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## Metaphor, Truth, and Representation<sup>1</sup>

**Abstract:** Do metaphorical sentences express facts or represent states of affairs in the world? Can a metaphorical statement tell us 'what there is'? These questions raise the issue of whether metaphors can be used to make truth-claims; that is, whether metaphors can be regarded as assertions that can be evaluated as true or false. Some theorists on metaphor have argued for a negative answer to the above-mentioned questions. They have claimed, among others, that metaphorical utterances are non-descriptive uses of language (Blackburn 1998); truth is not the constitutive aim of metaphors (Lamarque and Olsen 1994); metaphorical sentences do not have propositional contents (Davidson 1979; Cooper 1986; Rorty 1987, 1989; Lepore and Stone 2010, 2015); metaphorical utterances are neither assertions nor expressions of beliefs (Loewenberg 1973, 1975; Davies 1982; Davies 1984; Blackburn, 1984). I discuss a particular view, *Metaphorical Expressivism*, which exploits the relationship between truth, belief and assertion, and argues for the irrelevancy of truth to metaphors on the premise that metaphorical utterances do not count as assertions and that they do not count as the expression of beliefs. The denial of the truth-evaluability of metaphors on this view, I argue, is a product of an unmotivated tendency to see truth and meaning in terms of the portrayal of facts and a commitment to two untenable principles: literalism and representationalism.

**Keywords:** metaphor, truth, assertion, Representationalism, Literalism, Expressivism

### 0 Introduction

Some theorists of metaphor argue that metaphorical utterances are not expressions of beliefs and that they do not count as assertions. The cornerstone on which these arguments rest is the intricate connection that the notions of belief and assertion have with the notion of truth. An assertion, when it is sincere, is an expression of a belief; an assertion aims at truth, and truth is, arguably, thought to be the constitutive norm of assertion; and hence, assertion is a bearer of truth. An area of discourse (or an utterance) is truth-apt if the utterances in that discourse count as assertions and as expression of beliefs. In the case of metaphor, one can identify a composite view that I will refer to as *Metaphorical Expressivism* which

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exploits the relationship between truth, belief and assertion, and argues for the irrelevancy of truth to metaphors on the premise that metaphorical utterances do not count as assertions and they do not count as the expression of beliefs.

For the Metaphorical Expressivist, *truth does not matter to metaphors*. Rather, the maker of a metaphor is expressing an experience (instead of a belief), or making a suggestion or a proposal (instead of an assertion). Metaphorical Expressivism approaches the question of the truth-evaluability of metaphors from the aims and purposes of making metaphors: the aim of making a metaphor is not to make a truth-claim but to issue an invitation for someone to see one thing as another thing. The Metaphorical Expressivist adopts a literalist and representationalist view of truth and connects that to the notion of assertion and the expression of beliefs and argues, on the one side of a coin, that metaphors do not make claims to truth and thus they are neither assertions nor expressions of beliefs, and on the other side of the same coin, that metaphors do not count as assertions or expressions of beliefs and hence by that fact they are not truth-evaluable.<sup>2</sup>

This paper, then, is an assessment of the Metaphorical Expressivist's exploitation of truth's connection with assertion and belief to inform its position that truth does not matter to metaphors. Rather than showing that metaphors can be assertions and expressions of beliefs, the strategy I adopt here is a critical examination of the underlying motivations for the expressivist's contentions. The overall thesis here is that the Metaphorical Expressivist's view is untenable; the untenability of the view stems from the fact that it is grounded on certain mistaken assumptions and perspectives about metaphors and assertions which motivates the thought that metaphorical utterances are neither assertions nor expressions of beliefs. By revealing and discarding these mistaken assumptions and perspectives, the paper clears a hurdle towards construing metaphors as assertions and expressions of beliefs, and by so doing, it brings the notion of truth into the appraisal of metaphors.

2 There have been many arguments against the truth-evaluability of metaphors in the literature: one strand of argument owes its origin and force from Davidson (1979) who argues that metaphors do not have non-literal contents that are propositional in nature; another strand of argument uses the phenomenological model of understanding metaphors – seeing-as – as a basis for arguing that metaphors should not be appraised in terms of truth (for instance, Davidson 1979; Reimer 2001; Lepore and Stone 2010). However, the focus of this paper is on the main tenets and the arguments of the view I have termed Metaphorical Expressivism. So, while I admit that these other arguments and views have bearings on truth and representation with respect to metaphors, I do not discuss them here.

## 1 The Connection between Assertion and Truth

In the Preface to his *Truth and Other Enigmas*, Dummett (1978) writes that “just because the notion of assertion is so fundamental, it is hard to give an account of it that does not take other notions relating to language, or at least psychological notions such as intention and belief, as already understood” (p. xvii). In this spirit, most of the accounts of assertion attempt to explain assertion as involving beliefs and intentions (Grice 1957, 1989; Bach and Harnish 1979; Brandom 1983; Ellis 1990; Williams 2002), rationality (Douven, 2006), knowledge (Williamson 2000; DeRose, 2002), or a complex of attitudes (Grayling 2007). Truth is, however, seen to be intricately linked with assertion that it is often a ‘platitude’ that assertion is essentially truth-involving. There are at least three senses in which this connection is cashed out. In one sense, an assertion is a claim that something is true (Jäger 1970; Price 1983, 1987; Wright 1988, 1992, 2001; Cozzo 1994; Collin and Guldman 2005; Weiner 2005, 2007) that is, as briskly stated by Wright, “to assert is to present as true” (1992: 34). Collin and Guldman (2005) characterize truth as the key or central condition for the success of an assertion. That is, when one asserts that *p*, the key success condition of that assertion is that it is the case that *p*. This is sometimes referred to as the *fulfillment condition* of an assertion.

In another sense, assertoric discourse should aim at truth and that truth itself should be understood in terms of assertion (Dummett, 1981). This aim of making true statements could issue in a kind of epistemic commitment on the part of the speaker to be committed to the truth, belief in, or knowledge of, the utterance made (Appiah 1985; Ellis 1990; Williams 2002). Providing a warrant or justification for the truth of an assertion when challenged seems to naturally follow from this commitment to the truth of assertions. The third sense in which truth is linked with assertion is that truth is a constitutive norm of assertion; that is, a rule that guides the making of correct assertions is truth. The rule is often given us: *one must: assert p only if p is true* (Weiner 2005, 2007).

The intricate interrelationship among the notions of truth, belief and assertion is significant to the issue of the truth-evaluability of metaphors. If one can show that metaphorical utterances count as assertions then that will mean that metaphorical utterances make truth-claims and vice versa; if one can show that speakers express their beliefs by means of metaphorical utterances, then one can appraise those utterances as either true or false; if metaphorical utterances are assertions, then on one popular view of assertions, metaphorical utterances are expressions of beliefs. In arguing that metaphorical utterances are neither expressions of beliefs nor assertions, the Metaphorical Expressivist comes to the conclusion that truth is irrelevant to metaphors.

## 2 The Tenets of Metaphorical Expressivism

The very distinct tenet of the Expressivist about metaphor is that: *truth does not matter to metaphors*. And this tenet is based on the view that metaphorical utterances do not count as assertions, and they do not count as the expression of beliefs. Expressivists, in general, are opposed to minimalism about truth-aptness, in their insistence that despite surface propositional form, certain areas of discourse or types of sentences like performatives (Austin 1962), fiction (Divers and Miller 1995), ethics (Ayer 1952; Blackburn 1984), etc., are not truth evaluable. The expressivist contends that in such areas of discourses what matters is not the expression of beliefs but the evocation of moods and attitudes. And since such evocations of moods and attitudes are not appraised for truth, these areas of discourses have little, if not nothing, to do with truth and falsity. The Metaphorical Expressivist need not be an expressivist about other areas of discourses; she is an expressivist about metaphors in so far as she explains the refusal to attribute truth and falsity to metaphors on the basis that metaphors are not expressions of beliefs or assertions. Blackburn (1984, 1998) and Cooper (1986) are foremost Metaphorical Expressivists; other writers who espouse the views of Metaphorical Expressivism in various forms include Black (1955, 1962, 1993), Loewenberg (1975), Mack (1975), Davies (1982) and Davies (1984). Blackburn's expressivism, for instance, extends to metaphors in his belief that the maker of a metaphor is simply *endorsing* the invitation to the hearer to explore comparisons. The expressivist views of these philosophers on metaphors can be simplified into three main claims: (1) metaphorical utterances *fail* as assertions; (2) metaphorical claims do not tell how things *really* or *actually* are in the world. (3) metaphorical utterances are not *expressions* of beliefs but lead to the *acquisition* of beliefs.

### 2.1 Claim I: Metaphorical Utterances Fail as Assertions

According to Loewenberg (1975),

It is a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for an utterance to be a metaphor that, if taken as an assertion and interpreted literally, it is false. If the hearer concludes that the utterance *fails as an assertion*, what, if any, positive conclusion is he entitled to? What speech-act is being performed if not that of assertion? (Loewenberg 1975: 334)

An assertion, for Loewenberg, literally makes a truth claim, but a metaphorical utterance, when considered as an assertion, makes a false claim. However, a metaphor-maker does not intend to make a false claim and thus metaphorical utterances cannot be taken to be assertions. A metaphorical utterance fails the test of being an assertion, and signals that it be construed as a non-assertoric speech

act. In other words, a metaphorical utterance only appears to be an assertion by purporting to make a truth-claim, but interpreted literally, it does not make a truth-claim, and since the making of truth-claims is the hallmark of an assertion, metaphorical utterances do not count as assertions. Implicit in Loewenberg's view, as I will examine later, is the assumption that assertion properly belongs to literal utterances, and that for metaphorical utterances to be counted as assertions, they have to be interpreted or construed literally. Loewenberg answers her own question at the end of the quote above in the one below:

In concluding that such an utterance fails as an assertion, the hearer identifies it as metaphorical. He judges that the speaker was not making a truth claim about the referents of the words in the sentence he uttered but rather a *proposal* about a way to view, understand, etc. those referents. . . . The speaker does not assert this view because he knows that it does not represent what – actually and literally – is the case and he expects his hearers to know this. However, his utterance is not merely an expression, a blurting out, of his feelings, nor is he indifferent to his effect on hearers. The speaker is implicitly proposing that his hearer adopt the view expressed by the sentence he uttered. (Loewenberg 1975: 335)

The making of metaphors, for Loewenberg, belongs to the speech act of *proposals* where a speaker proposes to a hearer to view the terms of the metaphor in a certain way. What is significant about Loewenberg's view here is the fact that the proposal to view the referents of the metaphor in a certain way is premised on the fact that metaphors *fail as assertions*. Her explanation is grounded on the view that truth is the aim of making an assertion, and the fact that the speaker knows that the metaphorical utterance would be false shows that she was not aiming at truth, and hence the speaker was not making an assertion. Loewenberg also thinks that metaphors do not count as assertions because the claims metaphors make do not represent what is 'actually and literally' the case. This touches on the second claim of Metaphorical Expressivism.

### 2.2 Claim II: Metaphorical Claims Do Not Represent How Things Actually Are in the World

This claim is related to the first claim in the sense that a metaphorical utterance interpreted literally is false, and because it is literally false, it does not show the true state of affairs of what it claims about the world. When an utterance is construed metaphorically, the claim it makes does not tell us anything in the world; and when a metaphorical utterance is interpreted literally, it makes false claims about the world. In either case, it seems that speakers of metaphors do not aim to say what is really the case, and thus they do not purport to make assertions about the world or states of affairs. The conclusion to draw from this observation is that

metaphors are not in the business of making truth-claims about the world, and in other words, truth is not a concern when it comes to the making and appreciation of metaphors. Cooper (1986) says it succinctly here:

The notion of truth, as we normally understand it, is used to appraise utterances in terms of what they achieve. A true statement is one which successfully achieves what statements generally aim to achieve – telling how things really are. To employ the notion of truth in the appraisal of metaphor, therefore, wrongly suggests that metaphors, too, have the dominant aim of getting us to see how things actually are. (Cooper 1986: 250)

For,

The speaker of metaphor, on the other hand, is not aiming to state how things are, but at most to put us in the way of realizing how they are. (Cooper 1986: 207)

Cooper underscores the point that it will be mistaken to use the notion of truth as the currency for valuing metaphors, for metaphors do not fit the bill of representing how things actually are. Making a truth-claim is ‘telling how things actually are’ and this is reserved for literal utterances. Saying of metaphorical utterances that they are intended to make truth claims mischaracterizes the role of metaphor, and it suggests a misunderstanding of what it means to make a truth claim. The notion of truth at play here is a representationalist one: a claim is true if it correctly represents what is actually the case. Telling what is really or actually the case is adopting a literal mode of speech, and hence, the notion of truth here is understood in terms of literal truth conditions.

The terms ‘true’ and ‘false’ are often applied to metaphors where the intent of the application is to give a *heuristic* for the identification or recognition of a sentence as metaphorical. For instance, Beardsley (1976) thought that recognizing a metaphor involves discerning between two senses of the predicate term of the metaphorical sentence “in one of which the sentence is false” (p. 219); Davidson (1979) thought that most metaphorical sentences are “patently false” (p. 42); and Martinich (1996) claims that “every metaphorical proposition is false” (p. 430). What these authors are pointing out is that metaphorical sentences are literally false, that is, when the metaphorical sentences are interpreted literally, they are false.

Reacting to the claim of the literal falsity of metaphors, Binkley (1974), Cohen (1975, 1976), Hills (1997) and others have given examples of metaphors like ‘no man is an island’, ‘Moscow is a cold city’, ‘Jesus is a carpenter’ where the metaphors are true when they are interpreted literally. Unfortunately, Cohen (1975, 1976) has dubbed these cases ‘twice-true’ metaphors suggesting that they are true on both their literal and metaphorical interpretations. I say unfortunately because the label ‘twice-true’ does not explain or give an account of the ‘second’ sense

in which the metaphor is true. It merely assumes that if the utterance is literally true – the ‘first’ truth – then it is twice-true. The term ‘twice-true’ mischaracterizes or misrepresents the metaphor – all it shows is that the metaphorical utterance is true if interpreted literally. It does not follow from that that the utterance itself has another truth or is true in another sense. One has to give an account of why the metaphor itself is true non-literally. Saying that the sentence ‘x is F’ is twice-true implies that there are two propositions involved – a literal and a metaphorical one – and the sentence is true on both interpretations. But whereas we understand the sense in which ‘x is F’ is true on a literal interpretation we need an account of why it is true on a metaphorical interpretation. We can entertain the possibility of ‘x is F’ being literally true but metaphorically false, or literally false but metaphorically true (once-true?), or literally false and metaphorically false (twice-false?).

The view that some metaphors are twice-true should not be understood as an endorsement of the view that metaphorical utterances are truth-apt or truth-evaluable *per se*. We must distinguish the use of ‘true’ and ‘false’ as *identificational* terms from their use as evaluative predicates. In the identificational sense, metaphors are mostly literally false. That is, a way of identifying certain sentences as metaphors is to see that when they are interpreted literally they are obviously false or absurd. The case of ‘twice-true’ metaphors is to show that when interpreted literally, these sentences are true. So, the point of twice-true is to show that literal falsity or absurdity is not a universal heuristic for identifying metaphors: literal falsity is neither necessary nor sufficient for identifying linguistic expressions as metaphors. But the evaluative sense of true is about whether sentences identified as metaphors are truth-evaluable. And here, the heuristic identificational sense of twice-true is not an argument for, or in favour of, the fact that metaphors are truth-evaluable.

The fact that metaphors can be said to be true or false on their literal interpretation does not entail that metaphors, *qua* metaphors, are truth-evaluable. The act of qualifying metaphorical utterances as literally true or false is different from the act of appraising the metaphorical utterances as either true or false. The Metaphorical Expressivist will have no qualms with the view that some metaphors are literally true or false; what she contests is that the semantic notion of truth should be applicable in evaluating metaphors *as* metaphors. This means that we move beyond the recognitional or identificational status to the appraisal or evaluative status of our treatment of metaphors. Once we have identified a sentence *as* a metaphor, the Expressivist position is that that metaphorical sentence cannot be truth-apt either because it *fails* as an assertion or that it does not tell us something factual about the world or a combination of any of these and other reasons.

### 2.3 Claim III: Metaphorical Utterances Are Not Expressions of Beliefs but They Can Lead to the Acquisition of Beliefs

Metaphorical utterances are not expressions of beliefs: their makers do not intend to express beliefs, and they do not intend that their hearers will construe them as expressions of beliefs. Rather, the metaphor-maker by the use of the metaphorical expression is evincing an attitude or expressing a feeling (or opinion) towards, or about, the principal subject of the metaphorical sentence. Like the moral expressivist's contention that a moral judgment like 'stealing is wrong' does not express a belief but an attitude, emotion, desire, or motivation to refrain from the act of stealing, so the metaphorical expressivist maintains that a metaphorical statement "is not a simple matter of belief, but more to do with endorsement of invitations to think of things in a certain light" (Blackburn, 1998: 160).

Blackburn (1984) has an interesting take on metaphors with respect to the assertion and belief of the propositional content or the literal paraphrase of a metaphor. For him, a speaker does not express a belief in the metaphorical expression and he also does not assert the content or the literal paraphrase of his metaphor. Rather, the speaker uses a metaphor as a conduit for suggesting a content – the literal paraphrase of a metaphor – to a hearer which may result in the hearer coming to believe the paraphraseable content of the metaphor. Using 'Bert is a real gorilla' as an example of a metaphorical utterance, he writes:

'Bert is a real gorilla' yields that Bert is strong, rough, and fierce. ... Is it right to describe the speaker as having asserted falsely that Bert is a gorilla? Is it right to describe him as having asserted truly the yielded propositions, that Bert is strong and rough and fierce? ... The speaker said that Bert is a gorilla, but did not assert it: he did not intend anyone to believe that this was the truth, and would not normally be taken to have displayed that it is. He did, on the other hand, intend people to believe that Bert is strong, rough, and fierce, and chose a reliable method of transmitting this belief, and of being taken to do so. But the method was one of reliable suggestion, and we do not allow that people assert everything that they reliably suggest, and are known to be reliably suggesting. (Blackburn 1984: 173)

What is interesting about Blackburn's view on metaphor is that a speaker employs a metaphor as a 'reliable method' for suggesting a belief or a view to a hearer but the speaker does not assert this belief by the use of the metaphor. When a speaker utters a literal statement like 'Bert is strong' he will be asserting the proposition that Bert is strong and he will be expressing his belief in that proposition. However, when a speaker utters the metaphor 'Bert is a gorilla', he will not be asserting the literal proposition that Bert is a gorilla, nor will he be expressing his belief in that proposition. But he will also not be asserting the paraphraseable content of

the metaphor that Bert is strong. If he were to assert the paraphraseable content or the proposition that Bert is strong then one could evaluate the metaphor for truth vicariously via the truth-evaluation of the paraphraseable content. So, the questions of truth and assertion that could be raised in connection with metaphors do not arise in both directions – that is, the questions do not arise with respect to the metaphors themselves and their interpretations.

The view that the metaphor-maker does not express a belief by his metaphor has also been advanced by Davies (1984). For him, although the metaphor-maker does not *express* a belief by means of his metaphor, the metaphor can lead to the *acquisition* of beliefs on the part of the hearer. A metaphorical utterance can be regarded as a belief-inducing catalyst, that is, as something that can cause one to form (true) beliefs about the subjects of the metaphor or about the insights one might be directed to experience. So, on his view, we have a metaphorical utterance that is itself not belief-produced or a substitute for any belief (on the part of its maker), but a belief-causing agent or phenomenon (to its hearer). He rejects the attempt to transfer the propositional content of the belief the metaphor leads one to possess to the metaphor itself. According to him:

[t]he appreciation of metaphor can and does lead to the acquisition of beliefs, but the propositional content of those beliefs is not stated anywhere and, in particular, it is not stated, not even indirectly, in the metaphors. The appreciation of metaphor provides the occasion for the acquisition of such beliefs, but metaphors are not bearers of the propositional content of those beliefs. (Davies 1984: 298)

His argument is that the beliefs acquired by the hearer are not *stated* directly *in*, or indirectly *by* the metaphor itself. As an expression of an experience, the evaluation of metaphor for truth, for Davies, is beside the point:

Because the metaphor is not used to assert a belief, its truth-value ceases to be important. An expression of an experience is more like a sophisticated exclamation – such as "How lovely" – than it is like a statement. (Davies 1984: 298)

The three claims and the views expressed by the authors discussed above illustrate both the positive and negative views of Metaphorical Expressivism. On the negative side, the expressivist chronicles certain failings of metaphors: metaphors fail as assertions, metaphors are not expressions of beliefs, metaphors do not state how things really are. By their not making claims that such-and-such is the case, metaphors *fail* to be assertions; by their inability to tell or state how things *really* are, they *fail* as utterances that are truth-apt; and in virtue of the fact that they neither *express* the beliefs of their makers nor state directly or indirectly the beliefs their hearers are led to form, they are not the sort of things that can be determined to be either true or false. On the positive side, metaphors are expressions of experiences

and emotions of their makers; they are proposals and suggestions their makers put across to effect certain emotions and beliefs in their hearers.

In denying that metaphors are assertions, a number of theorists, including some of those mentioned above, have adopted some descriptions in explaining the *assertion-like* nature of metaphors: Mack (1975) speaks of metaphors 'masquerading' as assertions; Walton (1990, 1993), Turbayne (1962), and Hills (1997) regard metaphors as examples of 'make-believe' involved in the business of 'pretense'. Others, like Loewenberg (1975), Davies (1982), and Blackburn (1984) have resorted to the distinction between '*asserting that p*' and '*saying that p*' claiming that while a metaphor merely *says that* so-and-so, it does not *assert that* so-and-so. "An assertion makes a truth claim", writes Loewenberg, but "saying something" is much looser: it may even indicate nothing more than making a significant (i.e., meaningful) utterance" (p. 332). In this sense, she adds, "all metaphorical utterances 'say something'" because "they can all be given some interpretation" and also because they are all "purposeful utterances" (p. 332). Davies (1984) agrees with Loewenberg that a metaphorical sentence is used to "perform a *saying*, but not an *assertion*" (p. 79). He reasons in accord with Davidson (1978) that "in sincere assertion one aims at the truth; and, of course, metaphorical statements are apt to be (literally) false. But it does not follow that the metaphor producer *says* nothing at all: what he says is just what the sentence literally means" (p. 79). And in distinguishing the experience of seeing from believing a proposition, Davies (1982) contends that in uttering a metaphor, "the speaker aims at that which stands to seeing the world a certain way as truth stands to believing the world to be a certain way" (p. 79).<sup>3</sup>

### 3 Assessment of the Metaphorical Expressivist's Account

I shall argue below that Claims I-III that capture the insights of the Metaphorical Expressivist are only half-truths. The half that is true about Claim I is that in uttering a metaphor the speaker does not assert the content literally expressed by the metaphorical sentence. In this sense the utterance fails as a *literal* assertion. The italicization of 'literal' in the preceding sentence is crucial: for failing as *literal* assertion does not imply that the sentence also fails as a *metaphorical* assertion. The view that it fails as an assertion *simpliciter* assumes that assertion

3 These terms, 'saying', 'asserting', 'expressing', and 'stating' that are used in discussions on propositions and assertions have varied interpretations and usages in the literature. I incur no substantive commitment to any one of them, and in the discussions here, they could be used interchangeable.

is to be understood as literal. But this assumption, I shall show below, is wrong. The half that is true about Claim II is that indeed metaphorical sentences do not state what is actually or really the case; but it does not follow from this observation that metaphors do not make truth-claims. The assumption at play in Claim II is that truth is to be understood in representational terms, that is, what is true is what represents or corresponds to states of affairs as they are. The problem here is that truth is understood in terms of literal truth-conditions and hence the view that metaphors do not meet this requirement of a representational literal truth-condition is untenable. The half that is true about Claim III is that the beliefs of speakers are often not stated directly in, or indirectly by, their metaphorical utterances; however, this observation is not peculiar to, or distinctive of, metaphorical utterances. A speaker can utter a literal sentence to cause his audience to acquire certain beliefs, probably the belief she holds, but her literal utterance need not express that belief for it to be an utterance that can be appraised for truth.<sup>4</sup> The requirement for a metaphorical utterance to 'directly' express a belief or be a direct expression of a speaker's belief is an illegitimate one: if an utterance identified as a metaphor directly expresses a literal content or a belief that is unintended by its speaker then we cannot require the utterance to directly express a non-literal content or a speaker's belief.

Another half that is true about Claim III is that in making a metaphor, a speaker may be conveying a particular experience to his audience. But the half that is false here is the view that this evocation or conveyance of experience implies that the speaker is not expressing or asserting a belief. The cases of religious metaphors, for instance, blur the distinction between uttering a sentence to evince an experience and uttering a sentence to express or assert a belief. That is, religious practitioners use metaphors not only to convey their experiences but also to express their beliefs in the deities they worship. Consider Christian metaphors such as 'God is light', 'The Lord is my shepherd', 'God is love', 'Christians are the salt of the earth', 'The Lord is my rock and my refuge'. According to Meier et al (2007: 699),

"communication about the divine, however, is often done through metaphors that invoke physical characteristics... For example, God is referred to as "the light of the world" or as a "father," whereas the Devil is referred to as the "prince of darkness" or as a "serpent." These metaphors are thought to exist because they allow people to communicate about what they cannot see, hear, taste, touch, or smell".

4 An example is a scenario that Searle (1969) describes of an American soldier captured by Italian troops and the soldier wanted the troops to believe that he is a German soldier and so he says that "Kennst du das Land, wo die Zitronen blühen?"

They also write that “because we are sensory based creatures, we often use sensory-based metaphors to describe abstract concepts (i.e., concepts that do not have a concrete physicalistic basis)” (Meier et al [2007: 700]).

Two important points from their views are that one, religious practitioners talk about divine deities using metaphors, and two, religious practitioners use their metaphors to communicate things to others. Soskice (1985) takes a stronger view on point one, insisting that it is “not only possible but necessary that in our stammering after a transcendent God we must speak, for the most part, metaphorically or not at all” (p. 140). If religious practitioners talk about and express their beliefs in, and experiences with, divine beings by means of metaphors, then it seems plausible to suggest that the metaphors they employ are media for expressing those beliefs. This is why it is also possible to teach moral and religious lessons through the use of metaphors. The believer who employs a metaphor is not only attempting to cause his hearers to acquire certain beliefs, he is also expressing his belief; he is communicating his belief to his audience through his metaphorical utterances.

What motivates and informs the view that a metaphorical utterance fails as an assertion as posited in Claim I? Why should one suppose that a metaphorical utterance does not state what is actually the case, as posited in Claim II? Both Claims I and II reveal a tendency or commitment to two principles: literalism and representationalism. Literalism is an affirmation that sentences do not have any meaning, content or truth, other than their literal meanings, literal contents and literal truths.<sup>5</sup> Hence, evaluating metaphorical sentences for truth, or considering

5 Davidson’s account of metaphor is typically a literalist one in this sense. Davidson’s main claim (as he himself calls the ‘thesis’ of his paper) is that “metaphor means what the words, in their most literal interpretation mean, and nothing more” (1979: 30). Davidson’s literalism acknowledges a distinction between the literal and metaphorical uses of language but claims that sentences can only have ordinary literal meaning and truth and that a distinction between the literal and the metaphorical does not entail that metaphorical sentences have ‘special’ meaning and truth *in addition* to their literal senses and truth. What metaphors mean, and what their truth values are, are no different from their assessment from a literal point of view. From his commitment to compositionality also, Davidson is of the view that the meaning of a sentence is determined from the meanings of the individual words that compose it. If a metaphor can only be explained by appealing to the literal meanings of the words that compose it then for Davidson “sentences in which metaphors occur are true or false in a normal, literal way, for if the words in them don’t have special meanings, sentences don’t have special truth” (1979: 39). Combining his views on literalism and compositionality, Davidson’s claim is that the words of a metaphorical sentence have no special meanings other than their ordinary literal meanings and hence the sentences they compose

metaphorical utterances as assertions, should be cast in terms of literal truth-conditions and literal assertions respectively. Literalism is linked to representationalism which posits that the relevant criterion for truth or the making of truth claims is the capacity to tell things or represent states of affairs as they actually are.<sup>6</sup> Since what is *actually* or truly the case is what the literal interpretation of a sentence gives, literalism and representationalism depend on each other for their justifications. The requirement that one says things as they *really* or *actually* are, is a requirement that one adopts a literal mode of speech; and it is in virtue of speaking literally that the issue of whether what one says conforms to reality or not arises. The representationalist who captures truth in terms of representing states of affairs as they really are, is in effect, subscribing to a literalist conception of truth; but the literalist about truth need not adopt a representationalist stance towards literal truth-conditions.<sup>7</sup> It is, therefore, possible to be a literalist about truth without adopting representationalism, and vice versa. The *Metaphorical Expressivist* is committed to these two principles jointly or individually in her rejection of the truth-evaluability of metaphors.

The commitment to literalism is what fuels Claim I – that metaphorical utterances fail as assertions. This claim is underpinned by a more general view that

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only have literal meanings. In view of the fact that metaphorical sentences only have literal meanings and literal truth conditions, metaphorical sentences have no contents except the contents that they literally express. This is why most metaphors are literally false, if not absurd. That metaphors have no contents (except what they literally express) implies that there is ‘nothing’ else that is communicated or conveyed by the use of metaphor, ‘nothing’ else propositional that can be grasped and evaluated as true or false.

6 I use the notion of ‘representationalism’ in this distinctive sense as the capacity of a sentence to represent or correspond to the world or states of affairs.

7 A paradigmatic example is Davidson. Davidson rejects both a correspondence theory of truth and a representational model for understanding truth. But Davidson’s misgivings about the correspondence theory of truth is more to do with the notion of ‘correspondence’ than it is with the fact that truth depends on how the world is. He says in this place that: “correspondence, while it is empty as a definition, does capture the thought that truth depends on how the world is, and this should be enough to discredit most epistemic and pragmatic theories” (2005: 16). It is important to point out that the issue about representation or correspondence to facts in the discussion of metaphor is not necessarily about whether the correspondence theory is an adequate theory of truth. Indeed, the *Metaphorical Expressivist* need not hold any particular view about theories of truth. If truth, in an important sense, depends on how the world is, then the *Expressivist’s* contention is that metaphors are not truth-evaluable because they do not state how the world is.

assertion is literal and that the platitude that truth is the aim of assertion should be understood to mean that assertion aims at literal truth. The commitment to representationalism motivates Claim II – that metaphorical claims do not represent how things actually are in the world. This claim is a consequence of the more general view that there is a bifurcation between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language and metaphor belongs to the non-descriptive uses of language. The commitment to both literalism and representationalism can further be used to provide an additional support for why metaphors should not be appraised in terms of truth: metaphor is akin to other cognitive and non-linguistic devices like symbols, models, and maps, but these non-linguistic devices are not evaluated for truth. In what follows, I shall argue that the general views that underlie Claims I and II of the *Metaphorical Expressivist* are untenable, and that the principles of literalism and representationalism which give expression to these views are not plausible.

### 3.1 Is Assertion Literal?

We recall from Loewenberg (1975) the reasoning that metaphorical utterances fail as assertions because when they are considered as assertions and ‘interpreted literally’ they are false, for assertions aim at truth; but speakers do not intend for their metaphorical utterances to be interpreted literally, and so they do not intend to make assertions with their metaphorical utterances. What underlines this reasoning is the view that what counts as an assertion is something literal, and the truth that an assertion aims at is the literal truth.<sup>8</sup> And this is why a literal interpretation of a metaphor disqualifies the metaphor from being an assertion. At first glance, this reasoning is mistaken for one obvious reason. As it has been shown by Cohen (1975, 1976) and others, it is not a necessary condition for an utterance to be a metaphor that if it is interpreted literally it has to be false. The cases of ‘twice-true’ metaphors, on Loewenberg’s account, will mean that such metaphors will be regarded as assertions since their literal interpretations render them literally true. And this in turn will mean that Loewenberg will have to admit that some metaphors succeed, rather than fail, to be assertions.<sup>9</sup> This conclusion

8 More explicitly, the underlying assumption is that it is impossible to assert anything *other than* the literal content of one’s utterance, and analogously, it is impossible to express a truth except with a literal interpretation.

9 Loewenberg could argue that all metaphorical utterances fail as assertions because they are either obviously false or perhaps contravene some Gricean maxims. But this argument will be flawed since the obviousness of an utterance does not mean that it cannot be an assertion even if it is a false one. In a conversation, an utterance that is obvious may not add anything to the conversational score or serve as update to the

can only survive for a short while. What is more important is this: how should we construe the aims of speakers who employ these twice-true metaphors?

If literal truth is the aim of assertions, then one can suggest that the speaker who asserts a twice-true metaphor like ‘no man is an island’ aims at the literal truth. However, if the literal truth of the assertion of ‘no man is an island’ is the aim of the speaker, then the assertion ceases to be regarded as a metaphor. This will wrongly suggest that ‘no man is an island’ is *either* an assertion *or* a metaphor where it is an assertion when it is literally construed. It needs to be disentangled why the suggestion of the disjunction will be wrong. If we make ‘true on a literal interpretation’ the mark of an assertion, we risk considering all twice-true metaphors assertions.<sup>10</sup> Most metaphors can be negated to yield being ‘true-on-a-literal-interpretation’, as for instance, ‘Juliet is not the sun’. On the other hand, if we make ‘aimed at literal truth’ the condition for assertion then there cannot be any metaphorical assertions simply because understanding utterances as metaphors presupposes some sort of overriding of their literal content. But then, this condition no longer becomes a condition for assertion but a condition for a *literal assertion*.

The worry that arises here is that, if the metaphorical utterance is not required to be interpreted literally, and the speaker of a metaphor does not intend her utterance to be construed or interpreted literally, then why is it required that the metaphor be aimed at literal truth to count as an assertion? The condition ‘aimed-at-literal-truth’ is apt and relevant only in light of the condition ‘true-on-a-literal-interpretation’ or when a literal construal is appropriate. One cannot provide literal conditions – in terms of aims and interpretations – and insist that metaphors meet these conditions, all the while insisting also that metaphors should not be construed literally. It will be wrong then to suggest that metaphors

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conversational context, but it will still be an assertion alright. In the same way, an utterance that flouts or contravenes a Gricean maxim does not imply that the utterance cannot count as an assertion. Loewenberg could admit that twice-true metaphors are assertions on the basis that they are true on their literal interpretation but insist that these are just minor and rare cases of metaphors and that since most metaphors are literally false a general account of metaphors must eschew the notion of assertion. However, this line of argument is not persuasive. Twice-true metaphors are not special cases of metaphors for by the tool of negation many literally false metaphors such as ‘life is a bed of roses’ can be turned into a twice-true metaphor ‘life is not a bed roses’.

10 We cannot make this a necessary condition, since many genuine assertions are false. And we cannot make it a sufficient condition, since it’s implausible to suppose that asserters will assert obvious or irrelevant truths.



fail to meet these conditions, that they fail to be assertions, for metaphors do not, and cannot, take these tests. In a good and general sense, the student who does not take an exam cannot be considered to have failed it. The question of what counts as an assertion is not synonymous with the question of what counts as a literal assertion. And similarly, the trite saying that an assertion aims at truth is not to be construed as indicating that an assertion aims at *literal* truth.

The relationship between truth and assertion, where truth is thought to be the aim of an assertion, should not be understood in isolation independently of a general account of what counts as an assertion. That is, the relationship between truth and assertion should be brought to bear on, or be reflected in, the broader framework of understanding the nature of assertion. In the philosophical literature, there are at least three broad accounts of the nature of assertion: norm accounts, communicative accounts, and commitment accounts. The 'norm' accounts characterize assertion in terms of conditions under which assertions can be correctly and properly made. The fundamental tenet of norm accounts is that assertion is governed by rules. Assertion is therefore, a 'normatively constituted activity' such that a speech act is an assertion if it is governed by the norm. These norms are thought to be individuating; that is, they are what make assertion unique. The general rule of norm accounts can be schematized as: *one must assert p only if C(p)* where C will be the constitutive norm. So if knowledge is the norm, then the rule becomes: *one must assert p only if one knows that p*. The various proposals for the constitutive norm of assertion has been truth (Weiner 2005, 2007); belief (Bach and Harnish 1979); knowledge (Williamson 1996, 2000; Hawthorne 2004; Unger 1975; DeRose 2002); rational credibility (Douven 2006; Lackey 2007); reasonable belief (Kvanvig 2009; Turri 2014); certainty (Stanley 2008).<sup>11</sup>

The communicative accounts of assertion involve accounts that are based on the conversational or discourse practices of speakers of a language. These accounts focus on the significance and effects of assertion on speakers and hearers in a linguistic exchange. Principal of these accounts is that of Stalnaker (1978), and in a sense that of Grice (1957, 1989). Connecting the notions of the 'context set', 'presupposition', 'proposition', 'possible world' and common ground, Stalnaker (1978) argues that "the essential effect of an assertion is to change the presuppositions

11 Cappelen (2011) presents an alternative view that he refers to as the "No-Assertion" view where he argues that, by analogy with kissing and driving, assertion is a non-normative activity. According to him, assertion is not essentially constitutive of norms that make it unique from an ordinary notion of 'saying that', and that assertion can be 'evaluated by contextually variable norms, none of them constitutive' of the speech act of assertion.

of the participants in the conversation by adding the content of what is asserted to what is presupposed" (p. 86); and that "to make an assertion is to reduce the context set in a particular way". Bach and Harnish (1979) and Recanati (1987), following Grice have developed accounts of assertion that involve the beliefs and intentions of speakers in a communicative discourse.

The 'commitment' accounts of assertion take a social approach to assertion and explain assertions as involving social and epistemic commitments on the part of the speaker of an assertive sentence. For these accounts asserting that *p* is to be committed to the truth or belief that *p*, and to be responsible for providing reasons or justification for *p* when challenged. Notable accounts include that of Brandom (1983, 1994), Wright (1992), Searle (1969), MacFarlane (2011), Ellis (1990), Williams (2002).<sup>12</sup>

Now, on these broad accounts of the nature of assertions, it is neutral to an assertion whether it is literal or metaphorical. For instance, on the commitment account whereby to make an assertion is to undertake certain commitments and to license others to draw certain inferences from the utterance made, a metaphorical utterance can constitute an assertion or be asserted in so far as the speaker undertakes certain commitments and licenses others to do so. Similarly, if the making of an assertion involves reducing or adding to the context set in a conversation, then the making of a metaphor could count as an assertion in this way. This fact that on a broader account of the nature of assertion metaphors can count as assertions is a minor point here. The main points are that: (1) a broader understanding of the nature of assertion does not rule in favour of the fact that assertion is literal; indeed, what counts as an assertion is indifferent to whether it is literal or metaphorical; (2) the relationship between truth and assertion should be couched within a broader framework of what counts as an assertion. The challenge to Loewenberg and others who favour a literalist account of assertion is that they need to ground their bias for the literal on a view of assertion rather than on a conception of meaning like Davidson's account of metaphors. For, utterances have meanings – and there can be disagreements as to whether they possess metaphorical meanings in addition to their literal meanings – but whether the making of those utterances constitute assertions should be based on a theory of what counts as an assertion and not the *kind* of meaning it is supposed to possess. The Expressivist proceeds from an account of meaning and uses that account to justify whether an utterance constitutes an assertion or not. The suggestion I am motivating here is that the question of what counts as an assertion

12 Pagin (2004) has argued that assertion is not social in this sense.

can be answered independently from a prior conception of meaning. And if this is a correct possibility, then the Metaphorical Expressivist is challenged to provide an account of assertion like the ones briefly explained above that eliminates metaphors. As far as the main (and varied accounts) of assertion given in the literature goes, these accounts do not eliminate metaphors from being assertions in virtue of their meanings.

This second point is crucial. How could the platitude that 'truth is the aim of assertion' be given expression on the commitment account of assertion? In undertaking the commitment to justify and provide reasons for an assertion when challenged, the speaker thereby commits herself to the truth of her assertion. The assertion being aimed at truth is then not construed in terms of literal truth or in terms of matters of fact in the world. The aim at truth is reflected in both the logical and non-logical commitments that the speaker undertakes in endorsing and justifying his assertion. This is the way I suggest that the connection between truth and assertion be understood when it comes to metaphors. A metaphorical utterance can count as an assertion when in the making of it the speaker commits herself to its truth and becomes responsible for endorsing and justifying it when it is challenged. In this way, the speaker of the metaphor is not concerned with whether the metaphorical assertion is true (or false) on a literal interpretation or whether it was aimed at stating a literal truth. The reasons and justifications that the speaker provides for his metaphor are not intended to address the literal interpretations of the metaphor, for the challenge to a metaphor does not arise because of its literal construction.

So, the claim that metaphors fail to be assertions is unjustified. This claim assumes that an assertion is literal and the aim of an assertion is literal truth. These assumptions seem inapt in reference to twice-true metaphors; and these assumptions cannot serve as appropriate conditions for being an assertion. A broader understanding of the nature of assertion which gives expression to the view that truth is the aim of assertion reveals that metaphors can be assertions, and their speakers in asserting them, commit themselves to their truth and to their justifications and endorsements.

### 3.2 Descriptive and Non-Descriptive Uses of Language

"Can a metaphorical statement ever reveal 'how things are'?" asks Max Black (1993: 38). Black prefers the linguistic locution 'how things are' in his question to the more familiar way of asking the same (or a similar) question under the rubric of 'truth' such as 'can metaphorical statements be true?' Black's preference for this locution is evidenced in both his distaste for ascribing truth to metaphors and

in his affirmative answer to the question he posed. He thinks that the evaluative terms, 'truth' and 'falsity', properly belong to fact-stating uses of language, and that this ascription of the semantic notion of truth to the fact-stating statements of language is intimately tied in with other semantic and epistemic concepts like 'evidence', 'belief', 'contradiction' and 'knowledge'. To illustrate with one of his examples, when one hears the metaphor

(1) Nixon is an image surrounding a vacuum

it will be inappropriate to ask the following questions: "Are you perhaps lying?", "What's your evidence?", "How do you know?" (Black 1993: 38). The inappropriateness of these questions is due to his view that metaphorical statements are not fact-stating, and hence, unless these are merely rhetorical questions, we cannot fathom the sense in which we could provide answers to them. Whereas one can assign truth and falsity to a fact-stating statement like 'Nixon was a shopkeeper' and seek to adduce evidence for such a claim, one cannot do so for the metaphor. In view of this, Black contends that it will be a "violation of philosophical grammar to assign truth or falsity to strong metaphors" (1993: 39). Nonetheless, our unbridled tenacity to say things like 'how true' and 'that's true' in response to the metaphor in (1) above, according to Black, can be explained in terms of our recognition of the fact that the metaphor, in addition to its aesthetic effect, *really does say something* (p. 39).

So, despite his aversion to the assignment of truth to metaphorical statements, Black thinks that metaphors can reveal 'how things are'. Two questions rear their heads here: What is this *something* that the metaphor says? What is this *how-things-are* that the metaphor is supposed to reveal? Black's brief response<sup>13</sup> to the first question, in reference to the metaphor in (1) is that Nixon is "indeed what he is metaphorically said to be" (p. 39). But this response is uninformative. We began with the view that (1) is a metaphor, which by Black's characterization, is a peculiar use of language *distinct* from a fact-stating use of language, and yet *states something*. How else will it be a metaphorical *state-ment*? Presumably, what a metaphor states, then, is not a fact – it is not something we can give evidence for, it is not something we can claim to be either true or false – but to say that what a metaphor states is simply what it states begs the question.

Indeed, the notion of truth is related to other notions like justification and knowledge; it is also related to other terms like evidence and facts. And often

13 Black did not specifically pose these two questions and offer responses to them. But his remarks can be construed as offering responses to the questions I have posed.

these other notions and terms are discussed and understood in terms of truth, and vice versa. But the issue of the truth-evaluability of a statement is more of a semantic issue, and the inquiry is to do with whether certain statements or uses of language should be appraised for truth. Philosophers have been concerned with the truth-value of conditional statements, mathematical statements, statements in the future tense, statements whose referential subjects do not exist, etc. A conditional statement can be either true or false but the ascription of a truth-value to a conditional statement is independent of whatever facts it might purport to express. Similarly, a mathematical statement is either true or false but the debate among nominalists, realists, and anti-realists about mathematical statements is to do with whether mathematical statements state facts and the nature of those facts. Fact-stating is not the determinant of the truth-value of a mathematical statement and the proofs we construct to show the validity of mathematical statements implies that such statements are true. The point is that, whether in the case of mathematics or metaphors, the stating of facts does not determine the truth-evaluability of mathematical and metaphorical statements. The relationship between fact-stating and truth-evaluability is not that the first determines the second. One who argues from the non-fact-stating status of metaphors to their truth-evaluability already assumes a realist position and casts the debate in terms of whether true statements express facts or correspond to certain facts in the world. But the question of the truth-evaluability of metaphors need not be raised solely from a realist point of view.<sup>14</sup>

Black's distinction here between fact-stating statements and metaphors mimics the *bifurcation thesis* in the expressivist tradition between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of declarative sentences (Blackburn 1998; Price 2013). Blackburn (1998), for instance, suggests that metaphors are non-truth evaluable because they are non-descriptive uses of language:

Fiction is an interesting example, in that the natural thing to say, at least about writing fiction (as opposed to reporting on established fictions), is that the (atomic) sentences written do not deserve to be called true or false because the author's intention is not to describe the real world, at least in terms of the names employed or the events represented as having happened. But that gives the obvious opening for the expressivist to insist that the same is true, for instance, of simple expressions of emotion or attitude, even when these have indicative form. Yet another pertinent example will be acceptance or rejection

<sup>14</sup> I concede that mathematical realists who make fact-stating the core issue of the truth-evaluability of mathematical statements will disagree with many of things I have said in this paragraph, but their disagreements with my claims here will not take away the import of what I have attempted to articulate here.

of metaphors. These are typically couched in indicative sentences, certainly governed by norms of appropriateness, found in complex embeddings, yet certainly not intended or evaluated as straightforward cases of truths or falsehoods. This is how the expressivist says it is in more controversial examples, such as commitment to conditional, moral, modal, or other claims. These may illustrate dispositions to bad movements of thought or bad attitudes. (Blackburn 1998: 159)

Blackburn contends that simple expressions of emotions or attitudes and fiction can be couched in indicative form, but they do not deserve to be called true or false because the intention of their speakers, in using them, is not to describe anything about the real world. These sentences do not have descriptive content despite their being governed by norms and their occurrence in complex embeddings. In the case of fiction, the sentences do not represent anything that has happened in the actual or real world. And in the case of metaphors, speakers do not intend to describe anything in the world when they use metaphors. Hence, if truth-evaluation is applied to descriptive uses of language then metaphors, in general, are not assessed for truth.

The distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language may be useful to the view that there are certain kinds of expressions that are not evaluated for truth despite their apparent syntactic forms. However, the view that metaphors belong to only the non-descriptive arm of the distinction is unsatisfactory. Metaphors *can* be descriptive of their subjects and states of affairs in the world and speakers can intend them as such; and if they can be used both descriptively and non-descriptively, then the distinction is of no significance to the case of metaphors. Let us suppose that Black's 'Nixon is an image surrounding a vacuum' is a non-descriptive use of metaphor. Consider a case of a very obvious metaphor that was used in the wake of the arrest of the Sicilian Mafia, Salvatore Riina, in 1993 as reported by Alan Cowell: "His brother Gaetano, who went to Palermo's Palace of Justice today to arrange legal help for Mr. Riina, spoke briefly to reporters. 'My brother is a gentleman,' he told them. 'You are vultures.'"<sup>15</sup> Does Gaetano intend to describe something true or false of the reporters by his use of 'you are vultures'? It appears so. The question of whether the reporters are *really* vultures should be understood as asking about whether, metaphorically speaking, they are vultures. This way, the issue about whether he is describing or referring to them as the animal vultures does not arise. In this example, the speaker is doing more than merely evincing an attitude or expressing an emotion – the speaker is saying

<sup>15</sup> Alan Cowell, "Captured Mafia Leader's Hometown Rejoices, Then Worries"; The New York Times, January 17, 1993, <http://www.nytimes.com/1993/01/17/world/captured-mafia-leader-s-hometown-rejoices-then-worries.html> Accessed 13 July 2016.

something descriptively about the reporters and intends his audience to construe him as doing so. If this and other cases of metaphors count as descriptive uses of language where their speakers intend them as such, then metaphorical uses of language can belong to both the descriptive and non-descriptive arms of the dichotomy. And if this is the case, then the distinction is of no significance to metaphors, and as such, it cannot be used to deny the truth-evaluability of metaphors.

The distinction between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language is grounded in the intentions of speakers and so metaphors are said to be non-descriptive because their speakers do not intend to describe anything about the world. But how do we determine the intentions of speakers in using a bit of language or a metaphor? The intentions of speakers in using metaphors can be determined both by the context in which metaphors are used and the kinds of things that speakers do in using metaphors. In terms of context, metaphorical sentences appearing in works of fiction, for instance, will be used non-descriptively because the sentences in fiction do not describe things in the actual world. The kinds of things speakers do in using metaphors, however, more importantly, reveal the sort of intentions they have; that is, the intentions of speakers are made manifest in the things they do with their utterances. These things to a large extent determine the descriptive content and the truth-evaluable status of their utterances. Speakers are able to use metaphors in disagreements and as premises and conclusions in arguments; they are able to provide reasons and justifications for their metaphors; they are also able to draw inferences and conclusions from their metaphors.

Consider this example from Shakespeare:

**MENENIUS:** The senators of Rome are this good belly,

And you the mutinous members; for, examine  
Their counsels and their cares; digest things rightly  
Touching the weal o' the common; you shall find  
No public benefit which you receive  
But it proceeds or comes from them to you,  
And no way from yourselves.--What do you think,  
You, the great toe of this assembly?

**FIRST CITIZEN:** I the great toe? why the great toe?

**MENENIUS:** For that, being one o' the lowest, basest, poorest,  
Of this most wise rebellion, thou go'st foremost:  
Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run,  
Lead'st first to win some vantage. --  
But make you ready your stiff bats and clubs:  
Rome and her rats are at the point of battle;  
The one side must have bale.--

[*Coriolanus*, Act 1 Scene 1]

This example illustrates the kinds of commitments that speakers of metaphors bring to bear in the use of metaphors. What Menenius is doing in the second speech is to justify why the First Citizen is the great toe of the assembly. Menenius makes a claim in the first speech, his audience demands an explanation or justification for the claim, and Menenius in the second speech, explains the claim, or elaborates on the claim, or justifies the claim. This is akin to what pertains in the making of assertions. The commitment to endorse and justify a metaphorical utterance that this example illustrates give credence to the view that the speakers metaphorical utterance is a descriptive use of language. Surely, if speakers do not intend to say or describe something, if they do not intend to state that such-and-such is the case, then they will not be committed to endorsing, justifying, and withdrawing their metaphors. But because they often engage in these practices, they sometimes use metaphors both descriptively and non-descriptively.

### 3.3 Metaphor and Other Non-Linguistic Devices

The distinction between fact-stating sentences and metaphors or that between descriptive and non-descriptive uses of metaphor considered above is a paradigmatic symptom of an underlying disposition to treat specifically, the metaphorical, and more generally, the figurative, in purely instrumental terms. Metaphor is seen as a 'device' (cognitive and/or linguistic), an 'instrument' or a 'tool' *within* language use. Seen as a device, the relevant questions regarding the metaphorical become questions about what they are used *for*, what they are good *for*. In relation to these *instrumental-goal-oriented* questions, we develop *instrumental-know-how* techniques for the proper usage of this tool called *metaphor*. In one vein, this instrumental perspective of metaphor leads us to focus on the effects we can achieve by the use of metaphors and the causal explanations for our using them. In another vein, couching the use of metaphors in instrumental terms enables us to compare and classify metaphors among other linguistic devices like indexicality, modality, probability; and we compare and categorize metaphors in the same boat with other declarative statements like mathematical and ethical statements. But crucially, we treat metaphors on a par with other non-linguistic devices like maps, charts, graphs and pictures. And when we are not too charitable we relegate metaphors to the order of unfamiliar noises, birdsongs, and jokes.

Once we have this instrumental mentality towards metaphor, our concern becomes what we can, and cannot, do with the device of metaphor – or rather, what the device itself can, and cannot, do or achieve. Alas, the distinctions and the limitations of the tool are hereby drawn: Is metaphor a linguistic or a conceptual device? Is metaphor a fact-stating or a non-fact-stating linguistic device?

This instrumental perspective on metaphor often leads us to view the device of metaphor as a telescope or microscope – a mediating device. Let us call this device a *metascope*. The concern now becomes what can we see through this *metascope*? Can this device reveal ‘how things are’? Can this device make us see (and know) what there is? Does this device provide us with a lens through which we could see *reality* as it is? Can this device show us another reality, an *alter-reality*? Can we ever believe or know anything through the lens of *metascope*? All the various issues and questions I have raised in these last paragraphs may be very pertinent questions, but the thought here is that these questions and concerns are generated as a result of viewing metaphor primarily in instrumental terms. And as such, these questions, and the answers they require, are skewed towards our conceptions of the uses and limitations of the metaphorical device.

Max Black’s answer in the affirmative to his question we started with is a classic example of the instrumental conception of metaphor I have been considering. Black’s position is that metaphor is a cognitive device, it is a “cognitive instrument through which their users can achieve novel views of a domain of reference” (1993: 38). The cognitive instrument allows us to recognize what Black calls the *representational aspect* (p. 39) of metaphors; in other words, metaphors are devices for representing ‘how things are’. Black likens metaphor to other cognitive devices like charts, maps, graphs, photographs and models, saying that these are representational devices for “*showing* ‘how things are’” (p. 39). He infers correctly that in all these other cognitive representational devices, we assess them as being ‘correct’ or ‘incorrect’, and rarely, if ever, do we say that maps are true or false. So, a metaphor is a cognitive representational device for showing or revealing ‘how things are’ and we evaluate metaphors on the lines of correctness or incorrectness and not on the lines of truth or falsity. I have maintained Black’s locution – ‘how things are’ – throughout this discussion because Black himself does not explain what he means by that.

Black avoids talking about truth with respect to metaphor but embraces talking about metaphorical representations mainly because of his conception of metaphor in an instrumental sense – metaphor is a cognitive representational device. To reiterate an earlier question I posed, what is this *how-things-are* that the metaphorical device is supposed to show or reveal? A map is a diagrammatic representation of an area, and if it is an accurate one, we speak of the map as showing or revealing to us *what is there* in that area. Surely, the marks on a map are not the same as the landmarks and buildings in the area, but this is the sense in which the marks *represent* the landmarks. But we can also say that the landmarks are *represented* on the map in such a way that, if the map is accurate, reality, what-is-there in

the area, is projected onto the map, the representational device. That is, there is a representational relation between the represented (object), the area, and the representation, the map.

Is this the relation that obtains when metaphor is construed as a device? For one thing, a correct or accurate map is only correct or accurate *of* something, perhaps, of a particular geographical terrain. We can draw fictitious or imaginative maps, but we cannot properly speak of such maps as *correct* (or *incorrect*) or *accurate* (or *inaccurate*), though we can talk of them as representing a certain terrain even if there is no such terrain. A map is correct or accurate only in virtue of what it actually depicts; hence, the cartographer starts his drawing from the standpoint of an already perceived reality. But not necessarily so with the metaphor-maker: ‘correctness’ and ‘accuracy’ are not the stock-in-trade evaluative terms that the metaphor-maker is concerned with, and so she need not worry about what a metaphor is correct or accurate *of*. This is because, unlike the cartographer, she need not start her metaphor-making from the standpoint of an already perceived reality. In fact, rather than aiming to make her marks reflect or depict the object of representation, she often aims at casting the object in a *new* and *different* light. Rather than revealing or showing ‘what is there’ or ‘how things are’, the metaphor-maker can obscure ‘what is there’, and the metaphor-maker can bring to light what is unnoticed and unperceived. The projects of the cartographer and the metaphor-maker are different, and the ‘devices’ they each use have different purposes; that of the cartographer, if she is not being deceptive, is to represent ‘what is there’ with his device, the map. The above-mentioned disanalogies between metaphors and maps are apt to show that (1) metaphors and maps may be similar in certain respects but they differ in terms of how we appraise or evaluate them; (2) the evaluation of maps in terms of their being *correct* or *accurate of* something in the world stems from their being *representations*, for the very nature of representations is marked by their being representations *of* something, but metaphorical utterances are not representations *of*; and because they are not representations *of*, they cannot be supposed to reveal things in the world.

The discussion of the disanalogies between metaphors and maps is to highlight an explanatory approach that conceives of metaphors in representational terms to argue for the conclusion that metaphors do not really represent states of affairs in the world and hence they should not be appraised for truth. When metaphor is construed as a lens or device, our attention is then directed towards a representational mode of talk; we begin to question and reflect on what a metaphor is able to make us see, and then we inquire further about whether what the metaphor enables us to see corresponds to the facts or reality itself. If we claim

that the metaphorical device reveals the facts, then we pose epistemic questions about the evidence and justification for that revelation. On this approach, once it becomes apparent that the things metaphors reveal cannot be verified or confirmed empirically, the inquirer retreats and recasts the supposed revelation in non-truth-evaluable non-epistemic terms so that the initial questions about the truth-evaluable status of metaphors either become misplaced or irrelevant.

Similarly, once the inquirer hits a rock when she construes metaphors as cognitive statements that are truth-evaluable, she reworks her theory and construes metaphors as cognitive devices like maps and models, and then cast her evaluative terms in tandem with the evaluative terms applicable to cognitive devices like maps. That is, she construes metaphors in representational terms akin to pictorial representations. The problem with this approach to understanding metaphor is not that metaphors are not in an important sense like maps and pictorial representations; the problem is not that we shouldn't understand metaphors in instrumental terms as cognitive devices; the problem rather is that we tend to understand metaphors *only* in instrumental terms, and then we use the instrumentality of metaphor (what it is used *for*, what it makes us *see*) as the basis for proscribing metaphors from the court of truth. A related approach is to ban metaphors from truth-making discourses and then explain the use of metaphors as part of a theory of manipulation, or the making of invitations, or the putting forth proposals. However, the understanding of metaphor in instrumental terms does not preclude our understanding of metaphors among truth-evaluable, information-conveying, and fact-stating, uses of language. Metaphors can be seen as classed among cognitive devices or invitations or proposals, *and* be evaluated for truth. Similarly, the expressivist may be right in thinking of metaphors as the expression of experience or emotions, but thinking of metaphors in experiential terms does not precluded it from being considered as information-conveying assertions.

#### 4 Conclusion

Metaphorical Expressivists contend that truth does not matter to metaphors because metaphorical utterances are not expressions of beliefs or assertions. The analytical strategy pursued in this paper in response to the claims of Metaphorical Expressivism is to show that these claims acquire their force from, and are grounded in, certain assumptions about assertions and metaphors. These assumptions are that assertion is literal, that metaphors are non-descriptive uses of language, and that metaphors are similar to other cognitive devices which are not appraised in terms of truth. If these assumptions hold then metaphorical utterances cannot be couched in terms of truth. I have attempted to show that these assumptions

and claims are not persuasive, and that: (1) truth's connection with assertion does not imply that assertion is literal; (2) metaphors belong to both descriptive and non-descriptive uses of language, and hence the dichotomy between the two uses is not significant to show that truth does not matter to metaphors; (3) the issue of the appraisal of metaphors in terms of truth is biased against metaphorical truth when the issue is couched in representational terms.

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## Chance, Explanation and Interpretation

**Abstract:** Two contrasting theses are presented: (1) Literary works generated by chance cannot be given interpretations which reflect the causal background (for instance, authorial intentions) of the work. (2) Almost all literary interpretations are set in an explanative perspective. The two theses are not contradictory if we assume that literature generated by chance constitutes a very small part of the class of literary works. Thesis 2 does not entail the claim that interpretations explain anything, only that interpretations are fit to be integrated into causal explanations that mirror the contents of the interpretations. The key to this fitness is the concept of simplicity as used in the philosophy of science. However, it is argued that in general, interpreters of literature try to apply their readings to circumstances outside the explanative perspective. Thus, even if literature made by chance is not considered, interpreting literature involves more than explanation.

**Keywords:** literary interpretation, chance, explanation, application, simplicity, strength, specification

### 0 Introduction

We, students of literature of all ages and levels, make efforts to produce literary interpretations and analyses worth reading. We aspire to present something that is “valid” or “right”, or at least not wide off the mark. However, more often than not, we have difficulty in clarifying what makes our reading better than some other conflicting alternative. We may argue by pointing to obvious features of the text, to well-known facts about the author and about the broader historical context of the work, but we also know that other features and other facts may be called upon to support alternative interpretations. Still, we often stick to our reading, but with no strong rational arguments. We may in the end retreat to the declaration that this is “my interpretation”, or this is an interpretation made from a certain perspective, with no strong reasons why my reading is preferable to any other reading, or why this perspective should be used rather than another one, resulting in another interpretation.

This situation seems to call for philosophical consultations: What does it mean to say a literary interpretation is valid or true or correct? However, there is no general agreement among literary scholars or philosophers of literature or