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Idiom and Metaphor

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V*—IDIOM AND METAPHOR

by Martin Davies

0. The philosopher of language begins with the literal use of language. He tries to give an elucidation of the notion of literal meaning, perhaps in terms of conventions and speakers' intentions. And he tries to give an account of the way in which the literal meaning of a complete sentence depends upon the semantic properties of its constituent words and modes of combination. In attempting this, he has to address questions about abstract, theoretical semantics, and about the psychological reality of the dependence of meanings of wholes upon meanings of parts.

The literal use with which the philosopher of language begins is only a fragment of our total linguistic practice; and, in fact, it is something of an idealisation even of that fragment. Surveying the broader totality, the philosopher of language is bound, sooner or later, to cast an eye towards the literary, rather than the literal, use of language, and to have something to say about (roughly speaking) poetry. And if it is true that 'The metaphor is to poetry what the proposition is to logic',¹ then he will do well to focus attention on the concept of metaphor.

I shall be concerned with metaphor in the second part of this paper. Recent years have seen a massive increase in the philosophical literature on the topic, but my aim will be modest. I want to make some comments on the accounts of metaphor offered by Max Black, Donald Davidson, John Searle, and most recently Merrie Bergman. I label the accounts of Searle and Bergman 'proposition theories', and contrast them with Davidson's, which I label an 'image theory'. As for the difference between Davidson and Black, I shall suggest that there may be less to it than meets the eye.

In the first part of the paper I shall be concerned with idiom. This is not because I think, as some theorists have apparently thought, that metaphor is 'a species of' idiom.² On the contrary,

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getting clear about what idiom is, is a way of getting clear about what metaphor is not.

I

1. Idiom is certainly an obstacle to word-by-word translation.³ The French phrase 'avoir raison' has to be translated into English as 'to be right', not as 'to have reason'. Someone might suggest that this fact about translation goes to the heart of the notion of idiom: an idiom is a phrase which cannot be correctly translated on the basis of translation of its syntactically distinguished constituent words and modes of combination. One feature of such a definition would be that whether a phrase in one language is an idiom could only be determined relative to some chosen second language. Thus, 'avoir raison' would be an idiom in French relative to English, but not relative to Spanish ('tener razón') or to Italian ('avere ragione'), for example. This would be a counter-intuitive feature of the definition. Intuition proclaims simply that the French phrase is an idiom, and that there are corresponding idioms in Spanish and Italian, but not in English.

2. What then is an idiom? Roughly, it is a phrase (or sentence) which is conventionally used with a meaning different from its constructed literal meaning (if it has one). If the phrase does have a constructed literal meaning, it will thus be ambiguous. In a systematic semantic theory there will be a *theorem* specifying the constructed literal meaning: a theorem derived in a certain canonical way from axioms specifying the semantic properties of the phrase's constituent words and modes of combination. And there will be a separate *axiom* specifying the idiomatic meaning of the phrase. An idiom has no semantic structure; rather, it is a semantic primitive.⁴

If the members of a population are full understanders of the language containing the idiom, then their semantic mastery of the phrase with its constructed literal meaning will be related in various (causal explanatory) ways to their semantic mastery of other phrases and sentences containing those same constituent words and modes of combination. But, in contrast, their semantic mastery of the phrase used as an idiom may be (causally explanatorily) isolated from those other pieces of semantic mastery.

On this account, there is no relativity to a second language. The phrase 'avoir raison' is an idiom just because it is not possible to proceed by rational inductive means (to 'project') from knowledge of the meanings of other sentences containing 'avoir' and 'raison' to knowledge of the meanings of sentences containing the idiom.

3. Clearly, we can allow for the possibility that a phrase might be used with its constructed literal meaning, and yet be *treated as an idiom* (that is, be treated as though it had no semantic structure). Suppose that a phrase once had an idiomatic meaning quite different from its constructed literal meaning, and that with no change in the total causal explanatory structure of the speakers' semantic competence the idiomatic meaning gradually changed until it coincided with the constructed literal meaning. At the end of this process, a formal semantic theorist would no longer need to distinguish an ambiguity. But there would still be, in members of the population, two quite different pieces of semantic mastery. We might call this a case of 'literal idiom'. That may sound like a contradiction in terms, but in a full treatment it would be revealed as no more contradictory than 'veridical hallucination'. And, in fact, the two phenomena are highly analogous.⁵

4. An idiom is (let us continue to say) a phrase with a conventional meaning different from its constructed literal meaning. Is it then a sufficient condition for a phrase to be an idiom that it is unfailingly used to 'get across' a proposition different from its constructed literal meaning? Consider the sentence 'No head injury is too trivial to be ignored'.⁶ I am informed that, amongst those who use this sentence, it is used to 'get across' the proposition that no head injury is trivial *enough* to be ignored; something rather different from its constructed literal meaning. But the sentence is not an idiom; it is not even treated as an idiom.

It is the speaker's primary intention that the audience should believe that no head injury is trivial enough to be ignored. The speaker also intends (*à la Grice*) that the audience will recognise his primary intention in part by recognising which sentence has been uttered and employing his semantic mastery of the constituent words and modes of combination. Because the

speaker and audience make the same pragmatically explicable error, the speaker's primary intention is indeed recognised.

In such a case, a formal semantic theorist does not provide a separate axiom for the sentence 'No head injury is too trivial to be ignored'. Nor is there any causal explanatory isolation of the speaker's semantic mastery of that sentence from his semantic mastery of other sentences containing those same constituent words and modes of combination. Rather, a pragmatically explicable computational fault opens up a little gap between competence and performance.

5. The idiomatic meaning of an idiom cannot be worked out by rational inductive means (cannot be 'projected') from the semantic properties of the constituent words and modes of combination alone. But it may be that, given general non-semantic knowledge, one could work out what the idiom might well mean; and one could come to see its idiomatic meaning as unsurprising, or felicitous, or apt. Relevant knowledge might include knowledge of phonetics, knowledge of literature, and general knowledge about how the world works.

Simple examples of idioms which are phonetically apt are provided by rhyming slang. No amount of reflection upon the semantic properties of the constituent words and modes of combination in 'Let's take a butcher's hook', or upon how the world works, will assist in the interpretation of that idiom. It is rendered apt simply by the phonetic properties of the words. (In some cases of rhyming slang, though, the intended aptness is not simply phonetic. Consider 'trouble and strife' for 'wife'.)

No amount of reflection upon the semantic properties that the words 'light', 'fantastic' and 'trip' now have, or once had, or upon the phonetic properties of those words, or upon the way the world works, will assist in the interpretation of the idioms 'the light fantastic' and 'trip the light fantastic'. In this case the aptness of the idioms has to do with literature. Their felicity is apparent once one has seen the use of the constituent words in Milton's *L'Allegro*.⁷

6. No particular interest would attach to a taxonomy of apt idioms. But some interest does attach to the class of semantically apt idioms: syntactically complex expressions whose meanings are not determined by the semantic properties of their

constituent words and modes of combination, but whose meanings can be seen as somehow felicitous given the semantic properties of their constituents. This class is itself somewhat heterogeneous.

In an earlier paper, I considered words beginning with the 'hydro-' prefix and claimed that they should be regarded as semantically unstructured.⁸ The semantic properties of 'hydro-' and 'phobia', for example, determine at most that 'hydrophobia' applies to a phobia having something to do with water. I should now add, what was already implicit there, that the syntactically complex 'hydrophobia' is semantically apt. Given some general knowledge about the way the world works, in particular about water and about phobias, we can see its meaning as unsurprising.

7. Similar remarks apply to combinations like 'carpet sweeper' and 'vacuum cleaner'.⁹ The meanings of these phrases cannot be worked out from the semantic properties of their constituent words and modes of combination alone: a carpet sweeper sweeps carpets but a vacuum cleaner does not clean vacuums, it cleans by means of a vacuum. But again, given some general knowledge about the way the world works, we can see their meanings as unsurprising.

Considerations such as these can help to remove the unease that may be felt over simply classifying such syntactically complex expressions as semantically unstructured (that is, as semantic primitives). And we can add that there is no reason to suppose that the boundary between mere semantic aptness and genuine semantic structure is absolutely sharp.

8. The semantic aptness of an idiom may be of a rather different kind. It may be that the meaning of the idiom is related to the meaning that is determined by the semantic properties of its constituents in a way appropriate to some figurative use of language; appropriate to metaphor, for example.¹⁰ Typically, of course, such an idiom will be the conventionalised residue of a genuinely figurative use of language.

Consider the sentence 'He burnt his fingers', and assume that it is an idiom, as I have characterised that notion. A semantic theory for English will have a separate axiom for the syntactically complex expression 'burn one's fingers' specifying its idiomatic meaning: to incur harm by meddling. Full under-

standers of English normally use the idiom with the primary intention that the audience should believe that a certain person incurred harm by meddling, and intend that this primary intention should be recognised (in part) simply by the audience's recognition that the expression is regularly used to 'get across' such a proposition. This is just to say that the expression is treated as an idiom.

Such use of the expression is quite consistent with the speaker's, and the audience's, appreciating that it is a commonplace that burning one's fingers is (often) a case of incurring harm by meddling. Speaker and audience may both appreciate the semantic aptness of the idiom; they may both recognise the relation between the idiomatic meaning and the constructed literal meaning. And it may be common knowledge between them that all this is so.

But if all this is common knowledge between them, then a different use of the expression is possible. The speaker may still have the primary intention that the audience should believe that a certain person incurred harm by meddling, but intend that this primary intention should be recognised (in part) (*a*) by the audience's recognition of the literal meaning of the sentence, (*b*) by the audience's recognition that the utterance is not to be interpreted literally (that is, that he is not intended to believe that the person burnt his fingers), and (*c*) by the audience's recognition of the relation between burning one's fingers and incurring harm by meddling.

In this case there is no idiom, but a metaphorical use of a sentence with its constructed literal meaning. In this use, in contrast with the idiomatic use, the semantic properties of the constituents of the sentence are cognitively crucial.

Idiom and metaphor are disjoint, but this latter kind of semantically apt idiom lies close to the interface.

II

9. In the example that we just considered, where there is no idiom, the speaker (strictly and literally) *says* one thing and *means* (that is, utterer's occasion means, or *s-means*) something else. According to one type of account, this is quite generally what happens in metaphor. Thus, for example, John Searle restricts attention to subject-predicate cases in which a speaker utters a

sentence 'S is P' and thereby s-means that S is R, and continues¹¹

[T]he problem of metaphor is to try to get a characterisation of the relations between the three sets, S, P, and R, together with a specification of other information and principles used by speakers and hearers, so as to explain how it is possible to utter 'S is P' and mean 'S is R'.

Searle goes on to provide some principles of metaphorical interpretation. For present purposes it will suffice to say that the idea is not very different from Black's suggestion that being R should be a commonplace associated with being P.

In a recent paper, Merrie Bergman gives a somewhat similar account.¹²

[A] person who uses a sentence metaphorically does not use it to assert the proposition that is *literally expressed by the sentence*. In the case of assertive metaphor, we must distinguish between *sentence meaning* and *speaker's meaning*. What is distinctive of all metaphorical uses of language . . . is that the content of what is communicated is a direct function of salient characteristics associated with (at least) part of the expression.

As presented so far, these accounts may not seem to answer to the open-endedness and richness of metaphor. They seem to deal only with the most prosaic of prosaic metaphor: we might say, only with metaphor that is well placed to slide into idiom. But Searle does address the open-endedness of metaphor.¹³

A speaker says S is P, but means metaphorically an indefinite range of meanings, S is R₁, S is R₂, etc.

And it is one of Bergman's principal claims that the richness of metaphor can be accounted for without any shift in her fundamental position.¹⁴

[I]f we repeatedly ask of a metaphor 'What *else* might it mean?', after the propositions based on some highly salient characteristics have been noted we may begin to notice, or to *focus upon*, characteristics that initially were not salient—and this very focusing raises the salience of those characteristics.

10. Early in her paper, Bergman quotes a passage from Donald Davidson.¹⁵

It should make us suspect the theory that it is so hard to decide, even in the case of the simplest metaphors, exactly what the cognitive content [proposition? MD] is supposed to be . . . [I]n fact, there is no limit to what a metaphor calls to our attention . . . When we try to say what a metaphor 'means', we soon realise there is no end to what we want to mention.

And she goes on in reply:

The fact that metaphors 'generate' further and further readings does not, however, conflict with the claim that an author can successfully use a metaphor to convey a fairly specific cognitive content.

Surely she is right about that. But it does not fully answer Davidson's point, particularly the point Davidson made in the sentences omitted from the quotation.¹⁶

If what the metaphor makes us notice were finite in scope and *propositional* in nature, this would not in itself make trouble . . .

[M]uch of what we are caused to notice is not *propositional* in character.

I label Searle's and Bergman's accounts 'proposition theories'. What brings Davidson's account into conflict with them is that he denies that the content of a metaphor is exhaustively (let alone finitely) propositional.

I have already mentioned that Searle's and Bergman's accounts are in some ways similar to Max Black's seminal account. Yet it seems to me very unclear whether Black and Davidson are in serious disagreement. In the next four sections I shall concentrate on similarities between Black's and Davidson's accounts. Then, with a view to helping clarify Davidson's position (or my version of it) I shall look at the apparent disagreements. In the final three sections I shall return to the difference between proposition theories and Davidson's account.

11. Famously, Black¹⁷ said that a metaphor 'organises our view' of a subject. He said that

the principal subject is 'seen through' the metaphorical expression

Nor must we neglect the shifts in attitude that regularly result from the use of metaphorical language . . . to call a man a wolf is to support and reinforce dislogistic attitudes.

Those claims do not sound very different from the following points made by Davidson.¹⁸

Metaphor makes us see one thing as another

How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? . . . Bad question . . . Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture.

[M]uch of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character.

They do not sound *very* different; but there are differences that are worth noting. Black says that the use of a metaphor may support certain attitudes, and I take it that dyslogistic or eulogistic attitudes are not in general propositional. But when Davidson wants to give an example of a non-propositional component of the content of a metaphor, he does not choose an attitude but a case of imaging: 'When the metaphor "He was burned up" was active, we would have pictured fire in the eyes or smoke coming out of the ears'.¹⁹ Thus, we might say that Davidson's is the more radical departure from proposition theories.

12. It will be helpful to consider first a case of organisation, or rather reorganisation, of our view of some subject, that is achieved by a literal, rather than a metaphorical, use of language.²⁰ Suppose that Malcolm has been universally regarded as a pillar of probity and integrity; in short, as a good man. Suppose now that you are informed that Malcolm is a thief; he stole a large sum of money. Surely your view of Malcolm is radically reorganised. You do not merely add the property of being a thief to the properties you predicate of Malcolm and subtract such properties as may clash with this addition. Amongst the properties you still predicate of Malcolm, weightings and interrelations are changed. And behaviour once interpreted as the product of one attitude may now be interpreted quite differently.

The new piece of information may bring with it countless changes, not only in beliefs, but in other propositional attitudes, in non-propositional attitudes, and in images as well.²¹

Your view of Malcolm is so radically reorganised because you *see him as* (or *think of him as*) a thief. This complex cognitive/imaginative activity is centred on, and informed by, your coming to believe that Malcolm is, indeed, a thief. Certainly there is more to seeing Malcolm as a thief than just woodenly believing that he is a thief. But none of this suggests that your informer's sentence, 'Malcolm is a thief' had, in the context, any meaning other than its strict and literal meaning. The speaker said one thing and s-meant it. His utterance produced a massively complex result. But still his words 'mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation mean, and nothing more'.²²

13. Davidson's suggestion is that this same kind of organisation, or reorganisation, of our view of some subject (or indeed of the world) is what is achieved by metaphor. But, of course, seeing Malcolm as something he is not, say a wolf, is a more complicated matter than seeing him as something he is (e.g. a thief). For crucially, one does not come to believe that Malcolm is (literally) a wolf.

If one sees Malcolm as, or thinks of Malcolm as, a wolf then one does come to believe many other things of Malcolm (such as that he is fierce). And talk of predicating properties from a system of associated commonplaces can be regarded as providing a partial specification of some of the changes in propositional attitude which partly constitute the reorganised view of Malcolm. But such talk leaves out a good deal. For example, it leaves out everything about weightings and interrelations which are the result of the system of commonplaces being associated with the notion of a wolf. Thus Black himself wrote:²³

the set of literal statements so obtained will not have the same power to inform and enlighten as the original. . . the implications, previously left for a suitable reader to educe for himself, with a nice feeling for their relative priorities and degrees of importance, are now presented explicitly as though having equal weight.

It also leaves out everything about propositional attitudes other than belief, about attitudes that are not propositional, and about images. This fact has not escaped Black. In a later paper, after discussing the example 'Marriage is a zero-sum game', he wrote²⁴

Such a heavy-handed analysis of course neglects the ambience of the secondary subject, the suggestions and valuations that necessarily attach themselves to a game-theory view of marriage, and thereby suffuse the receiver's perception of it.

And at the end of that paper he compared metaphors with other 'cognitive devices [charts, maps, graphs, pictorial diagrams, photographs, "realistic" paintings] for *showing* "how things are", devices that need not be perceived as mere substitutes for bundles of statement of fact'.²⁵

14. The reorganisation of view that is achieved in a metaphorical use of 'Malcolm is a wolf' is in many respects like that achieved in a literal use of 'Malcolm is a thief'. But the crucial difference remains. In the metaphorical use the speaker does not intend that the audience should believe that Malcolm is a wolf.

According to Searle and Bergman, for example, the speaker intends that the audience should believe some proposition or propositions *other than* that Malcolm is a wolf. According to Davidson, 'Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight'.²⁶ That is, the speaker intends that the audience should see Malcolm as a wolf or (more long-windedly) should see the world as one in which *Malcolm is a wolf*. If seeing the world as one in which . . . can be regarded as an attitude towards a proposition, then we can capture the contrast between the two accounts this way. For Searle and Bergman: *same attitude, different proposition*. For Davidson: *different attitude, same proposition*. Perhaps this attenuates the notion of a propositional attitude too much. But we can still mark the contrast. For Searle and Bergman, the audience does something usual with a proposition *other than* the proposition literally expressed. For Davidson, the audience does something *unusual* with the proposition that is literally expressed.²⁷

Perhaps if one is to see Malcolm as a wolf one must believe him to be treacherous, for example. Perhaps that is common knowledge between speaker and audience, and perhaps sufficient further conditions are met for us to say that the speaker s-meant (*inter alia*) that Malcolm is treacherous. Nevertheless, his intentions in s-meaning various particular propositions will never add up to his primary intention in using the metaphor: the intention that his audience should be inspired or prompted to see Malcolm as a wolf.

A metaphorical use of 'Malcolm is a wolf', like a literal use of 'Malcolm is a thief', may produce a massively complex result, and perhaps in this case there is just room for the idea that the speaker may say one thing and s-mean another (or several others). But it is not difficult to see why someone holding such a view as I have been outlining would say that 'metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more'.²⁸

15. I have been concentrating on similarities between Black's and Davidson's accounts. But Davidson's account—as expressed by him—has drawn a reply from Black which is not wholly taken up with pointing to the similarities between their views.²⁹ Before moving to some final, general thoughts about metaphor, I want to make some comments that are relevant to Black's reply, and which may help to clarify Davidson's position.

In a case of outright (literal) assertion, a speaker may begin with a belief and intend that the audience should end up believing the same.³⁰ In believing the proposition that *p*, the speaker does not merely entertain the proposition that *p*, or wonder whether *p*, or see the humour in the idea that *p*, or . . . Let us say that he *affirms that p in thought*. He may then utter a sentence with the primary intention that the audience end up sharing his belief, and thereby assert that *p*.

Similarly, in a case of serious use of metaphor, a speaker may begin with a view of the world as one in which *q* say, and intend that the audience should end up seeing the world as one in which *q*. In thinking of the world in that way the speaker does not merely entertain the possibility of seeing the world a certain way, or wonder whether to see it that way, or see the humour in the idea of seeing it that way, or . . . Let us say that he

metaphorically affirms that q in thought. He may then utter a sentence with the primary intention that the audience end up sharing his view of the world, and thereby, let us say, *metaphorically assert that q.*³¹ To introduce terminology is not, of course, to provide a substantive theory, and certainly this terminology is not intended to bear any explanatory weight. Metaphorically affirming that *q* in thought, is not believing that *q*; and correlatively, metaphorically asserting that *q* is not asserting that *q*. Perhaps, we can say a little more: the thought that *q* must be entertained, and further it 'must strike me as in some way right or appropriate'.³²

Black credits Davidson with the view that³³

(A) The producer of a metaphorical statement says nothing more than what is meant when the sentence he uses is taken literally.

He later goes on³⁴

One might suppose that since Davidson regards the sentence used in a metaphorical statement as preserving its ordinary literal meaning, he might take its user to be asserting at least one supposed fact.

But . . . what metaphorical statements, taken literally, assert is nearly always plainly false and absurd. Thus, (A) should be understood to mean that a metaphor producer is 'saying' *nothing at all*.

Much of the problem here seems to be terminological. Davidson regards the sentence as preserving its literal meaning and as being used to perform a *saying*, but not an *assertion*. 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. Sayings are truth-*evaluable*, and assertion is the norm for sayings, but it does not follow that for all sayings falsehood is a fault. Some sayings, and in particular what we have called metaphorical assertions, are not aimed at the truth. In a sincere metaphorical assertion 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. A particular way of seeing the world may be insightful or

unilluminating, appropriate or inappropriate, rich or barren. By a natural extension of our terminology, we could call the aim of sincere metaphorical assertion *metaphorical truth*. But, once again, the mere introduction of terminology provides no philosophical explanation.

Finally, Black says, regarding the assignment of meaning to metaphors³⁵

A metaphor may indeed convey a 'vision' or 'view' . . . but this is compatible with its also saying things that are correct or incorrect, illuminating or misleading, and so on.

Davidson need not deny that sharing a 'vision' or 'view' may be sharing something which is itself illuminating or misleading, or even metaphorically true or false. Nor need he deny that it may involve *inter alia* sharing beliefs which may be correct or incorrect, indeed may be literally true or false. But what Davidson would be concerned to deny is that from the contents of those beliefs we can in general construct something which deserves to be called the content or meaning of the metaphor. Those propositional contents no more exhaust the significance of the metaphor than does having those beliefs constitute having the vision.

16. Let us now focus upon the two kinds of theory of metaphor. I have labelled theories such as Searle's and Bergman's 'proposition theories'. I label theories such as Davidson's 'image theories'. Could it be that the two kinds of theory apply to two kinds of metaphor? The proposition theory seems to fit what is called prosaic (low-energy) metaphor, the kind of metaphor that at its lowest energy extreme shades into mere idiom. On the other hand, the image theory seems to fit what is called poetic, essential (high-energy) metaphor. Thus, for example, according to the proposition theory, metaphor is in principle paraphrasable; and prosaic metaphor is often reckoned to be paraphrasable. On the other hand, it is no part of the image theory that metaphor is in general paraphrasable; and poetic metaphor is indeed often reckoned to defy paraphrase—hence, *essential* metaphor.

Consider now one of Bergman's examples.³⁶

One salient characteristic associated with 'encyclopedia' is the property of being a source of information. Thus I can use 'Marie is an encyclopedia' . . . to assert that Marie knows lots of things.

What happens here is that we hold fixed our conception of the world as it really is, and seek to interpret the language used metaphorically, employing various principles (such as those articulated by Searle) to arrive at a proposition that fits the world as it really is. To speak very intuitively and inexactly: the metaphorical language is interpretatively construed downwards to fit the real world.

I should like to compare this with an example from Samuel R. Levin.³⁷ He invites us to consider the following lines by Emily Dickinson.

The mountain sat upon the plain
 In his eternal chair,
 His observation omnifold,
 His inquest everywhere.
 The seasons prayed around his knees,
 Like children round a sire:
 Grandfather of the days is he,
 Of dawn the ancestor.

According to the proposition theory, we again seek to interpret the language used metaphorically, so as to arrive at propositions that fit the world as it really is (in this case, describe the mountain as it really is). Thus, perhaps, the first two lines express metaphorically the proposition that the mountain was located in a certain place and had been there for some time. And one can work through the remaining lines.

Levin contrasts this account of what happens in the poet and in her audience with another account. Thus, according to the proposition theory

Emily Dickinson experienced a rather ordinary vision, or conception—that of a mountain's being high and old—and proceeded to make an interesting if unspectacular poem out of that conception by contriving to express it in an extraordinary arrangement of language.

While in contrast

If we invert the approach, *we countenance a world in which the mountain has the properties attributed to him*: he actually sits on an eternal chair . . . On this view *it is not the language that is remarkable, it is the conception.*

To speak very intuitively and inexactly: the world is imaginatively construed upwards to fit the metaphorical language.

None of this is to deny that if the poet addresses an audience concerning a particular mountain, then the audience, having shared a certain vision, is in the end able to arrive at beliefs about the real world. What Levin says is that³⁸

we need to modulate the images described in the poem into such as make sense given our knowledge of facts in the actual world.

But what is important for present purposes is Levin's picture of something which happens in the user of the metaphor and in the audience, and which is quite unlike anything admitted by the proposition theory.

17. Suppose we agree that the two kinds of theory apply to two kinds of metaphor. Is it then an illusion that metaphor is a unified phenomenon, ranging from the almost dead metaphors that are scarcely different from idioms, through prosaic metaphors, and on to essential poetic metaphors? I think that it is not an illusion, for to the extent that the proposition theory is correct it seems to be a special case of the image theory.

A metaphor may be, in Black's terminology, not very *resonant*: it does not 'support a high degree of implicative elaboration'.³⁹ One sees, or thinks of, one thing as another, but the imagination is scarcely engaged. Thinking of *A* as *B* is hardly distinguishable from believing that *A* is *C*, *D*, and *E*. The proposition theory would give an adequate description of the use of such a metaphor.

In general, seeing one thing as another involves a complex of propositional and non-propositional attitudes and elements which are not attitudes at all; in general, but not without exception. Perhaps an exceptional case is provided by what Black regards as an 'unfortunate example' of metaphor: 'Richard is a lion'.⁴⁰ Perhaps thinking of Richard as a lion just comes to believing Richard to be brave. (Or perhaps there is a

sub-community of speakers of English whose imaginations are so disposed that for them there is no difference: those who have read too many papers on metaphor.)

Of course, none of this refutes the image theory. The image theory applies quite generally, but for cases towards the prosaic end of the spectrum the proposition theory, with its more meagre conceptual resources, is also adequate.

18. Davidson wrote⁴¹

Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight. . . . *in most cases* what the metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, recognition of some truth or fact.

With that I have agreed. But I should also agree with Black that any account along these lines is thus far seriously deficient. What we urgently need is⁴²

clarification of what it means to say that in metaphor one thing is thought of (or viewed) *as* another thing.
[W]e lack an adequate account of metaphorical thought.

And perhaps we can add that what we lack is not something to be furnished by empirical psychology, but by the philosophy of mind, taking as its starting point the concept of imagination.⁴³

NOTES

¹ A. Preminger (ed.), *Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* (Princeton, 1974), p. 494.

² See I. Scheffler, *Beyond the Letter* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1979), p. 83, discussing the intuitionistic approach to metaphor.

³ In this section I am indebted to Lloyd Humberstone.

⁴ Here and in the next two paragraphs, I follow the terminology of my *Meaning, Quantification, Necessity: Themes in Philosophical Logic* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), Chapters 3 and 4.

⁵ See D. Lewis, 'Veridical Hallucination and Prosthetic Vision', *Australasian Journal of Philosophy* 58 (1980), and my 'Function in Perception' (forthcoming).

⁶ Here I am indebted to Frank Vlach. The example is from J. Bennett, *Linguistic Behaviour* (Cambridge University Press, 1976), at p. 17.

⁷ Come, and trip it as ye go
On the light fantastic toe,
And in thy right hand lead with thee
The mountain nymph, sweet Liberty.

⁸ 'Meaning, Structure and Understanding', *Synthese* 48 (1981), at p. 141.

⁹ Here I am indebted to Mark Sainsbury.

¹⁰ Nothing in the present paper is supposed to depend upon sharp distinctions amongst metaphor, metonymy, and synecdoche, for example. I do assume, however, that metaphor is distinguished from simile.

¹¹ 'Metaphor' in A. Ortony (ed.), *Metaphor and Thought* (Cambridge University Press, 1979), at p. 98. For his principles of metaphorical interpretation, see pp. 113-20. And for a discussion of some of the refinements needed here, see Scheffler *op. cit.* pp. 110-18.

¹² 'Metaphorical Assertions', *Philosophical Review* 91 (1982), at p. 234. See also at p. 235

The salient characteristics associated with a common noun or intransitive verb include properties commonly believed to be characteristic of the things—possible or actual—the noun or verb applies to.

for an indication of some similarity with Black's account. Cf. A. Ortony, 'The Role of Similarity in Similes and Metaphors' in Ortony (ed.) *op. cit.*

¹³ Searle *op. cit.* p. 122.

¹⁴ Bergman *op. cit.* p. 245.

¹⁵ *Ibid.* pp. 230-1. See Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', *Critical Inquiry* 5 (1978), reprinted in S. Sacks (ed.), *On Metaphor* (University of Chicago Press, 1978), and in M. Platts (ed.) *Reference, Truth and Reality* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1980). (Page references to this reprinting.) The quoted passage is at p. 252.

¹⁶ Davidson *op. cit.* (my emphasis).

¹⁷ 'Metaphor', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 55 (1954-5), reprinted in M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Cornell University Press, 1962), and in J. Margolis (ed.), *Philosophy Looks at the Arts* (Temple University Press, 1978). (Page references to this reprinting.) See p. 461.

¹⁸ Davidson *op. cit.* pp. 252-3.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p. 244.

²⁰ Here I am indebted to Mark Sainsbury.

²¹ Cf. P. F. Strawson, 'Imagination and Perception', in *Freedom and Resentment and other essays* (Methuen, 1974), at p. 53: 'Non-actual perceptions are in a sense represented in, alive in, the present perception'.

²² Davidson *op. cit.* p. 238.

²³ Black *op. cit.* p. 464.

²⁴ 'More About Metaphor', in Ortony (ed.) *op. cit.*, at p. 30.

²⁵ *Ibid.* p. 41.

²⁶ Davidson *op. cit.* p. 253.

²⁷ The non-propositional attitudes which are part of seeing the world a certain way may well be centred directly on the proposition that Malcolm is a wolf rather than on any proposition that is believed. Also, Christopher Janaway has pointed out that if we focus on the belief that Malcolm is fierce, say, and ask why he should be called a wolf, rather than a tiger or a bear, there may be no answer available other than that Malcolm's fierceness is the fierceness of a wolf.

²⁸ Davidson *op. cit.* p. 238. Even on Davidson's view, it can be allowed that the speaker says that Malcolm is a wolf and s-means that the audience is to see Malcolm as a wolf. But this is not what people have had in mind when they have said that in metaphor a speaker says one thing and means another.

²⁹ 'How Metaphors Work: A Reply to Donald Davidson', in Sacks (ed.) *op. cit.*

³⁰ If an utterance of *s* is to be an assertion that *p*, then I require that *s* (literally) mean that *p* and that the speaker's primary intention be that the audience should believe that *p*. Asserting that *p* is a special case of saying that *p*.

³¹ Cf. Black 'How Metaphors Work' pp. 182-5.

³² R. Scruton, *Art and Imagination: A Study in the Philosophy of Mind* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 90; see also p. 98.

³³ *Op. cit.* p. 185.

³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 186.

³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 192.

³⁶ Bergman *op. cit.* p. 235-6.

³⁷ 'Standard Approaches to Metaphor and a Proposal for Literary Metaphor' in Ortony (ed.) *op. cit.*, at pp. 132-3 (my emphasis).

³⁸ *Ibid.* p. 133. (This is relevant to the distinction between metaphor and fiction.)

³⁹ 'More About Metaphor' p. 27.

⁴⁰ 'Metaphor' p. 456.

⁴¹ Davidson *op. cit.* p. 253 (my emphasis).

⁴² 'How Metaphors Work' p. 192. But see again Scruton *op. cit.* Chapters 7 and 8, for some steps in the right direction.

⁴³ I am grateful to Christopher Janaway, Colin McGinn, David Murray, Mark Platts, Mark Sainsbury, and Roger Scruton for comments on an earlier version of this paper.