘public lexicon,’ in a manner of speaking. Davidson’s point is that if metaphors did have some type of meaning, we should be able to paraphrase the metaphor in some way, as if metaphors have meaning, people should have the cognitive resources to come up with an

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the metaphor is not the literal meaning of the simile, and that the simile, like the metaphor, has both a figurative and literal meaning.

<sup>86</sup> Camp and Reimer, 853.

<sup>87</sup> Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 46.

<sup>88</sup> Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” 260.

intended paraphrase, since the meaning should already be in the ‘public lexicon’ and thus, the paraphrase should convey the meaning of the metaphor.

Because such a thing cannot be done, Davidson believes that the lack of the ability to paraphrase is an argument in his favor. If metaphors do have meaning, they should be able to be paraphrased, as sentences with literal meanings can be paraphrased in other similar sentences, without a loss of cognitive content. The fact that metaphors cannot be paraphrased is evidence that Davidson’s account is correct, as it is the only one which “accounts for the facts that many metaphors don’t easily admit of literal paraphrase, and their ‘import’ seems to be different in kind from that of typical literal utterances.”<sup>89</sup>

### 3.2. Comparativism

Comparativism is not without its own set of problems.<sup>90</sup> The most noted criticism of comparativism is that not all metaphors can be translated into similes. Of course, many metaphors seem to be easily put into simile form, such as “Sally is a block of ice,” to “Sally is *like* a block of ice.” Nothing here seems to be different other than that the metaphor is an abbreviated form of the simile. Whatever is communicated by the metaphor seems to be also communicated via the simile. However, there are other metaphors which do not seem capable of having a counterpart simile.

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<sup>89</sup> Camp and Reimer, 858.

<sup>90</sup> These problems apply both to Fogelin’s comparativism and literal comparativism.

Take this example from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*. "When the blood burns, how prodigal the soul/Lends the tongue vows." William Lycan explains that to turn such a metaphor into a simile would result in an interpretation like this:

A first pass might be: When *x*, which is like a person's blood, does something that resembles burning, how prodigally *y*, which is like a person's soul, does something similar to lending some things that are vowelike to *z*, which resembles a person's tongue.

Lycan then quips, "We are not much wiser."<sup>91</sup>

This criticism can not only be seen in literary metaphors, but also in simple metaphors, too. Sam Glucksberg and Catrinel Haught give a few cases where it seems odd to put certain metaphors into simile form. Here are two examples. Due to the Enron scandal, a reporter made the metaphorical claim concerning another company with corrupt practices, stating that "WorldCom is the next Enron." Likewise, when there was a snafu in the 2004 Florida presidential elections, a commentator stated that "Florida is headed toward being the next Florida." Glucksberg and Haught explain that while these metaphors make perfect sense, it would seem odd to say their simile counterparts "WorldCom will be like the next Enron," and "Florida is headed toward being like the *next* Florida."<sup>92</sup> Neither seems to make too much sense.

There are countless cases where the metaphor cannot be adequately put into simile form, and this seems to indicate that comparativism is a flawed theory for it can't account for many metaphors which do not have a counterpart simile.

Even if one finds that comparativism can overcome this criticism, I believe that comparativism makes two general assumptions which I find to be mistaken. First,

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<sup>91</sup> This example was reprinted in Camp and Reimer, 853. The original article is in William Lycan, *Philosophy of Language: A Contemporary Introduction*, (New York: Routledge, 2000), 217.

<sup>92</sup> Sam Glucksberg and Catrinel Haught, "On the Relation Between Metaphor and Simile: When Comparison Fails, *Mind & Language*, 21 (2006): 360-378, 365-366.

comparativists often assume that the only difference between metaphor and simile is one of aesthetics and not of meaning, with Fogelin being one example of a comparativist who holds this belief. However, this assumption belies the importance of the aesthetic qualities. This can be seen by looking at the basic argument for comparativism:

1. The only grammatical difference between metaphors and similes is that metaphors are abbreviated forms of their counterpart similes.
2. The grammatical difference between similes and metaphors does not change the meaning of a simile from its counterpart metaphor. Metaphors and their counterpart similes both mean the same thing, i.e. they communicate the same thing.
3. The grammatical difference between similes and metaphors can change the aesthetics between a metaphor and its counterpart simile, so metaphors and their counterpart similes can be different aesthetically.
4. Therefore, the only difference between the two is aesthetic.

I take something like this to be the basic argument for comparativism, and such an argument ignores the importance of the aesthetic component of the metaphor. Imagine if premise 2 was false. Nobody would say that metaphors and similes were the same thing because they wouldn't have the same non-literal meanings. Yet, premise 3 explicitly states that there is an aesthetic difference between the two, but even though this premise is accepted by comparativists, none think that this changes the fact that metaphors and similes are essentially the same linguistic device. By admitting this, comparativists assume that the communicative aspect of metaphors is the only important part of the metaphor, for if aesthetics were taken into account, metaphors and similes would be thought of as different devices, simply on aesthetic grounds. Given the aesthetic qualities that metaphors and similes both have, there seems to be a problem with the idea that these are the same phenomenon when it is widely agreed that a metaphor and its corresponding simile have different aesthetic properties. At the very least, further

explanation would be needed as to why metaphors and similes can be different if they have a different meaning but cannot be different if they have different aesthetic qualities.

Regarding the argument for comparativism just laid out, Sam Glucksberg and Catrinel Haught recently published a study that questions the validity of premise 2, that metaphors and similes mean the same thing. Glucksberg and Haught explain that in many cases, the metaphorical interpretation given by a group will be quite different from the interpretation given for its corresponding simile. They note:

For the expression ‘some ideas are like diamonds,’ typical paraphrases included responses such as ‘some ideas are *rare* and *desirable*,’ ‘some ideas are *rare* and *glitter*,’ and ‘some ideas are very *valuable*.’ Note that the italicized properties...are all properties of the literal ‘diamond.’ In contrast, metaphors tend to evoke emergent properties, properties that inhere in the superordinate category of [the metaphorical ‘diamonds’] as valuable entities, but not to literal diamonds. Typical paraphrases of this kind were ‘some ideas are brilliant and *insightful*’ and ‘some ideas are fantastic and *creatively very unique*.<sup>93</sup>

The interpretations given for the metaphor are superordinate, i.e. at a higher level, than those interpretations given with the simile. The interpretations of the metaphor, as Glucksberg and Haught point out, have nothing to do with the literal diamonds, unlike the interpretations of the similes. They claim that the reason for this is that similes are comparisons while metaphors are actually categorizations, which I mentioned earlier. The difference here is that in a simile, the subject is compared to the literal object, while in a metaphor, the subject matches up with a category that the object is in. For example, in “My lawyer is like a shark,” lawyer would be compared to the literal shark, while in a metaphor lawyer matches up with the relevant shark category, predator.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Glucksberg and Haught, 364.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 362. Glucksberg and Haught clarify that metaphors are not necessarily always categorizations, and can occasionally be comparisons.

Furthermore, the use of adjectives can often have strong ramifications for how metaphors and their corresponding similes. Given that comparativists assume that metaphors are simply elliptical (i.e. abbreviated) similes, their identical figurative meaning shouldn't change due to the inclusion of the same adjective into the metaphor and its simile. Glucksberg and Haught did another test to see how “My lawyer is an old shark,” and “My lawyer is *like* an old shark” would be interpreted and were then given the choice to select between two paraphrases which they thought most apt for either figure of speech. In this case, their paraphrase choices were “The lawyer was very vicious and dangerous. He had been in law for a long time and the experience had made him sly, sneaky, and cunning” and “The lawyer was somewhat vicious and dangerous. He was still sly, sneaky, and cunning, but less energetic and weaker than when he was younger.” When the metaphor was given to the participants, the vast majority picked the former paraphrase, and in the case of the simile, the vast majority chose the latter paraphrase.<sup>95</sup>

Finally, much of what can be said about interaction theory not being able to bypass the paraphrase problem can also be said about Fogelin's theory. Fogelin seems to imply a similar idea to Black's, that metaphorical meaning is irreducible to literal meaning. Fogelin explains that one of the reasons metaphors and similes work is because they are ineffable, i.e. there is something that what they point that cannot be conveyed in literal terms.<sup>96</sup> He uses the non-metaphorical example of picture comparison to explain ineffability. Compare the face of *x* who happens to look like the face of Bette Davis, and the hearer might agree that they do look similar. And this might be the case even though

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 373-75.

<sup>96</sup> Fogelin, 96-97.

the speaker cannot put into words how the face of  $x$  looks like the face of Bette Davis.<sup>97</sup> What Fogelin is advocating here is that there is something that the figurative meanings of metaphors and similes can convey which cannot be conveyed in literal terms, and that's why an attempted paraphrase, while coming close, might not work. Therefore, I think the criticism that I applied to Black's interaction theory above regarding the paraphrase problem can also be applied to Fogelin's comparativism.

### 3.3. Gricean Theory

Having discussed the main problems for interaction theory, it's time to look at those problems which plague Gricean theory of metaphor. However, I'd like to quickly refute a criticism, only because it seems to be prevalent in the philosophical literature on metaphor. It is commonly stated that a Gricean account is unable to account for metaphorical utterances because comprehension studies have shown that metaphorical interpretations of metaphorical utterances are often interpreted either concurrently with the literal interpretation, and occasionally, the metaphor is not even interpreted literally.<sup>98</sup> It is thought that since in a Gricean account the literal meaning must be interpreted in order to determine the speaker meaning, that this criticism refutes Gricean theory. However, there could be many other factors at play, the biggest being metaphorical familiarity. If this test is given with metaphor examples like "You're the cream in my coffee," or "Richard is a lion," these results would be skewed in such a way since everybody has seen this metaphor before, and seen it countless times. Camp and Reimer

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>98</sup> For more on such criticisms, see Camp and Reimer, 856-857, and Catherine Wearing, "Metaphor and What is Said," *Mind & Language*, 21 (2006): 310-332, 313.

even note that other tests with novel metaphors show that it takes longer to deduce metaphorical than literal interpretations of the utterance,<sup>99</sup> which along with the dubious nature of the original test, is enough to disregard this entire criticism.

There is one notable problem which affects the Gricean theory of metaphor. It is a criticism based on what Hills calls *oracular utterances*. Hill defines an oracular utterance as “utterances in which a speaker speaks to an effect she herself doesn’t yet fully understand, in the hope that what her utterance properly conveys is something she can and should mean, once she has discerned what that is.”<sup>100</sup> Hills cites as an example an episode where Wittgenstein was discussing aspects of the *Tractatus* with Italian economist Piero Sraffa. Wittgenstein was explaining to Sraffa that a proposition and what it describes must have the same logical form. Sraffa then makes the gesture of brushing his chin with the tips of fingers. He then asks Wittgenstein “What is the logical form of *that*?”<sup>101</sup> Hills explains that Sraffa’s action could be taken in two ways. It could be taken either as a type of rhetorical question, or it could be taken as a legitimate request from Sraffa to Wittgenstein in order that he help him solve a difficult case. If taken as the latter, “it’s at least conceivable that Sraffa didn’t have any determinate prior intention about which way Wittgenstein was to take his question, didn’t know which way his question was best taken, and hoped for Wittgenstein’s help in figuring out how it was best taken.”<sup>102</sup>

If one is going to take the speaker meaning of the metaphor to be the non-literal meaning of the metaphor, then the problem of oracular utterances will then become a

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<sup>99</sup> Camp and Reimer, 856.

<sup>100</sup> Hills, 268.

<sup>101</sup> Ray Monk, *Ludwig Wittgenstein: The Duty of Genius*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 260-261.

<sup>102</sup> Hills, 266.

problem for the Gricean theorist. Just as in the Sraffa case, there will be times when a speaker utters a metaphor, not knowing exactly what he means by it, and might also be one of the reasons why he uttered the metaphor in the first place, not having any concise way of explaining his thoughts in literal terms. If the speaker meaning is taken to be what the metaphor “really means,” then in such cases where the speaker himself is unsure of exactly what he means, the metaphor itself will then not mean anything, since the speaker himself has no determinate idea in the meaning he attempts to convey in uttering the metaphor.

A final criticism related to Gricean theories is where a speaker can only mean a determinate number of things by the metaphor, yet what the metaphor can get one to notice is indeterminate. I believe this criticism is also related to the paraphrase problem, and I will explain this connection below.

The Gricean account seems unaffected by the paraphrase problem as the meaning of the metaphor would simply be what the speaker means, so it could be paraphrased quite easily in that the paraphrase would simply be whatever the speaker intended to get across. However, this can be problematic in that a metaphor can often ‘mean’ much more than what the speaker had intended. For example, take the metaphor, “Juliet is the sun.” Concerning this metaphor, Stanley Cavell suggests a few things that the metaphor makes him notice. He first states a couple of ideas that are common interpretations such as “Romeo begins his day with Juliet.” However, he then gives a few novel ideas that I have not seen in any other analysis of this particular metaphor (which is probably the most oft-used metaphor in the philosophical dialogue on metaphor). He states that “only in [Juliet’s] nourishment, can [Romeo] grow. And his declaration suggests that the

moon, which other lovers use as an emblem of their love, is merely her reflected light, and dead in comparison.”<sup>103</sup>

Now, what if Shakespeare only meant with the metaphor that “Romeo began his day with Juliet”? Since what's pertinent to a non-literal meaning of the metaphor is what the speaker means, there's no way to account for Cavell's moon interpretation. Can this interpretation, while relevant to our understanding of the metaphor, but not meant by the speaker, be thought of as an idea conveyed by the metaphor in a Gricean theory? I would argue that this cannot be the case. When we place the meaning of the metaphor to the realm of the speaker, the meaning of it must be whatever the speaker intended, regardless of whether we think a potential meaning is good or not. If metaphor is based on speaker meaning, then we can't attribute interpretations which we don't think the speaker was trying to convey, whether they be good or bad. Just because another interpretation is good, doesn't mean the author *meant* it.

Of course, a counterpoint to this might be that we really can't know what the speaker intends with the metaphor since authors don't explicate their metaphors. However, the problem with Gricean theory is that there are countless more metaphorical interpretations that one can hold as being what the speaker meant by the metaphor than what the speaker actually did mean by the metaphor. Essentially, a speaker can only mean a determinate number of things when uttering a metaphor, but the number of things which a metaphor can make us notice is indeterminate, which means that by definition, there will be a number of interesting and novel ideas that must be not considered a part of

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<sup>103</sup> Stanley Cavell, “Aesthetic Problems of Modern Philosophy,” *Must We Mean What We Say?: A Book of Essays*, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1976), 73-96, 78-79.

the metaphor since the speaker, by the very definition of a Gricean theory of metaphor, cannot be taken to have meant *all* novel and interesting ideas that a metaphor shows us.

Consequently, Gricean theory is also affected by the paraphrase problem. The longer we can go on with a paraphrase, and as Davidson notes, we can go on indefinitely, the more one will realize that much of what is noticed in a paraphrase cannot be meant by the speaker as the speaker can only mean a determinate, presumably small, number of things with the metaphor.

When we talk about what the author means when he uses a metaphor, it seems that much of what we are usually talking about is what the metaphor means to us, which leads right back into Davidson's theory of metaphor. Davidson's belief on what a metaphor does places very minimal constraints on our interpretations of a metaphor while both semantic theories and Gricean theories limit metaphorical interpretations. Davidson himself comments on this very point, stating that "there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention."<sup>104</sup> Davidson allows for a variety of metaphorical interpretations since the focus of the metaphorical interpretation is no longer placed on the sentence or speaker, but rather the hearer. This allows Davidson to bypass the problem of paraphrase, since for him, metaphors cannot be paraphrased, since you can only paraphrase something which means something, and metaphors do not have a meaning beyond its literal one.

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<sup>104</sup> Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," 263.

### 3.4. Brute Force Theory

There is one main criticism of Davidson's theory which does not affect the other theories of metaphor. The brute force theory conflicts with the common belief that metaphors are "cognitively significant," (i.e. we can disagree or agree with a metaphorical utterance, they can be true or false, etc.).<sup>105</sup>

Many prominent semantic theorists have agreed with this criticism of the brute force theory. Hills states that someone can "meaningfully and appropriately respond" to a *simple* metaphor such as Juliet is the sun with responses such as "Yes, she is," "No, she isn't," and "Is she?" all of which imply that the metaphor does indeed have some sort of meaning, since we can only affirm or deny propositions.<sup>106</sup> Josef Stern echoes a similar point to Hills. He states that if in the above metaphor, Count Paris disagreed with Romeo that the metaphor was true, then this is certainly not a disagreement that the literal part of the metaphorical utterance is false, but that they are disagreeing that the metaphorical content produced by the metaphor is true, implying that they both recognize the same metaphorical meaning, but simply disagree on its truth-value.<sup>107</sup>

I believe there are a few criticisms to these points. It is one thing to say that a metaphor can be interpreted propositionally and quite another to say that this means the metaphor has a meaning and a truth-value. When we hear a metaphor, people will interpret it in different ways, and even Davidson admits that interpretations can be propositional in nature.<sup>108</sup> Consequently, if one hears "Juliet is the sun" and interpret it

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<sup>105</sup> Camp and Reimer, 858.

<sup>106</sup> Hills, 300.

<sup>107</sup> Stern, 24.

<sup>108</sup> Davidson (2001), 263.

as “Romeo starts his day thinking of Juliet,” and they might agree that this is the case. However, if another interprets it as the way Cavell did, that Romeo’s “declaration suggests that the moon, which other lovers use as an emblem of their love, is merely her reflected light, and dead in comparison,”<sup>109</sup> then that person might also agree this is true. Just because metaphorical contents can be propositional in character, does not imply that we are necessarily thinking of the same propositional content.

This point also applies when one attempts to subscribe truth-values to metaphors. While we can certainly ascribe truth-values to metaphors, just because we disagree on the truth-value of a metaphor does not mean that we have the same propositional content in mind when discussing the metaphor. Rather, we could have two entirely different interpretations in mind. Furthermore, since metaphors can’t have truth values in the way literal statements can, to say that a metaphor is true under a brute force account is simply a way of agreeing with what you noticed due to the metaphor rather than asserting an actual truth-value to the metaphor.

In the next chapter, I will focus on a problem that is more difficult to solve and poses more problems for Davidson’s theory, and this is the dead metaphor problem.

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<sup>109</sup> Cavell, 78-79.

#### Chapter 4: The Dead Metaphor Problem

To reiterate, the dead metaphor problem is based on the standard account of dead metaphor. A dead metaphor is a metaphor that has acquired an explicit literal meaning, with this new literal meaning being derived from the live metaphor. The standard account of dead metaphors is that what is derived from the metaphorical interpretation that eventually becomes the literal meaning for the dead metaphor just is the non-literal meaning of the metaphor. For example, the literal meaning of “lion” as used in “Richard is a lion,” is “brave.” The literal meaning brave was, while the metaphor was alive, the metaphorical meaning of the metaphor “Richard is a lion.” However, now it has simply become the literal meaning of the dead metaphor. Given this, it is not hard to see how semantic and Gricean theories are able to explain how dead metaphors work. In semantic accounts the literal meaning of the dead metaphor was once the metaphorical or figurative meaning of the live metaphor. While in Gricean theory, the literal meaning of the dead metaphor was once the speaker meaning of the live metaphor. Yet, there does not seem to be any way Davidson's theory can explain the formulation of dead metaphors, given that he does not believe metaphors have a non-literal meaning.

A problem now arises from the standard account of dead metaphor. The standard account of dead metaphor implies that metaphors have a non-literal meaning, so any theories of metaphor that do not have any notion of a non-literal meaning will then not be able to explain the phenomenon of dead metaphor. This then leads into what I am calling the dead metaphor problem. The problem is that given the standard account, that the non-literal meaning of the live metaphor becomes the literal meaning of the dead

metaphor, any account that denies that metaphors have non-literal meanings then are unable to explain how dead metaphors form. The dead metaphor problem then looks something like this:

The non-literal meaning of the metaphor becomes the literal meaning of the dead metaphor. This is the basic idea of the standard account of dead metaphor. Any metaphorical account which does not account for non-literal meaning is not able to account for how dead metaphors work, i.e. the standard account of dead metaphor.

Therefore, Davidson's theory cannot account for how dead metaphors work.

In this case, there looks to be two options that might be able to save Davidson's brute force theory. Either refute the standard account of the dead metaphor or refute the dead metaphor problem. The problem with refuting the standard account of the dead metaphor is that it is highly intuitive; it seems to accurately explain how dead metaphors form. The problem with refuting the dead metaphor problem is that if one refutes only the dead metaphor problem, other problems could potentially be created for a brute force theory that are based on the standard account of dead metaphor, which is a much greater problem. Therefore, in order to save Davidson's brute force theory, the standard account of metaphor must shown to be flawed, which would then get rid of any problems which stem from it, i.e. the dead metaphor problem.

#### **4.1. Reimer's Solution**

The only response I have seen that responds to the criticism of Davidson on the point of dead metaphors is from Reimer. She gives an argument concerning dead metaphors that would actually force those who adopt a standard account of dead

metaphor into a contradiction. She lays out Davidson's argument on dead metaphors not being the metaphorical meaning<sup>110</sup> of the live metaphor through *modus tollens*:

If metaphors involved metaphorical meanings, these would become the literal meaning of the dead metaphor.

They are not the literal meanings of dead metaphors.

Therefore, metaphors do not have metaphorical meanings.<sup>111</sup>

Reimer points out that both premises could be objected to on the same basic objection to get around Davidson's argument, by explaining that "what distinguishes the living metaphor from the dead is that the former has *non-semantic* (perhaps imagistic) components not possessed by the latter."<sup>112</sup>

However, Reimer explains that this was precisely Davidson's point. What the metaphor gets us to notice is often imagistic and non-propositional in character. As she states:

“The ‘intimation’ of a living metaphor appears *different in kind* from the newly acquired cognitive content of a dead metaphor. In particular, it is associated with *imagery* of some sort—imagery that is constitutionally incapable of literal paraphrase. Thus, to claim that living metaphors have special “cognitive contents”—cognitive contents distinct from their literal meanings—is to suggest what is false: that literal meanings and metaphorical “intimations” are similar in *kind*.”<sup>113</sup>

Reimer's point is simple. Davidson's argument on dead metaphors is also proof of the validity of his account on metaphor. All attempts by meaning theorists<sup>114</sup> to combat Davidson's argument against dead metaphors concede the main point that Davidson is trying to make regarding metaphor; what the metaphor gets us to notice can be different *in kind* to propositions like meaning. Essentially, the semantic theorist runs

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<sup>110</sup> Although Reimer focuses her account on semantic theory here, it seems it could just as well apply to Gricean theory.

<sup>111</sup> Marga Reimer, “Davidson on Metaphor,” *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* 25 (2001): 142-155: 149.

<sup>112</sup> *Ibid.*, 150.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 150, (emphasis Reimer's).

<sup>114</sup> I use the term ‘meaning theorists’ in this chapter as every other prominent account mentioned in this paper has a type of non-literal meaning. I simply use it here for the sake of brevity in order to refer to a proponent of any one of those accounts.

into the problem of arguing for metaphors by drawing the same distinctions Davidson makes in his own account of metaphor, which would thereby concede that Davidson's general theory of metaphor is correct.<sup>115</sup>

I agree with Reimer's point above. However, I do not think she captured the main flaw of the standard theory of metaphor with this critique. What Reimer does is to try to use her argument from *modus tollens* to force the meaning theorist to adopt the idea that metaphors have non-propositional effects. And I find her criticism to be merely indicative of why the standard account of dead metaphor doesn't work. The reason the standard account of dead metaphor does not work is because it attempts to subsume all metaphors under one general account; it attempts to provide a systemic explanation on how dead metaphors form that cover all metaphors.

Reimer's critique works because the premises in the argument above are based on a passage in WMM that implies that not all metaphors are propositional.<sup>116</sup> Now, the meaning theorist would want to start from a position of non-literal propositional meaning which then becomes a literal propositional meaning, as this is the most intuitive approach. So the first systemic approach of the standard account of dead metaphor would be holding all metaphors to have non-literal propositional meanings. However, when it is proven that not all metaphors have propositional content, then the meaning theorist will concede that metaphors have non-propositional contents, in order to keep the standard account of dead metaphor alive in some form. At this point, however, they have forced themselves into Davidson's theory of metaphor. Now, I think this works, but I do

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>116</sup> See Davidson, "What Metaphors Mean," 253. Davidson uses the example of "He is burning up" saying that when the metaphor was alive, "we would have pictured fire in the eyes or smoke coming out of the ears."

not think Reimer grasped the main point of why the standard account of dead metaphor doesn't work; it attempts to subsume all metaphors under a substantial systemic theory.

In the next part of this section I will show that there are aspects of the dead metaphor problem which cannot be explained by the standard account of dead metaphor. Consequently, I will argue that this is because such aspects cannot be developed when trying to explain how dead metaphors form via non-literal meanings. These criticisms will show that the dead metaphor problem is not a problem for Davidson's account because the standard account of dead metaphor is flawed. If the standard account is flawed, then the dead metaphor problem as presently construed is also flawed. This will then lead into the point which I will argue for in Chapter 5. The reason why the standard account of dead metaphor is wrong—which is why the dead metaphor problem does not affect Davidson's theory—is indicative of why the other theories on metaphor cannot work. All attempts to provide a substantial systemic theory of metaphor, i.e. they attempt to provide substantial detail into how metaphors work, something which cannot be done.

#### **4.2. The Problem of Interpretation**

It is not surprising that the dead metaphor problem is considered to be such a devastating criticism of Davidson's brute force account, as the most logical way of explaining how dead metaphors form seems to be by way of explaining it via a transition from a non-literal meaning to a literal meaning. If the non-literal meaning is denied as it is in Davidson's account, it then becomes difficult to explain how dead metaphors form since we are left without a way that gets us to the literal meaning of the dead metaphor.

However, if one attempts to develop the standard account of dead metaphor in ways which I believe it needs to be developed in order for it to be seen as an adequate account of how dead metaphors form, then it will be seen that the dead metaphor problem will not be a problem for Davidson's brute force theory. I will now give three examples which show the standard account to be inchoate.

First, the transition from metaphorical meaning to literal meaning of a dead metaphor is much more complex than let on in the standard account of dead metaphor. Essentially, when a metaphor is interpreted while alive, it is often not just open to one meaning only. A literal paraphrase of a live metaphor often covers wide ground on what the metaphor means. Yet, when a dead metaphor has acquired a literal meaning from the metaphorical meaning, it often only acquires one literal meaning, or if multiple meanings, does not acquire all the meanings that had been attributed to the metaphor while alive. In the case of 'ape,' as in the metaphor "Jeff is an ape," it has acquired, according to Webster's dictionary, the literal meaning of 'uncouth.' However, when metaphors are alive, they often bring in multiple interpretations. For example, "Jeff is an ape" could be just as reasonably interpreted to mean "Jeff is hairy," "Jeff is strong," or "Jeff is stupid." Why is it that "ape" has not acquired any of these other interpretations as literal meanings, even though it seems that the metaphor could mean any of these interpretations? Any of these could be what the metaphor itself meant while it was alive. One is then left with the problem of how to explain why these other metaphorical meanings didn't become literal meanings of the dead metaphor. If these interpretations are metaphorical meanings, why does only one become the literal meaning of the dead metaphor?

A meaning theorist might respond that the literal meaning of the dead metaphor is determined simply by the interpretation that ends up being most popular among those who are interpreting the metaphor. This doesn't lead the meaning theorist to the conclusion that the popular interpretation is simply that, a popular interpretation and not a meaning of the live metaphor. He would argue that the popular interpretation of the metaphor is also one of its metaphorical meanings.

Yet, this response implicitly holds that the popular interpretation of a metaphor is a metaphorical meaning of the live metaphor; it does not provide any argument that the interpretation which is picked was at one time a non-literal meaning of the metaphor. So, a brute force theorist could respond that just because a popular interpretation becomes the literal meaning of the dead metaphor doesn't tell one anything about this metaphorical meaning of the live metaphor. The key point becomes how can this assumption be validated, i.e. how can the popular interpretation of a metaphor be recognized as being a metaphorical meaning of the live metaphor. Aside from the questionable assumption that a popular interpretation necessarily means that particular interpretation was once part of the metaphorical meaning of the live metaphor, there is no other way to determine if the popular interpretation was ever part of the metaphorical meaning of a metaphor.

### **4.3. More on Non-Propositional Metaphors**

In 4.1., I argued that one of the reasons why Reimer's solution works is because she points out that many metaphors can have non-propositional effects. However, it is possible that a meaning theorist could hold that some metaphors do have non-

propositional effects while maintaining that the standard account of dead metaphor is correct. Therefore I will explore this issue some more.

As Davidson noted, what we notice due to a metaphor is often non-propositional in nature. Traditionally, the transition from metaphorical to literal meaning in a dead metaphor is thought to be a case where a propositional metaphorical meaning becomes a propositional literal meaning. However, the implicit assumption in the standard account of dead metaphor is that metaphorical meanings are propositional, given that the metaphorical *meaning* of the live metaphor becomes the literal meaning of the dead metaphor. This is certainly not the case, as Davidson states:

If metaphor involved a second meaning, as ambiguity does, we might expect to be able to specify the special meaning of a word in a metaphorical setting by waiting until the metaphor dies. The figurative meaning of the living metaphor should be immortalized in the literal meaning of the dead. But although some philosophers have suggested this idea, it seems plainly wrong. ‘He was burned up’ is genuinely ambiguous (since it may be true in one sense and false in another), but although the slangish idiom is no doubt the corpse of a metaphor, ‘He was burned up’ now suggests no more than that he was very angry. When the metaphor was active, we would have pictured fire in the eyes or smoke coming out of the ears.<sup>117</sup>

Davidson’s point is that the standard account of dead metaphor is flawed because what is thought to be the metaphorical meaning is actually something which is non-propositional, and thus, something which cannot become a literal meaning. In the example above, a question could be posed to the meaning theorist as how could the image of ‘smoke coming out of the ears,’ turn into the literal meaning of ‘he was very angry’ for the dead metaphor ‘He was burned up.’ Such a transition seems *prima facie* absurd. Therefore, this poses a serious problem for meaning theorists and seemingly does away with the standard account of dead metaphor.

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<sup>117</sup> Davidson, “What Metaphors Mean,” 253.

I can think of two ways that a meaning theorist can get around this argument. First, he can argue that there are some metaphors which have propositional meanings that become dead while those which are non-propositional do not. Second, he can still argue that all metaphors become dead while modifying the standard account of dead metaphor.

If he argues that only metaphors with propositional meanings become dead, then he argues essentially for different classes of metaphor. This is not an uncommon notion. Max Black implies this when he states that some metaphors are better interpreted by one metaphorical theory rather than another one, implying that simpler metaphors were better interpreted by simpler metaphorical theories (e.g. comparison theory), while more complex metaphors were better suited to be interpreted by more complex theories (e.g. Black's own interaction theory).<sup>118</sup> The meaning theorist could explain that there are different classes of metaphor, and that those which have propositional metaphorical meanings can become dead, while those which have non-propositional effects cannot. Of course, a meaning theorist would have to concede that there would be many metaphors not amenable to becoming dead, but he could argue that at least some metaphors do have propositional meanings, and therefore, there are a substantial number of metaphors which could still be covered under any type of theory which held a metaphor to have a propositional metaphorical meaning.

I do not find this solution very convincing, and I don't believe a meaning theorist would be, either. This account would apply to only the simpler metaphors, which have an identical structure to dead metaphors like "Jeff is an ape," or "Richard is a lion." Most metaphorical theorists deem these and alive metaphors like them to be quite trivial, and when constructing metaphorical accounts, are more interested in explaining the meaning

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<sup>118</sup> Black, *Models and Metaphors*, 45.

of more ‘literary’ metaphors, metaphors which are typically more difficult to interpret. Furthermore, most metaphorical theorists develop comprehensive theories to cover the entire range of metaphors, from the simple to the complex. They would not be satisfied if their metaphorical theories only covered a small range of metaphors (especially given they’re the most uninteresting ones).

The meaning theorist would then have to adopt the idea that metaphors can have both propositional meaning and non-propositional effects. This idea seems much more plausible as it leaves the meaning theorist open to developing a metaphorical theory for the whole range of metaphors, rather than a limited case of simple metaphors. I think there is an ingenious solution that allows meaning theorists to incorporate non-propositional effects of metaphors into the standard account of dead metaphor.

As mentioned above, the reason Davidson rejects the standard account of dead metaphor is due to metaphorical effects being non-propositional. The meaning theorist now needs to devise a way in which metaphors which contain non-propositional effects can become dead. A perfect way might be to say regarding those metaphors which do have non-propositional effects, that what is non-propositional is what is lost from the transference of the live metaphor to the dead. This not only gets around Davidson’s criticism, it also works as a good explanation for explaining why dead metaphors and live metaphors are so different. A meaning theorist can explain that what is non-propositional is lost from the transition from a live metaphor to a dead metaphor. For example, with the metaphor ‘He is burned up,’ if this contained non-propositional effects such as ‘smoke coming out of the ears,’ this is lost upon the transition to a dead metaphor. With this explanation, a meaning theorist can then point to this loss of non-propositional

effects as a key difference in dead and live metaphors, given that the difference between the two metaphors is very easily perceived.

Of course, the meaning theorist still has to determine a way of explaining *how* the metaphor loses its non-propositional effects. This might be done by the signification of non-propositional effects. In the example, 'He is burning up,' even if it has the non-propositional effects of 'smoke coming out of the ears' or 'the face turning red,' it can be said that these images do signify something that could be propositional. In this case, it could be said that what these images signify is the proposition that 'He is angry.'<sup>119</sup> The meaning theorist could then argue two different theories in order to explain how a metaphor which was once non-propositional could then become dead. First, he could explain that what those propositions which are signified by the imagistic non-propositional effects of the metaphor are actually metaphorical meanings of the live metaphor. This would mean that there would be countless propositional meanings, but the meaning theorist would of course be willing to accept this, considering he would accept this point with regards to those metaphors which might be considered to be only propositional. However, this would seem to leave the metaphor open to a countless number of propositional meanings, given that all the propositions would be based on an imagistic effect of the metaphor, and as the old saying goes, "A picture is worth a thousand words," or in this case, propositions. A second solution would undoubtedly be preferred. A second solution might simply focus on the use of the metaphor where the non-propositional effects of the metaphor will end up being associated with a particular

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<sup>119</sup> Anyone who has watched cartoons as a child might recognize this to be the case. For example, the antagonist of a Looney Tune starring Bugs Bunny, after many attempts of trying to kill or incapacitate him, might end up literally with a red face and smoke coming out of the ears. In this case the metaphor has come 'alive.' By these images, the audience can discern that the antagonist is now angry at himself or Bugs Bunny for the rabbit's continued success at eluding capture.

propositional meaning, similar to the popular interpretation argument, and the dead metaphor stems from this changed association from a non-propositional to the most popular propositional meaning that stems from the non-propositional effects of the live metaphor. Of course, this does not imply that all metaphors which are non-propositional will eventually become dead, but it simply purports to explain how some metaphors which have non-propositional effects can become dead.

Once the meaning theorist is forced into adopting this second solution, he will then be forced into Reimer's argument mentioned in 4.1. Once the distinction between non-propositional effects and propositional meanings is made, then one is forced into adopting Davidson's theory of metaphor, as he will by then be holding that at least some, if not all, metaphors will have non-propositional effects rather than propositional meanings.

I think these problems clearly show that the transition from a non-literal meaning to a literal meaning is not as neat and tidy as those who adopt the standard account of dead metaphor suppose. Therefore, the dead metaphor problem that directly follows from the standard account of dead metaphor also is flawed since if the account is flawed, then that means the transition from a non-literal meaning to a literal meaning can no longer be assumed. If this assumption no longer holds, it is no longer a problem that Davidson can't account for how dead metaphors form, since meaning theorists don't presently have an account that can, either.<sup>120</sup>

I believe the reason the standard account of dead metaphor does not work is due to the fact that it attempts to provide a substantial systemic account of dead metaphor that

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<sup>120</sup> Although the Davidsonian would most likely say that really isn't a way of explaining how dead metaphors form, and I am inclined to agree with this.

encompasses all of metaphor. I have hoped to show that my criticisms have shown that this cannot be the case. With this thought in mind, I will now explain in the next chapter that the reason the other prominent metaphors fail is because they too attempt to provide a substantial systemic account of how metaphors work.

## Chapter 5: Revisiting the Theories of Metaphor

As one can see, any discernible attempt to validate the standard account of dead metaphor, and consequently, the dead metaphor problem, will be difficult if not impossible. And I think the nature of the standard account of dead metaphor is indicative of most attempts to posit a theory of metaphor, that being that they all attempt to provide a substantial systemic account of metaphor. As the reader might have discerned, metaphors are a non-systemic feature of language. Although Davidson never explicitly stated this in WMM, he did take this to be a feature of metaphors. As he states in *Truth and Predication*, there are no “conventions or rules for creating or understanding metaphors, irony, humor, etc.”<sup>121</sup> Metaphors, like jokes, are simply non-systemic features of a language with have no precise rules to govern them. The difference between Davidson’s brute force theory and all other significant metaphorical theories mentioned in this paper is that the other theories are providing substantial systemic metaphorical theories. Davidson’s theory is the only which does not do this.

Now, Davidson’s theory is systemic, as any theory which isn’t a systemic theory will not be of much use over the field which it attempts to cover. However, the only positive systemic aspect of the brute force theory is very minimal. It explains that metaphors are used to show a likeness or get the hearer to notice something. Of course, everybody would agree to this point, and I do not think of any metaphor theorist who would dismiss this claim. What they disagree with Davidson on is that there is much more to metaphors than this particular aspect. This is where these other theories would introduce their substantial systemic solutions, and as metaphors relate to these theories,

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<sup>121</sup> Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, 154f.

one could argue that metaphor is a non-systemic phenomenon. In order to illustrate this point the non-systemic nature of metaphors, I will focus on the three most promising solutions which explain how metaphors work: Fogelin's comparativism, interaction theory, and Gricean pragmatic theory of metaphor. By doing so, I will show how a minimal account of metaphor should be adopted.

### 5.1. Interaction Theory Revisited

I've mentioned briefly the criticism of the explanatory power of interaction theory in Chapter 3, but it is now something I am turning to in more detail. Essentially, the criticism is that the explanatory device used in interaction theory is too vague. And I don't see a way out of this criticism. It is hard to explain many of the things mentioned as being essential in interaction theory. I'll restate here the essential aspects of how interaction theory works. In a metaphor *A* is *B*, Black talks about how both *A* and *B* should be thought of as conceptual systems. The tension between the focus (*B*), i.e., the literal utterance reconstrued metaphorically, and the frame (*A*) i.e. the literal utterance that surrounds the focus, is what enables the interaction between the conceptual systems of *A* and *B*, these conceptual systems being systems of associated commonplaces.

I do not find much of a problem with Black's system of associated commonplaces. Something like this is bound to be somewhat ambiguous given the ambiguous nature of metaphors. Now, it must not be too vague in order for it to remain explanatory, but it also must be ambiguous enough in order that the requirements for what counts as an associated commonplace of an object are not too stringent. Otherwise,

we would be left with an explanatory device that might not be able to cover all cases of metaphor.

The problem with interaction theory lies not with the content of the conceptual systems, but the very idea of conceptual systems ‘interacting’ with each other. Black’s whole theory is counterintuitive, and parts of it seem vague. As Camp and Reimer had noted, the idea of ‘interaction’ here seems metaphorical itself, so one is not exactly sure *how* these systems actually do interact with each other, even if they do interact with each other. More importantly, Black’s system of metaphor places too many restraints on metaphorical interpretation, not allowing for all metaphors to be properly interpreted. For example, Fogelin mentioned Keats’ metaphor “O for a beaker full of the warm South,” as a metaphor where one would be hard pressed to delineate it into conceptual systems. So it certainly seems there will be cases of what one might call literary metaphors which cannot be interpreted in Black’s model. Hills’ twice-apt metaphors would also not be able to be interpreted by using interaction theory, given that this theory operates under the condition that there is a tension within the metaphorical utterance. Twice-apt metaphors are tensionless. Black’s interaction theory is a perfect example of a metaphorical account which ultimately proves unsatisfactory due to it being too strong a theory of metaphor. Due to this, it is unable to account for certain metaphors that a less stringent account, like Davidson’s, can account for.

## 5.2. Fogelin's Comparativism Revisited

If one recalls from Chapter 2, the way to determine the metaphorical meaning of Fogelin's comparativism is via what he calls 'salient characteristics.' In this theory, what a metaphor means will be determined by the salient characteristics it would share with the object it is being compared to. To give another example of this, I will use a non-metaphorical instance which Fogelin used. On the literal comparison of Winston Churchill to a bulldog, i.e. on Churchill looking like a bulldog, Fogelin states:

The characteristic physiognomy of a bulldog face establishes the criterion of comparison, and if the comparison is correct, then Churchill's face must meet it. Here it might be objected that in making this comparison, we set aside all sorts of bulldog-face features: fur, wet nose, and so forth. These, however, are not salient features of a bulldog's face since they do not set it off from the faces of other dogs. That, I think, is why it can be right to say that Churchill looked like a bulldog, but wrong to say that he looked like a dog.<sup>122</sup>

Granted, this is a non-metaphorical use of "Churchill is a bulldog," but the metaphorical use of "Churchill is a bulldog" would operate in a similar way, i.e. the salient characteristics between Churchill and a bulldog would be determined in a similar manner. So one would expect that the metaphor "Churchill is a bulldog" would be different than the metaphor "Churchill is a dog," given that the salient characteristics of a bulldog would be different than the salient characteristics of a dog. Bulldogs might be considered stubborn, strong, etc. while it is certainly not the case that a dog will have these same salient characteristics.

This certainly seems plausible, yet there is a problem in defining exactly how the salient characteristics should be determined. Of course, some ambiguity might be allowable, but there is a fine line which Fogelin's comparativism must tread here. Again,

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<sup>122</sup> Fogelin, *Figuratively Speaking*, 90.

just like it mentioned above for Black's system of associated commonplaces, Fogelin's salient characteristics must not be too vague in order for it to remain explanatory, but it also must be ambiguous enough in order that the requirements for what counts as a salient characteristic is not too strict.

Fogelin shouldn't have to worry about the latter problem, since his explanatory device is ambiguous. While Fogelin talks of salient characteristics, what's going to be considered to be salient will be arbitrary. Of course, it does seem that the intensive and diagnostic criteria that Fogelin (and Tversky) mention is a good way to counter the ambiguity in Fogelin's 'salient characteristics' model. I do think there are a few problems with using these criteria to define 'salient characteristics.' Notably, it seems difficult to determine the difference between a distinctive feature and a regular feature of an object if the only major criterion is prominence, a concept which is itself vague. However, I do think Fogelin's view could survive if this was the biggest criticism to his explanatory device. The intensive and diagnostic criteria, while ambiguous, still seem able to account for how metaphors might work.

However, Fogelin's account doesn't work because as Haught and Glucksberg show, metaphors and similes are often interpreted differently. If metaphors and similes really did share the same content but had different a different grammatical structure, they should have the same metaphorical interpretations. However, people often interpret metaphors and their corresponding similes quite differently. Although Fogelin's account of metaphor sounds good in theory, it does not hold up in practice. The necessary connection between metaphors and similes is one that is too restrictive on metaphorical interpretation and is what should lead one to ultimately discount comparativism.

I think there is also a much more fundamental problem with semantic accounts of metaphor not yet mentioned above. Essentially, certain contextual situations show that the semantic account is too strong a theory for metaphor. For example, say two men are sitting around when the first man, call him Romeo, says of his pregnant wife who has just entered into the room, “Look at my wife. Juliet is the sun.” His friend, let’s call him Paris, might retort, perhaps due to the overly sentimental nature of the metaphor, “Yea, she does look big enough to have her own orbit now.” Of course, Romeo could respond that wasn’t what he meant. However, could he respond that that was not what the metaphor meant? I don’t think so.

One could respond that literal utterances could be equally vague in certain cases, such as with the sentence “I went to the bank.” Someone could conceivably ask “Which kind of bank?” wondering whether he went to the bank of a river or the financial institution. All that is needed here is for more explication, and the person could simply reply what type of bank. It could be argued that a metaphor is like this. Metaphorical phrases, like certain words, could have more than one meaning, and what is needed at certain times is simply an explanation from the speaker on what he means with the metaphor.

Yet, there’s a difference between these two cases. When one needs clarity with a literal assertion, she would ask the speaker “Which use of the word bank did you mean?”. When one needs clarity on a metaphorical assertion, she would ask “What did you mean by ‘Juliet is the sun’?”. The difference here is that with a literal assertion, the hearer already knows the literal meanings of the word, so just needs clarity to determine which meaning the speaker is using. However, with the metaphor, the hearer doesn’t know

what the meaning of the metaphor is. And this just isn't due to the novelty of the metaphor, if the hearer had been hearing it for the first time. Even if the hearer hears different people saying it, each time she hears somebody say a certain metaphor, it is still plausible that she might ask "What did you mean by that metaphor?". It is highly counterintuitive to say on the one hand that a metaphorical *sentence* has a non-literal meaning apart from its literal meaning while on the other hand believing it perfectly reasonable that the hearer of the metaphor cannot know this meaning, even if she is fully cognitively capable of doing so. The biggest problem with semantic accounts is that what is called a 'metaphorical meaning' does not seem anything like 'meaning,' as we are familiar with the term.

### 5.3. Gricean Theory Revisited

Just as with semantic theories, Gricean theory also is too strong. As I mentioned earlier, Gricean theory makes the non-literal meaning of the metaphor whatever the speaker intended to mean with the metaphor. I certainly do not discount the fact that people are pretty good about determining a speaker's intentions when he utters a metaphor. However, there is a lot more to a metaphor than simply what the speaker intended to convey with the metaphor. As I noted in my criticism of Gricean theory in Chapter III, there are many things which a metaphor causes us to notice, such as Cavell's 'moon' interpretation of "Juliet is the sun." Yet, if the non-literal meaning of a metaphor is simply the speaker meaning, many interpretations of a metaphor will have to be disregarded since there is only a determinate number of things that a metaphor can mean.

Due to this, a Gricean theory is then too strong, given that by definition, it cannot account for all metaphorical interpretations since there can only be a determinate number of things a metaphor can mean even though what a metaphor can get us to notice is indeterminate.

As I said, I do not want to discount the role that speaker meaning plays in metaphorical interpretation. Metaphors are used frequently in poetry, literature, and everyday conversation, and for the most part, people seem to grasp the speaker's intentions in uttering the metaphor. In the case of everyday conversation, the added caveat would also be that one is expected to understand the metaphors that the speaker utters, given that they are often simpler and need to be understood in order for the conversation between speaker and hearer continue. Yet, I have just hoped to show that there is more to metaphors than just the speaker's intentions.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

After a brief reexamination of the other metaphorical theories, I have attempted to pinpoint the problem with the other prominent metaphorical theories. These prominent theories, like a standard account of dead metaphor, are all substantially systemic, which is what ultimately leads to their undoing; each account is not able to account for either all types of metaphor or all possible metaphorical interpretations. Davidson's theory is the best reason simply for the reason that it doesn't place any restrictions on a metaphor. Essentially, Davidson's theory of metaphor is in some sense the definition of metaphor,

that a metaphor is a resemblance between two objects and is used to get us to notice something that might not otherwise be seen.

I mentioned in the introduction that much work was now being done on the communicative aspects of metaphor, and one of the things that generally agreed upon was that metaphors had a genuine non-literal meaning. With this being rejected, is it still possible that metaphors can be communicative? Unless one holds the condition that what is communicative must have a meaning, then certainly metaphors can still be communicative. Speech acts by their very nature are going to be communicative. And art, particularly paintings, are sometimes considered to be communicative in the sense that the artist was trying to convey something via his painting. Just because a metaphor does not have a non-literal meaning, does not mean it is not communicative. And unlike art, the speaker's intentions are considerably less difficult to determine, at least in most cases. I believe that much of the reason Davidson's theory is often criticized is because there is this intuition that if metaphors do not have a non-literal meaning, then they can't be considered communicative tools and somehow are less important. But it's precisely because metaphors do not have a meaning that gives them their special place in language. If metaphors were confined to having a specific meaning, they wouldn't be able to be as insightful as many of them usually are.

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