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Metropolis

Metropolis

## Concepts We Live By

Metaphor is for most people a device of the poetic imagination and the rhetorical flourish—a matter of extraordinary rather than ordinary language. Moreover, metaphor is typically viewed as characteristic of language alone, a matter of words rather than thought or action. For this reason, most people think they can get along perfectly well without metaphor. We have found, on the contrary, that metaphor is pervasive in everyday life, not just in language but in thought and action. Our ordinary conceptual system, in terms of which we both think and act, is fundamentally metaphorical in nature.

The concepts that govern our thought are not just matters of the intellect. They also govern our everyday functioning, down to the most mundane details. Our concepts structure what we perceive, how we get around in the world, and how we relate to other people. Our conceptual system thus plays a central role in defining our everyday realities. If we are right in suggesting that our conceptual system is largely metaphorical, then the way we think, what we experience, and what we do every day is very much a matter of metaphor.

But our conceptual system is not something we are normally aware of. In most of the little things we do every day, we simply think and act more or less automatically along certain lines. Just what these lines are is by no means obvious. One way to find out is by looking at language. Since communication is based on the same conceptual system that we use in thinking and acting, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like.

Primarily on the basis of linguistic evidence, we have found that most of our ordinary conceptual system is metaphorical in nature. And we have found a way to begin to identify in detail just what the metaphors are that structure how we perceive, how we think, and what we do.

To give some idea of what it could mean for a concept to be metaphorical and for such a concept to structure an everyday activity, let us start with the concept ARGUMENT and the conceptual metaphor ARGUMENT IS WAR. This metaphor is reflected in our everyday language by a wide variety of expressions:

#### ARGUMENT IS WAR

Your claims are *indefensible*.

He *attacked* every weak point in my argument.

His criticisms were *right on target*.

I *demolished* his argument.

I've never *won* an argument with him.

You disagree? Okay, *shoot!*

If you use that *strategy*, he'll *wipe you out*.

He *shot down* all of my arguments.

It is important to see that we don't just *talk* about arguments in terms of war. We can actually win or lose arguments. We see the person we are arguing with as an opponent. We attack his positions and we defend our own. We gain and lose ground. We plan and use strategies. If we find a position indefensible, we can abandon it and take a new line of attack. Many of the things we *do* in arguing are partially structured by the concept of war. Though there is no physical battle, there is a verbal battle, and the structure of an argument—attack, defense, counterattack, etc.—reflects this. It is in this sense that the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor is one that we live by in this culture; it structures the actions we perform in arguing.

Try to imagine a culture where arguments are not viewed in terms of war, where no one wins or loses, where there is no sense of attacking or defending, gaining or losing

ground. Imagine a culture where an argument is viewed as a dance, the participants are seen as performers, and the goals to perform in a balanced and aesthetically pleasing way. In such a culture, people would view arguments differently, experience them differently, carry them out differently, and talk about them differently. But we would probably not view them as arguing at all: they would simply be doing something different. It would seem strange even to call what they were doing "arguing." Perhaps the most neutral way of describing this difference between their culture and ours would be to say that we have a discourse form structured in terms of battle and they have one structured in terms of dance.

This is an example of what it means for a metaphorical concept, namely, ARGUMENT IS WAR, to structure (at least in part) what we do and how we understand what we are doing when we argue. The essence of metaphor is understanding and experiencing one kind of thing in terms of another. It is not that arguments are a subspecies of war. Arguments and wars are different kinds of things—verbal discourse and armed conflict—and the actions performed are different kinds of actions. But ARGUMENT is partially structured, understood, performed, and talked about in terms of WAR. The concept is metaphorically structured, the activity is metaphorically structured, and, consequently, the language is metaphorically structured.

Moreover, this is the *ordinary* way of having an argument and talking about one. The normal way for us to talk about attacking a position is to use the words "attack a position." Our conventional ways of talking about arguments presuppose a metaphor we are hardly ever conscious of. The metaphor is not merely in the words we use—it is in our very concept of an argument. The language of argument is not poetic, fanciful, or rhetorical; it is literal. We talk about arguments that way because we conceive of them that way—and we act according to the way we conceive of things.

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The most important claim we have made so far is that metaphor is not just a matter of language, that is, of mere words. We shall argue that, on the contrary, **human thought processes are largely metaphorical.** This is what we mean when we say that the human conceptual system is metaphorically structured and defined. Metaphors as linguistic expressions are possible precisely because there are metaphors in a person's conceptual system. Therefore, whenever in this book we speak of metaphors, such as ARGUMENT IS WAR, it should be understood that *metaphor means metaphorical concept.*

## The Systematicity of Metaphorical Concepts

Arguments usually follow patterns; that is, there are certain things we typically do and do not do in arguing. The fact that we in part conceptualize arguments in terms of battle systematically influences the shape arguments take and the way we talk about what we do in arguing. Because the metaphorical concept is systematic, the language we use to talk about that aspect of the concept is systematic.

We saw in the ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor that expressions from the vocabulary of war, e.g., *attack a position, indefensible, strategy, new line of attack, win, gain ground*, etc., form a systematic way of talking about the battling aspects of arguing. It is no accident that these expressions mean what they mean when we use them to talk about arguments. A portion of the conceptual network of battle partially characterizes the concept of an argument, and the language follows suit. Since metaphorical expressions in our language are tied to metaphorical concepts in a systematic way, we can use metaphorical linguistic expressions to study the nature of metaphorical concepts and to gain an understanding of the metaphorical nature of our activities.

To get an idea of how metaphorical expressions in everyday language can give us insight into the metaphorical nature of the concepts that structure our everyday activities, let us consider the metaphorical concept TIME IS MONEY as it is reflected in contemporary English.

TIME IS MONEY

You're wasting my time.  
This gadget will save you hours.

I don't *have* the time to *give* you.  
How do you *spend* your time these days?

That flat tire *cost* me an hour.  
I've *invested* a lot of time in her.

I don't *have enough* time to *spare* for that.  
You're *running out* of time.  
You need to *budget* your time.

*Put aside* some time for ping pong.  
Is that *worth* your while?

Do you *have* much time *left*?  
He's living on *borrowed* time.

You don't *use* your time *profitably*.  
I lost a lot of time when I got sick.

*Thank you* for your time.

Time in our culture is a valuable commodity. It is a limited resource that we use to accomplish our goals. Because of the way that the concept of work has developed in modern Western culture, where work is typically associated with the time it takes and time is precisely quantified, it has become customary to pay people by the hour, week, or year. In our culture TIME IS MONEY in many ways: telephone message units, hourly wages, hotel room rates, yearly budgets, interest on loans, and paying your debt to society by "serving time." These practices are relatively new in the history of the human race, and by no means do they exist in all cultures. They have arisen in modern industrialized societies and structure our basic everyday activities in a very profound way. Corresponding to the fact that we *act* as if time is a valuable commodity—a limited resource, even money—we *conceive of* time that way. Thus we understand and experience time as the kind of thing that can be spent, wasted, budgeted, invested wisely or poorly, saved, or squandered.

TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY are all metaphorical concepts. They are metaphorical since we are using our everyday experiences with money, limited resources, and valuable

commodities to conceptualize time. This isn't a necessary way for human beings to conceptualize time; it is tied to our culture. There are cultures where time is none of these things.

The metaphorical concepts TIME IS MONEY, TIME IS A RESOURCE, and TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY form a single system based on subcategorization, since in our society money is a limited resource and limited resources are valuable commodities. These subcategorization relationships characterize entailment relationships between the metaphors. TIME IS MONEY entails that TIME IS A LIMITED RESOURCE, which entails that TIME IS A VALUABLE COMMODITY.

We are adopting the practice of using the most specific metaphorical concept, in this case TIME IS MONEY, to characterize the entire system. Of the expressions listed under the TIME IS MONEY metaphor, some refer specifically to money (*spend, invest, budget, profitably, cost*), others to limited resources (*use, use up, have enough of, run out of*), and still others to valuable commodities (*have, give, lose, thank you for*). This is an example of the way in which metaphorical entailments can characterize a coherent system of metaphorical concepts and a corresponding coherent system of metaphorical expressions for those concepts.

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## HIGHLIGHTING AND HIDING

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### Metaphorical Systematicity: Highlighting and Hiding

the expressions we use for talking about language. Here are some examples:

#### The CONDUIT Metaphor

It's hard to *get* that idea *across to* him.

I *gave* you that idea.

Your reasons *came through* to us.

It's difficult to *put* my ideas *into* words.

When you *have* a good idea, try to *capture* it immediately in words.

Try to *pack* more thought *into* fewer words.

You can't simply *stuff* ideas *into* a sentence any old way.

The meaning is right *there in* the words.

Don't *force* your meanings *into* the wrong words.

His words *carry* little meaning.

The introduction *has* a great deal of thought *content*.

Your words seem *hollow*.

The sentence is *without* meaning.

~ The idea is *buried in* terribly dense paragraphs.

In examples like these it is far more difficult to see that there is anything hidden by the metaphor or even to see that there is a metaphor here at all. This is so much the conventional way of thinking about language that it is sometimes hard to imagine that it might not fit reality. But if we look at what the CONDUIT metaphor entails, we can see some of the ways in which it masks aspects of the communicative process.

First, the LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS FOR MEANINGS aspect of the CONDUIT metaphor entails that words and sentences have meanings in themselves, independent of any context or speaker. The MEANINGS ARE OBJECTS part of the metaphor, for example, entails that meanings have an existence independent of people and contexts. The part of the metaphor that says LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS FOR MEANING entails that words (and sentences) have meanings, again independent of contexts and speakers. These metaphors are appropriate in many situations—those where context differences don't

The very systematicity that allows us to comprehend one aspect of a concept in terms of another (e.g., comprehending an aspect of arguing in terms of battle) will necessarily hide other aspects of the concept. In allowing us to focus on one aspect of a concept (e.g., the battling aspects of arguing), a metaphorical concept can keep us from focusing on other aspects of the concept that are inconsistent with that metaphor. For example, in the midst of a heated argument, when we are intent on attacking our opponent's position and defending our own, we may lose sight of the cooperative aspects of arguing. Someone who is arguing with you can be viewed as giving you his time, a valuable commodity, in an effort at mutual understanding. But when we are preoccupied with the battle aspects, we often lose sight of the cooperative aspects.

A far more subtle case of how a metaphorical concept can hide an aspect of our experience can be seen in what Michael Reddy has called the "conduit metaphor." Reddy observes that our language about language is structured roughly by the following complex metaphor:

IDEAS (OR MEANINGS) ARE OBJECTS.

LINGUISTIC EXPRESSIONS ARE CONTAINERS.

COMMUNICATION IS SENDING.

The speaker puts ideas (objects) into words (containers) and sends them (along a conduit) to a hearer who takes the idea/objects out of the word/containers. Reddy documents this with more than a hundred types of expressions in English, which he estimates account for at least 70 percent of

matter and where all the participants in the conversation understand the sentences in the same way. These two entailments are exemplified by sentences like

The meaning is *right there in* the words,  
which, according to the CONDUIT metaphor, can correctly be said of any sentence. But there are many cases where context does matter. Here is a celebrated one recorded in actual conversation by Pamela Downing:

Please sit in the apple-juice seat.

In isolation this sentence has no meaning at all, since the expression "apple-juice seat" is not a conventional way of referring to any kind of object. But the sentence makes perfect sense in the context in which it was uttered. An overnight guest came down to breakfast. There were four place settings, three with orange juice and one with apple juice. It was clear what the apple-juice seat was. And even the next morning, when there was no apple juice, it was still clear which seat was the apple-juice seat.

In addition to sentences that have no meaning without context, there are cases where a single sentence will mean different things to different people. Consider:

We need new alternative sources of energy.

This means something very different to the president of Mobil Oil from what it means to the president of Friends of the Earth. The meaning is not right there in the sentence—it matters a lot who is saying or listening to the sentence and what his social and political attitudes are. The CONDUIT metaphor does not fit cases where context is required to determine whether the sentence has any meaning at all and, if so, what meaning it has.

These examples show that the metaphorical concepts we have looked at provide us with a partial understanding of what communication, argument, and time are and that, in doing this, they hide other aspects of these concepts. It is

important to see that the metaphorical structuring involved here is partial, not total. If it were total, one concept would actually *be* the other, not merely be understood in terms of it. For example, time isn't really money. If you *spend your time* trying to do something and it doesn't work, you can't get your time back. There are no time banks. I can *give you a lot of time*, but you can't give me back the same time, though you can *give me back the same amount of time*. And so on. Thus, part of a metaphorical concept does not and cannot fit.

On the other hand, metaphorical concepts can be extended beyond the range of ordinary literal ways of thinking and talking into the range of what is called figurative, poetic, colorful, or fanciful thought and language. Thus, if ideas are objects, we can *dress them up in fancy clothes*, *juggle them*, *line them up nice and neat*, etc. So when we say that a concept is structured by a metaphor, we mean that it is partially structured and that it can be extended in some ways but not others.

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system do change what is real for us and affect how we perceive the world and act upon those perceptions.

The idea that metaphor is just a matter of language and can at best only describe reality stems from the view that what is real is wholly external to, and independent of, how human beings conceptualize the world—as if the study of reality were just the study of the physical world. Such a view of reality—so-called objective reality—leaves out human aspects of reality, in particular the real perceptions, conceptualizations, motivations, and actions that constitute most of what we experience. But the human aspects of reality are most of what matters to us, and these vary from culture to culture, since different cultures have different conceptual systems. Cultures also exist within physical environments, some of them radically different—jungles, deserts, islands, tundra, mountains, cities, etc. In each case there is a physical environment that we interact with, more or less successfully. The conceptual systems of various cultures partly depend on the physical environments they have developed in.

Each culture must provide a more or less successful way of dealing with its environment, both adapting to it and changing it. Moreover, each culture must define a social reality within which people have roles that make sense to them and in terms of which they can function socially. Not surprisingly, the social reality defined by a culture affects its conception of physical reality. What is real for an individual as a member of a culture is a product both of his social reality and of the way in which that shapes his experience of the physical world. Since much of our social reality is understood in metaphorical terms, and since our conception of the physical world is partly metaphorical, metaphor plays a very significant role in determining what is real for us.

## The Creation of Similarity

We have seen that many of our experiences and activities are metaphorical in nature and that much of our conceptual system is structured by metaphor. Since we see similarities in terms of the categories of our conceptual system and in terms of the natural kinds of experiences we have (both of which may be metaphorical), it follows that many of the similarities that we perceive are a result of conventional metaphors that are part of our conceptual system. We have already seen this in the case of *orientational metaphors*. For example, the orientations MORE IS UP and HAPPY IS UP induce a similarity that we perceive between MORE and HAPPY that we do not see between LESS and HAPPY.

*Ontological metaphors* also make similarities possible. We saw, for example, that the viewing of TIME and LABOR metaphorically as uniform SUBSTANCES allows us to view them both as being similar to physical resources and hence as similar to each other. Thus the metaphors TIME IS A SUBSTANCE and LABOR IS A SUBSTANCE allow us to conceive of time and labor as similar in our culture, since both can be quantified, assigned a value per unit, seen as serving a purposeful end, and used up progressively. Since these metaphors play a part in defining what is real for us in this culture, the similarity between time and labor is both based on metaphor and real for our culture.

*Structural metaphors* in our conceptual system also induce similarities. Thus, the IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor establishes similarities between ideas and food. Both can be digested, swallowed, devoured, and warmed over, and both

can nourish you. These similarities do not exist independently of the metaphor. The concept of swallowing ideas is independent of the metaphor, but the concept of food is independent of the metaphor, but the concept of swallowing ideas arises only by virtue of the metaphor. In fact, the IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor is based on still more basic metaphors. For example, it is based partly on the CONDUIT metaphor, according to which IDEAS ARE OBJECTS and we can get them from outside ourselves. It also assumes the MIND IS A CONTAINER metaphor, which establishes a similarity between the mind and the body—both being CONTAINERS. Together with the CONDUIT metaphor, we get a complex metaphor in which IDEAS ARE OBJECTS THAT COME INTO THE MIND, just as pieces of food are objects that come into the body. It is this metaphorically created similarity between ideas and food that the IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor is partly based on. And, as we have seen, the similarity itself is a consequence of the CONDUIT metaphor and the MIND IS A CONTAINER metaphor.

The IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor fits our experience partly because of this metaphor-induced similarity. The IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor is therefore partly grounded via the MIND IS A CONTAINER and CONDUIT metaphors. As a consequence of the IDEAS ARE FOOD metaphor, we get new (metaphorical) similarities between IDEAS and FOOD: both can be swallowed, digested, and devoured, and both can nourish you. These food concepts give us a way of understanding psychological processes that we have no direct and well-defined way of conceptualizing.

Finally, we can see the creation of similarity in *new metaphors* as well. For example, the metaphor PROBLEMS ARE PRECIPITATES IN A CHEMICAL SOLUTION is based on the conventional metaphor PROBLEMS ARE OBJECTS. In addition, the CHEMICAL metaphor adds PROBLEMS ARE SOLID OBJECTS, which identifies them as the precipitates in a chemical solution. The similarities thus induced between problems as we usually experience them and precipitates in a chemical solution are: they both have a perceptible form

and thus can be identified, analyzed, and acted upon. These similarities are induced by the PROBLEMS ARE SOLID OBJECTS part of the CHEMICAL metaphor. In addition, when a precipitate is dissolved, it appears to be gone because it does not have a perceptible form and cannot be identified, analyzed, and acted upon. However, it may precipitate out again, i.e., recur in solid form, just as a problem may recur. We perceive this similarity between problems and precipitates as a result of the rest of the CHEMICAL metaphor.

A more subtle example of the similarities created by a *new metaphor* can be seen in LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART. This metaphor highlights certain aspects of love experiences, downplays others, and hides still others. In particular, it downplays those experiences that fit the LOVE IS A PHYSICAL FORCE metaphor. By "downplaying," we mean that it is consistent with, but does not focus on, experiences of love that could be reasonably described by "There is a magnetism between us," "We felt sparks," etc. Moreover, it hides those love experiences that fit the LOVE IS WAR metaphor because there is no consistent overlap possible between the two metaphors. The collaborative and cooperative aspects of the LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART metaphor are inconsistent with (and therefore hide) the aggressive and dominance-oriented aspects of our love experiences as they might be described by "She is my latest conquest," "He surrendered to her," "She overwhelmed me," etc.

By this means, the LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART metaphor puts aside some of our love experiences and picks out others to focus on as if they were our only experiences of love. In doing so it induces a set of similarities between the love experiences it highlights and the real or imagined experiences of collaborating on a work of art. These induced similarities are given in our list of entailments ("Love is work," "Love is an aesthetic experience," etc.). Within the range of highlighted love experiences, each

experience fits at least one of the similarities given in the list of entailments, and probably no one of them fits all the entailments. For example, a particularly frustrating episode would fit “Love regularly brings frustration” but might not fit “Love is an aesthetic experience” or “Love is primarily valued for its own sake.” Each entailment thus states a similarity that holds between certain types of love experiences, on the one hand, and certain types of experiences of collaborative works of art, on the other. No one entailment shows the overall similarity between the *entire range* of highlighted love experiences and the range of experiences involved in producing a collaborative work of art. It is only the whole metaphor, with its entire system of entailments, that shows the similarities between the full range of highlighted love experiences and the full range of experiences of producing a collaborative work of art.

Moreover, there is a similarity induced by the metaphor that goes beyond the mere similarities between the two ranges of experience. The additional similarity is a *structural* similarity. It involves the way we understand how the individual highlighted experiences fit together in a coherent way. The coherence is provided by the structure of what we know about producing a collaborative work of art and is reflected in the way the entailments fit together (e.g., some are entailments of WORK, some are entailments of ART, some are entailments of COLLABORATIVE WORK, etc.). It is only this coherent structure that enables us to understand what the highlighted experiences have to do with each other and how the entailments are related to each other. Thus, by virtue of the metaphor, the range of highlighted love experiences is seen as similar *in structure* to the range of experiences of producing a collaborative work of art.

It is this *structural* similarity between the two ranges of experience that allows you to *find coherence* in the range of highlighted love experiences. Correspondingly, it is by virtue of the metaphor that the highlighted range of experi-

ences is picked out as being coherent. Without the metaphor, this range of experiences does not exist for you as being an identifiable and coherent set of experiences. Conceptualizing LOVE as A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART brings them into focus as fitting together into a coherent whole.

Moreover, the metaphor, by virtue of giving coherent structure to a range of our experiences, *creates similarities of a new kind*. For example, we might, independently of the metaphor, see a frustrating love experience as similar to a frustrating experience in producing a work of art jointly with someone, since they are both frustrating. In this sense, the frustrating love experience would also be similar to *any* frustrating experience at all. What the metaphor adds to an understanding of the frustrating love experience is that the *kind* of frustration involved is that involved in producing collaborative artworks. The similarity is similarity with respect to the metaphor.

Thus the precise nature of the similarity between the frustrating love experience and the frustrating art experience is perceived only in understanding the love experience in terms of the art experience. Understanding love experiences in terms of what is involved in producing a collaborative work of art is, by our definition, to comprehend that experience in terms of the metaphorical concept LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART.

We can summarize the ways in which metaphors create similarities as follows:

1. Conventional metaphors (orientational, ontological, and structural) are often based on correlations we perceive in our experience. For example, in an industrial culture such as ours there is a correlation between the amount of time a task takes and the amount of labor it takes to accomplish the task. This correlation is part of what allows us to view TIME and LABOR metaphorically as RESOURCES and hence to see a similarity between them. It is important to

remember that correlations are not similarities. Metaphors that are based on correlations in our experience define concepts in terms of which we perceive similarities.

2. Conventional metaphors of the structural variety (e.g., IDEAS ARE FOOD) may be based on similarities that arise out of orientational and ontological metaphors. As we saw, for example, IDEAS ARE FOOD is based on IDEAS ARE OBJECTS (ontological) and THE MIND IS A CONTAINER (ontological and orientational). A structural similarity between IDEAS and FOOD is induced by the metaphor and gives rise to metaphorical similarities (ideas and food can be swallowed, digested, and devoured, can provide nourishment, etc.).

3. New metaphors are mostly structural. They can create similarities in the same way as conventional metaphors that are structural. That is, they can be based on similarities that arise from ontological and orientational metaphors. As we saw, PROBLEMS ARE PRECIPITATES IN A CHEMICAL SOLUTION is based on the physical metaphor PROBLEMS ARE SOLID OBJECTS. This metaphor creates similarities between PROBLEMS and PRECIPITATES, since both can be identified, analyzed, and acted upon. The PROBLEMS ARE PRECIPITATES metaphor creates new similarities, namely, problems can appear to be gone (dissolve into solutions) and later reappear (precipitate out).

4. New metaphors, by virtue of their entailments, pick out a range of experiences by highlighting, downplaying, and hiding. The metaphor then characterizes a similarity between the entire range of highlighted experiences and some other range of experiences. For example, LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART picks out a certain range of our love experiences and defines a *structural* similarity between the *entire range* of highlighted experiences and the range of experiences involved in producing collaborative works of art. There may be isolated similarities between love and art experiences that are independent of the metaphor, but the metaphor allows us to find coherence in

these isolated similarities in terms of the overall structural similarities induced by the metaphor.

5. Similarities may be similarities with respect to a metaphor. As we saw, the LOVE IS A COLLABORATIVE WORK OF ART metaphor defines a unique *kind* of similarity. For example, a frustrating love experience may be understood as being similar to a frustrating art experience not merely by virtue of being frustrating but as involving the *kind* of frustration peculiar to jointly producing works of art.

Our view that metaphors can create similarities runs counter to the classical and still most widely held theory of metaphor, namely, the *comparison theory*. The comparison theory says:

1. Metaphors are matters of language and not matters of thought or action. There is no such thing as metaphorical thought or action.

2. A metaphor of the form "A is B" is a linguistic expression whose meaning is the same as a corresponding linguistic expression of the form "A is like B, in respects X, Y, Z . . ." "Respects X, Y, Z, . . ." characterize what we have called "isolated similarities."

3. A metaphor can therefore only describe preexisting similarities. It cannot create similarities.

Though we have given evidence against much of the comparison theory, we accept what we take to be its basic insight, namely, that metaphors can be based on isolated similarities. We differ with the comparison theory by maintaining that:

1. Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action and only derivatively a matter of language.

- 2.a. Metaphors can be based on similarities, though in many cases these similarities are themselves based on conventional metaphors that are not based on similarities. Similarities based on conventional metaphors are nonetheless *real in our culture*, since conventional metaphors partly define what we find real.

2.b. Though the metaphor may be based partly on isolated similarities, we see the important similarities as those created by the metaphor, as described above.

3. The primary function of metaphor is to provide a partial understanding of one kind of experience in terms of another kind of experience. This may involve preexisting isolated similarities, the creation of new similarities, and more.

It is important to bear in mind that the comparison theory most often goes hand in hand with an objectivist philosophy in which all similarities are objective, that is, they are similarities inherent in the entities themselves. We argue, on the contrary, that the only similarities relevant to metaphor are *similarities as experienced by people*. The difference between *objective similarities* and *experiential similarities* is all-important, and is discussed in detail in chapter 27. Briefly, an objectivist would say that objects have the properties they have independently of anyone who experiences them; the objects are *objectively similar* if they share those properties. To an objectivist it would make no sense to speak of metaphors as “*creating* similarities,” since that would require metaphors to be able to change the nature of the external world, bringing into existence objective similarities that did not previously exist.

We agree with objectivists on one major point: that things in the world do play a role in constraining our conceptual system. But they play this role *only through our experience of them*. Our experiences will (1) differ from culture to culture and (2) may depend on our understanding one kind of experience in terms of another, that is, our experiences may be metaphorical in nature. Such experiences determine the categories of our conceptual system. And properties and similarities, we maintain, exist and can be experienced only relative to a conceptual system. Thus, the only kind of similarities relevant to metaphors are *experiential*, not *objective*, similarities.

Our general position is that conceptual metaphors are

grounded in *correlations* within our experience. These experiential correlations may be of two types: *experiential cooccurrence* and *experiential similarity*. An example of experiential cooccurrence would be the *MORE IS UP* metaphor. *MORE IS UP* is grounded in the cooccurrence of two types of experiences: adding more of a substance and seeing the level of the substance rise. Here there is no experiential similarity at all. An example of experiential similarity is *LIFE IS A GAMBLING GAME*, where one experiences actions in life as gambles, and the possible consequences of those actions are perceived as winning or losing. Here the metaphor seems to be grounded in experiential similarity. When such a metaphor is extended, we may experience new similarities between life and gambling games.

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Metaphor, Truth, and Action

In the preceding chapter we suggested the following:

Metaphors have entailments through which they highlight and make coherent certain aspects of our experience.

A given metaphor may be the only way to highlight and coherently organize exactly those aspects of our experience.

Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities. A metaphor may thus be a guide for future action. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies.

For example, faced with the energy crisis, President Carter declared "the moral equivalent of war." The WAR metaphor generated a network of entailments. There was an "enemy," a "threat to national security," which required "setting targets," "reorganizing priorities," "establishing a new chain of command," "plotting new strategy," "gathering intelligence," "marshaling forces," "imposing sanctions," "calling for sacrifices," and on and on. The WAR metaphor highlighted certain realities and hid others. The metaphor was not merely a way of viewing reality; it constituted a license for policy change and political and economic action. The very acceptance of the metaphor provided grounds for certain inferences: there was an external, foreign, hostile enemy (pictured by cartoonists in Arab headdress); energy needed to be given top priorities; the populace would have to make sacrifices; if we didn't meet

the threat, we would not survive. It is important to realize that this was not the only metaphor available.

Carter's WAR metaphor took for granted our current concept of what ENERGY is, and focused on how to get enough of it. On the other hand, Amory Lovins (1977) observed that there are two fundamentally different ways, or PATHS, to supply our energy needs. He characterized these metaphorically as HARD and SOFT. The HARD ENERGY PATH uses energy supplies that are inflexible, nonrenewable, needing military defense and geopolitical control, irreversibly destructive of the environment, and requiring high capital investment, high technology, and highly skilled workers. They include fossil fuels (gas and oil), nuclear power plants, and coal gasification. The SOFT ENERGY PATH uses energy supplies that are flexible, renewable, not needing military defense or geopolitical control, not destructive of the environment, and requiring only low capital investment, low technology, and unskilled labor. They include solar, wind, and hydroelectric power, biomass alcohol, fluidized beds for burning coal or other combustible materials, and a great many other possibilities currently available. Lovins' SOFT ENERGY PATH metaphor highlights the technical, economic, and sociopolitical *structure* of the energy system, which leads him to the conclusion that the "hard" energy paths—coal, oil, and nuclear power—lead to political conflict, economic hardship, and harm to the environment. But Jimmy Carter is more powerful than Amory Lovins. As Charlotte Linde (in conversation) has observed, whether in national politics or in everyday interaction, people in power get to impose their metaphors.

New metaphors, like conventional metaphors, can have the power to define reality. They do this through a coherent network of entailments that highlight some features of reality and hide others. The acceptance of the metaphor, which forces us to focus *only* on those aspects of our experience that it highlights, leads us to view the entailments of the metaphor as being *true*. Such "truths" may be true,

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## Truth

of course, only relative to the reality defined by the metaphor. Suppose Carter announces that his administration has won a major energy battle. Is this claim true or false? Even to address oneself to the question requires accepting at least the central parts of the metaphor. If you do not accept the existence of an external enemy, if you think there is no external threat, if you recognize no field of battle, no targets, no clearly defined competing forces, then the issue of objective truth or falsity cannot arise. But if you see reality as defined by the metaphor, that is, if you do see the energy crisis as a war, then you can answer the question relative to whether the metaphorical entailments fit reality. If Carter, by means of strategically employed political and economic sanctions, forced the OPEC nations to cut the price of oil in half, then you would say that he would indeed have won a major battle. If, on the other hand, his strategies had produced only a temporary price freeze, you couldn't be so sure and might be skeptical.

Though questions of truth do arise for new metaphors, the more important questions are those of appropriate action. In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and the actions that are sanctioned by it. In all aspects of life, not just in politics or in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor.

### Why Care about a Theory of Truth?

Metaphors, as we have seen, are conceptual in nature. They are among our principal vehicles for understanding. And they play a central role in the construction of social and political reality. Yet they are typically viewed within philosophy as matters of "mere language," and philosophical discussions of metaphor have not centered on their conceptual nature, their contribution to understanding, or their function in cultural reality. Instead, philosophers have tended to look at metaphors as out-of-the-ordinary imaginative or poetic linguistic expressions, and their discussions have centered on whether these linguistic expressions can be *true*. Their concern with truth comes out of a concern with objectivity: *truth* for them means *objective, absolute truth*. The typical philosophical conclusion is that metaphors cannot directly state truths, and, if they can state truths at all, it is only indirectly, via some non-metaphorical "literal" paraphrase.

We do not believe that there is such a thing as *objective* (absolute and unconditional) *truth*, though it has been a long-standing theme in Western culture that there is. We do believe that there are *truths* but think that the idea of truth need not be tied to the objectivist view. We believe that the idea that there is absolute objective truth is not only mistaken but socially and politically dangerous. As we have seen, truth is always relative to a conceptual system that is defined in large part by metaphor. Most of our metaphors have evolved in our culture over a long period, but many