

METAPHOR AS A FUNCTION OF  
LANGUAGE, INTENTION, AND INTERPRETATION

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TRUTH, MEANING, AND REFERENCE

Metaphor stands at the juncture of epistemology and metaphysics. What makes it elusive is intimately bound up in its dual character, a "thing" of the imagination straddling the realms of knowledge and reality. Due to its unique position, metaphor is often only understood up to a certain point: one usually frames it either as solely a concern of knowledge or as only a matter of what is. In order to appreciate the impact metaphor has for both of these fields of learning, this paper takes up three constitutive concepts of metaphor, truth, meaning, and reference, and attempts to understand what the "cash value" is of each on both sides of the epistemology/metaphysics fence.

One way of reading Gottlob Frege understands "truth," though significant, as a narrow and limited concern. Truth questions deal with an important part of human experience: the experience of scientific investigation. If one reads Frege as privileging science and its effects over and above every other aspect of being human, one concludes truth is the highest of all values, and all else is secondary in value to it. But a less inclined

reading sees truth differently, as one of several notable considerations necessary for living a satisfying life. Art, while different from science, is no less important, and Frege need not necessarily be read as saying it is.[1] If truth as correspondence is the only way of understanding the concept of truth, it becomes a shallow, nearly empty concern. This correspondence sense of truth occupies the highest place of a hierarchy skewed towards precise explanation, but the lowest place of one slanted towards the disclosure of new information.

Yet even in this limiting sense, truth is still wholly indispensable. Since the time of Socrates, the philosophical tradition has never let go of the importance of truth. The correspondence sense of truth is precise, and any investigation, whether scientific, aesthetic, or otherwise, can always benefit from this particular care. Rhetoric, says Socrates, admits it is best utilized by one who has come into possession of truth.[2] Still, truth as correspondence is only the most recent "form" of an ever evolving idea of truth. This sense developed in response to the human need to define the surrounding indefiniteness, to find ordered patterns of experience. Paul Ricoeur traces this sense of truth from its roots in the primal finitude of being human.[3]

The second concept in the hierarchy is meaning. Though not as precise a concept as truth as correspondence, what it loses in precision, it gains fourfold in its insightful disclosure. Again, one must be careful about how to approach meaning. If the drive to limit and order experience takes the upper hand, "meaning" quickly becomes a compilation of words identifying other words. Language is always an instance of experience; it is impossible to imagine what words mean apart from the experiences they represent. Linguistic meaning is not operational but relational; it does not simply identify and substitute words for words, but acts "like a space

in which things are related to one another." [4]

Meaning's relational character, according to Philip Wheelwright, has two aspects: one which means, performing the act of meaning, and the other which is meant, the object of the meaning act. [5] The claim meaning occupies a higher place in the disclosure hierarchy than does truth as correspondence follows from the structure of human existence as Ricoeur outlines it in Fallible Man. Whereas the limited sense of truth results from human primal finitude, a finitude consisting in a point of view, meaning "is the non-point of view," forcing signification to be concerned with both its "noun" (i.e. with the object of truth) and its "verb" (i.e. with its own act of signifying some object). [6]

But what of the precision lost when speaking of meaning? Because it is relational, meaning is already one step removed from the objects it relates. Its relational aspect is manifested in a negative way when one asks what a speaker means when using particular words in a given context. The meaning intended by the speaker rarely, if ever, exactly matches the "object" within the speaker's discourse, for the object is constituted at least as much by the listeners as by the speaker. Meaning only communicates once it is founded upon and finds a place within discourse. [7]

Frege was convinced that the bedrock of discourse is reference. [8] Reference has the function of validating the objects related by meaning, paralleling the way meaning confirms truth as correspondence. Reference occupies the third place in the disclosure hierarchy; it is the source of new insights as well as great confusion. An understanding of reference must be both epistemological and metaphysical in scope. Distortion occurs if one assumes a natural dichotomy between the cognitive and the emotive in being human. [9] The desire for knowledge privileges intellect over feeling, and the desire for

being often commits the opposite bias. Reference, in its strictest sense, never allows any separation or isolation of thought and feeling from one another.

The obliteration of the separation between thinking and feeling shows metaphor as overlapping categories, as exhibiting various degrees of several different understandings. Because human thought is discursive, the closure brought to any discussion is always a matter of degree, never "once and for all." [10] Metaphor is best illustrated as a process, as an event dynamically emerging from its relatively static surroundings, instead of an already constituted entity resulting from the play of language.

The focus is on metaphor as a power, the dynamis at work in the process of giving one thing "a name that belongs to something else," the power Aristotle called transference. [11] The transference power of language's metaphorical nature is not and cannot be completely circumscribed within the circle of logic. The intimate significance of human experience is at times more aptly expressed through the other arts (especially poetry) than by any logical formulation. The most unfortunate misunderstanding of reference repudiates any metaphorical use of language: "It is the prejudice of a theory of logic that is alien to language if the metaphorical use of a word is regarded as not its real sense." [12]

#### METAPHOR'S THREE THREADS

Metaphor is a finely woven concept, interlacing both the ideas of truth, meaning and reference with the ways those ideas are taken up by the metaphor's writer or speaker and the metaphor's reader or hearer. Metaphor reflects language's capacity to aim at what, at least initially, escapes expression. Metaphor always already involves an interaction between persons, language, and the world they inhabit.

Aristotle claims "it is from metaphor that we can

best get hold of something fresh"; it does what neither ordinary words nor strange words are capable of doing: [13] it reveals novelty within what is most familiar to us. One recognizes metaphor with respect to its paradoxical nature; its essence is one of "a semantic tension which subsists among heterogeneous elements brought together in some striking image of expression."

[14] Metaphor steps out beyond the limits of intellect. One cannot "learn" how to master metaphor from others, for metaphor depends upon intuition: "a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity of dissimilars." [15]

One of metaphor's constitutive threads (distinguished but not separated from metaphor) is the figure's "literal" or ordinary meaning, the denotations of the words employed by the metaphor in their everyday understanding. This variable is metaphor's material aspect, analogously referring to the material cause of Aristotle's four causes. "Ordinary words" are the "stuff" from which metaphors emerge. In their ordinariness, they have the same appeal as does clay from the ground: common and familiar, it usually goes unnoticed.

But in the hands of one who knows what to do with this "stuff," the familiar takes on an altogether unfamiliar form, the ordinary becomes the extraordinary. Metaphor, like rhetoric, is something greater than the sum of its parts.[16] Like rhetoric, in its employment of the movement of dialectic, and apparent confusion of differences marks metaphor, only to be resolved by a refiguring that draws the same out of the different. What is vital, though, is the undecidable adumbration between the like and the unlike: what is the same cannot be conceived without at the same time calling upon what is different, and vice-versa.[17] To drive only for precision and only for clarity, Aristotle points out, leaves language mean and prosaic, and the reaction against

this, an equally pathological drive for only the significant and only the sublime, makes language perplexing and bewildering. All things in moderation, counsels Aristotle, and double so for language: strange words and metaphors "will save the language from seeming mean and prosaic, while the ordinary words in it will secure the requisite clearness." [18]

Metaphor's second essential thread is what the author intends, aims at, hopes to accomplish through the play of the connotations of the words employed in the metaphor. This aspect of metaphor, emphasizing the intentions of the author rather than simply language per se, reveals language's teleological character: language contains aims and ends within itself for the sake of which metaphors are created.

The teleology of language comes to the fore through the intentions of the metaphor's author. Language is acted upon, appropriated through the efficacy of the author. Ricoeur calls this act "the central act of discourse, namely, predication." [19] The activity of affirmation, of declaration, presents a second image of activity, a double image, in which both author and expression act: the author, with respect to what is predicated of what; the expression, with respect to its representation of things "as in a state of activity." [20] Metaphor, unlike metonymy, has a double action: it names through predicates and arrives at "new" predicates through old familiar names. Metaphor can be seen as a result of the action of a writer (or speaker) upon its object, language: "metaphor is the outcome of a debate between predication and naming; its place in language is between words and sentences." [21]

The author's intentions draw upon the previous concepts of meaning and reference. Metaphor obscures any identification of reference as only a matter of denotation. With respect to metaphor reference moves

in two directions simultaneously: on the one hand is reference's denotative aspect; on the other hand, reference now also consists "in pointing out a meaning or property that something 'possesses.'" [22] The play of differences realized at the level of words, with their myriad connotations, blots out the separation between subject and object, between feeling and thought, and starts on the way to poetry. The author intentionally uses the indefiniteness of words to evoke in the reader (or listener) the primacy of the oneness permeating human being. [23]

While the intentions of the metaphor's author opens up language's capacity for expression over and beyond simply language "in and of itself," the interpretation of the metaphor's listener further opens up language. Metaphor has the distinct power to elicit shock or surprise from its hearers. [24] Good metaphors and good jokes share this capacity. A joke provokes the listener to laugh by exposing an unexpected humorous twist within ordinary circumstances. A metaphor provokes the listener to think by displaying an unfamiliar "something" through ordinary words. In the same way, both jokes and metaphors resist explanation: explaining jokes and metaphors undoes and effaces their particular constituent twists. Wheelwright supports Ricoeur's argument for the double direction of metaphorical reference by claiming that a metaphor's "full meaning involves a tension between two or more directions of semantic stress." [25] Metaphor manifests its efficacy in the multitude of interpretations it evokes from its audience: a poet is more poetic, claims Martin Heidegger, when her saying is at its greatest openness, "ready for the unforeseen." [26] From this encounter between linguistic event and linguistic observer, from the interaction between speaking and listening, "something comes into being that had not existed before and that exist form now on." [27]

The third thread of metaphor is the reader's role

to gather together the manifold of possibilities presented by the metaphor. In keeping with the analogy to Aristotelian causes, the reader's role functions as metaphor's formal aspect. The ordinary language (metaphor's "matter") has been worked over by the author (metaphor's "efficient" cause). Yet there remains an indefiniteness and indeterminacy about the figurative expression. What brings the metaphor to a greater degree of definiteness is the way the listener interprets the significance of the metaphor as s/he understands it. The interplay of language, author intention and reader interpretation reminds one of Socrates' metaphor for dialectics, a story about sowing seeds. [28] Like the dialectician, the metaphor author makes a double choice: one, to decide which words are capable of producing the most food for thought; the other, to find those persons in which the words will have the best opportunities of growth.

Ricoeur is not less sensitive to the role the hearer plays in the essence of metaphor. The novelty of a metaphor's emergence is manifested in the reader, the one experiencing the metaphor as an event rather than as a static object. A metaphor's event trait distinguishes it as an authentic metaphor, a living metaphor, from other expressions that have long since passed away. [29] The hearer of the metaphor is in the unique situation of simultaneously experiencing and acting, what Ricoeur understands to be involved in Wittgenstein's concept of "seeing as." Event and meaning are experiencing and acting: "the experience-act of 'seeing as' ensures that imagery is implicated in metaphorical signification: 'The same imagery which occurs also means.'" [30]

The single phenomenon metaphor creates in reader, in which the reader both acts and is acted upon, cannot be split in two, as if one might experience without acting, or vice-versa. But in order to explain and understand this phenomenon, take a closer look at each

of its aspects. On the experiential side of this situation, the hearer receives the metaphor as another experience among an indefinite number of various other background experiences.[31] These background experiences supplement and enrich the interpretation of the initially received metaphor: the more diverse the additional experiences, in their quality as well as in their quantity, the greater the realization of the metaphorical capacity to reveal new realities to the listener. The varieties of contexts available to the hearer, coupled with ordinary language, is responsible for the possibility of metaphorical tension. This, Ricoeur says, is why metaphor differs from allegory: whereas allegories consist only of metaphorical terms, "the metaphorical statement incorporates non-metaphorical terms . . . with which the metaphorical term interacts." [32]

The other aspect of this phenomenon is its acting aspect. Clearly the "agent" responsible for "putting together" the significance of the metaphor is the reader's imagination. Once having crossed over into this field of activity, the usual philosophical distinctions between subject and object, nature and freedom, and science and art evaporate. In this place, poetry is indistinguishable from thought; truth, meaning and reference, as they were initially framed under the auspices of the imposed dichotomies, can no longer be understood as before. Truth here has significance for both the subject and object of experience, for the experience as constituted by the one experiencing and the one experienced.

Wheelwright places more emphasis upon the receptive aspect of seeing as rather than its active aspect. "A poetic utterance invites our imaginative assent, which is to say our depth assent, to some degree or other and in some context or other." [33] But imagination is more than mere assent; its activity is better described by Ricoeur's term of refiguring, of working the complex of experience into a composite whole, of using its ability

to gather together and resolve what, at first glance, appears scattered and undecidable.

Approach the problem phenomenologically. Rather than focus upon either the object of consciousness or its subject, the "I" of Descartes' "I think," what Ricoeur calls self-consciousness, he considers the "space" between the subject and the object, the way subject and object are already related to one another: consciousness. The experience of consciousness already presupposes one who is conscious and something consciousness is conscious of; it is "the synthesis [the transcendental imagination] brings about between understanding and sensibility (or in our terminology, between meaning and appearance, between speaking and looking)." [34] The imagination does not ignore the category splits humanity has imposed upon the world; instead, it recognizes the categorical divisions as its own "creations," and as such is able to suspend those delineations whenever it sees fit, in order to "work out" something unusual which presents itself. [35]

If metaphor in its essence has these three threads running through it, one owing directly to the products of language, the other two owing indirectly to language by way of being acted upon, how does metaphor alter the previous understandings of truth, meaning and reference? Since language issues from consciousness, from the interaction between persons and worlds, what effects does the suspension of dichotomous representations have upon these three key ideas of metaphor? Comprehending metaphor as a function of the three independent variables of language, author and listener has two major consequences. One is an explicit concern of Ricoeur's in The Rule of Metaphor, namely, the issue of ontology and metaphorical reference. The other, less emphasized but still important to him, concerns the human imagination and metaphorical truth.

## TWO CONSEQUENCES OF METAPHOR

Aristotle's remarks on the poet throw some light upon what metaphor aims at accomplishing and the ways it goes about accomplishing it. Aristotle regards the poet as another imitator, like other "makers of likenesses." Since his business is to represent things, the poet does this in one of three ways. The first two ways concern the actuality of things, either as they were or are in freality (i.e. as they were or are known to be), or as they were or are said or thought to be (i.e. as they were or are believed to be). The third way is the other side of actuality, the possibilities of things, things "as they ought to be." [36] the present investigation will focus upon the third way, upon the opposition between actuality and possibility.

Ricoeur concentrates on this third way because it is the site of greatest conflict. Conflict is the core of human essence. The consciousness relation already expresses this in its two aspects: "the object is synthesis; the self is conflict." Moreover, Ricoeur does not regard the ongoing conflict in being human as something to be reduced or eliminated. Rather, it is the energy used to synthesize the external object and interiorize the synthesis affectively within the self. "[A]ll [our] external conflicts could not be interiorized if a latent conflict within ourselves did not precede them, did not gather them in and bestow upon them the note of inwardness which it has from the outset." [37] Ricoeur's outline of the structure of human existence supports why Socrates' dialectical method has withstood the test of time. [38]

One of the consequences of authentic, live metaphors is the heightened clarity of this fundamental, never-ending, ever-tense battle going on at the core of human existence. It is necessary and worthwhile to come to this realization about human nature. However, it exacts

a certain cost. Unless humanity is careful, this terrifying and dangerous awareness can easily destroy the essence of humanity.

Ricoeur illustrates the care necessary to preserve humankind. To be human already involves relations of esteem. One esteems both an other and one's self. This esteem is grounded in a recognition of worth, the value both the other and the self have as human persons. But the truly difficult aspect of esteeming lies in esteeming one's self as another. The care needed to safeguard humanity lies both in valuing what it is to be human precisely by way of valuing another, even valuing one's self as another. "I believe that I am worth something in the eyes of another who approves by existence; in the extreme case, this other is myself." [39] Heidegger realizes the same dangerous threat manifesting itself in unreflective, unbounded technological development, the realization of "the unconditional character of mere willing in the sense of purposeful self-assertion in everything." [40]

The best way of coming to terms with this threat, the best way of making sure of giving the proper care and attention human essence deserves, is to allow what is of value to come to the forefront of experience, and to arrange what comes forward in a way that reinforces the capacity to reaffirm one another, to reaffirm the existence of the other, over and over again. For this reason Ricoeur insists upon an ontology to ground metaphorical reference.

Language is the natural result of consciousness. The "world" is a world-for-us as we name it, as it makes its way into language. Yet the converse is also true: language returns to the world of presence, so it already necessarily depends upon a "world" to re-present. "Thus the original humanity of language means at the same time the fundamental linguistic quality of man's being-

in-the-world." [41] Language always appears alongside of and with humanity; in language, metaphor is the convergence point of the creation of meaning. Metaphor's structure consists in a double tension: on the one hand, it yields to the ordinary and familiar understandings of the terms, but on the other hand, precisely through such a yielding, it resists by displaying something altogether fresh and original. "This double tension," Ricoeur declares, "constitutes the referential function of metaphor in poetry." [42]

If safeguarding humanity from annihilating itself is what needs to be done, and since science has been successful at achieving what it aims to accomplish, why not bring the ways of science to bear upon language in order to accomplish this pressing need? Science, Hans Georg Gadamer points out, dwells within language, not vice-versa. Its particular ability to refigure the world, to represent it especially in a quantifiable and calculable way, is but one way of dealing with the dangerous, essential conflict of being human. Language, in both its scientific and artistic expressions, helps humankind to cope by being the medium in which it can deal with the danger. "It is not just that the statement and the judgement are merely one particular form among the multiplicity of linguistic attitudes--they themselves remain bound up with man's attitude to life." [43]

Poetry, like thinking, is dedicated to the task of constantly making it possible for human persons to esteem and value one another. To the overly scientific or "rational" person, poetry is totally irrelevant to the task at hand. But since science owes its nature to language, poetry "is what first brings man onto the earth, making him belong to it, and thus brings him into dwelling." [44] And if poetry is the most appropriate way of using language to meet this task, perhaps, as Gadamer suggests, the beautiful is what needs to be

aimed at for the ontological project of discovering and arranging human values. The beautiful is crucial to ontology, for of itself it presents itself. "This means it has the most important ontological function: that of mediating between idea and appearance." [45]

For Ricoeur, the ontological project is the means to attaining the requisite protection for humanity from its own destructive impulses. The agent necessary for carrying out these means is the human imagination. Language presents the place of possibility for imagination to begin its work, for language reassures human existence. [46] Imagination makes an advance beyond transcendental analogy into the realm of poetic resemblance. This move is necessary in order to think being in a more original way than was possible through analogy. Poetic resemblance can step beyond analogy because analogy has stepped beyond metaphor. [47] Poetry has preserved what speculative poetry has lost: the familiar Greek sense of phusis, of generative power. The language of speculative discourse has "to seek after the place where appearance signifies 'generating what grows.'" [48]

Language, whether as poetry or as discourse, is what makes human existence possible. Through it we act and respond--in it are the possibilities of action and reaction. Human action results in a creation, a place fashioned from the larger medium, a place where we can live. [49] In this place, it is impossible to construe truth as a matter of correspondence. The correspondence sense is possible only by denying and repressing the fundamental role language has in protecting human being.

The metaphorical concept of truth is paradoxical, for metaphor employs both a literal "is not" over and against an ontological "is." [50] These two features of the single whole called language time and again come up against one another, and by appropriating the energy released in the confrontation, propel language into

its ever-widening expansiveness. The power liberated through poetic confrontation gives humanity the warmth and security it continually needs in order to renew itself. The most satisfying way to live is to bask in the warmth of the fire at the heart of language, of the fire in our own hearts. Even though humanity does not yet live in such a way, it is still possible: "dwelling can be unpoetic only because it is in essence poetic." [51]

Metaphor reveals the terrific power permeating every fibre of language, every fibre of being. And language results from living in this world at this time, and in the infinitude of worlds recurring throughout historical time. An ontological project has to be undertaken by way of language, for language leaves traces of where being human has come from as well as hints to where it is headed. Only by constantly going through language, Heidegger asserts, can we reach what is, "because language is the house of Being." [52]

#### NOTES

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26. "...Poetically Man Dwells...", p. 216.
27. Gadamer, p.419.
28. Phaedrus, 276e-277a (p. 160).
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33. Wheelwright, p. 205.
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38. Phaedrus, 265c-e (pp. 132-33).
39. Fallible Man, pp. 188-89.
40. "What Are Poets For?", pp. 116-17.
41. Gadamer, p. 401.

42. Rule of Metaphor, p. 40.
43. Gadamer, p. 411.
44. "...Poetically Man Dwells...", p. 218.
45. Gadamer, p. 438.
46. "What Are Poets For?", p. 96.
47. Rule of Metaphor, p. 272.
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PERSONS AND PROPERTY IN QUEBEC CIVIL LAW:  
A PHILOSOPHICAL PERSPECTIVE.

by

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I Introduction

The unfortunate tendency of many lawyers and law professors to treat law as a self-contained science, exclusive of politics, philosophy and economics has resulted in a certain inarticulation as regards changes in the law. This 'tunnel vision' is well equipped to document changes in the law, often in purely textual terms, but is ill-equipped to explain why these changes are taking place, or to take any coherent initiative in effecting change.

In legal discourse today, we are witnessing a fundamental re-focussing of the relation between persons and property. This is certainly true for Quebec Civil Law, but is no less true for the Common Law and Public International Law.

In the Civil Law of Quebec, we see a new notion of the patrimony being developed in Bill 20. This new notion stands as a solution to the long debate on who owns the trust property. It consists of the concept of persons attaching to autonomous patrimony and stands in stark contrast to the Civil Code concept of patrimony attaching to personality.

The Civil Code notion of property is rooted in classical Will Theory which was developed in the 17<sup>th</sup> century to justify the set of property relations borne of the Industrial Revolution. It is almost a tautology to assert that the property relations of today are not those of a land economy in 1700. Yet, this new notion of the patrimony in Bill 20 has had a most difficult birth. This is, I