What Metaphors Really Mean

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Abstract

In *What Metaphors Mean*, Donald Davidson argues that metaphors have no special meanings beyond their literal meanings. In this paper I examine his arguments and find them wanting. My primary aim, however, is not critical, although that will be important; after all, Davidson's analysis of metaphor is predominant in our philosophical tradition, leading, I think, to many serious errors in other fields: most notably, epistemology. My primary aim, contrarily, is to recommend the analysis of metaphor found in *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson; but also to draw attention to the consequences that such an analysis has for epistemology. As it happens, the virtues of this superior analysis of metaphor become clearest when it is pitted against the predominant analysis.

What Metaphors Really Mean

In *What Metaphors Mean*, Donald Davidson argues that metaphors have no special meanings beyond their literal meanings. In this paper I examine his arguments and find them wanting. My primary aim, however, is not critical, although that will be important; after all, Davidson's analysis of metaphor is predominant in our philosophical tradition, leading, I think, to many serious errors in other fields: most notably, epistemology. My primary aim, contrarily, is to recommend the analysis of metaphor found in *Metaphors We Live By*, by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson; but also to draw attention to the consequences that such an analysis has for epistemology. As it happens, the virtues of this superior analysis of metaphor become clearest when it is pitted against the predominant analysis.

Let us begin therefore with Davidson. He wishes to argue that metaphors have no cognitive content whatsoever beyond that of their literal meanings--that is to say, there is nothing beyond their literal meanings "that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message" (p.448). In order to fulfill this wish, Davidson marshals three arguments designed to show that, "as much of metaphor as can be explained in terms of meaning may, and indeed must, be explained by appeal to the literal meaning of words." (p.444)

First of all, he claims, if there is a special metaphorical meaning, this meaning should disappear when the metaphor dies and becomes merely literal language (p.447). However, he adds, there is no difference in meaning between a dead metaphor and the same expression when it is used novely. After all, the now-literal expression "He is harrowed," for example, means, and means only, that the person in question is disturbed. But when Shakespeare had Horatio say novely that Hamlet's ghost harrowed him with fear and wonder, as if the ghost were a farmer who drew a harrow made of fear and wonder across his mind, would the then-metaphorical expression "He is harrowed" have meant anything more than it means now--namely, that the person in question is disturbed? Davidson thinks not, and consequently concludes that there is no special metaphorical meaning. Notice, therefore, that any objection to his first argument against special metaphorical meaning will have to show that some meaning does indeed disappear when a metaphor dies.

Secondly, he claims, if there is a special metaphorical meaning, there should likewise be a special simile meaning. After all, he observes, a simile "may make us think deep thoughts, just as a metaphor does," (p.447) and when we choose a simile rather than a metaphor--as when we say that someone *is like* a pig rather than saying that someone *is* a pig--we merely choose to communicate the same idea in a different way, since the only difference

between a simile and a metaphor, Davidson thinks, is that all similes are trivially true, because anything is like anything else in infinitely many respects, whereas most metaphors are patently false, because, for example, no person is a pig (p.445). Yet there is no such thing as special simile meaning; consequently, Davidson concludes, there is no such thing as special metaphorical meaning. Notice, therefore, that any objection to his second argument against special metaphorical meaning will have to show that metaphors are different from similes in more than the simple respect that he highlights.

Thirdly, he claims, attempts to paraphrase metaphors always fail, since the paraphrase is always weaker in some way than the original. Consider the example he provides: "A famous critic said that Tolstoy was a 'great moralizing infant'" (p.440). Can this metaphor possibly be paraphrased? We might begin by specifying the properties which the adult Tolstoy shared with normal infants, but even if we could specify exactly those meant by the critic, that is, even if there were a determinate number of such properties, it still seems that such a list would be weaker than the original metaphor. And yet, Davidson wonders, if there were a special metaphorical meaning, why should such failure occur? After all, it seems, if there were a special metaphorical meaning--so that each metaphor masked a unique cognitive content: a belief, an intention or a representation of some fact--an adroit paraphraser should be able to capture the force of a metaphor by unmasking its unique content. Advocates of special metaphorical meaning seem incapable, then, of explaining the failure of paraphrasing. At any rate, Davidson believes that he can explain this failure by appeal to merely literal meaning. In order to do so, he begins by distinguishing between what words *mean* and what they *do*, although he does not explain this distinction, except insofar as it pertains to metaphors (p.439).

Metaphors, he claims, do not have anything more than mere literal meanings, but they nonetheless do much more than mere literal language. For example, when Shakespeare has Horatio say that Hamlet's ghost "harrows me with fear and wonder," these words *mean* no more than that the ghost draws a harrow made of fear and wonder across him, a proposition patently false. Nevertheless, these metaphorical words *do* much more than literal words would have done. After all, compare Horatio saying that Hamlet's ghost "harrows me with fear and wonder," on the one hand, with him saying that Hamlet's ghost "disturbs me," on the other. The metaphorical words cause us to imagine Horatio as a field, which Hamlet's ghost plows with a harrow that is somehow made of fear and wonder. This final element of our image, a harrow that is somehow made of fear and wonder, is of course odd, and thereby indeterminate, so that we might dwell upon it further, even embellishing it in innumerable ways according to our

own imaginative inclinations. In sum, then, the metaphorical words are causally effective, indeterminately provoking in those who appreciate them multifarious images, feelings, or other thoughts. Contrarily, the literal words would not have been so causally effective.

Davidson thus argues that paraphrasing metaphors usually, and perhaps even always, fails because paraphrasers seek to expose some belief or intention hidden within, or some fact coyly represented by, the metaphor (p.447-8). But, as he has hoped to show, metaphors do not hide beliefs or intentions, neither do they coyly represent facts; instead, they indeterminately provoke multifarious images, feelings or other thoughts in those who appreciate them--images, feelings and thoughts that are sometimes too indeterminate and multifarious as to be possibly recorded. Therefore, by the hypothesis that metaphors have no special *meanings* but nonetheless *do* something special, Davidson seems to have shown why paraphrasing a metaphor is so difficult, and perhaps even impossible to accomplish. In his words: "The common error is to fasten on the contents of the thoughts a metaphor provokes and to read these contents into the metaphor itself." (p.447) Accordingly, then, a good paraphrase should not aspire to unmask some belief or intention masked by a metaphor, nor should it aspire to expose some fact coyly represented by that metaphor; instead, a good paraphrase should aspire to provoke in those more lazy or ignorant than the paraphraser some of the same images, feelings or thoughts that the original metaphor provoked in him or her (p.448).

Now, the goal of Davidson's third argument against special metaphorical meaning, remember, was to show that one feature of metaphors--that is, that they often cannot be paraphrased--not only *may*, but also *must*, be explained by appeal to merely literal meanings of words (p.444). And it seems that he has indeed shown by this third argument that this one feature *may* be explained by appeal to merely literal meanings of words, but he has certainly not shown by it that this one feature *must* be so explained, except insofar as he has suggested that if there were special metaphorical meaning--so that each metaphor masked a unique cognitive content: a belief, an intention or a representation of some fact--an adroit paraphraser should be able to, but cannot, capture the force of a metaphor by unmasking its unique content. Notice, therefore, that any objection to his third argument against special metaphorical meaning will have to show, at least, that the failure of paraphrasing *may* be explained by appeal to some meanings beyond the merely literal--so that, if the objections against his first two arguments against special metaphorical meaning are also decisive, the hypothesis of special metaphorical meaning will not have suffered at all from Davidson's attack. And yet, a more powerful objection to his third argument against special metaphorical

meaning--an objection that would not only vindicate this hypothesis from his attack, but also give us positive reason to endorse it--will have to show that the failure of paraphrasing *must* be explained by appeal to some meanings beyond the merely literal. By offering a competing analysis of metaphors, the next section of this paper aims to show just that.

Let us introduce this analysis by considering present-day English metaphors for the mind. As Lakoff and Johnson show (pp.27-8), we speak of the mind in present-day English according to at least two metaphors: the *machine* metaphor, and the *brittle-object* metaphor. With the first we say, for example, "We're still trying to *grind out* the solution to this equation," or, "I'm a little *rusty* today," or, "We've been working on this problem all day and now we're *running out of steam*," or, "My mind just isn't *operating* today," or finally, "He *broke down*," etc.; with the second, the *brittle-object* metaphor, we say, for example, "He *cracked* under cross examination," or, "Her ego is very *fragile*," or, "You have to *handle him with care* since his wife's death," or, "The experience *shattered* him," or finally, "Her mind *snapped*," etc. Now, the fact that we so often speak about the mind with metaphors should not surprise us: the mind is something both complex and not directly perceived, so that we cannot describe it either fully or directly, and as a result we use metaphors in order to describe it partially and indirectly, not by reference to it so much as by comparing it with simpler, perceivable things which we think it resembles. Not surprisingly, then, we use metaphors to describe other complex things that we cannot perceive directly.

Consider, for example, present-day English metaphors for the specific mental phenomenon of love. As Lakoff and Johnson show (p.49), we speak of love in present-day English according to at least five metaphors: the *physical force* metaphor, the *patient* metaphor, the *madness* metaphor, the *magic* metaphor, and, finally, the *war* metaphor. With the first we say, for example, "I was *magnetically drawn* to him," or, "They *gravitated* to each other," or, "His whole life *revolves* around her," or finally, "They lost their *momentum*," etc.; with the second, the *patient* metaphor, we say, for example, "This is a *sick* relationship," or, "They have a *strong, healthy* marriage," or, "The marriage is *dead*--it can't be *revived*," or finally, "It's a *tired* affair," etc.; with the third, the *madness* metaphor, we say, for example, "I'm *crazy* about her," or, "He *drives me out of my mind*," or, "She constantly *raves* about him," or finally, "He's gone *mad* over her," etc.; with the fourth, the *magic* metaphor, we say, for example, "She *cast her spell* over me," or, "The *magic* is gone," or, "I was *entranced* by him," or finally, "She is *bewitching*," etc.; with the fifth, the *war* metaphor, we say, for example, "He is known for his many rapid *conquests*," or, "She *fought* for him, but his mistress *won out*," or, "He *fled from* her *advances*," or finally, "He *enlisted the aid* of her friends," etc.

Now, when we have been presented with such schematic arrays of examples--not all of which, notice, would have seemed to us as metaphorical, let alone as schematically metaphorical, had Lakoff and Johnson not drawn our attention to them as such--we must begin to wonder whether these metaphorical ways of describing the mind or love are more than mere artful embellishments upon concepts which could exist independent of them. For Davidson, as we have seen, would think that they are nothing more than mere artful embellishments, since according to him, remember, there are literal ways of talking about, say, the mind or love, and then there are metaphorical ways of talking about these same things, but the concepts of the mind or of love themselves, as literal, exist independent of the metaphorical ways we artfully embellish them.

To be fair to Davidson, he would not concede that all of these examples are indeed examples of genuinely *metaphorical* ways of describing the mind or love. After all, he claims that metaphorical ways of describing something should differ from literal ways of describing the same thing only insofar as the metaphorical ways are usually false and indeterminately provoke in us images, feelings or other thoughts. Most of these examples, however, might be true, given some quite common circumstances, and not all of them indeterminately provoke images, feelings, or other thoughts, since, as we have seen, not all of them would have seemed extraordinary enough--or, specifically, extra-literal enough--to have done so, had Lakoff and Johnson not drawn our attention to them as such.

However, by sharply distinguishing between, on the one hand, those of the above examples which indeterminately provoke images, feelings, or other thoughts, calling them metaphors, and, on the other hand, those of the above examples which do not, calling them literal uses of language, Davidson sacrifices an opportunity to explain the intricate links that exist between them, as we will shortly see. For now, let us provisionally assume that all of these examples are indeed examples of genuinely *metaphorical* ways of describing the mind or love. And let us ask once again: Can the present-day English concepts of the mind or of love exist independent of these metaphorical ways of describing them? In other words: Are these ways of describing the mind or love mere artful embellishments upon concepts existing independent of them, or do they somehow penetrate and thereby constitute the present-day English concepts of *mind* and *love*?

In order to answer this question, let us put it in the following, more specific, way, focusing upon the concept of love: Is there a concept of love in present-day English that is *both* substantive enough to account for the diverse applications of the word "love" by speakers of present-day English, *and* nonetheless independent of at least

the *physical force* metaphor, the *patient* metaphor, the *madness* metaphor, the *magic* metaphor, and, finally, the *war* metaphor? In other words: Are there necessary and sufficient conditions for the application of this concept which express only its inherent properties, that is, only those of its properties which exist independent of its metaphorical relations in present-day English to at least these other concepts? Wittgenstein observed the impossibility of isolating a definitive set of such conditions even for the relatively simple concept of a game (ss. 68-71); we should not be surprised if the search for such conditions for the more complex concept of love proves futile. But if there is no definitive set of such conditions for the concept of love in present-day English, as it seems there is not, we can explain why not, so long as we adopt this competing analysis of metaphor: the concept of love is penetrated by those other concepts--*physical force*, *patient*, *madness*, *magic*, and *war*--and it is thereby constituted, to some degree, by its relation to them. In short, as Lakoff and Johnson are fond of saying, this concept is, to some degree, metaphorically structured.

Metaphorically structured concepts, like the concept of love in present-day English, gain some of their meaning by their relations to other concepts. But in order to understand a particular metaphorically structured concept, one must understand its metaphorical relations to other concepts. If some of these concepts, in turn, are metaphorically structured concepts, as all of the concepts to which we have seen *love* related, we must go beyond them and understand, in turn, their metaphorical relations to other concepts. And if some of these concepts, in turn, are metaphorically structured concepts, we must . . . etc. In short, in order to understand a single metaphorically structured concept, we must go beyond it, often understanding the whole scheme of metaphorical relations from which it gains its meaning. In many cases, this whole scheme of concepts will be the language itself. As Wittgenstein warned, "to understand a sentence means to understand a language" (ss.199).

What, then, does understanding the whole scheme of metaphorical relations from which a particular concept gains its far-more-than-literal meaning require? Although the lists of examples we have examined for the metaphorically structured concepts of the mind and of love have been sufficient to show that these concepts are indeed metaphorically structured, and although these lists have even been sufficiently schematic to show that these concepts are structured by distinguishable metaphors, such lists have nevertheless been insufficient to help us understand the precise nature of the relations between these metaphors--those relations from which, after all, these particular concepts gain their special metaphorical meanings. Something more than such lists is therefore required. In order to elicit what is required, though, let us introduce another, simpler, example of a metaphorically structured

concept, that of *argument*, since these two concepts which we have been examining, those of the mind and of love, each occupy such notoriously tangled positions in their scheme that it would be too difficult for us to use them here to show what this special understanding requires.

As Lakoff and Johnson show (pp.4, 90-2, 98), we speak of arguments in present-day English according to at least four metaphors: the *journey* metaphor, the *container* metaphor, the *building* metaphor, and, finally, the *war* metaphor. For simplicity's sake we will restrict ourselves to examples of only the first two metaphors. With the first, the *journey* metaphor, we say, for example, "We have *set out* to prove that bats are birds," or, "*When we get to the next point*, we shall see that philosophy is dead," or, "*So far*, we've seen that no current theories will work," or, "We have *arrived at* a disturbing conclusion," or finally, "This observation *points the way to* an elegant solution," etc. With the second, the *container* metaphor, we say, for example, "Your argument doesn't have much *content*," or, "Your argument is *empty*," or, "That argument *has holes in it*," or, "That argument *won't hold water*," or, "You won't *find* that idea *in* his argument," or, "That conclusion *falls out of* my argument," or finally, "I still haven't gotten to the *core* of the argument," etc.

Once again, although such lists might be sufficient to show that the concept of argument is indeed metaphorically structured, and even sufficiently schematic to show that it is structured by distinguishable metaphors, such lists are nevertheless insufficient to help us understand the precise nature of the relations between these metaphors--the relations from which, after all, this particular concept gain its special metaphorical meaning. Specifically, these lists tell us neither the ways in which these two metaphors can be mixed when we talk about arguments, nor why we can mix them in the ways in which we can mix them but cannot mix them in other ways that are apparently similar. For when we mix these metaphors, the result is either permissible or impermissible present-day English. We say permissibly, for example, "*At this point* our argument doesn't have *much content*," or, "*In* what we've done *so far*, we have provided the *core* of our argument," or, "If we keep *going the way we're going*, we'll *fit all the facts in*," etc. But we also say impermissibly, for example, "We can now follow the *path* of the *core* of the argument," or, "The *content* of the argument *proceeds* as follows," or, "The *direction* of his argument has no *substance*," or, "I am disturbed by the *empty path* of your argument," etc. What is at least required, then, in order to understand the scheme of metaphorical relations from which a particular metaphorically structured concept, like that of argument, gains its special metaphorical meaning, is an explanation of why the various metaphors which

structure the concept can be mixed in the ways in which they can be mixed but cannot be mixed in the ways in which they cannot.

Davidson, remember, claims that "as much of metaphor as can be explained in terms of meaning may, and indeed must, be explained by appeal to the literal meaning of words." (p.444) However, nothing about either literal journeys or literal containers or both explains the difference between these permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors. Following Davidson, then, this difference, which is inexplicable by appeal to the literal meaning of words, must not be explicable by meaning at all. Of course, he may explain it instead by appeal to the images, feelings, or other thoughts that these literal meanings provoke in us. But if these separate metaphors provoke any images, feelings, or other thoughts in us, they presumably do so equally in the cases of the permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors. And yet, if this is the case, the difference between these permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors cannot be explained by appeal to the images, feelings, or other thoughts that these metaphors provoke in us. Therefore, Davidson cannot explain the difference between these permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors either by appeal to their literal meanings, or by appeal to the images, feelings or other thoughts provoked in us by these literal meanings. Contrarily, then, we should try to explain this difference by appeal to something other than either their literal meanings or the effects of their literal meanings.

Let us therefore follow Lakoff and Johnson and explain the difference between these permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors by appeal to their special metaphorical meaning--by appeal, specifically, to the special sort of entailments that exist within and between their metaphors (pp.89-96). Our linguists begin this explanation by noticing the following, staightforward entailment about literal journeys: as we make a journey, more of a path is created; a path is a surface; therefore, as we make a journey, more of a surface is created. When they combine this literal entailment with the *journey* metaphor, though, they notice the following, interesting entailment about the concept of argument as it is structured by this metaphor: an argument is a journey; as we make a journey, more of a surface is created; therefore, as we make an argument, more of a surface is created. This metaphorical entailment is interesting because of the following, parallel entailment about the concept of argument as it is structured by the *container* metaphor: an argument is a container; as we make a container, more of a surface is created; therefore, as we make an argument, more of a surface is created.

Thus, although there is no consistent image between the *journey* metaphor and the *container* metaphor, there is nonetheless a significant similarity between them: each imputes to an argument the creation of a surface;

moreover, each imputes to an argument the creation of a surface which corresponds to the argument's form. With the *journey* metaphor, on the one hand, this surface, the path, corresponds to its form, whereas the ground the path itself covers corresponds to the argument's content. With the *container* metaphor, on the other hand, this surface, the bounding surface of the container, corresponds to its form, whereas what is inside this bounding surface corresponds to its content. In the manner of the *journey* metaphor, then, an argument with a lot of form but little content will create a lot of path but cover little ground. A classic example of such an argument is the so-called "circular" argument, like a circular path that continues infinitely over the same ground. And in the manner of the *container* metaphor, then, an argument with a lot of form but little content will have a large bounding surface with little inside. A classic example of such an argument is the so-called "vacuous" argument, like a large but empty vessel.

In these ways, therefore, both metaphors involve this same distinction between form and content, although each highlights it differently: the *journey* metaphor emphasizes a progressive aspect of argument, whereas the *container* metaphor emphasizes a substantive aspect of argument. As a result of this similar distinction, whenever a mixed metaphor about argument uses an element from one metaphor to correspond to the form and then uses an element from the other metaphor to correspond to the content, it is permissible; indeed, such mixtures are common and important. For in this way, as Lakoff and Johnson observe, "The progress aspect of the *journey* metaphor and the amount aspect of the *container* metaphor can be highlighted simultaneously." (p.95) Let us review two of our examples of permissible mixed metaphors to confirm this: "*At this point* [on the path: *journey* metaphor, form] our argument doesn't have much *content* [within itself: *container* metaphor, content]," or, "*In* [the container: *container* metaphor, content] what we've done *so far* [along the path: *journey* metaphor, form], we have provided the *core* [of what is inside: *container* metaphor, content]."

But whenever a mixed metaphor about argument uses an element from one metaphor to correspond to the form and an element from the other metaphor to correspond to the content, and, furthermore, mixes them so as to speak of the form of the content or the content of the form, it is impermissible. Let us review two of our examples of impermissible mixed metaphors to confirm this: "We can now follow the *path* [*journey* metaphor, describing the form] of the *core* [of what is within: *container* metaphor, content] of the argument," or, "The *content* [*container* metaphor, content] of the argument *proceeds* [*journey* metaphor, describing the proceeds] as follows." The *journey*

metaphor and the *container* metaphor do not share an entailment that permits the conflation of form and content, and so sentences that metaphorically conflate them in this way are impermissible.

We can therefore explain the difference between these permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors by means of a special sort of entailments, metaphorical entailments. For, as Lakoff and Johnson show, metaphorically structured concepts, like that of *argument*, have a special sort of coherence, metaphorical coherence, so that the various metaphors that structure such a concept harmonize or clash according to illuminable, coherent schemes. As we might expect, these schemes become more complex for a particular concept as that concept becomes structured by more metaphors. Now the concept of argument, remember, is actually structured by at least two additional metaphors, the *building* metaphor and the *war* metaphor, so that a full illumination of the metaphorical scheme in which it gains some of its meaning would be far more complex than that which we have provided (for the beginnings of such an illumination, though, see Lakoff and Johnson, chapter 17).

And yet still further complexity is added when, as is often the case, a concept is structured by metaphorical relations to still other metaphorically structured concepts. For in order to illuminate such a concept, notice, we would also have to illuminate those other concepts. Thus, as we should expect, in order to fully illuminate metaphorically structured concepts we must often go beyond the local metaphorical schemes in which they gain some of their meaning, and further understand the whole metaphorical scheme of which these local schemes are parts. But, as we have seen, such schemes are not obvious. They may be consciously revealed by illuminating, for example, the difference between permissible and impermissible mixed metaphors, but this complex task requires the skill of a linguist. Does understanding a metaphorically structured concept therefore require this sort of illumination?

As Wittgenstein famously observed (ss.149), the hallmark of understanding a particular concept, and thus, by extension, of understanding a particular metaphorically structured concept, is the ability to go on from a finite list of paradigm applications of it to make acceptable, novel applications of it. Now, we speakers of present-day English show that we understand all sorts of metaphorically structured concepts, since we do precisely this all the time--in poetry most saliently, but in everyday conversation as well. But we do this without having ever studied the complex metaphorical schemes illuminated by our linguists. Apparently, then, we speakers of present-day English understand the scheme in which all sorts of metaphorically structured concepts gain some of their meaning; only, our understanding of this scheme must be unconscious. Thus, understanding a metaphorically structured concept in

present-day English usually involves unconsciously understanding its position within this scheme of concepts. And, as we have seen, understanding this position involves understanding its metaphorical coherence with these other concepts--specifically, the precise metaphorical entailments it shares with these other concepts.

Yet in this respect there is nothing unique to present-day English: the same unconscious process must also occur for understanding other languages. However, if the same process does occur when understanding other languages, and if--as anyone who speaks another language will confirm--the metaphorical schemes of different languages are different from the metaphorical scheme of present-day English, then learning another language will involve learning a different scheme of concepts. In other words, learning another language will involve learning a different conceptual scheme.

A conceptual scheme is notoriously a network of both belief and meaning. Consider the example of the conceptual scheme of quantum mechanics. There is no way to understand the terms of quantum mechanics in isolation: for example, *spin* cannot be understood by a list of inherent necessary and sufficient conditions--that is, a list of conditions that ignored its interrelation with other quantum mechanical concepts, like *charge*, *field*, *neutrino*, etc. The meanings of these words thus penetrate each other, so that the meaning of each is, to some degree, constituted by its complex relations to the others. Now, the network of these interrelated meanings is a theory, the theory of quantum mechanics, which embodies a network of beliefs about minute physical phenomena. Importantly, then, there is ultimately no distinction between these interrelated meanings and these interrelated beliefs: as a result, there is ultimately no distinction between the analytic and synthetic truths of quantum mechanics. And so likewise, Quine has argued, for natural language itself, which also embodies a network of interrelated beliefs.

We should agree. After all, we have just seen precisely how the meanings of a few present-day English words--'mind', 'love', and 'argument'--embody such beliefs. By using the *machine* metaphor of the mind, for example, speakers of present-day English exhibit belief, often unconscious, about the nature of the mind: that is a machine. With such a relation, and even, as we saw, such a penetration, the theory that the mind is a machine comes quite naturally. And yet this relation and penetration is relatively recent. There is, not surprisingly, no similar relation or penetration in Homeric Greek. Consequently, just as one quantum mechanical theory might relate *spin* to *charge* in one way, and another theory in another, so too one language might relate *mind* to *machine* in one way, and another language in another, or in no way at all. Languages are, by such interrelated metaphors, conceptual schemes.

Needless to say, Davidson has famously argued that the very idea of a conceptual scheme is incoherent. We should not pass by, therefore, without briefly discussing his argument. It invokes his also famous *principle of charity*, according to which "the only possibility at the start," when we, as interpreters, encounter a stranger--that is, someone whose signs of assent and dissent might be different from, even opposite to, our own--"is to assume general agreement on beliefs." (p.78; cf. p.79) By this principle, then, we must always seek to attribute to the stranger as many true beliefs as possible--that is to say, as many beliefs-which-we-assume-to-be-true as possible. This principle will therefore preclude us from recognizing an incommensurable conceptual scheme, that is, a network of radically different beliefs. As a result, Davidson concludes, "we have found no intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different." (p.79)

Should we accept, however, the principle of charity as the appropriate guide to the interpretation of strangers? So described, it is hard not to. For if we reject the principle of charity, we court the charge of *uncharitability*. Let us not be ashamed to do so, however, for the principle of charity is not as charitable as at first blush it might appear. According to this principle, remember, when we, as interpreters, encounter a stranger, we must always seek to attribute to the stranger as many true beliefs as possible--that is to say, as many beliefs-which-we-assume-to-be-true as possible. According to Davidson, this attribution will not be complete "until we have successfully established a systematic correlation of sentences held true with sentences held true." (p.78) For Davidson, then, his principle of charity disguises a particular mode of understanding--*correlation*--as understanding itself. And yet if conceptual schemes do exist, correlation would necessarily occur from the perspective of the interpreter's own conceptual scheme. Thus, if conceptual schemes do exist, we should expect that a principle of interpretation that required correlation would necessarily occlude alien conceptual schemes--misunderstanding them as, perhaps, odd variants of the interpreter's home conceptual scheme. In short, if conceptual schemes exist, Davidson would be the Frazer of semantics and epistemology.

We have just reviewed evidence that conceptual schemes do exist--on small scales in the guise of theories, but more importantly on large scales in the guise of metaphors. Might another mode of understanding therefore exist? That is to say, might there be a mode of understanding which does not occur from the perspective of the interpreter's home conceptual scheme, but instead tries to abandon that perspective in favour of adopting the perspective of a stranger's conceptual scheme? I think so. In fact, we have already seen an example of such a mode of understanding. For when we sought to understand the metaphorically structured concept of *argument* we sought

to understand its interrelations with surrounding concepts, its metaphorical coherences. Another mode of understanding, then, one recommended by this superior analysis of metaphor, is understanding by *interrelation*.

Davidson's argument against the very idea of a conceptual scheme fails because the principle of charity upon which it depends disguises *correlation* as understanding itself, ignoring the alternative: understanding by *interrelation*. In sum, the principle of charity is ultimately uncharitable, as uncharitable as Frazer's assessment of strange religions. This uncharitability is not restricted to this argument, however; it also infect his arguments against special metaphorical meaning, since, as we shall see, they depend upon the thesis it supports: that there are no conceptual schemes. More precisely, his argument against the very idea of a conceptual scheme and his arguments against special metaphorical meaning stand or fall together. Let us see how they fall.

First of all, he claimed, if there is a special metaphorical meaning, this meaning should disappear when the metaphor dies and becomes merely literal language. But according to him, remember, the difference between a live metaphor and a dead one was that a live metaphor is both usually false and always provokes in us images, feelings, or other thoughts, whereas a dead one both may be true or false equally, depending upon the circumstances, and does not so provoke us. Yet the superior analysis of metaphors that we have examined draws the boundaries between metaphor and merely literal language somewhat differently. For according to it, on the one hand, many sentences that would be literal according to Davidson are in fact metaphorical; indeed, most of the examples we examined were like this--of such a nature, that is, that they gained special metaphorical meanings by means of their schematic relations to other concepts, regardless of whether they provoked in us images, feelings, or other thoughts. And thus according to it, on the other hand, dead metaphors, or merely literal uses of language, would gain no such special meanings, even if they were to provoke in us images, feelings or other thoughts. Now, following this superior analysis of metaphors, some meaning does indeed disappear when a metaphor dies, just as Davidson observed. For if a concept that was once metaphorically structured loses its relations to other concepts, due to some shift in the metaphorical scheme (that is to say, some shift in the conceptual scheme, whether it be precipitated by the integration of theoretical advances or by cultural whims) so that this concept no longer gains a special metaphorical meaning by means of schematic relations to these other concepts, then it both dies and loses some of its meaning--its special metaphorical meaning. With this superior analysis of metaphors, then--according to which metaphors are the bricks and mortar of conceptual schemes--Davidson's first argument against special metaphorical meaning turns out to be innocuous.

Secondly, he claimed, if there is a special metaphorical meaning, there should likewise be a special simile meaning. After all, Davidson suggested, the only difference between similes and metaphors is that all similes are trivially true whereas most metaphors are patently false. But because there is no such thing as special simile meaning, he argued, there should likewise be no such thing as special metaphorical meaning. After adducing this second argument, we noticed that any objection to it would have to show that metaphors are different from similes in more than this one way which Davidson has suggested. However, we have already seen how metaphors are indeed different from similes in more than this one way: metaphors, on the one hand, help structure many of the most important concepts of our, or any, language; similes, on the other hand, do not--for they simply cannot grammatically connect concepts within an intricate, often unconscious, scheme the way metaphors do. In order to see why not, consider the several metaphorically structured concepts we examined earlier and try to imagine how similes could have played the roles which metaphors played in structuring them. With this superior analysis of metaphors, then--according to which metaphors are the bricks and mortar of conceptual schemes--Davidson's second argument against special metaphorical meaning also turns out to be innocuous.

Thirdly, he claimed, attempts to paraphrase metaphors usually, perhaps even always fail, since the paraphrase is always weaker in some way than the original. Moreover, he claimed that this feature of metaphors not only *may*, but also *must*, be explained by appeal to the merely literal meanings of words. After adducing this third argument, we noticed that the most powerful objection to it--an objection that would not only vindicate the hypothesis of special metaphorical meaning from his attack, but also give us positive reason to endorse it--would have to show that the failure of paraphrasing *must* be explained by appeal to some meanings beyond the merely literal. However, we have already seen how an understanding of metaphorically structured concepts requires understanding their special metaphorical meanings, and thus the metaphorical schemes in which these concepts gain their meaning. In short, then, we have already seen how a paraphrase of a metaphor which seeks to convey understanding of that metaphor *must* provide an extensive gloss in the style of Lakoff and Johnson. Their superior analysis of metaphors has thus provided us with the most powerful objection to Davidson's third argument against special metaphorical meaning. With this superior analysis of metaphors, then--according to which metaphors are the bricks and mortar of conceptual schemes--this final argument also turns out to be innocuous.

Let us conclude. Although I have here sought to defeat Davidson's analysis of metaphors by marshaling this competing analysis, my aim, as I noticed at the beginning, has not been primarily critical. It has been

nonetheless important that we recognize and remember the inadequacies of Davidson's analysis of metaphors, and also that we recognize and remember the interdependence of that analysis and his correspondingly inadequate argument against the very idea of a conceptual scheme. For the two are both symptoms of the same philosophical disease, one most egregiously exhibited by Frazer but still common in more subtle and therefore more dangerous forms today: uncharitableness disguised as charity--or, more specifically, homogenizing uniformity disguised as the acknowledgment of diversity. In order to inoculate ourselves against this disease, then, we must first analyze metaphors correctly, as Lakoff and Johnson have, in outline at least, done; but we must do so in order to recognize, more importantly, the presence of alien conceptual schemes. According to this analysis, though, an alien conceptual scheme exists wherever an alien metaphor exists, and alien metaphors are as common as alien languages. We must therefore recognize not only the presence, but also the prevalence of alien conceptual schemes. For the burden of our philosophical inheritance is, I believe, not only a recognition of this prevalence but also the development of an epistemology which is not crippled by it.

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