

ASPECTS OF METAPHOR

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ASPECTS OF METAPHOR

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PREFACE

Speaking metaphorically (or is it metonymically?), this volume was inspired by the biblical line about knowing a tree by its fruit. The trees in our case are different treatments of metaphor that have been put forward recently. Of the contributors to this volume, Eva Kittay, Bipin Indurkha and Robert Fogelin have published book-length treatments of metaphor, some of them as a special case of non-literal meaning in general. Some others have likewise put forward interesting general views about metaphor. How are we to judge such a competition of different views? The legalistic answer that most philosophers (and most editors) seem to be inclined to give these days is to sick the protagonists of the different approaches on to each other, that is, to ask them to prove the worth of their own theories by criticizing others. I for one find this adversarial approach to philosophical and linguistic theorizing not only uncongenial but also unproductive.

In this spirit, the emphasis in the papers published here is constructive rather than comparative. This does not exclude criticism completely. For instance, Robert J. Fogelin criticizes the critics of the traditional view of metaphors as implicit comparisons, and Jaakko Hintikka and Gabriel Sandu criticize speech-act approaches to metaphor. In the main, however, the different essays develop different constructive treatments of metaphor or else examine some of the main conceptual issues concerning metaphor. Robert Fogelin defends the implicit comparison view while Bipin Indurkha as well as Jaakko Hintikka and Gabriel Sandu explore different ways of implementing the idea that metaphors involve essentially similarity considerations. Eric Steinhart and Eva Kittay treat metaphor from the vantage point of the theory of semantical fields.

Of the other papers Susan Haack examines the epistemological aspects of metaphor which are also discussed by Bipin Indurkha. Avishai Margalit and Naomi Goldblum discuss tests for recognizing metaphoric as distinguished from literal use. Noel Carroll argues for the existence of the theoretically highly interesting category of visual metaphors. And E. M. Zemach relates the use of metaphors to the Wittgensteinian idea of a way of life. The range of these papers illustrates a fact which I myself

realized much more clearly than before in editing this volume, viz. the connections of the problem of metaphor with other philosophical issues and the consequences of this problem for philosophy in general.

I will not try to summarize the contents of these papers, for the authors present and in several instances summarize their cases better than I can hope to do. Furthermore, the time is not ripe yet to try to synthesize the different approaches, not even in a volume in *Synthese Library*. Pointers toward such a synthesis are nevertheless provided by the different key concepts that play a role in different approaches, for instance the notion of analogy which is emphasized both by Steinhart and Kittay and by Hintikka and Sandu.

This volume was originally planned as a special number of *Synthese*. Various practical considerations motivated its transfer to *Synthese Library*, jointly with my conviction that the papers published here are so important as to deserve a publication in a book format. The editing has unfortunately taken longer than I anticipated. I thank the contributors heartily for their patience and for agreeing to the transfer of their papers to *Synthese Library*. I also acknowledge gratefully the assistance of Michael Vasko in the editing process.

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SUSAN HAACK

“DRY TRUTH AND REAL KNOWLEDGE”:
EPISTEMOLOGIES OF METAPHOR AND
METAPHORS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

1

Locke is eloquent in defence of plain speech. In a famous, or notorious, passage at close of chapter X of Book III of the *Essay*: “Of the Abuse of Words,” though he admits that “since wit and fancy find easier entertainment than dry truth and real knowledge, figurative speeches and allusions in language will hardly be admitted as an imperfection of it,” Locke insists that nevertheless,

if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness; all the artificial and figurative applications of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else than to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgement; and so indeed are perfect cheats.

Figurative language may be appropriate in “harangues and popular addresses”; but, Locke continues, it is

certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform and instruct, wholly to be avoided; and where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault, either of the language or person that makes use of them (Locke, 1690, vol. II, p. 146).

However, if figurative use of language is indeed, at least where “dry truth and real knowledge” are concerned, an *abuse* of language, then it is an abuse of which Locke himself is hardly innocent. At the close of his long paragraph deploring the figurative, Locke observes that it will no doubt be thought “great boldness” in him to speak out against figures of speech; for “[e]loquence, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against.” And a few pages earlier in the same chapter, deploring the “affected obscurity” of “the wrangling and disputing philosophers,” Locke comments that “there is no such way to gain admittance, or give defence to . . . absurd doctrines, than to guard them about with legions of obscure, doubtful and undefined words.” “Which,” he continues, “if it be hard to get them out of, it is not for the strength that is in them, but the briars and thorns, and the obscurity of the thickets they are beset with” (1690, vol. II, p. 128).

1

And Locke's use of metaphor is not always, as no doubt it is here, purely in the service of vividness; certain metaphors play a role in his philosophy much deeper than mere picturesqueness of speech: the metaphor of the philosopher as underlaborer to the sciences, for example, and the metaphors of the mind as an empty cabinet, blank sheet of paper, wax tablet.

Locke is by no means the only philosopher who manifests this kind of pragmatic inconsistency between his official attitude to figurative language, and his use of it. Hobbes, almost as notoriously, regards it as an abuse of speech to use words metaphorically, "that is, in another sense than they are ordained for; and thereby deceive"; though he admits that "Metaphors, and Tropes of speech" are less dangerous than other kinds of inconstancy of meaning, "because they profess their inconstancy" (1651, pp. 102, 110). But even when he is explaining why metaphors are an abuse of speech, he uses them: "Metaphors . . . are like *ignes fatui*; and, reasoning upon them, is wandering among innumerable absurdities" (p. 116). Again: the man who seeks precise truth, Hobbes argues, needs definitions; otherwise he will "find himself entangled in words, as a bird in lime-twigges; the more he struggles, the more belimed" (p. 105). Again: without language, he remarks, a man could be neither "excellently wise" nor "excellently foolish," "[f]or words are wise man's counters, they do but reckon by them: but they are the mony of fooles . . ." (p. 106). In Hobbes, too, metaphor plays a more than decorative role; most notable, of course, is "*Leviathan*" itself.¹

For now I will add only one more name to the list of "plain Englishmen"² whose official condemnation of metaphor is at odds with their use of it. J. S. Mill classifies metaphor as a kind of ambiguity, differing from ordinary ambiguity such as that of "file" or "post" or "box" only in that "a name . . . is predicated of two things, not univocally, . . . but in significations somewhat similar, derived one from another" (Mill, 1843, pp. 28–29). And this kind of ambiguity, Mill remarks, where the sense, though different, are related, is especially likely to tempt one into fallacies of equivocation. Compared to Hobbes or Locke, Mill is a dry, literal writer; yet even he, not long after issuing this warning against metaphor, and in a discussion of one of the most philosophically consequential fallacies of equivocation, the confusion of "is," meaning "exists," with the copula, observes that "[t]he fog which rose from this narrow spot diffused itself at an early period over the whole surface of metaphysics" (p. 50).

These writers' hostile attitude to figurative language will strike modern readers as quaint, perhaps, but surely as indefensible. In this regard, intellectual fashion has changed dramatically. Today virtually all writers on metaphor agree that it has a legitimate place not only in "harangues and public addresses," not only in literary writing, but also where "dry truth and real knowledge" are concerned; and indeed many go so far as to claim that metaphor plays not only a legitimate or a useful but an essential role in theoretical inquiry. To this extent, at least, I concur: that if the question is, given the tension between Hobbes', Locke's and Mill's official condemnation of metaphor and their use of it, whether the conclusion one should draw is that their practice falls regrettably short of their legitimately high standards of what language is appropriate in serious discourse, or that their practice is quite legitimate and their repudiation of metaphor ill-motivated – the latter answer is clearly the better. These writers' use of metaphor is, after all, in general harmless and on occasion positively illuminating, so it must be their repudiation of metaphor that is repudiated.

But this response, though correct as far as it goes, does not imply that metaphor is essential to inquiry; in fact it provides no simple or straightforward answers about the epistemology of metaphor. In the passage quoted, Locke seems to take it for granted that figurative language is confusing and emotive; this should be read in the light of the passage earlier in the *Essay* where he distinguishes *wit*, the operation of "assemblage of ideas . . . with quickness . . . wherein can be found any resemblance or congruity, thereby to make up pleasant pictures and agreeable visions in the fancy," from *judgement*, the operation of discerning ideas, "thereby to avoid being misled by similitude, and by affinity to take one thing for another" (1690, vol. I, p. 203). Hobbes is taking metaphor to be a kind of ambiguity which, while not the most virulent, can lead to a dangerous instability of meaning; Mill is construing metaphor as a particularly treacherous kind of ambiguity. In other words, their agreement that metaphor is inappropriate in serious discourse does not derive from their subscribing to the same theory about how metaphor works, or the same diagnosis of why it is inappropriate.

It is hard to deny, of course, that emotive language, ambiguity, instability of meaning are indeed all unwelcome in serious discourse; so, one is tempted to argue, none of these accounts of metaphor can be correct. Well, no, not *entirely* so; but it is surely no less hard to deny that metaphorical language *may* function to arouse emotion, or *may*

give rise to something like equivocation if (by accident or design) it is taken literally.

Hobbes, Locke and Mill agree that metaphor is to be deplored, but not about why. Virtually all modern writers agree that metaphor is to be welcomed – but, still, not about why. Not only do they not agree about how metaphor plays the significant role in inquiry they agree it *does* play; some – and a fashionable party, at that! – insist on the importance of metaphor while denying it “cognitive content.”³ it is all very confusing, to put it mildly.

Both the friends and the enemies of metaphor, it seems to me, exaggerate. Metaphors are sometimes cognitively vital; not seldom illuminating; perhaps more often than not at least harmless. Metaphors can also be feeble; can be exploited to the purpose of persuading by emotional appeal rather than rational argument; can serve as lazy substitutes for adequate theoretical articulation; can lead inquiry into what turns out to be quite the wrong direction. Metaphor is neither a Good Thing nor a Bad Thing in and of itself; it is, rather, a linguistic device capable of being put to good or bad use, sometimes a help, sometimes harmless, sometimes a hindrance.⁴ An adequate theory of how metaphor works, therefore, ought to make it possible to explain *both* its usefulness *and* its dangers.

2

The best starting point for such a theory is the traditional account, the account found in Aristotle (*Rhetoric*, 1406b, 1410b), Cicero (*de Oratore*, 3.38.156–39.157), and Quintilian (*Institutio Oratoria*, Book VIII, vi, 8–9): metaphors are elliptical similes. This idea is of course hopelessly out of fashion; nevertheless, it has not only an honorable ancestry, but also an undeniable intuitive appeal. (It is also strikingly consonant with a noteworthy feature of some of the examples given in section 1: a shift from metaphor to corresponding simile, or *vice-versa*, within a single sentence. Hobbes begins by remarking that the man who seeks precise truth needs definitions to avoid finding himself entangled in words “as a bird in lime-twigges” [simile] and continues with the comment, “the more he struggles, the more belimed” [metaphor]. Locke, after observing that “there is no such way to . . . give defense to . . . absurd doctrines, as to guard them round about with legions of obscure, doubtful and ill-defined words” [metaphor], continues by remarking that to do so is to

“make these retreats *more like* the dens of robbers or the holes of foxes . . . than the fortresses of fair warriors” [simile.]

Present fashion has it, of course, that the traditional account faces insuperable difficulties, and that one or another rival theory (a semantic-interaction theory, as in Richards and Black; or a speaker-meaning theory, as developed by Searle; or, most fashionably of all, perhaps, the “fecund falsity” theory as urged by Davidson) is clearly superior. So I shall be swimming against the tide; for my view is that the idea that metaphor is elliptical simile can be elaborated in a way that avoids the difficulties fashionably supposed insuperable, and that, so elaborated, it can accommodate what is most plausible in the theories fashionably supposed to be its rivals. I shall be swimming against the tide, but not without assistance; here, happily, I can rely in considerable measure on arguments to be found in Fogelin’s admirable book, *Figuratively Speaking*, in defense of what he calls the “comparativist” position.

A metaphor is an elliptical simile; the difference between the two is that the latter does in a grammatically explicit way what the former does implicitly. (This difference is significant; it explains, for instance, why metaphor permits much greater grammatical flexibility than simile.) To say this, however, is to say relatively little; before it amounts to anything that merits the title “theory” it needs to be amplified by some account of what similes are, how they work. The first moves are easy enough. Similes are, manifestly, statements which compare one thing with another; they are given the special title “simile” and classified among figures of speech because they make *figurative* or *tropical* comparisons.

This leaves two further questions: how do ordinary, non-figurative statements of comparison work, and what is peculiar about figurative, tropical comparisons? The ordinary statements of comparison with which metaphors have the closest affinity are those which are *unspecific* and *context-dependent*: statements which indicate that the things compared are alike in significant but unspecified respects, which respects are significant depending on the context. This much is true alike of such literal comparisons as “Tomatoes are like apples” (which might, depending on context, be taken as telling one that both are fruit, or that both contain vitamin C, or that both can be ripened artificially, etc.) and of “My love is like a red, red rose,” or “Reading Heidegger is like wading knee-deep through treacle.”

The etymology of “trope” (from the Greek, *tropos*, turn) offers a clue to what makes non-literal comparisons non-literal: the things

compared figuratively are in significant respects *unlike* each other, the comparison is on the face of it *incongruous*, and to figure out the respects of likeness calls for an imaginative twist.⁵ Consider this very fine exchange of insults from *A Midsummer Night's Dream* (Act 3, Scene 2): Puck has anointed the wrong Athenian's eyes with the love-potion; Lysander, Hermia's lover, has fallen in love with Helena. But Helena, lovesick for Demetrius, thinks that Lysander is making declarations of love to mock her, and that Hermia is part of the cruel plot:

Hermia: O me! you juggler! you canker-blossom!
 You thief of love! What! Have you come by night,
 And stolen my love's heart from him?

Helena: Fine, i'faith!

.....

Hermia: Fie! Fie! you counterfeit, you puppet you!
 'Puppet!' why so? Ay, that way goes the game.
 Now I perceive that she has made compare
 Between our statures; she hath urged her height;
 And with her personage, her tall personage,
 Her height forsooth, she hath prevailed with him.
 And are you grown so high in his esteem
 Because I am so dwarfish and so low?
 How low am I, thou painted maypole?

.....

Helena: O, when she is angry, she is keen and shrewd;
 She was a vixen when she went to school;
 And though she be but little, she is fierce.

Hermia: 'Little' again! Nothing but 'low' and 'little'!

.....

Lysander: Get you gone, you dwarf!
 You minimus, of hind'ring knot-grass made;
 You bead, you acorn.

Helena isn't as tall as a maypole, or made of wood, or perfectly cylindrical in shape, or painted in stripes. The insulting suggestion is (something like): she is too tall, too stiff and gawky, lacking in feminine curves – and she “paints.” Hermia isn't a small furry animal with a pointed nose and sharp teeth. This time the insulting suggestion is spelled out for us: “though she be but little, she is fierce.”

It goes without saying that these comments miss most of the intricacies and subtleties of a very intricate and subtle interchange – the

shift from a literal comment on Helena's height ("she hath urged her height") through an ironical juxtaposition of terms ("with her personage, her *tall* personage") to a play on a metaphorical use of "high" ("and are you grown so high in his esteem?"), for example. But they make, albeit crudely, the point that is at issue; that there has to be a kind of editing of the features of a maypole, or a vixen, to find those that might be the relevant respects of comparison here.

Initial incongruity being, I suppose, a matter of degree, so too, I take it, is the distinction of figurative and literal comparisons.

By setting the comparativist position in the context of Grice's theory of conversation, Fogelin is able to present comparative statements (presumably, that is, the unspecific ones) as indirect, in the sense that their utterance conveys more than is said; and figurative comparisons as, additionally, non-literal in virtue of being made with the mutually-recognized intention on the speaker's part that the hearer should not take the words uttered at face value, but adjust them so as to square with the context. And borrowing from Tversky's discussion of comparisons and similarity, he is able to present the process of adjustment as a matter of selecting, among the salient features of Gs (where "G" is the predicate of the comparison statement) those appropriate to Fs (the subject). This applies rather neatly to the example just discussed: we select, among the salient features of maypoles, or vixen, those applicable to persons, specifically to young women.

It is compatible with the idea of metaphor as elliptical simile, then, to acknowledge that metaphor is better regarded as a phenomenon of use than as a peculiarity of words or sentences – live metaphor, that is; metaphorical usages may, through being conventionalized or, as Searle puts it, "frozen," eventually enter the language in petrified form as a kind of ambiguity (as "foot the bill," "ruminate over a problem," "grasp an idea," "taken aback"⁶) or idiom (as "kick the bucket," "bite the bullet," "three sheets to the wind"). The briefest reflection, or the most superficial skimming of the dictionary, suffices to reveal how ubiquitous is the formerly, and the still barely, metaphorical.

"Conventionalization" being a matter of degree, so too, I take it, is the distinction of live and dead metaphor – though one might take the occurrence of a secondary sense in a dictionary as a rule of thumb to distinguish the definitely dead from the merely moribund. Perhaps it will be felt that there is tension between treating the distinction of live *versus* dead metaphor as a matter of degree, and treating dead metaphor

as a matter of semantics while treating live metaphor as a phenomenon of use; but I am willing to grasp this nettle and acknowledge that the line between semantic phenomena and phenomena of use is not sharp.

In treating (live) metaphor as a phenomenon of use what is suggested is a development of the traditional conception in a somewhat contemporary style. I agree with Searle and Davidson, in other words, in regarding metaphor as belonging rather to pragmatics than to semantics. My disagreement with them could be summed up, rather crudely, like this: Searle focusses too exclusively on speakers' intentions; Davidson focusses too exclusively and too indiscriminately on the effect of a metaphorical utterance on its hearers.

Searle explains metaphor in terms of speaker's, as distinct from linguistic, meaning. (So in his account metaphor is a kind of ambiguity, but a non-standard kind, since there are two meanings, but in two senses of "meaning.") Speaker's meaning is characterized in terms of the utterer's intentions, and Searle provides a list of principles by which to compute "which similarities are metaphorically intended by the speaker" (Searle, 1979, p. 113). What makes me uneasy about this is the idea that the speaker's intentions necessarily exhaust the interpretation of the metaphor. The problem is not that Searle holds that metaphorical meaning is always completely determinate; in fact, he allows a category of "open-ended metaphor" where "a speaker says *S* is *P* but means an indefinite range of meanings, *S* is *R*₁, *S* is *R*₂, etc." (p. 122). It is, rather, that his account of metaphorical meaning as constituted by the speaker's intentions implies that any interpretation of the metaphorical utterance by a hearer which specifies respects, however appropriate, which the speaker didn't specifically have in mind is a *mis*interpretation. And this seems wrong. (It may be that Searle fails to see this because of an ambiguity in his formula: read as "a speaker says *S* is *P* but means metaphorically "*S* is *R*₁, or *S* is *R*₂, or . . ." it has the consequence that any interpretation that makes the respects of comparison more detailed or determinate than the speaker had in mind is a misinterpretation; read as "a speaker says *S* is *P* but means metaphorically "*S* is *R*₁," or means metaphorically "*S* is *R*₂," or means metaphorically – well, something else" it does not. But on the reading on which it doesn't have the undesired consequence it also fails to do what Searle wants it to do – give a criterion to determine the metaphorical meaning of an utterance.)

Davidson urges that we "give up the idea that a metaphor carries a message, that it has a content or meaning (except, of course, its literal

meaning)” (Davidson, 1978, p. 261). Unlike Searle’s, which focusses on the speaker’s intentions, Davidson’s account is focused on the effects of a metaphorical utterance on its audience. A metaphorical utterance is an utterance of a sentence which is, taken literally, strikingly anomalous (usually, glaringly false, but sometimes simply trivial). And such an utterance “can, like a picture or a bump on the head, make us appreciate some fact – but not by standing for, or expressing, the fact” (1978, p. 262). The analogy with a bump on the head might tempt one to read Davidson as offering a brutally causal account: a metaphorical utterance just causes the audience to think this or that, as a loud noise might do. But this can’t be right; Davidson stresses that it is the anomalous character of the sentence uttered which alerts us to its being a metaphor, and suggests that making a metaphor is something like joking or lying, so he cannot be taken as suggesting a purely causal account, an account in which the (literal) meaning of the words uttered has no role at all.

One way of putting what bothers me would be to say, simply, that Davidson doesn’t tell us what that role is. A better way, perhaps, would be to say that the meaning of the words uttered could have a causal role in bringing about an effect on an audience in any of a number of ways, only one of which is characteristic of metaphor, and that it is hard to avoid the suspicion that Davidson is either relying on a mistaken assimilation of metaphorical to some other perlocutionary effects, or else offering no account at all of how the words uttered affect what a metaphorical utterance “evokes” or “intimates.” An utterance of certain words may evoke a response in an audience by means of simple association of ideas (I believe it was Titchener who reported that the word “but” recalled to him the back of the head of a colleague of his, who sat in front of him at departmental seminars and regularly opened the discussion, “But . . .”). This isn’t how metaphors work. An obviously anomalous utterance may evoke a response in an audience by means of provoking them to work out what the speaker could have been trying to do (the startling opening sentence of chapter 5 of Ursula Le Guin’s *The Left Hand of Darkness*: “My landlady was a voluble man,” prompts the reader to figure out that the apparent mix-up of genders is a device to draw one’s attention to the fact that the inhabitants of the world in which the story is set are neither male nor female, but hermaphrodite.) This isn’t how metaphors work either – as Davidson must be aware, since he observes (correctly) that the effect of metaphor cannot be explained simply in terms of the hearer’s figuring out the speaker’s intentions.

These remarks about Searle and Davidson may provoke the question: how, if metaphor is a phenomenon of use, can it fail to be *either* a matter of the speaker's intentions (as Searle has it) *or* a matter of the effect on the hearer (as Davidson has it)? Fogelin's account shows us that there is a third possibility. Metaphor is an interactive phenomenon, in the sense that it is an utterance which a speaker intends his hearer to amplify and adjust ("interactive," here, is of course intended pragmatically, to allude to an interaction between speaker and hearer, not in the semantic sense in which Black uses the term.)⁷

3

Though it is not a semantic phenomenon, metaphor certainly is a linguistic phenomenon, a phenomenon of the use of language. An understanding of its cognitive role, therefore, calls for some thought about the role of language in inquiry; and this leads rather directly to the hoary old problem of The Relation of Thought to Language.

One way to read Locke's critique of figurative language is to take it as focused on the inappropriateness of figures of speech to certain kinds of discourse: in discourse intended simply to persuade, one might take Locke to be saying, figurative language may be appropriate, but in discourse intended to instruct it is inappropriate. The distinction implicit in this reading between persuasive and instructive discourse (i.e., discourse intended to persuade and discourse intended to instruct) may be thought quite artificial, occluding the possibility that a speaker might intend to persuade an audience of some truths. But despite its artificiality, the distinction does highlight an important point: that simply inducing one's hearer to believe that *p*, even if "*p*" is true, does not necessarily count as having brought him to the knowledge that *p*; that requires that he be induced to believe that *p* by being made aware of good reasons for thinking "*p*" true. Locke's allusion to "real knowledge" may be an indication that he is aware of this point. Nevertheless, construed as a claim about the language appropriate to instructive discourse, Locke's position is mistaken; metaphor may be a very useful device of instructive discourse. A metaphorical presentation may, for example, make "dry truth" more palatable, by representing it in terms more familiar to the audience, and/or more memorable, by presenting it in a way that calls for the audience to participate.

Perhaps, though, Locke intends an allusion to the distinction he had

made in chapter IX of Book III, “Of the Imperfection of Words,” between the civil and the philosophical use of words: the former is “such a communication of thoughts and ideas by words, as may serve for the upholding of common conversation and commerce,” the latter is “such a use [of words] as may serve to convey the precise notions of things, and to express in general propositions certain and undoubted truths, which the mind may rest upon and be satisfied with in its search after true knowledge” (1690, vol. II, p. 105). On this reading, Locke’s point would be that figurative language is inappropriate for a particular kind of instructive discourse; for, as one might say in a contemporary idiom, the most strictly scientific discourse.⁸ Construed in this way, as a claim about the language appropriate for the ideally precise and specific articulation and presentation of scientific or philosophical theories, Locke’s position is, I think, correct. Metaphorical presentation is allusive, open-ended, unspecific; it lacks the specification, the precision, which theoretical articulation aspires eventually to reach.

But Locke is saying not only that figurative language is inappropriate to serious (on the most plausible reading, to “philosophical”) *discourse*, but also that it is an impediment to genuine *inquiry*. In the passage I discussed in section 1 he comments that by moving the passions, metaphors are liable to “cloud the judgement.” And in the *Epistle to the Reader*, he had observed that one of the tasks of the philosophical underlaborer is to remove the rubbish that stands in the way of inquiry; and he specifically mentions, among this rubbish, the “vague and insignificant forms of speech, and abuse of language” that “have so long passed for mysteries of science” (1690, vol. I, p. 14). So chapters IX and X of Book III of the *Essay* – “Of the Imperfection of Words,” “Of the Abuse of Words” – are precisely intended to contribute to the whole project by removing the linguistic rubbish which, according to Locke, is a significant “hindrance of true knowledge.”

Though Locke is wrong to hold that figurative language is always an abuse, and that it is inevitably a hindrance to inquiry, he is right to take for granted that the language one uses and the way one uses it may – will – affect one’s success in inquiry. For all that Book III of the *Essay*, with its stress, from the beginning, that the purpose of language is to express and communicate ideas, seems officially to make language dependent on thought, Locke’s conception of abuses of language as hindrances to knowledge reveals his awareness that, conversely, thought may also depend on language.

A correct picture of the relation of thought and language will involve quite complex relations of interdependence. Whether or not one wants to say that a languageless creature can have thoughts, one had better acknowledge that the possession of language is intellectually enabling, in the sense that it makes it possible for adult humans to engage in complex and sophisticated mental processes which would not otherwise be possible for them. But language is not an unmixed blessing – as Hobbes is well aware: after observing that the possession of language makes men, unlike brutes, capable of “ratiocination,” he goes on to remark with characteristic shrewdness that it also makes human beings, unlike brutes, capable of “multiplying one untruth by another” (1650, p. 23).

It would be an oversimplification to assume that possession of language is a simple matter of yes or no; it is a matter of degree both in breadth (e.g., in vocabulary or mastery of complex constructions) and in depth (e.g., in completeness of understanding of complex or deeply theoretical terms, in skill in indirect and figurative language-use). It would be another oversimplification to think of language mastery as a matter of fluency in some language or languages conceived as fixed; at least at the higher levels of intellectual sophistication, where theoretical inquiry is concerned, it is also a matter of capacity for linguistic innovation (e.g., of disambiguation of terms in common usage, and of devising novel vocabulary).⁹ And it would be another oversimplification again to suppose that the possession of language is intellectually enabling *only* because (as Hobbes observes) it is an aid to the memory and the means of learning from others; it is also potentially intellectually enabling because it makes it possible to think thoughts that would otherwise be too complex or subtle to grasp.

But the points most relevant to the argument of the present paper are simple enough. First: language and thought are *interdependent*, in the sense that cognitive capacity and linguistic sophistication can be mutually reinforcing.¹⁰ But, second: though the capacity for language is surely cognitively *enabling*, linguistic imperfections or abuses may no less surely be cognitively *disabling*; just as richness of and scrupulousness in the use of linguistic resources can advance inquiry, poverty or abuse of linguistic resources can impede it.¹¹ Locke’s glorious tirade against affected obscurity in the “holes of foxes” passage is a remarkably shrewd diagnosis of an endemic disease of philosophy!¹²

To complete my picture of the epistemology of metaphor, another piece has to be put into place alongside the account of metaphorical usage and the account of the relation of language to thought. This concerns the stages of inquiry, and requires a revision of the familiar dichotomy of the context of discovery *versus* the context of justification.¹³ Relying on a distinction between a stage at which an inquirer comes up with a theory in the first instance and the stage at which the theory is subsequently subjected to testing strongly suggests a picture in which an inquirer arrives at a stroke, as it were, at a full-blown theory. And this is surely extremely rare, at best. A better picture would include something like an initial phase in which an inquirer forms a vague idea for a possible theory, and subsequent phases of exploration and articulation, testing, modification, presentation; a better picture again would avoid the suggestion of a simple sequence of phases and acknowledge that the exploration-and-articulation, testing, modification, presentation of an initial vague idea can take place together, or in an up-and-back order. Unlike the discovery/justification distinction, the more elaborate distinctions suggested here would have the advantage that they need not rely, explicitly or implicitly, on there being precise and well-motivated criteria for the individuation of theories. This more complicated picture is a bit more realistic about what inquiry is really like; it is also more hospitable to the idea that metaphors have a significant role in inquiry – in the pursuit of “dry truth and real knowledge.”

I shall be arguing that the locus of the most interesting cognitive role of metaphor is in the exploratory phases of inquiry. First, though, it will be helpful to amplify some points anticipated in section 3 about the role of metaphor in the presentation of theories.

Success or failure in presentation is, obviously, audience-relative; what succeeds, or is appropriate, for one audience may fail, or be inappropriate, for another. A popular account of a scientific or philosophical theory will presumably aim to make the essentials of the theory (sufficiently) clear to a lay audience, whereas a presentation in a professional journal will aim to spell out the detailed workings of the theory as explicitly as possible. The discussion in section 3 has suggested a distinction, first, of persuasive and instructive discourse, and then, within the category of instructive discourse, a continuum from the popular through the professional to the ideally explicit, specific and detailed. The role of