

# Language's Dreamwork Reconsidered

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## *Abstract*

This paper offers both exegetical and systematic reconsiderations of Donald Davidson's view on metaphor. In his essay *What Metaphors Mean*, Davidson argued against the idea that metaphors have any kind of propositional content beyond the literal meaning of the relevant sentence. Apart from this negative claim, Davidson also made a constructive proposal by suggesting that metaphor's distinctive effect is to prompt a mental state of seeing-as. These two points seem connected insofar as Davidson makes the following assumptions. First, metaphors cause their distinctive effects in an a-rational way. Second, seeing-as is a non-propositional mental state. If we side with Davidson in thinking of meaning as rational and propositional, then it follows that metaphors' distinctive effects cannot be an instance of meaning. They have the wrong format and are brought about in the wrong way. Against this background, I distinguish a strong reading and a modest reading of Davidson's wrong-kind objection to metaphorical meaning. By taking into account some of Davidson's later pronouncements on the matter, this paper aims to show that Davidson did not hold on to the strong version of the wrong-kind objection. This would open up the way to conceiving of metaphorical meaning in terms of speaker's meaning, were it not for the fact that Davidson sticks to the wrong-way objection. The two concluding sections examine the cogency of the wrong-way objection as applied to metaphorical speaker's meaning, and offer a model for thinking about the a-rational mental causation Davidson thought metaphors exhibit.

*Keywords:* Davidson, metaphor, speaker's meaning, mental causality, rationality, seeing-as, conceptual innovation.

## 1. Introduction

Significantly, Donald Davidson (1978: 31) starts his seminal article *What Metaphors Mean* (WMM) with a metaphor: "Metaphor is the dreamwork of language". More significantly still, he goes on to point out the ways in which he wishes to compare metaphor to Sigmund Freud's notion of dreamwork. For Davidson, there are two relevant points of comparison. First, the interpretation of both metaphors and dreams "reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator". Second, the act of interpretation in both cases is "a work of the im-

agination". This second point implies, as Davidson explains, that the interpretation of metaphor is barely, if at all, "guided by rules".

Yet is Davidson's opening metaphor apt? Is using metaphor really like dreaming, and does the interpretation of metaphors and dreams really work in the same way? What would this mean for using metaphor in serious cognitive enterprises such as philosophy? Whether we are happy with Davidson's metaphor seems to depend, among other things, on how seriously we are willing to take dreams on the one hand, and metaphors on the other. Presumably, the analogy would work fine for those with a positivist leaning who think that neither metaphor nor dreams carry cognitive content relevant for the business of doing, say, philosophy. Yet Davidson (1978: 32-33) distances himself explicitly from such a view by asserting that his scepticism about metaphorical meaning does not end up construing metaphor as "confusing, merely emotive, unsuited to serious, scientific, or philosophic discourse". To the contrary, he considers metaphor a legitimate device in science, philosophy, and law, claiming that it is "effective in praise and abuse, prayer and promotion, description and prescription". Would he be willing to say the same thing about dreams? Be this as it may, the main question is whether Davidson's theory delivers his desired result for metaphor. There are two stumbling blocks that Davidson puts in the way of those, like him, who want to claim that metaphor can be used effectively in description and praise, for instance. Both of these blocks fall from his comparison between dreams and metaphors.

First, if the imagination is equally involved in both making and understanding a metaphor, and if we think of the imagination as involving image-like forms of representation, then it might seem that metaphor has the wrong format to feed into descriptions of the world. Elisabeth Camp (2013: 363) calls this *the wrong-kind objection*. Indeed, Davidson's positive proposal concerning the nature of metaphor is that it induces a state of seeing-as. Metaphor "makes us see one thing as another", as he (1978: 47) puts it. In considering a metaphor, we attend to "some likeness, often a novel or surprising likeness, between two or more things" (Davidson 1978: 33). To illustrate this effect, Davidson refers to the ambiguous image of a duck-rabbit, made famous by Ludwig Wittgenstein (1984). What are we led to see in such cases? For Davidson (1978: 46), there is a difficulty in answering this question, because there seems to be "no limit" as to what is called to our attention, and "much of what we are caused to notice is not propositional in character". This would explain the unparaphrasability and creative richness often attributed to metaphors. Yet if we accept that this quasi-perceptual quality applies to metaphor, we run into the wrong-kind objection (1978: 47): "How many facts or propositions are conveyed by a photograph? [...] Bad question. [...] Words are the wrong currency to exchange for a picture".

Second, if the interpretation of the metaphor "reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator", as Davidson (1978: 31) says, then one way to spell this out would be to say that the originator lacks privileged access or first-person authority over the interpretation of the metaphor. If the author of a metaphor lacks rational control over its interpretation, and we deem it necessary for meaning to be such that the speaker, if competent, has rational control over the interpretation of her utterance, then whatever interpretation she or her interpreter comes up with, is produced in the wrong way, as it were. This is, in a nutshell, Davidson's *wrong-way objection* (Camp 2013: 364).

In the following, I discuss Davidson's wrong-kind objection in more detail from an exegetical point of view (section 2). I will offer a strong reading as well as a modest reading of this objection, arguing that Davidson is more likely to have endorsed the modest reading. Once we accept that some propositional content may be associated with metaphor, rather than none, the way seems to open up to construe this propositional content in terms of speaker's meaning—assuming that Davidson's arguments against construing it as semantic meaning in his sense are convincing. I explore this option in section 3 by drawing on some of Davidson's remarks about similes. Conceiving of metaphorical meaning this way has surely seemed attractive to a number of people.<sup>1</sup> What went unnoticed by some, however, is that Davidson's wrong-way objection may be construed such that it attacks not only the notion of metaphorical expression meaning but also the idea that there might be something like metaphorical speaker's meaning.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Davidson does not bring up speaker's meaning in WMM. The notion shows up only in later essays such as *Communication and Convention* (CC; Davidson 2001a), *A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs* (NDE; Davidson 1986), *Locating Literary Language* (LLL; Davidson 1993a), and *The Social Aspect of Language* (SLA; Davidson 1994). It is a burden on the exegetical reconsideration proposed here to tell a plausible story about the line Davidson might have taken on metaphorical speaker's meaning. Sections 4 and 5 are devoted to this task, with section 5 raising systematic considerations against the background of the exegesis offered in section 4. In the concluding section, I shall take stock of what I consider the most plausible conception of metaphor that we may ascribe to Davidson.

## 2. The Wrong-Kind Objection to Metaphorical Meaning: Strong Reading and Moderate Reading

In order to give a flavour of the tension between the strong and moderate versions of Davidson's wrong-kind objection, I will quote a number of conflicting passages from WMM:

Metaphor makes us see one thing as another by making some literal statement that inspires or prompts the insight. Since in most cases what the metaphor prompts or inspires is not entirely, or even at all, recognition of some truth or fact, the attempt to give literal expression to the content of the metaphor is simply misguided (Davidson 1978: 47).

Here Davidson emphasises that the effects of metaphor are not propositional.<sup>3</sup> Otherwise they would serve the purpose of recognising some truth or fact. Yet in other passages Davidson seems to waver. In fact, this wavering can already be found in the above, for Davidson says that what the metaphor prompts is “not entirely” recognition of some fact. This seems to leave open the possibility that

<sup>1</sup> For an overview see Reimer and Camp 2006: 855-57, and Carston 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Read: Implicated speaker-meant content of utterances deemed metaphorical that goes beyond the corresponding sentence's literal meaning.

<sup>3</sup> “Propositional effects” is shorthand for mental states or events that have propositional content. I shall say more about this in section 4.

sometimes it might be. Another telling passage that features the same kind of ambivalence is the following:

What we notice or see is not, in general, propositional in character. Of course it *may* be, and when it is, it usually may be stated in fairly plain words (Davidson 1978: 47).

In these two passages, Davidson wavers, seemingly allowing, albeit reluctantly, that metaphor may result in propositional effects. One way to account for this ambivalence would be to say that he stresses the non-propositional side of metaphorical effects when talking, as it were, to the proponents of metaphorical meaning, and he accommodates potentially true beliefs inspired by metaphor in order to avoid falling back into the kind of denunciation of metaphor associated with positivism or empiricism.

Apart from these ambivalent passages, some statements in WMM seem to commit Davidson in a more or less straightforward manner to the idea that part of what metaphors convey are propositional thoughts:

Metaphor does lead us to notice what might not otherwise be noticed, and there is no reason, I suppose, not to say these visions, *thoughts* [my italics, A.H.], and feelings inspired by the metaphor, are true or false (Davidson 1978: 41).

Once we understand a metaphor we can call what we grasp the “metaphorical truth” and (up to a point) say what the “metaphorical meaning” is (Davidson 1978: 33).

Passages like these give hope to the project of contriving a theory that allows for metaphor to convey propositional contents, in some way or other, apart from possibly achieving further effects as well. Then again, we find declarations that block this route outright:

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. This theory is false, whether or not we call the purported cognitive content a meaning (Davidson 1978: 46).

A number of interpreters have commented on the conflict between the passages above (Camp 2013: 365; McGuire 2001). Does Davidson allow for the possibility that speakers might succeed in producing propositional effects in their audience by means of metaphor, or does he want to preclude this possibility? It seems that WMM lends itself to at least two readings of this issue, and I think the issue cannot be resolved by looking only at WMM. That is why I suggest casting a glance at some of Davidson’s later pronouncements on the matter.

It is striking that nowhere in WMM does Davidson avail himself of the notion of speaker’s meaning or “non-natural meaning” (Grice 1957).<sup>4</sup> Rather, Davidson’s (1978: 40) use of the term “meaning” is emphatically restrictive in that

<sup>4</sup> I will use the labels “speaker’s meaning” and “non-natural meaning” interchangeably in this paper.

paper so that it applies only to the “ordinary” or literal meaning words and sentences have “prior and independent of the context of use”. As I indicated in the introduction, though, Davidson does make use of the notion of speaker’s meaning and some other elements of Grice’s theory of conversation in his later work.<sup>5</sup> For present purposes, I shall rest content with drawing attention to a section in LLL where Davidson (1993a: 300) concedes that we may decide to use the word ‘meaning’ also for “what the metaphor carries us to”. He adds, in an endnote, that he was “foolishly stubborn” about the word ‘meaning’ in WMM. I take this statement to give us a *prima facie* reason to believe that here he abandons the strong version of the wrong-kind objection to metaphorical meaning in favour of the modest one. If true, this would be noteworthy for the strong version threatens any attempt to construe metaphor’s effects in terms of speaker’s meaning, at least so long as we think of speaker’s meaning as propositional. This will be my starting point in the next section.

### 3. Systematic Reconsideration I: Similes, Metaphors, and Speaker’s Meaning

While some people have sympathised with the strong reading of Davidson’s wrong-kind objection to metaphorical meaning, most notably Richard Rorty (1987), a wide range of other people have found this position unconvincing (Bergmann 1982; Black 1979; Haack 1987; Moran 1989; Reimer 1996). The strong sceptical attitude towards metaphors conveying propositional content in any way whatsoever seems even less plausible given that in WMM Davidson did not take into account any construal of metaphor’s effects in terms of speaker’s meaning (McGuire 2001). Of course, if metaphorical effects were entirely non-propositional, this would also pose a problem for such a construal so long as we think of speaker’s meaning as propositional (Camp 2013; Carston 2010). Thus, the fact that Davidson abdicates strong non-propositionalism about metaphor’s effects is crucial here as well.

Now, what could such a construal of metaphorical effects in terms of speaker’s meaning look like? Interestingly, Davidson himself gives us an idea by discussing simile:

Having decided, we might then say the author of the simile intended us—that is, meant us—to notice that similarity. But having appreciated the difference between what the words meant and what the author accomplished by using those words, we should feel little temptation to explain what has happened by endowing the words themselves with a second, or figurative, meaning (Davidson 1978: 40).

It is true that Davidson speaks about simile here, not about metaphor. And he uses this comparison for his own purposes, asking rhetorically:

[Simile] may make us think deep thoughts, just as a metaphor does; how come, then, no one appeals to the “special cognitive content” of the simile? (Davidson 1978: 45).

<sup>5</sup> Despite this, Davidson remained sceptical about other parts, most notably the metase-mantic project of grounding meaning in non-linguistic intentions (Cook 2009; Davidson 1994: 12, n. 13).

Davidson's argument here works via *modus tollendo tollens*: If metaphor had a special propositional content, then similes should have a special propositional content too. Similes do not have special propositional content (or at least nobody claims they do). Hence metaphors do not have special cognitive content either.

Of course, it is open to us to question the assumption that similes do not have special propositional content. This would seem even more plausible on the assumption we may share with Davidson, and be it only for the sake of the argument, that the literal meaning of similes consists merely in pointing out that the two things compared share some property or other. If we use this minimalistic conception of what similes literally mean, it is as good as certain that similes will violate either Grice's (1989) Maxim of Relevance or his Maxim of Quantity. "If everything is like everything, and in endless ways" (Davidson 1978: 39), then pointing out this triviality does not look like a worthwhile contribution to most conversations. Davidson (1978: 42) himself recognises that conversational oddity or irrelevance might be what triggers the recognition of metaphor. But he stops short from spelling out the parallel between his remarks on simile and metaphor, and Grice's treatment of conversational implicature. Stressing the fact that, in such cases, the special propositional content does not attach to the words, is beside the point for someone who wants to propose an analysis of metaphorical content in terms of speaker's meaning along Gricean lines. For indeed in order to trigger the search for an implicated speaker's meaning, the words need to be taken in their literal meaning at first. It is precisely the resultant oddity that justifies the interpreter in looking beyond—so long as she has reason to presume the speaker to be cooperative and rational.

Interestingly enough, Davidson comments, much later, on the option of treating metaphor along the lines of conversational implicature. His comment is prompted by Oliver Scholz's (1993) paper on metaphor, to which he replies by saying, among other things, the following:

Here I should make a remark about Gricean implicature. One important motive in Grice's treatment of conversational implicature was the same as my motive in saying what I did about metaphor: to separate those aspects of communication which can be treated only informally from those which can be given formal semantic treatment, namely, the relatively literal which underlies all the rest. I have nothing but admiration for what Grice did in that direction. It seems to me to be one of the classical defenses of the possibility of a serious theory of meaning (Davidson 1993b: 173).

This statement seems to lend further support to construing metaphor's effects as instances of implicated speaker's meaning. The assumption that implicatures can only be treated informally should not stop Davidson from considering such a construal. After all, by the time of NDE (1986: 446) Davidson goes as far as saying that even the recognition of literal or "first" meaning relies only on "rough maxims". Moreover, Davidson (1978: 46) gives further fodder to such a construal by comparing metaphorical effects to the way the Delphic Oracle communicates, according to Heraclitus: "It does not say and it does not hide, it intimates".

Against the hope however, that Davidson's account of metaphor might be easily converted into a Gricean one, it should be noted that the wrong-way objection remains valid. Indeed, there is reason to believe that it is actually Davidson's crucial argument against the idea of metaphorical meaning. This is the

argument I focus on in the following section, before assessing its cogency in sections 5 and 6.

#### 4. The Wrong-Way Objection to Metaphorical Meaning: Mental Causality beyond Rationality

In the exegetical reconsideration of Davidson's wrong-kind objection in section 2, we have encountered reasons to believe that Davidson preferred the moderate over the strong reading of the wrong-kind objection. In the systematic reconsideration in section 3, I sketched a way in which Davidson may be turned into a simile theorist of metaphor. This construal requires that we conceive of the propositional effects of metaphor that the moderate reading of the wrong-kind objection allows for as instances of speaker's meaning. To come back to a more exegetical perspective, I want to quote an interview that Davidson gave to Kathrin Glüer that seems, at first sight, to support this project:

Davidson: If you call somebody a rat, and you intend that as a metaphor, somebody is not getting what you mean if they think that the word "rat" means a despicable person. They have to know what a rat is in order to understand the metaphor. First meaning depends upon your past practice or at least whatever a person has to go on to figure out what the first meaning is. Now, what happens after that? In my original article on metaphor, I resisted calling it meaning because it didn't have that character. It wasn't something that you could be expected to have prepared people for in advance, something they are used to and so forth. Otherwise they would just take the word to be ambiguous or just to mean that. [...]

Glüer: [...] To me, it is absolutely plausible to say [...] that [...] the interpretation of metaphors requires that there is this first meaning, however ephemeral it might be, that gets the interpreter going on what the speaker is ultimately up to. The speaker has to have two (or more) intentions: one semantic that settles for the first meaning, and a secondary, "metaphoric" intention as well.

Davidson: That is exactly what I would say (Davidson and Glüer 1995: 82-3).

Now the crucial question is what does this "secondary metaphoric intention" mean? For those in the business of defending metaphorical speaker's meaning, it would certainly be tempting to construe it as a reflexive intention in Paul Grice's (1957) sense. Yet while this secondary intention could indeed be construed as an instance of non-natural meaning, it could be construed equally well as a case of natural meaning, possibly in the sense of a "perlocutionary effect" (Tirrell 1991: 154), or an "ulterior purpose" (Davidson 2001a: 272).<sup>6</sup> Before giving reasons for thinking that the second interpretation is more likely to be true, I deem it

<sup>6</sup> "Perlocutionary act" or "perlocutionary effect" are technical terms from speech act theory that originated with J.L. Austin (1962). Davidson (2001a, 1993a) uses the terms "ulterior purpose" or "ulterior effect", respectively, to refer to what he considers roughly the same things. Furthermore, we may consider perlocutionary effects to be instances of what Grice (1957: 378) called "natural meaning". I will assume here that these different terminologies do in fact refer to the same phenomena, yet I do not think that any argument hinges on this assumption. In case of doubt, Davidson's terminology should be considered binding. While I deem it desirable to link these two frameworks to each other, and to speech act theory, I shall not pursue this project here.

worthwhile to recall some elements of Davidson's thinking concerning illocutionary force and ulterior purposes.

In WMM, Davidson (1978: 33) stresses that metaphor belongs to the domain of language use. In this context, it is worth noting that, for Davidson, already the illocutionary force belongs to that domain (Davidson 2001a, 2001d). Moreover, both force and ulterior purpose are, on this view, not guided by rules—in the sense of conventions—even though the identification of the illocutionary force is at the same time a necessary condition for understanding:

There is one intention not touched on by a theory of truth which a speaker must intend an interpreter to perceive, the [illocutionary, A.H.] *force* of the utterance. An interpreter must, if he is to understand a speaker, be able to tell whether an utterance is intended as a joke, an assertion, an order, a question, and so forth. I do not believe there are rules or conventions that govern this essential aspect of language. It is something language users can convey to hearers and hearers can, often enough, detect; but this does not show that these abilities can be regimented. I think there are sound reasons for thinking nothing like a serious theory is possible concerning this dimension of language. Still less are there conventions or rules for creating or understanding metaphors, irony, humor, etc. (Davidson 1990: 312-13, n. 56).

If it were not for the fact that humour or jokes show up twice, it would be clear that Davidson is talking about illocutionary force in the second sentence, and ulterior effects in the last sentence of this footnote. Be this as it may, if he had wanted to signal that metaphors, irony, and humour belong to the same category as assertions, orders, and questions, which seem clear cases of illocutionary force, he would not have opened the last sentence with “still less”.

Why does it matter whether we think of metaphorical effects in terms of illocutionary force or ulterior purposes? In some sense, it does not seem to matter much for Davidson insofar as, for him, neither is guided by rules, as the quote above shows. In that sense, both belong to the domain of language use. Yet force is different from ulterior effects to the extent that, first, it is governed by a Gricean reflexive intention (“a speaker must intend an interpreter to perceive [...] the force of the utterance”), and second, that it is essential to understanding (“[a]n interpreter must, if he is to understand a speaker, be able to [identify the illocutionary force, A.H.]”). These conditions do not hold in the case of ulterior purposes. It is not a necessary condition on the bringing about of some ulterior effect like scaring (“Boo!”) that the interpreter be able to detect the speaker or agent's intention to bring about that effect. Their success, the bringing about of the intended effect, does not depend on the audience's recognising this intention nor on the speaker intending for her audience to recognise her intention to bring about the intended effect. In other words, such acts are not acts of communication.

If the effects of metaphor should turn out to be ulterior effects, then this is just another way of saying that the wrong-way objection applies to metaphorical speaker's meaning, as will become clearer in the following section. Indeed, there is evidence that construing the wrong-way objection this way comes close to what Davidson had in mind. Let us have a look at his reply to a paper by Pablo Quintanilla (1999) on metaphor and conceptual innovation:



But as Professor Quintanilla says, when metaphor affects the propositional contents of beliefs, not all that eventuates can be rationalized.<sup>7</sup> He describes such a process as the displacement of non-propositional thoughts by propositional thoughts. I am slightly less inclined to speak of non-propositional thoughts, but only because I (perhaps somewhat arbitrarily) restrict the word “thought” to mental states and events with propositional contents. But it hardly matters; certainly the ways metaphor, imagination, conceptual creativity, and daydreaming work their wonders in the mind are cases of mental causality which is outside or beyond the rational (Davidson 1999: 327).

In order to get a sense of this kind of mental causality that lies outside the rational, I suggest casting a glance at Davidson's (2004) essay *Paradoxes of Irrationality* (POI). There he rehearses, first, what *rational mental causality* amounts to on his account. Two elements are crucial for this type of causality, which he also refers to as *reason explanation*. First, in order for mental states, typically belief-desire pairs, to explain some other mental state, action, or event, the propositional contents of the former need to stand in “appropriate logical relations”<sup>8</sup> to those of the latter (Davidson 2004: 179). Second, the former needs to cause the latter.<sup>9</sup> In short, reasons are, for Davidson, mental causes that stand in certain logical relations to the effects they cause. It follows from this that both the cause and the effect cited in some reason explanation need to lend themselves to a description in propositional terms. For if one, or both, of the relevant states or events defy the assignment of some propositional content, no logical connection could be established in the first place. This setup allows Davidson, in a second step, to characterise cases of mental causality that are beyond the rational, meaning that they fail to meet, in one way or another, the two conditions on reason explanations just outlined.

Davidson discusses four such cases in POI: manipulation, for instance, luring a person into your garden by growing a beautiful flower (2004: 181); perception, for instance, coming to believe that a bird is flying by (2004: 179); association, for instance, humming a tune in order to recall a name (2004: 186); and self-improvement, namely changing your attitudes or desires by means of a second-order desire (2004: 186-7). As a general term for these four cases, I suggest the label *a-rational mental causation*, or *a-rationality*. Davidson makes it clear that he wants to distinguish these four cases from the cases of *irrationality* with which he is primarily concerned in POI, but that I propose to largely ignore here.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> Even in this late pronouncement, we once again encounter the ambivalence in Davidson's formulation (“not all”) that I pointed out in section 2.

<sup>8</sup> As Gozzano (1999: 138-39) explains, the appropriate relations that account for rationality comprise principles of decision theory and logic, as well as, for instance, the requirement of total evidence for inductive reasoning.

<sup>9</sup> These conditions are necessary for rational mental causality, yet not sufficient, as Davidson (2004: 173) claims. I follow Davidson in neglecting this complication in the present context.

<sup>10</sup> In order to justify this omission, I point to my introduction where I argued that Davidson did not consider metaphor to be an irrelevant, possibly irrational, rhetorical device that stands in the way of serious scientific inquiry, for instance. As long as we can avoid construing metaphor as irrational within Davidson's framework, I think this line should be pursued.

While these four cases fail to meet the conditions on rational mental causality, they do so for different reasons. Perception is, for Davidson, a case where the cause cannot be described in propositional terms. Manipulation, by contrast, is a case where the cause can be assigned a propositional content, namely the desire that you enter my garden in combination with my belief that I will succeed by growing a beautiful flower there. Yet while my intention may cause the desired effect, let us assume you do enter my garden, it does not, as Davidson (2004: 181) puts it, constitute the reason on which you acted. Rather, in the scenario that we are invited to envisage, it is your desire to have a look at the flower that causes you to enter. This is, thus, a case where there is no appropriate logical connection between cause and effect. Self-improvement, and incidentally the cases of irrationality that Davidson discusses in *POI*, are structurally similar to the manipulation case insofar as the logical relation is “missing or distorted” (Davidson 2004: 179).<sup>11</sup> At the same time they differ from manipulation to the extent that the causal relation obtains within the mind of a single person, instead of spanning two minds. Association, finally, seems to share with perception the deficiency that the cause lacks propositional content—at least if we think about Davidson’s (2004: 186) case of “humming a certain tune”. It nevertheless differs from perception, because the cause is internal, rather than external, to the individual’s mind.

Against this background we can now return to the guiding question of this section: How are we to understand the “second metaphoric intention” that Davidson endorses in his reply to Glüer? If the systematic reconsideration I offered in section 3 is to go through, that is if metaphorical meaning can be thought of as speaker’s meaning, then this intention needs to be reflexive—in the sense that the speaker intends for her audience to recognise it, and that it serves as a reason for the audience to retrieve the relevant propositional content. Yet in his reply to Quintanilla, Davidson argues that metaphor’s effects are caused in the “wrong way”, that is in a way that defies the requirements on reason explanation. If this were true, then it would undermine the idea of metaphorical speaker’s meaning. In my second systematic reconsideration, hence, I shall examine the cogency of this objection. In doing so, I will also work towards clarifying which of the four cases of *a*-rationality mentioned above would seem to fit metaphor best. I draw together my results in the conclusion where I present what I take to be the most plausible view of metaphor that we may attribute to Davidson on the basis of my exegetical and systematic reconsiderations.

## 5. Systematic Reconsideration II: Davidson and Grice on Rationality in Communication

In section 3, I offered a reading of WMM that paves the way to construing metaphor’s effects in terms of implicated speaker’s meaning.<sup>12</sup> Davidson himself

<sup>11</sup> In “First Person Authority” (FPA), Davidson (2001b: 7) considers yet another case that seems to fit this pattern, the “noninferential” recovery of authority over a previously unconscious attitude in psychoanalytic practice. This example is telling given the comparison between dreamwork and metaphor with which Davidson opens WMM.

<sup>12</sup> To be sure, I do not want to argue myself that metaphorical meaning, if there is such a thing, is best cast in the mould of implicated speaker’s meaning. My aim is merely to evalu-

seemed to be open to such a construal. That is at least what his reply to Scholz suggests. The reply to Quintanilla I discussed in section 4, however, stands in conflict with this interpretation. There he makes it clear that metaphor's effects are to be understood as an instance of a-rational mental causation. I suggest pinning down these conflicting interpretations with reference to the "secondary metaphorical intention" that Glüer named. In order to make sense of Davidson's toying around with the idea of implicated speaker's meaning as a model for metaphor, this intention would have to be reflexive. Reflexive intentions are a necessary condition for speaker's meaning. If, however, we take Davidson's wrong-way objection seriously, then this intention cannot be reflexive.<sup>13</sup> Rather, it would be an instance of mental a-rationality. Davidson thus faces a dilemma. Either he accepts that metaphor's effects may be construed as conversational implicatures in Grice's sense, but then he would have to accept that these effects are within the domain of the rational—at least on a Gricean understanding of rationality. Or else he sticks with his assessment that the effects of metaphor are a-rational, but then it seems that they cannot be construed as conversational implicatures.

We have at least two potential options to resolve this dilemma in a way that salvages as much as possible of what seems to be Davidson's conception of metaphor.<sup>14</sup> One option would consist in showing that Davidson and Grice simply employ different standards as to what counts as rational forms of communication. The second option I will examine is whether we find in Grice a model of a-rational verbal behaviour that can accommodate what Davidson says in his reply to Quintanilla. The goal is to assess whether Davidson's wrong-way objection holds even if we try to construe the effects of metaphor in terms of implicated speaker's meaning.<sup>15</sup> Since the wrong-way objection rests on the contention that these effects are produced in a purely causal, hence a-rational way, two things need to be shown in order for the objection to apply to speaker's meaning. For one, we would need to show that rationality is indeed a demand on speaker's meaning, something I will largely take for granted here. For another, we would have to establish that the Grice's and Davidson's frameworks are sufficiently similar with respect to the underlying notion of rationality. Otherwise the dispute threatens to be merely verbal.<sup>16</sup> Due to lack of space, I have to defer an examination of this option to resolve Davidson's dilemma to some later occasion. In other words, I shall additionally assume that the two frameworks are relevantly similar.

ate whether such a project would be compatible with Davidson's pronouncements. For an overview of the problems that such a project has to face, see, for instance, Carston 2012.

<sup>13</sup> The reasons backing up this contention will become more evident in the course of this section.

<sup>14</sup> Here I still assume that there might be a way to reconcile most of what Davidson says about metaphor, in WMM and beyond. Of course, an exegetical reconsideration of a quite different sort might simply aim for the conclusion that Davidson's pronouncements on the matter cannot be made coherent.

<sup>15</sup> I am thus defending Davidson, as he appears in his reply to Quintanilla, against Davidson, as he appears in his reply to Scholz.

<sup>16</sup> This would be a case of Davidson having his cake and eating it too. If different standards of rationality were in play, Davidson could maintain that metaphorical effects are a case of speaker's meaning, while denying that speaker's meaning has to be rational in his sense of the term.

I turn thus to the second option to resolve the dilemma. Grice considers two cases of a-rationality that may disqualify some speaker's intention from counting as an instance of non-natural meaning.<sup>17</sup> For one, the speaker must not think it is a "foregone conclusion" (Grice 1957: 384) that her reflexive intentions will play no role in achieving the relevant cognitive effects in her audience. If she did, this would preclude her from even forming such a communicative intention, since having an intention requires, on most conceptions, that we believe we can, in principle, realise the corresponding goal.<sup>18</sup> Under the same heading, Davidson (1986: 440) discusses a snippet from a dialogue between two characters in Lewis Carroll's (1994: 100) *Through the Looking Glass*. Humpty Dumpty tries to convey to Alice that he has just produced a nice knockdown argument against her position (on a topic irrelevant to our concerns) by saying "There's glory for you". He could not believe, though, that Alice would be able to interpret him correctly out of the blue, Davidson argues. And indeed, upon Alice expressing her bafflement, Humpty Dumpty rejoins "Of course you don't [know what I mean by 'glory', A.H.]—till I tell you". So, on both Davidson's and Grice's account, Humpty Dumpty did not have, and could not have had, a reflexive, communicative intention. He knew, as his confession shows, that Alice would not be in a position to get, without further information, what he was up to by using the term 'glory' in that way.

Now, why should someone who speaks metaphorically fail to have a reason for believing that her audience grasps what she is trying to convey? For one way to understand Davidson's wrong-way objection to metaphorical speaker's meaning, which I reconsidered in the previous section, would have it that indeed she must fail to have such a reason. This would explain why the act of speaking metaphorically is a-rational for Davidson.

One way to construe the wrong-way objection along these lines would consist in combining it with the wrong-kind objection. We find this line of argument most explicitly stated in Davidson's reply to Oliver Scholz who chides him for relying on an unclear notion of seeing-as. Davidson's answer comes pat:

I thought Wittgenstein and others had made the notion of seeing as clear enough to make their (and my) point: there are important experiences that cannot be reduced to one way or another of grasping a propositional content. If it is a central function of (fresh, active, live) metaphors to induce such experiences, no theory of reference or truth can cope with what is distinctive about metaphor (Davidson 1993b: 173).

We are back to the wrong-kind objection, or so it seems. If the mental state of seeing-as is such that it does not involve grasping any proposition, and given that it is a hallmark of rationality that it operates holistically via inferential links between propositions (Gozzano 1999: 138), then these links break down in the

<sup>17</sup> In fact, I distinguish here two cases that for Grice (1957) were but one, namely the second one I am going to discuss. Yet I think that this second case is just a specific instance of the more general problem that sometimes the speaker's intentions do not play the role they are supposed to play in communication when it comes to producing the relevant cognitive effects. Davidson brings up another case that fits this general description, as we will presently see.

<sup>18</sup> According to a more modest conception, it would only be required that we do not believe that our aim is impossible to meet (Longworth 2017).

face of seeing-as. If we read Davidson that way, then he can even allow for the case that entertaining this state may result in recognising some fact or other. This would be a mere by-product, though, and the speaker may not, if she believes that the mental state of seeing-as works in the way described by Davidson, harbour any hopes that she is in a position to exert any rational control over these by-products.

This argument looks, at first, similar to the second case that may hamper the rationality of speaker's meaning, according to Grice (1957: 382). If Herod shows Salome the severed head of John the Baptist on a charger, then the communicative intentions of the agent fail to serve as reason for the audience to form the relevant belief, say, that St. John is dead. Or so Grice argues.<sup>19</sup> Davidson's argument in the quote above seems to be structurally similar insofar as it involves, via the mental state of seeing-as, a perceptual or quasi-perceptual element. Unlike Grice, however, he does not think that this element gives away too easily, as it were, the relevant information, without the speaker's communicative intention playing any role. Rather, the quasi-perceptual mental state of seeing-as interferes with meaning and communication in a different way. Since there is, as Davidson presumes, no proposition to grasp, no belief will be formed either, and just as little information will be gathered.<sup>20</sup>

This combination of the wrong-kind and wrong-way objections probably construes Davidson's argument against metaphorical content most faithfully. Yet, to some extent, I agree with Scholz's critical stance that prompted Davidson's reply above. The role that Davidson wishes to assign to seeing-as in the context of the combined argument seems to rest on assumptions that are questionable. To begin with: Is Wittgenstein's notion of seeing-as the right model for metaphor's distinctive effects, given that metaphor is a phenomenon of language or thought, but not, or not necessarily, of perception (Kemp 1991: 86)? Even if seeing-as, or related notions such as "taking-as" (Tirrell 1991: 149) or "imagina-

<sup>19</sup> I am sceptical about the cogency of such cases. I would argue that the information Salome can infer without referring to Herod's communicative intentions is not the same as that which she gains via recognition of Herod's intention. In the first case, the relevant proposition is, indeed as Grice suggests, something to the effect that John the Baptist is dead. In the second case, however, it would be something like the realization that Herod had John the Baptist killed. These propositions are sufficiently distinct, I take it. More generally, my tendency would be to claim that whenever people stage evidence such as severed heads, what they want to communicate is richer than the conclusion the evidence indicates by itself. Presumably, the additional element concerns the communicator's involvement or attitude regarding the relevant states of affairs. I shall not, however, pursue this line of argument here.

<sup>20</sup> For Wittgenstein, seeing-as seems to have been a general term for an array of mental states that range from cases bordering on conceptual thinking, at one extreme, to cases bordering on non-conceptual perception, at the other (Glock 1996: 38). While appreciating the reversible figure of the duck-rabbit arguably requires you to possess the concepts of both a duck and a rabbit, Davidson apparently thought otherwise. Either he conceived of seeing-as as a *sui generis* mental state that defies description in propositional terms, as his reply to Scholz seems to suggest, or else he patterned seeing-as on perception. For as we have seen in section 4, perceptual inputs also do not have propositional content for Davidson. Then again, Davidson grants that perception causes beliefs, and beliefs do have propositional content. So the a-rationality of perception could only serve as a model for metaphor if Davidson conceded that at least some of the ensuing effects may be propositional. See sections 2 and 6 for more on this.

tive seeing” (McGinn 2004: 48-55), should turn out to capture aptly what is distinctive about metaphor, is Davidson right in holding that this mental state necessarily defies the grasping of propositions?<sup>21</sup> Finally, even if the mental state of seeing-as were non-propositional on a conception of propositions as structured entities, would the argument still go through if we switched to a conception of propositions as functions from possible worlds into truth values (Moran 2017: 384; Stalnaker 1972)?

By appealing to the quasi-perceptual state of “metaphorical” seeing-as, Davidson’s combined argument would seem to be closest to the case of perception in the fourfold typology of a-rationality discussed in section 4. The wrong format of seeing-as, that is the presumed absence of any propositional content to be grasped, would hence explain why metaphor fails to correspond to the requirements of reason explanation. For reasons sketched in the previous paragraph, however, this is not, from a systematic perspective, the most promising line of argument in defence of Davidson’s wrong-way objection to metaphorical speaker’s meaning. Having said that, the combined argument might well be the most faithful to Davidson’s position from an exegetical point of view. I will not try to settle this exegetical question here. Rather, I will explore, by way of conclusion, if there is another way to construe the wrong-way objection that avoids the problematic notion of seeing-as.

To that effect, I submit, first of all, that the wrong-way objection to metaphorical speaker’s meaning needs to be construed as a modal claim as follows: The speaker must not have any reason to expect that she exerts rational control over the effects of the metaphor. For, of course, there is also a version of the wrong-way objection that is not a question of modality, but merely an empirical matter. It may well be that sometimes speakers or writers use metaphor without having any definite content in mind that they wish to convey. Perhaps the purpose of certain poetic metaphors such as “Time is a pond in which the past bubbles to the surface” (Ransmayr 1987: 166) is not to make an assertion about the nature of time, but to captivate the reader’s imagination by prompting the mental image of a bubbling pond. This may well be how things stand in this case. Our intuitions arguably diverge as to how often metaphors are used playfully, and how often they are used to communicate content. Be this as it may, for Davidson’s argument against metaphorical speaker’s meaning to go through, he would have to show that metaphors cannot serve the purpose of communication by their very nature. If the distinctive effect of metaphor were to induce a state relevantly similar to seeing-as, and if this state defies description in propositional terms, then Davidson would have such a modal argument at his command. Yet there is another, possibly more promising line of argument open to him as well. It is to this issue that I turn now.

## 6. Conclusion

In the previous section, I concluded my systematic reconsideration of Davidson’s wrong-way objection to metaphorical speaker’s meaning by arguing that it needs to be understood as a modal claim. Something about metaphor would have to violate, by necessity, the following rationality constraint on speaker’s meaning, on which Davidson seems to agree with Grice: The speaker

<sup>21</sup> This question refers to the point I raised in footnote 20.

needs to have a reason to expect that she will succeed in conveying a particular propositional content to her audience by means of metaphor, and the audience's recognition of her intention serves as reason for them to retrieve it. The wrong-way objection would have it that the speaker cannot reasonably expect to succeed in conveying a propositional content to her audience, even if she should wish to. While Davidson seemed to hold, as his reply to Scholz shows, that something like seeing-as fits this bill, I argue now that there is another model available, one potentially less fraught with problems. Davidson himself adopts this model in his reply to Quintanilla:

I agree with Professor Quintanilla that metaphor can play an important role in conceptual invention and change. [...] A more drastic form of conceptual change involves explicit introduction of novel concepts, concepts not definable in terms of the original stock. Here, it is natural to say, metaphor can play an overt role. It enters at first by providing an insight by using a familiar word or phrase in a surprising and suggestive way. But in cases where the insight proves to have a general application, the metaphor hardens, surprise dissipates, and suggestion turns to forthright description (Davidson, 1999: 326-27).

Davidson here offers a different perspective on the wrong-way objection. In cases of conceptual change, the speaker could not reasonably expect that she will succeed in expressing and communicating the concept in question because either she or her audience did not yet possess that concept prior to encountering the metaphor. As a type of a-rationality, conceptual change works differently from the combination of the wrong-way and wrong-kind objections we encountered in section 5. While perception suggested itself as the model of a-rational mental causation for the combined argument,<sup>22</sup> either association or manipulation would fit conceptual change. Which of the two works better depends on whether we assume the likeness the metaphor draws attention to is novel only to the audience, or to the speaker as well. Manipulation would seem to suit the first case, whereas association might capture the second.<sup>23</sup> In any case, this model for metaphor requires that the originator of the metaphor believes that at least her audience, and possibly she as well, are not prepared to instantly grasp the metaphor's "meaning".

Of course, it may be held against this conception that it applies at best to a small fraction of the metaphors we use in everyday contexts. True, but the apparent artificiality of Davidson's account dissipates, to some degree at least, if we take into account that most of these are "dead" or idiomatic metaphors such as "He was burned up" (Davidson 1978: 38). Moreover, Davidson would probably want novelty to be construed on the microlevel of the language users' idiolects where conceptual change arguably occurs more frequently than on the macrolevel of a linguistic community. In addition, it seems to be a merit of Davidson's conception that it aims to do justice to metaphor's creative power in

<sup>22</sup> With some reservations. See footnote 20.

<sup>23</sup> Alternatively, we might also consider the recovery of unconscious attitudes as a model for the kind of a-rational mental causality involved in metaphor (see footnote 11). As mentioned earlier, this line of thinking is tempting, given Davidson's "dreamwork" metaphor. To the extent, however, that this model requires an intrapersonal split into two subsystems, one conscious and one unconscious, this raises certain questions regarding Davidson's philosophy of mind, most notably its holism. For further discussion see Gozzano 1999.

a way that keeps sight of the element of surprise that goes along with this process from the subject's point of view. The price to pay for accommodating this creativity in the form of conceptual change may be that the production of novel metaphors, at its very initial stage, turns out to be a-rational. This holds so long as we believe, as Davidson seems to have done, that conceptual change by means of metaphor is a process that cannot be moulded into reason explanations. In this sense, then, metaphor might indeed resemble dreamwork, though formal pragmaticists, cognitive linguists, and psychoanalysts will wake up with a start upon hearing this.<sup>24</sup>

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