CHAPTER TWO

CONCEPTUAL BLENDING AND METAPHOR THEORY

2.1 Metaphor

Metaphor has fascinated and bothered philosophers since the ancient Greeks. Aristotle was the first to define metaphor, and three components of his explanation have influenced metaphorical analysis up to the twenty-first century: the argument that metaphor is located at the level of word, rather than larger linguistic unit; his understanding of metaphor as deviant, non-literal word usage; and his belief that metaphor is motivated by pre-existing similarity.¹

Medieval commentators were chary of metaphor, seeing it primarily as a stylistic device. Metaphor may have been necessary in sacred discourse, because speaking of divine truths directly was impossible. But metaphor outside of sacred texts was dangerous. Later empiricist and rationalist philosophies also believed metaphor to be deceptive; literal language was the only satisfactory way to assert truth claims or to speak accurately. For them, metaphor undermined correct reasoning and should be avoided. As John Locke said,

...[I]f we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that...all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong ideas, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment; and so indeed are perfect cheats....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.²

Early twentieth century philosophy distinguished between language’s “cognitive” and “emotive” purposes; scientific knowledge could be stated literally, and its truth verified independently. In logical positivism, metaphor was emotive and therefore of no use to philosophy. Even after

logical positivism lost its ascendancy, linguistic philosophers continued to think of metaphor as a kind of ‘parasitic’ use of language.\(^3\)

In 1936, I. A. Richards first made the argument that metaphor was a matter of thought, not just word or language. He also held that language is saturated with metaphor, and that communication without metaphor is impossible. Richard’s work was largely ignored until Max Black argued that metaphors could not necessarily be reduced to literal correspondence, and that the perceived similarities between metaphorical parts might be the product rather than the cause of metaphorical association.\(^4\)

An explosion of research followed Max Black’s assertions. However, the real turning point in contemporary metaphor research occurred in 1977, at a multi-disciplinary conference on metaphor when Michael Reddy presented a paper analyzing the metaphors that humans use to speak about language and information exchange.\(^5\) This analysis served as the launching pad for a generation of linguistic theorists, philosophers, and cognitive scientists, led by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson in their landmark book, *Metaphors We Live By*. These researchers laid the foundation for modern claims that metaphor is a matter of thinking, not just language, and that metaphor is imbedded in everyday thinking and speech.

Contemporary metaphor theory, as elucidated by Lakoff, Johnson, Turner, Sweetser, and Grady,\(^6\) holds that metaphorical capacity springs from embodied cognition; humans perceive the world through the senses in combination with cognitive capacities.

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