

The Philosophy of Language

Lecture Nine

Metaphor

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Metaphor

Re-Cap: Davidson's Theory of Meaning

Some Initial Remarks about Metaphors

Metaphorical Meaning

Metaphor and Speaker-Meaning

Davidson's Approach to Metaphor

Summary

Davidson's Search for a Theory of Meaning

- Davidson wanted to figure out how to construct a **theory of meaning**
- A theory of meaning for a language L would somehow present the meaning of every sentence in L
- There are infinitely many sentences in L , so a theory of meaning would have to be **compositional**
- The theory would have to explain what a sentence means by showing how its meaning is determined by the meanings of the expressions which it is built out of

From Meaning to Truth

- Davidson thought that we could use a Tarskian theory of **truth** for L as a theory of **meaning** for L
- Tarskian theories of truth are **compositional**
 - The truth-conditions of whole sentences are determined by the semantic properties of the expressions they are built out of
- A good Tarskian theory of truth is meant to satisfy **Convention T**
 - A good theory of truth for L will yield outputs of the form 's is true in L iff p ', where s is a sentence from L , and ' p ' is the meta-linguistic translation of s

Testing a Theory of Truth

- However, while Davidson agreed that a good theory of truth should meet Convention T, he recognised that he could not use this as a test for whether the theory is good
- Convention T appeals to the concept of *translation*, which in turn is defined in terms of *meaning*, and Davidson wanted to co-opt a theory of truth as a theory of meaning
- Davidson thought we could see how we should test a theory of meaning by thinking about cases of **radical interpretation**

Radical Interpretation

- If we are trying to interpret a language we do not understand, we should start by watching how speakers use whole sentences
- We should then try to come up with truth-conditions for those sentences which fit the way that they are used
- After we have assigned truth-conditions to enough sentences, we can devise a theory which implies that those sentences have those truth-conditions
- That theory will have axioms which assign semantic roles to the expressions which make sentences up
- We can use those axioms to make new predictions about the truth-conditions of other sentences, and we can then check how well those predictions fit the way that the speakers use their sentences

Semantic Holism

- This way of thinking about interpretation leads to **semantic holism**
- According to semantic holism, it does not really make sense to ask what a given sentence means in isolation
- We can only ask what a single sentence means in the context of a whole language
- That's because the only way of investigating whether we have interpreted a given sentence correctly is by using that interpretation to make predictions about what **other** sentences mean, and then checking whether those predictions are right

The Principle of Charity

- A radical interpreter must follow the Principle of Charity
- According to that principle, when we interpret other people, we must do so in a way which maximises the number of true beliefs that they hold
 - We want a theory which, for the most part, makes a sentence true just when the speakers hold it to be true
- Without the Principle of Charity, **any** theory meaning could be made to fit with the way that speakers use the sentences in their language

A Problem for Davidson

- Lots of philosophers have raised lots of objections to Davidson's programme
- One of the problems is that it simply isn't clear that we really could construct a Tarskian theory of truth for natural languages
 - Tarski designed his theories to work for **formal** languages, and **natural** languages use lots of devices that do not appear in formal systems
- One of these devices is **metaphor**
 - Davidson's theory of meaning is designed to handle the **literal** meaning of sentences, and it isn't clear how it should be extended to handle **metaphorical** meaning

A Problem for Everyone

- In fact, metaphor poses a problem for pretty much every philosopher of language
- Philosophers tend to focus on the literal in their theorising about language
- To an extent, this is fairly understandable
 - It seems like the literal use of sentences will somehow be fundamental, and that we should explain the various non-literal uses of sentences in terms of the literal use
- But the fact of the matter is, people use metaphors **all the time**
- So philosophers of language must eventually deal with metaphors!

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Where to Find Good Metaphors

- You can find a lot of good metaphors in great works of literature, especially poetry
 - ‘Juliet is the sun’ (Shakespeare, *Rome & Juliet*)
 - ‘Now is the winter of our discontent, made glorious summer by this sun of York’ (Shakespeare, *Richard III*)
- But this should not mislead you into thinking that metaphor is a rare, or somehow fringe, device
- People use metaphors **all of the time**

The Ubiquity of Metaphor

- **Metaphors about Time**

- The time flew by; the time really dragged on; the lecture only got more interesting as each hour passed by

- **Metaphors about Death**

- He kicked the bucket; she has gone to sleep; his lights went out

- **Metaphors involving Death**

- The microphone died; the town centre was dead; that joke died

Metaphors and Literal Absurdity

- Most metaphors would be obviously **false** if taken literally
 - Juliet is the sun
- But not all — some metaphors would be obviously **true** if taken literally
 - Nobody is an island
- And some metaphors would be neither obviously true nor obviously false if taken literally (although this is rarer)
 - John is lost

Dead Metaphors

- Over time, metaphors can *die*, like this one:
 - John is a cold person
- That was once a metaphor, but now it has come to literally mean that John is unemotional
- To say that a metaphor has died is not just to say that it has become familiar or hackneyed
- A metaphor dies at the point you would add another entry into the dictionary to cover the erstwhile metaphorical use
- Nonetheless, it is possible to resuscitate a dead metaphor:
 - John is ice cold, but some red hot new shoes would melt him

Extended Metaphors

- Philosophers often focus on very simple metaphors, like:
 - Juliet is the sun
- Keeping things simple can often be helpful, and for the most part we will stick to the simple examples
- But it is also important to recognise that metaphors can be extended and complex

*There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.*

(Robert Graves, 'The Cool Web')

Metaphors Resist Paraphrase

- When explaining a metaphor to someone, we often try to offer it a literal paraphrase:
 - When Romeo said that ‘Juliet is the sun’, he meant that she was the light of his life, that his day began and ended with her, that...
- But while these paraphrases can be helpful, they never seem to capture **everything** in the metaphor
- We always have to trail off with ellipsis dots, or say ‘and so on’, or something like that

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An Argument for Metaphorical Meaning

- It seems that a sentence can change its truth-value, depending on whether it is being used literally or metaphorically
 - ‘Juliet is the sun’ is false when said literally
 - ‘Juliet is the sun’ was true when Romeo said it metaphorically
- This seems to require that a sentence has a different **meaning** when it is used metaphorically rather than literally
 - If sentence s_1 means the same thing as sentence s_2 , then s_1 and s_2 have to have the same truth-value
- We thus appear to be forced to distinguish between the **literal** meaning of a sentence, and its **metaphorical** meaning

Metaphorical Word Meaning

- One suggestion would be that individual **words** change their meaning when they are used metaphorically
 - When used literally, ‘the sun’ refers to the sun (and nothing else)
 - When Romeo used ‘the sun’ metaphorically, it referred to the person who is the light of his life, who his day starts and ends with, who...
- That would explain why ‘Juliet is the sun’ says something false when meant literally, but something true when Romeo used it metaphorically

The Big Problem with Metaphorical Word Meaning

- The reason that we talk about the meanings of individual **words** (or *subsential expressions* more generally) is to explain how we manage to understand **whole sentences**
 - You understand what the sentence ‘Socrates is wise’ means because you know what ‘Socrates’ means, you know what ‘is wise’ means, and you can see how those two have been put together
- This requires that we can understand what a word means **in advance** of understanding any particular use of that word in a sentence

The Big Problem with Metaphorical Word Meaning

- But you cannot figure out what 'the sun' is meant to mean in Romeo's metaphorical use of 'Juliet is the sun' **in advance** of understanding that whole metaphor
 - You do not understand what Romeo meant by first knowing what 'is the sun' means metaphorically, and combining that metaphorical meaning with the meaning of 'Juliet'
 - You start by figuring out what the whole metaphor, 'Juliet is the sun' means, and then work backwards to figure out what the metaphorical meaning of 'the sun' is
- But as a result, introducing metaphorical meanings for individual words is pointless
 - Metaphorical meanings for words just can't be put to the work that the meanings of words are supposed to do!

Where Are We?

- Earlier we said that there was an argument for distinguishing between the literal and metaphorical meanings of sentences
 - ‘Juliet is the sun’ is literally false, but it was true when Romeo said it metaphorically
- But we can’t account for this difference in **sentence** meaning by introducing a distinction between literal and metaphorical meaning for individual **words**
- It seems that we need to find a way of saying that the whole sentence ‘Juliet is the sun’ means different things when used literally and when used metaphorically, even though the individual words all keep their ordinary, literal meaning

Metaphors and Similes

- One popular approach is to say that metaphors are really just elliptical similes
 - When used metaphorically, ‘Juliet is the sun’ is really just elliptical for ‘Juliet is *like* the sun’
- On this *Simile Theory*, the individual words in ‘Juliet is the sun’ mean exactly the same thing whether the sentence is used literally or metaphorically
- Nonetheless, the whole sentence ‘Juliet is the sun’ changes its meaning, because when we use it metaphorically, it is just short for ‘Juliet is like the sun’

(The Simile Theory is often attributed to Aristotle, although Fogelin insists that this is a bad interpretation of Aristotle in his *Figuratively Speaking*)

Problems with the Simile Theory

- There are lots of problems with the Simile Theory
- We will go through a few here, and explain how we might twist the theory to deal with them
- By the end, we will have a new theory, *The Figurative Simile Theory*, which is defended by Fogelin in *Figuratively Speaking*
- I think that this is the best version of the Simile Theory, but as we will see, it still has lots of problems

Problem 1: Emptiness

- The first problem is that the Simile Theory drains all of the **content** out of metaphors
- It is trivially true to say that Juliet is *like* the sun, because everything is *like* everything else, in one way or another
 - Juliet and the sun are both physical objects in space
 - Juliet and the sun both emit heat into their environment
 - Juliet and the sun will both cease to exist one day
- So if **all** that Romeo meant when he said 'Juliet is the sun' is that Juliet is *like* the sun, then he really wasn't saying much at all

Solution 1: Salient Properties

- We can solve this problem by insisting that when we say that Juliet is like the sun, we mean that Juliet and the sun share a number of *salient* properties
- A **salient** property is a property that strikes us as important, as worth mentioning
 - That is a *very* rough explanation of what ‘salient’ means, but it would be hard to give anything more precise
 - What definitely seems clear is that whether a property counts as ‘salient’ will depend heavily on context
- So when Romeo says ‘Juliet is the sun’, he is making the substantial claim that Juliet and the sun share some **salient** properties

Problem 2: Symmetry

- Here is an application of the Simile Theory:
 - When used metaphorically, ‘Men are pigs’ means that men and pigs share a number of salient properties
- Here is another application of the Simile Theory:
 - When used metaphorically, ‘Pigs are men’ means that pigs and men share a number of salient properties
- But saying that men share a number of salient properties with pigs, is the same as saying that pigs share a number of salient properties with men
- So the Simile Theory wrongly implies that, when used metaphorically, ‘Men are pigs’ and ‘Pigs are men’ mean the same thing

Solution 2: Introducing Asymmetry

- We can solve this problem by further modifying our account of what it means to say that A is like B :
 - A is like B iff A has a sufficiently large number of B 's salient properties
 - Men are like pigs iff men have a sufficiently large number of the salient properties of pigs
 - Pigs are like men iff pigs have a sufficiently large number of the salient properties of men
- This will allow 'Men are pigs' and 'Pigs are men' have different metaphorical meanings, because the salient properties of pigs are not the salient properties of men

Solution 2: Introducing Asymmetry

- Imagine that the salient properties of pigs are:
 - Greedy, brutish, filthy
- If we say 'Men are pigs', we mean that men have a sufficiently large number of these properties
- And imagine that the salient properties of men (and women) are:
 - Conscious, ethically valuable, violent
- If we say 'Pigs are men', we mean that pigs have a sufficiently large number of these properties

Problem 3: Metaphors Built on Mistakes

- If I said 'John is a neanderthal', most people would take me as saying that John is a dimwitted thug
- But according to the Simile Theory as it currently stands, this metaphor really means:
 - John has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties of neanderthals
- And as it turns out, neanderthals weren't really dimwitted thugs
 - Neanderthals had bigger brains than homo sapiens
 - And it is widely believed that it was the homo sapiens who wiped the neanderthals out

Solution 3: Attributed Properties

- We can solve this problem by tweaking the Simile Theory even further:
 - ‘John is a neanderthal’ means that John has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties **commonly attributed to** neanderthals
- Even though neanderthals were not really dimwitted thugs, stupidity and violence are two of the most salient properties that people often **attribute** to neanderthals
- So the metaphor ‘John is a neanderthal’ does mean that John is a dimwitted thug after all!

Problem 4: No Similarity

- According to the Simile Theory, the metaphorical meaning of 'Juliet is the sun' is:
 - Juliet has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun
- But, the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun are things like:
 - The sun is a massive ball of gas in space, it is constantly undergoing a fusion reaction, it is the object around which the Earth orbits...
- Juliet does not have **any** of these properties!
- So according to the Simile Theory, 'Juliet is the sun' is false even when it is used metaphorically!

Solution 4: Figurative Similes

- We can get around this problem by saying that 'Juliet is the sun' is an abbreviation for a **figurative simile**
- The idea is that we are not meant to take this simile **literally**:
 - Juliet has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun
- We are meant to take it figuratively:
 - Juliet is *like* something that has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun: she is the centre of Romeo's life, she is the light of his life, she...

Problems for the Figurative Simile Theory

- We now have a very complex version of the Simile Theory, which is essentially the **Figurative Simile Theory** which Fogelin advances in his *Figuratively Speaking*
- This is the best developed version of the Simile Theory, but it still faces a number of problems
- We will end this section by looking at two

Problem 1: STILL NO SIMILARITY!

- On the Figurative Simile Theory, 'Juliet is the Sun' metaphorically means something like this:
 - Juliet is *like* something that has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun: she is the centre of Romeo's life, she is the light of his life, she...
- But in this explanation, we have used more *metaphors*
 - Juliet is not *literally* the centre of Romeo's life, or the light of his life, or...
- So now we will need to cash out these metaphors, but it is not clear that we will be able to do that without using even more metaphors

Problem 1: STILL NO SIMILARITY!

- This strikes me as a deep, fundamental problem with any version of the Simile Theory
- There aren't any interesting literal similarities between Juliet and the sun
- So if we are looking for interesting similarities between them, they will have to be metaphorical ones
- But in that case, the Simile Theory will be forced to draw upon metaphorical similarities in its explanation of what 'Juliet is the sun' metaphorically means

Problem 2: Complex Metaphors

- The second problem with the Figurative Simile Theory is that even if it worked for simple metaphors, it is not clear how to apply it to more complex ones
- How would you even begin to apply it to the following?

*There's a cool web of language winds us in,
Retreat from too much joy or too much fear:
We grow sea-green at last and coldly die
In brininess and volubility.*

(Robert Graves, 'The Cool Web')

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Summary

Where Are We?

- We thought we had an argument which forced us to distinguish between a sentence's literal meaning and its metaphorical meaning
 - When used literally, 'Juliet is the sun' is false
 - When Romeo used it metaphorically, 'Juliet is the sun' was true
 - So 'Juliet is the sun' must have meant something other than what it literally means when Romeo said it
- But we have not found any good way of explaining how 'Juliet is the sun' could have these two meanings:
 - It was no use suggesting that 'the sun' has a metaphorical meaning along with its literal meaning
 - It was no use suggesting that when 'Juliet is the sun' is used metaphorically, it is elliptical for 'Juliet is *like* the sun'

A Different Idea

- Maybe we should let go of the idea that 'Juliet is the sun' has two different meanings
 - When Romeo said 'Juliet is the sun', that sentence meant what it literally means: that Juliet is the sun
- So when Romeo said 'Juliet is the sun', that sentence meant something false
- Nonetheless, Romeo himself still meant something true!

Speaker-Meaning versus Sentence-Meaning

- At various points in this module, we have looked at the difference between *sentence-meaning* and *speaker-meaning*
 - The **sentence-meaning** of ‘Juliet is the sun’ is the conventional meaning of that sentence
 - The **speaker-meaning** of Romeo’s utterance of ‘Juliet is the sun’ is whatever thought that Romeo was trying to convey by that utterance
- The idea is that metaphor is just one of those cases where sentence-meaning and speaker-meaning come apart
 - The sentence-meaning of ‘Juliet is the sun’ is just its literal meaning
 - But the speaker-meaning of Romeo’s utterance of ‘Juliet is the sun’ is something like: Juliet is the light of my life, my day starts and ends with Juliet...

Semantics versus Pragmatics

- At various points in this module, we have looked at the difference between *semantics* and *pragmatics*
 - **Semantics** is the study of what words and sentences *mean*
 - **Pragmatics** is the study of how people actually *use* words and sentences
- The idea is that the study of metaphor belongs to pragmatics, not semantics
- Semantics only ever deals with literal meanings

Where To Go From Here

- The suggestion that metaphorical meaning is always speaker-meaning is a good start to a theory of metaphor, but it is just a start
- We need a theory of how this metaphorical speaker-meaning works
- We need an account of the following things:
 - How do we manage to tell that someone is uttering a sentence with a metaphorical speaker-meaning?
 - How do we manage figure out what that metaphorical speaker-meaning is?
- The philosopher who first tried to offer a speaker-meaning account of metaphor was Searle
(See Searle's 'Metaphor', on the VLE Reading List)

In Searle's Own Words

The problem of explaining how metaphors work is a special case of the general problem of explaining how speaker meaning and sentence or word meaning come apart [...] Our task in constructing a theory of metaphor is to try to state the principles which relate literal sentence meaning to metaphorical [speaker's] utterance meaning.

(Searle, 'Metaphor', pp. 92–3)

A Reminder about Grice

- In Lecture 3, we discussed Grice's idea that conversations are governed by various **maxims**
 - Only say things you believe to be true
 - Be as informative as is appropriate for the conversation
 - ...
- Grice said that when someone wilfully breaks one of these maxims, that is often a clue that they speaker-mean something different from what their sentences literally mean
 - Speaker A asks, 'Is Satre a good philosopher?', and B says, 'Satre is a good novelist.'
 - A spots that the sentence-meaning of B's sentence has nothing to do with what they asked, and so guesses that B meant something more than that...

A Gricean Method for Spotting Metaphors

- Searle thought that we could apply Grice's approach to spotting when someone is speaking metaphorically
- Taken literally, many metaphors would be obviously false:
 - Juliet is the sun
- Others would be obviously truey:
 - Nobody is an island
- But either way, the literal sentence-meaning of a metaphor is **defective**: it is either absurdly false, or trivially true!
- This gives us a clue that the speaker means something metaphorical
 - If we assumed that the speaker-meaning lined up with the sentence-meaning, we would have a terrible breach of Grice's maxims

A Gricean Approach Doesn't Always Work

- We won't **always** be able to use this Gricean method to tell whether someone is speaking metaphorically
- Imagine that John has been absent for many days
- In this scenario, it wouldn't be clear if we should take the following as a metaphor:
 - John is lost
- The trouble is that this sentence would not be defective if taken literally
- However, these kinds of cases seem to be fairly rare, and Searle's method for spotting when someone is speaking metaphorically seems to work well in many cases

Understanding A Speaker's Metaphor

- So far, Searle has only given us a way for telling whether someone is speaking metaphorically
- We now need to figure out how to tell what it is that this person metaphorically speaker-means
- Searle offers *eight* different principles for how we might identify the metaphorical speaker-meaning of a given utterance
- We won't go through all eight here, but will look at just one, to give the idea

Searle's Principle 1

- **If a speaker, *S*, utters '*A is B*' metaphorically, then look for the various properties that *Bs* have by definition; one suggestion is that *S* speaker-meant that *A* had one of these properties**

Suppose Tim says, 'Adam is a giant'

Taken literally, 'Adam is a giant' is obviously defective, so there is good reason to think that Tim's speaker-meaning is metaphorical

By definition, giants are very tall

So one suggestion is that Tim speaker-meant that Adam is very tall

Guessing the Metaphor

- Searle's other principles make different suggestions about what a *literally-defective* utterance might speaker-mean
- Searle's idea is that we look over all the suggestions, and make an informed guess about which is the most likely
- We then take that speaker-meaning to be the metaphorical speaker-meaning

Problem 1: Enough Principles?

- The first obvious problem for Searle's approach is: Can we be sure that Searle have given enough principles for what a metaphor might mean?
- Searle himself admits that he probably hasn't listed all of the principles; there are more out there to be articulated
- This by itself isn't too much of a problem, so long as you are confident that these extra principles **could** be articulated, if we spent long enough trying to figure them out

Problem 2: Fruitful Metaphors

- On any broadly Gricean approach, what a speaker means by an utterance all comes down to the intentions of that speaker
- So on Searle's Gricean approach to metaphor, if we want to know what a speaker metaphorically means by a given utterance, we should look at their intentions
- But very often, the point of a metaphor goes well beyond what the speaker intended
- In fact, sometimes we introduce a metaphor precisely because we don't know where it leads, but we want to follow it through:
 - Spacetime is a rubber sheet...
 - ...so when we put a massive body into spacetime, that body warps the spacetime around it

Problem 3: No Paraphrases

- Right at the beginning of this lecture, we noted that it is hard, maybe even impossible, to give a literal paraphrase of a metaphor:
 - Juliet is the sun
 - Juliet is the light of my life, my day begins and ends with her, ...
- Any attempt to give a literal paraphrase of a metaphor fails, because we inevitably have to rely on ellipsis dots, or 'and so on', or something like that

Problem 3: No Paraphrases

- Metaphors are, then, resistant to paraphrase
- But this is **very** hard to explain on Searle's view
- According to Searle, when someone utters a sentence metaphorically, they simply speaker-mean something other than that sentence sentence-means
 - 'Juliet is the sun' sentence-means that Juliet is the sun
 - As uttered by Romeo, 'Juliet is the sun' speaker-means that...
- But in that case, why can't we write out in plain, literal words, a sentence which sentence-means exactly what Romeo speaker-meant?
- Why is it that whatever sentence we write out, we think it misses something of Romeo's metaphor?

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Summary

There is no such thing as Metaphorical Meaning

- Davidson took the fact that metaphors are resistant to literal paraphrase very seriously
 - (See his paper, 'What Metaphors Mean', available via the VLE)
- According to Davidson, there was a very simple reason why:
there is no such thing as metaphorical meaning!
- It was clear that Davidson wasn't just denying that there are metaphorical **sentence-meanings**
- He was denying that there are metaphorical **speaker-meanings** too

In Davidson's Own Words

the central error about metaphor is most easily attacked when it takes the form of a theory of metaphorical meaning, but behind that theory, and storable independently, is the thesis that associated with a metaphor is a cognitive content that its author wishes to convey and that the interpreter must grasp if he is to get the message.

(Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', p. 46)

What Romeo Said

- According to Davidson, when Romeo said 'Juliet is the sun', he meant exactly what the sentence literally means: that Juliet is the sun!
- There was no hidden, metaphorical speaker-meaning that Romeo was trying to express
- Why did Romeo bother saying something so obviously false?
- Because Romeo did hope that his metaphor would have an **effect** on his audience
- Importantly, however, this effect was not to make the audience **believe** something new; it was to make them **see** things differently

Seeing As

- According to Davidson, the point of Romeo's utterance was to make us see Juliet *as* similar to the sun
- Importantly, this is not the same as *believing that* Juliet is the sun
- As Davidson put it (p. 47): seeing *as* is not the same as seeing *that*

Non-Propositional Mental States

- To call a mental state **propositional** is to say that it has a proposition as its content
 - believing *that snow is white*; fearing *that there will be another world war*; hoping *that I'll have pizza for dinner*
- Philosophers often focus on propositional mental states, but there are lots of non-propositional mental states too
 - being anxious; being nervous; being happy
- These are all mental states, but they do not have propositions as their contents

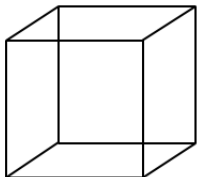
Knowing-How versus Knowing-That

- In some cases, you can get propositional and non-propositional versions of the same mental state
- The most famous example of this is knowledge, which comes in at least two varieties:
- **Propositional Know-That**
 - I know *that* $2+2=4$; you know *that* Frege introduced the sense/reference distinction
- **Non-Propositional Know-How**
 - You know *how* to talk; I know *how* to ride a bike

Seeing-As versus Seeing-That

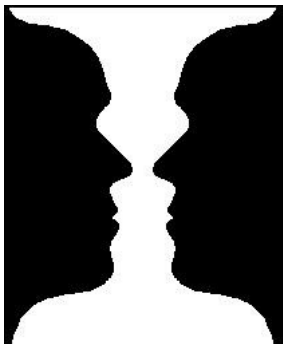
- **Propositional Seeing-That**
 - I see *that* you are all paying close attention to the lecture
- **Non-Propositional Seeing-As**
 - I see John *as* a cold person
- The idea is that seeing-as is not a case of seeing-that, it does not a matter of having certain beliefs
- It is a distinct, non-propositional version of seeing

Example 1: The Necker Cube



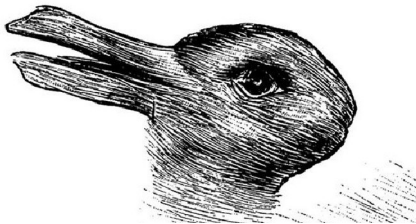
- You can see this as a cube with one face forward or another; but when you change how you see it, you do not change any of your **propositional** mental states

Example 2: The Faces and the Candlestick



- You can see this as two faces or as a candlestick; but when you change how you see it, you do not change any of your **propositional** mental states

Example 3: Wittgenstein's Duck-Rabbit



- You can see this as a duck or as a rabbit; but when you change how you see it, you do not change any of your **propositional** mental states

Why Metaphors Resist Literal Paraphrase

- According to Davidson, the point of a metaphor is to get us to see one things differently
 - When Romeo says 'Juliet is the sun', he is trying to get us to see Juliet as similar to the sun
- That is why we cannot give a good literal paraphrase of a metaphor
 - We can only express **propositional contents** with sentences
 - But the insight you get from a metaphor is non-propositional

Why Metaphors Are So Fruitful

- We mentioned earlier that metaphors can be fruitful in ways we cannot predict when we first introduce them
 - Spacetime is a rubber sheet...
 - ...so when we put a massive body into spacetime, that body warps the spacetime around it
- Davidson can explain why metaphors can be so fruitful:
 - The point of a metaphor is to make us see things differently, to see one thing *as* similar to another
 - There is no predicting what insights we might reach when we see things in this new way

Problem 1: Bad Metaphors

- Imagine that we are disagreeing about whether this metaphor gets things right:
 - Nobody is an island
- It is hard to see what exactly we are disagreeing about on Davidson's view
- We are not arguing about whether some **proposition** is true or false, since Davidson thinks that the point of a metaphor is non-propositional
- It seems that we have to be arguing over whether we should see people as similar to islands
- But what kind of disagreement is that?

Problem 2: Dead Metaphors

- At the start of this lecture, we noted that metaphors can die:
 - John is a cold person
- That is not really a metaphor anymore; it is just an idiomatic way of literally saying that John is unemotional
- It would be easy to explain what happens when a metaphor dies if we believed in metaphorical meanings
 - When a metaphor dies, the metaphorical meaning of a sentence becomes its new literal meaning
- But Davidson does not believe in metaphorical meanings, so what exactly happens on his view when a metaphor dies?

For More on Davidson...

- If you want to know more about Davidson's approach to metaphor, I strongly recommend that you read these two papers, both on the VLE
 - Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean'
 - Marga Reimer 'Davidson on Metaphor'
- Reimer's presents tidied up versions of Davidson's arguments for his view, and defends that view from a number of objections

Metaphor

Re-Cap: Davidson's Theory of Meaning

Some Initial Remarks about Metaphors

Metaphorical Meaning

Metaphor and Speaker-Meaning

Davidson's Approach to Metaphor

Summary

Philosophers Must Confront the Metaphorical!

- Philosophers of language have a habit of focusing on the literal use of language
- This may be justified, since the literal use of language seems to be the fundamental use
- Nonetheless, people use language metaphorically all the time in lots of different circumstances, and philosophers of language must eventually account for this kind of use

Metaphorical Sentence-Meaning

- One strategy for dealing with the metaphorical is to say that sentences have metaphorical meanings as well as literal meanings
- The best version of this idea is Fogelin's Figurative Simile Theory
- According to this theory, when Romeo said 'Juliet is the sun', he meant:
 - Juliet is *like* something that has a sufficiently large number of the salient properties commonly attributed to the sun: she is the centre of Romeo's life, she is the light of his life, she...
- However, this theory faces a serious objection:
 - The respects in which Juliet is meant to be similar to the sun will always be metaphorical

Metaphorical Speaker-Meaning

- A more promising option is to move metaphorical meaning out of semantics and into pragmatics
 - Sentence-meaning is always literal
 - Metaphorical meaning is always speaker-meaning
- Searle developed this pragmatic approach to metaphor, but there were still problems for his theory
- One lingering problem: if there is such a thing as metaphorical speaker-meaning, why is it so hard, maybe even impossible, to give a literal paraphrase of a metaphor?

No Metaphorical Meaning

- This leads us to Davidson's radical position: there is no such thing as metaphorical meaning
 - This applies to speaker-meaning as well as sentence-meaning
- But Davidson is not saying that metaphors are pointless, or insignificant
- In fact, there is a sense in which Davidson takes metaphors more seriously than anyone else
- Davidson does not think that metaphors are just another way of conveying meanings
- Davidson thinks that metaphors do something all of their own
 - They lead us to see things differently, to see one thing as similar to another

Tomorrow's Seminar

- The reading for tomorrow's seminar is:
 - Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean'
- Access to this paper can be found on the VLE Reading List