

Demystifying Metaphor: A Strategy for Literal Paraphrase

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Abstract:

There is a long philosophical tradition of skepticism about the possibility of adequate paraphrases for metaphorical utterances. And even among those who favor paraphrasability, there is a tendency to think that paraphrases of metaphorical utterances may themselves have to be non-literal. I argue that even the most evocative and open-ended metaphorical utterances can be literally and adequately paraphrased, once we recognize that they are actually indirect speech acts—specifically, indirect directives that command the hearer to engage in an open-ended comparison. This leads to an overall picture in which trite, unevocative metaphorical utterances admit of just straightforward, usually non-directive literal paraphrases, while the most evocative metaphorical utterances admit of only indirect directive paraphrases, and metaphorical utterances in a third category admit of two literal paraphrases, one of which is straightforward and usually non-directive, and the other of which takes the indirect directive form. This argument for literal paraphrasability is intended to demystify metaphor, but not to undercut metaphor’s tremendous value as a communicative device.

1 Introduction

There is a long philosophical tradition of skepticism about the possibility of adequate paraphrases for metaphorical utterances. For instance, Donald Davidson (1978) writes: “When we try to say what a metaphor ‘means,’ we soon realize there is no end to what we want to mention” (p. 46). In a similar vein, Max Black (1955) contends that paraphrase “fails to give the *insight* that the metaphor did” (p. 293). Mark Phelan (2010) has helpfully termed this the Inadequacy Assumption, and he also attributes this view to a range of other theorists.¹ The Inadequacy Assumption appears in another guise in the work of Stanley Cavell (1976), who argues that an ‘and so on’ must be added to all paraphrases of metaphorical utterances (p. 79; *cf.* Hills 2008, p. 31). This claim amounts to an admission that any paraphrase we attempt to construct for a metaphorical utterance will be inadequate: acknowledgement of incompleteness is built into the very form of the paraphrase.

¹ Specifically, Phelan (2010) writes: “Among the theorists who have endorsed this ‘Inadequacy Assumption’ (*IA*), in one form or another, are Max Black ([1955]), Donald Davidson (1978), John Searle (1979), Merrie Bergmann (1982), Richard Moran (1989), Marga Reimer (2001), and Samuel Guttenplan (2005)” (p. 482). Christopher Bache (1981, pp. 323–4) attributes a similar view to Paul Ricoeur (1975) and Ted Cohen (1976).

Among those who think metaphorical utterances *can* be adequately paraphrased, another assumption is quite common. Martin Warner (1973, p. 372), Christopher Bache (1981, p. 313), David Hills (2008, p. 20), and Mark Phelan (2010, p. 487) all support the paraphrasability of metaphorical utterances to some extent, but they contend that the paraphrase may itself have to be non-literal. Certain metaphorical utterances, on this view, are just not paraphrasable in literal terms. We'll call this the Non-Literality Assumption.

The Inadequacy and Non-Literality Assumptions tend, in different ways, toward mystification of metaphor. Here I have in mind mystification in the sense of just creating mystery around some phenomenon, not in the sense of treating something as mystical. After endorsing the Inadequacy Assumption, it is easy to conclude (with Davidson (1978)) that the reason why metaphorical utterances cannot be adequately paraphrased is that there *is* no determinate additional content there at all beyond just the literal content of the uttered sentence, which the speaker clearly does not intend to convey. This conclusion gives metaphor an air of mystery by portraying it as an aberration from our more usual communicative practices: metaphorical utterances, for some reason, do something fundamentally different in kind from our more ordinary usage of language in which we convey messages to each other. The Non-Literality Assumption, on the other hand, implies that although metaphorical utterances do convey content beyond their literal meaning, that content is expressible only in non-literal terms. On that view, there is a kind of content that the human mind can grasp but which somehow, mysteriously, resists confinement within the bounds of literal language. Both of these ideas—that metaphorical utterances are either not in the business of conveying content or that they convey content that cannot be conveyed literally—amount to a kind of mystification of metaphor.

Against the Inadequacy and Non-Literality Assumptions, I'll argue that even the most evocative and open-ended metaphorical utterances can be literally and adequately paraphrased, once we recognize that they are actually indirect speech acts (Searle 1975)—specifically, indirect directives. This new approach to paraphrasing metaphorical utterances will, by undercutting the two Assumptions, also undercut the temptation toward mystification that can result from them.

We'll start, in Section 2, with some preliminary issues, including clarification of what a paraphrase of a metaphorical utterance should aim to achieve. Then, we'll spend Section 3 introducing the indirect directive strategy for paraphrasing metaphorical utterances. In Section 4, we'll consider some questions and objections concerning the view put forward in Section 3. And finally, we'll end with a discussion of the connection between paraphrasability and the value of metaphor, in which I'll argue that the fact that even the most evocative metaphorical utterances are literally paraphrasable does not imply that metaphor is not valuable. In other words, to demystify metaphor is not to trivialize it.

2 Some preliminaries

Before proceeding, I want to discuss an assumption that underlies my approach to metaphor, a restriction in the paper's focus, and then a few key issues related to the nature of paraphrase.

In this paper, I assume that metaphor is a pragmatic phenomenon: I take metaphor to be a matter of what a speaker means by her utterance on a particular occasion, rather than a matter of what the words themselves mean. As a result, we will focus on metaphorical *utterances* rather than on type-level metaphors, because pragmatic phenomena occur only at the level of the utterance (*cf.* Bergmann 1982, p. 232). I use the term 'metaphorical utterance' to

refer to any utterance that contains one or more expressions used metaphorically, and I use the term ‘metaphor’ to refer to the general phenomenon of speaking metaphorically.

Within the broader topic of metaphor, we will focus primarily on conversational metaphor—on metaphorical utterances occurring within ordinary conversations with a speaker and hearer in each other’s presence. This will allow us to utilize a broadly Gricean understanding of metaphor as a species of conversational implicature. On the Gricean picture, metaphorical utterances *flout* conversational maxims—that is, their literal content is obviously false (transparently failing to comply with the Quality maxim “Do not say what you believe to be false”), or sometimes trivially true (transparently failing to comply with the Quantity maxim “Make your contribution as informative as is required”), which then leads the hearer to search for something else the speaker might mean by her utterance that would preserve the assumption that she is cooperating within the conversation (Grice 1989, pp. 24–27, 30–31). To identify the implicated content, the hearer relies on some kind of resemblance or similarity (in a very broad sense) (Grice 1989, p. 34). We will largely leave aside the use of metaphor in literary, poetic, and religious or spiritual contexts in which there may be a presumption that speakers often mean more than what they appear to say, and where metaphorical utterances thus only sometimes flout Gricean maxims.² This restriction of the paper’s focus should not be taken to suggest that the paper’s overall strategy for paraphrase does not apply to literary, poetic, and religious or spiritual metaphor; those kinds of cases are largely left aside simply because sticking with a single account of the mechanism behind metaphor allows for a more perspicuous presentation of the new approach to paraphrase.

² I am grateful to an anonymous referee for the observation that religious and spiritual contexts can have this feature just as easily as literary and poetic ones do.

Because my focus is on the issue of paraphrase in particular, I won't argue explicitly for the Gricean approach to metaphor that we'll be utilizing, and I'll remain neutral about the details of how hearers arrive at an exact implicated content for metaphorical utterances. In fact, I don't take the Gricean framework to be essential to this paper's strategy for literal paraphrase, even for just conversational metaphor, so what follows may still be of interest to readers who are uncomfortable with my Gricean assumptions. Nonetheless, as we'll see in Section 3, this paper's approach to paraphrase does provide some new support for the Gricean approach to conversational metaphor.

Now we'll turn toward the nature of paraphrase. Our presupposition that metaphor is a pragmatic phenomenon has significant implications for what a paraphrase of a metaphorical (as opposed to literal) utterance ought to achieve. When we talk about paraphrasing a literal utterance, we are looking for another utterance whose literal (or perhaps even semantic) content is the same as the original utterance's literal or semantic content. Metaphorical utterances, too, have literal and semantic content, and that content can easily be paraphrased. For instance, we might literally paraphrase a metaphorical utterance of 'Hector is a mouse' (where Hector is actually a human) with 'Hector is a member of the *mus* genus.' But that, of course, is not the sort of paraphrase we want when we ask for a paraphrase of a metaphorical utterance. Instead, when paraphrasing a metaphorical utterance, we're seeking an utterance whose literal, semantic content is the same as the metaphorical utterance's non-literal, pragmatic content.³

³ This construal of paraphrase is indebted to Elisabeth Camp's (2006), although it differs from hers in applying just to paraphrases of metaphorical utterances (p. 2; cf. Phelan 2010, pp. 486–487). Another noteworthy difference between paraphrasing a metaphorical utterance and paraphrasing a literal utterance is that paraphrase is an asymmetrical relation in the former case, and a symmetrical one in the latter (Stewart 1971, p. 115).

Before proceeding, I also want to note that there is a kind of inadequacy of literal paraphrase of metaphorical utterances that I'm not interested in contesting. At a given time, in a given language, adequate literal paraphrase of a particular metaphorical utterance may be impossible because the language lacks sufficient vocabulary (*cf.* Camp 2006, p. 16). In other words, there might be a “semantic gap” in that language at that time that makes it impossible to literally express certain content (Searle 1979, p. 88). Genuine semantic gaps are rare—a literal paraphrase may have to be quite long-winded in order to express the metaphorical utterance's non-literal content, but that doesn't prevent it from being adequate. Unavailability of a short, pithy literal paraphrase should not be confused with unavailability of a literal paraphrase, *tout court*.

Genuine unparaphrasability due to a semantic gap is likeliest to arise in conversations about a previously unknown aspect of reality, perhaps due to a scientific discovery. At that time, in that language, there may be no way to literally describe the phenomenon in question, although the metaphorical utterance nonetheless conveys an entirely determinate claim (*cf.* Bache 1981, p. 311; Camp 2006, pp. 19–20). For examples, think of early conversations using Freud's notion of repression (Bache 1981, p. 319), or the notion of mental files in cognitive science (Camp 2006, pp. 17–18).

I'm uninterested in contesting unparaphrasability that comes from semantic gaps because it doesn't support either kind of mystification discussed in the Introduction. That is, it provides no reason to doubt the possibility of introducing a new expression whose literal content matches the non-literal content of the expression used metaphorically, and thus it provides no reason to think that such metaphorical utterances convey no content, or that their content is in principle inexpressible in literal terms. So, as we proceed, we'll leave this trivial sort of unparaphrasability aside.

3 How to paraphrase metaphorical utterances

The next step is to show how to offer literal, adequate paraphrases for even the most evocative and open-ended metaphorical utterances (again, leaving aside the uninteresting cases of unparaphrasability just discussed). Ultimately, the strategy will be to treat evocative metaphorical utterances as indirect directives that instruct the hearer to engage in an open-ended comparison. Before delving into this new strategy for paraphrase, we'll consider some simpler metaphorical utterances for which paraphrase is relatively straightforward. This order of progression will be useful both for the purpose of working up gradually to the harder cases, and for setting the stage for seeing how paraphrases based on treating metaphorical utterances as indirect directives interact with other paraphrases that may be available as well.

For a case of straightforward paraphrase, imagine that our friend Hector pays for take-out food and then raises no objection when someone else snatches the food and slips out the door after Hector's name is called. After observing this behavior, you utter 'Hector is a mouse.' Here, it seems relatively straightforward to paraphrase the metaphorical content of your utterance with something along the lines of 'Hector is timid.' The question of whether you also conveyed that Hector has a small nose, or that he really enjoys cheese, just does not arise, although those paraphrases could be appropriate in other contexts. Adequate paraphrase does not seem difficult here.

But it might be thought that calling someone a mouse is too close to being a dead metaphor—at least, it's a trite one—and that's what explains the ease of paraphrase. Let's consider, then, a metaphorical utterance that is not trite, but still relatively simple to paraphrase. Consider the following dialogue between two co-workers:

Dialogue 1

A: I was finally brave enough to ask Lila for approval for my new project proposal this week. I met with her on Monday.

B: Finally! How did it go?

A: I haven't heard back yet, but I think it went well. After all the time I spent practicing my pitch, reading through all of my notes, and coming up with answers to the questions she might ask, I actually felt incredibly exhilarated when it was over.

B: Sounds like it was good that you didn't rush into it!

A: It was. Lila is Mount Everest!

The metaphorical utterance comes at the end: *A*'s utterance of 'Lila is Mount Everest!' Here, the Gricean story generates a fairly straightforward paraphrase. *A*'s utterance is obviously false if taken literally. So, *B* will look for some other content *A* could be indirectly conveying instead, by searching for some contextually significant similarity that Lila bears to Mount Everest. Because *A* has just been talking about how much work was required to prepare to talk to Lila, and how good she felt afterwards, a particular similarity to Mount Everest is salient, allowing for a paraphrase along the following lines: 'Talking to Lila about my new project is a major achievement that required effort.' I'll refer to contexts such as Dialogue 1 as *robust*, which means that they allow a particular, determinate property to be attributed by a metaphorical utterance.⁴ Going forward, I'll refer to these simple paraphrases as *Type 1* paraphrases. The Type 1 paraphrase in this case may seem dissatisfying in a way that the 'Hector is timid' paraphrase did not—we'll discuss that concern below.

So much for the simpler cases. Metaphorical utterances, of course, do not always have robust contexts. As Marga Reimer (2001) puts it, "Perhaps 'No man is an island' can be interpreted as communicating a non-literal cognitive content—(something like) man is by nature social. But what is one to do with William Blake's ([1789/1912]), 'O rose, thou art sick'? What is the special (non-literal) cognitive content of *this* metaphor?" (p. 147). So next, sticking with conversational metaphor for now, we'll consider a non-robust context.

⁴ I am grateful to Elisabeth Camp for discussion that was very helpful in formulating this notion of robustness.

Imagine that *A* and *B* have not yet begun their conversation, and perhaps do not know each other terribly well, though they both know Lila. *B* then approaches *A*, and the following conversation ensues:

Dialogue 2

B: What do you think of Lila?

A: Lila is Mount Everest!

Here, the Gricean story does not seem to work. *B* can still recognize that *A*'s utterance is obviously false, but from there it is difficult to know how to proceed. Does *A* mean, perhaps, that Lila is difficult and challenging in some way? That she is aesthetically awe-inspiring? That she is overrated, perhaps? That she is dangerous? That it is difficult to talk to her or approach her? Even if we tried to create a disjunction of all of these claims, the paraphrase would seem inadequate. *A* could plausibly say that she didn't mean anything as determinate as that list of properties. This is the sort of metaphorical utterance that seems to most clearly defy adequate literal paraphrase.

As a first step toward a paraphrase of this tricky case, it's helpful to think about what the point of the utterance seems to be. Given the context's non-robustness, all that *A* can reasonably expect is that *B* will associate Lila with Mount Everest in her mind, to see what similarities might occur to her, rather than that *B* will attribute any particular belief about Lila to *A*. In other words, the utterance seems to have *compliance* conditions rather than truth conditions, at the level of speaker meaning. If that's correct, then to find a literal paraphrase, we need an utterance that literally has compliance conditions. This amounts to treating the metaphorical utterance as an indirect speech act, which we can paraphrase as follows: "Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!"

We'll call this a *Type 2* paraphrase—a paraphrase that takes the form of a command to associate two things together in one's mind and see what similarities emerge. I'm not rigidly

committed to a specific formulation of the paraphrase here—‘Compare Lila to Mount Everest!’ or ‘Try to think of similarities between Lila and Mount Everest!’ also seem acceptable. Different contexts may allow for subtly different sorts of paraphrases, but all Type 2 paraphrases take the form of some sort of directive to associate one thing with another in one’s mind.⁵

Let’s now consider how well this strategy applies to Reimer’s example of a metaphorical utterance that resists paraphrase: Blake’s ‘O rose, thou art sick.’ Unlike our previous examples, this is a poetic metaphorical utterance, but it is one that seems to rely on flouting, as ordinary conversational metaphor does. Instead of a speaker and hearer in each other’s presence, we have an author, perhaps a fictional speaker, and a constantly shifting audience. Context still plays an important role, but this time the context that matters is the one offered within the poem, as well as perhaps the author’s context or that of a foreseeable audience. Such contexts can be either robust or not, just as conversational contexts can, allowing for different kinds of paraphrases. Importantly, paraphrase still has the same goal: producing an utterance whose literal content matches the original utterance’s non-literal content.

Given the importance of context, we’ll begin by looking at the entire poem:

O rose, thou art sick:
The invisible worm,
That flies in the night
In the howling storm,

Has found out thy bed
Of crimson joy;
And his dark secret love
Does thy life destroy (Blake 1789/1912, p. 43).

⁵ Martin Warner (1973) proposes an understanding of what evocative metaphorical utterances convey that is somewhat similar to our Type 2 paraphrases (p. 370). However, he sees metaphorical utterances not as indirect directives, but as their own distinct type of illocutionary act, and he is in fact one of the proponents of the Non-Literality Assumption listed in this paper’s Introduction.

Even with the context in mind, including some knowledge of 18th-century English sexual norms, a clear Type 1 paraphrase does not suggest itself, which is probably what motivated Reimer's skepticism about paraphrasability. But I'll suggest the following Type 2 paraphrase for the poem's first line: "Think of a rose infested with a worm, and associate it with erotic love!"

Of course, arriving at this paraphrase is not what the reader's actual engagement with the metaphorical utterance amounts to. Rather, the heart of the reader's engagement with the metaphorical utterance will involve *carrying out* the prescribed mental association until it no longer seems fruitful. This will need to be done in concert with the interpretation of the rest of the poem. But crucially, with Type 2 paraphrases in our toolbox, the complexity of this interpretive process is no obstacle to paraphrasability.

With Type 2 paraphrases on the table, one might wonder whether we can also construct one for the utterance of 'Lila is Mount Everest!' in Dialogue 1. In Dialogue 1, after *B* recovers the content 'Talking to Lila about my new project is a major achievement that required effort,' she might wonder to herself, why did *A* convey this content to me indirectly rather than directly? In other words, recovery of the first non-literal content might lead to a second-order implicature involving a Gricean Manner maxim—an implicature that is generated from the fact that *A* conveyed a simple content to *B* in a way that seems needlessly complicated.⁶ A reasonable explanation for the complexity would be that *A* also intends *B* to compare Lila to Mount Everest more broadly. In other words, the "Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!" content seems to be present there too, though in a subsidiary

⁶ Grice lists "Be perspicuous" as a supermaxim under Manner, with "Avoid obscurity of expression," "Avoid ambiguity," "Be brief," and "Be orderly" falling under it. He acknowledges that there may be other Manner maxims, and the one to which I'm appealing here would be something like 'Be direct,' which also falls naturally under "Be perspicuous" (Grice 1989, p. 27).

capacity, and thus a Type 2 paraphrase is appropriate too. The suitability of this second paraphrase explains why the initial Type 1 paraphrase may have seemed unsatisfactory.

But importantly, a similar point does *not* apply to our ‘Hector is a mouse’ case. Using ‘mouse’ metaphorically in that kind of situation is so common that once the hearer has recovered the typical ‘Hector is timid’ content, there will be no question about why the speaker conveyed what she did in *that* particular way. In other words, there is no open-ended, indirect command to compare Hector to a mouse more broadly.

It’s also worth noting that when both Type 1 and 2 paraphrases are appropriate for a single metaphorical utterance, the Type 2 paraphrase will be secondary or subsidiary to the Type 1 paraphrase (as was the case for the metaphorical utterance in Dialogue 1) and not the other way around. When a hearer encounters an obviously false utterance, she asks herself what the speaker could be trying to convey instead. In a robust context, a determinate alternate claim will be salient, and that’s what the hearer will hit upon (and be intended by the speaker to hit upon) first, allowing for a Type 1 paraphrase. Then, if there’s a question about why the speaker chose to convey such a determinate content in an unusual and relatively taxing way, a secondary Type 2 paraphrase is appropriate. On the other hand, in a non-robust context, there is no determinate alternate claim, which means that the first suitable paraphrase will be Type 2. Now of course, various determinate properties will occur to the hearer as she complies with the indirect directive. But none of these in particular will be meant by the speaker because, as stipulated, the context is non-robust, and as a result there are no *particular* alternate claims the speaker can reasonably expect the hearer to hit upon. So, only in certain robust contexts are both types of paraphrase suitable for the same metaphorical utterance, and in such cases, the Type 2 paraphrase will be secondary to the Type 1 paraphrase.

The upshot of the preceding discussion is that there are three kinds of metaphorical utterances: metaphorical utterances that admit of only a Type 1 paraphrase (*i.e.*, trite metaphorical utterances), metaphorical utterances that admit of a primary Type 1 paraphrase and a secondary Type 2 paraphrase (*i.e.*, non-trite metaphorical utterances in robust contexts), and metaphorical utterances that admit of only a Type 2 paraphrase (*i.e.*, metaphorical utterances in non-robust contexts). See Figure 1 for a comparison.⁷

	Primary paraphrase: Type 1	Primary paraphrase: Type 2
No secondary paraphrase	Trite metaphorical utterances (<i>e.g.</i> , ‘Hector is a mouse.’)	Metaphorical utterances in non-robust contexts (<i>e.g.</i> , Dialogue 2)
Secondary paraphrase: Type 2	Non-trite metaphorical utterances in robust contexts (<i>e.g.</i> , Dialogue 1)	

Figure 1: *Three kinds of metaphorical utterances*

The recognition that many metaphorical utterances that admit of Type 1 paraphrases also admit of secondary Type 2 paraphrases makes the view defended in this paper quite friendly to accounts of metaphor such as Richard Moran’s (1989) and Elisabeth Camp’s (2017). As Moran (1989) puts it, “there are two dimensions of metaphor, the dimension of effects, which I’ve referred to in terms of framing or the adoption of a perspective, and the dimension of the beliefs that prompt the comparison in the first place,” where “it is natural to assume that these initiating beliefs are part of what [the speaker] means to communicate” (pp. 108–109). I think that many metaphorical utterances do have these two dimensions, but the

⁷ Camp (2006) makes some remarks that foreshadow my categorizations: “In conversations where the speaker intends to make a determinate point, this merely requires identifying a few features in the subject characterization which can be matched to prominent features in the governing characterization. For richer, more ‘deeply meant’ metaphors, however, the speaker wants his hearer to take the project of applying the governing characterization more seriously” (p. 9). Mitchell Green (2017) also draws a somewhat similar distinction between image-permitting and image-demanding metaphors, but his distinction has to do with just the hearer’s pre-existing familiarity with the metaphor (or lack thereof) rather than with the metaphorical utterance’s own content. Also, on my view, metaphorical utterances that admit of only Type 2 paraphrases do not necessarily demand *images*, although images may play a role—what they demand are *associations*.

two dimensions are just two levels of implicature—a first level generated by a Quality (or perhaps Quantity) maxim, and the second by a Manner maxim.

The major contribution of the present paper, beyond what Moran and Camp have offered, is to show how even the open-ended, framing effects dimension of metaphor poses no obstacle to adequate paraphrase, once we have Type 2 paraphrases in our toolbox. Moran (1989) himself is an advocate of the Inadequacy Assumption (p. 90), and Camp (2006) has stated that a metaphorical utterance’s framing effects cannot be captured in paraphrase (p. 9). But on my view, many metaphorical utterances are best seen as indirect directives to engage in the kind of mental activity that will generate the framing effects, leaving the actual framing effects themselves on the perlocutionary side (in J.L. Austin’s (1962) sense). Framing effects thus no longer present any threat to paraphrasability.⁸

It is also worth noting that the introduction of Type 2 paraphrases strengthens the Gricean approach to conversational metaphor. The Gricean approach works only if all conversational metaphorical utterances pragmatically convey a determinate content, and Type 2 paraphrases point toward a determinate content for even the most evocative, open-ended metaphorical utterances.⁹

⁸ The view put forward in this paper might be thought to receive additional support from David Hills (2008), who argues for paraphrasability on the following grounds: speakers seem to paraphrase their own metaphorical utterances, and it would be absurd to suggest that speakers are misguided about whether their own utterances can be paraphrased (pp. 20–24). However, I don’t think Hills successfully establishes that the speakers in his examples actually do think of the additional statements surrounding their metaphorical utterances as *paraphrases*. He gives us no compelling reason to think that such speakers take themselves to be expressing the same content already expressed by their metaphorical utterance, rather than (for instance) just expressing some of the thoughts that they hoped their metaphorical utterance would inspire. In a similar vein, Mark Phelan (2010) uses empirical research to argue that ordinary speakers do not generally think that metaphorical utterances are harder to paraphrase than literal ones. However, Phelan’s work seems open to the objection that the lack of context provided for the utterances whose paraphrases participants were asked to evaluate may have led participants to be satisfied with rather trite paraphrases of the metaphorical utterances they considered, treating them more like dead metaphors.

⁹ For instance, Ernie Lepore and Matthew Stone (2015) criticize Gricean approaches to metaphor on the grounds that metaphorical utterances call for “a distinctive and creative kind of interpretive engagement,” rather than conveying a determinate propositional content (p. 170). Type 2 paraphrases allow us to accommodate the open-ended engagement to which Lepore and Stone rightly point without having to give up on a determinate content

4 Questions and responses

Next, we'll turn toward a series of possible questions about the approach to paraphrase proposed above. Some of these questions and responses amount to objections and replies; others are more clarificatory in nature and lead to discussion of further details of the view. Much of the discussion will focus on Type 2 paraphrases, as they are the most distinctive aspect of the view.

4.1 Do Type 2 paraphrases eliminate trivial unparaphrasability?

With Type 2 paraphrases on the table, one might wonder whether the trivial unparaphrasability discussed in Section 2 has been eliminated. As a reminder, trivial unparaphrasability occurs when a metaphorical utterance is used to bridge a semantic gap, such as when a scientist discovers a previously unknown aspect of reality. One might wonder: even for a metaphorical utterance that bridges a semantic gap, won't a Type 2 paraphrase be possible?

It's true that some cases that might initially have seemed trivially unparaphrasable do admit of Type 2 paraphrases. For instance, if a scientist says of new particles she has discovered, 'These particles are incorrigible embezzlers,' she might well be trying to get her audience to engage in the kind of comparison that makes a Type 2 paraphrase appropriate. The paraphrase would then be, 'Think of the particles and associate them with incorrigible embezzlers!' or perhaps 'Think of embezzlers and consider what properties they have that might help us understand what the particles are like!' So, the introduction of Type 2 paraphrases does reveal that the class of trivially unparaphrasable metaphorical utterances is smaller than one might initially think.

for metaphorical utterances (taking the form of a directive, in this kind of case) and thus without undermining the Gricean approach, at least as it applies to conversational metaphor.

But nonetheless, some metaphorical utterances in scientific contexts remain trivially unparaphrasable. In a robust context, a metaphorical utterance of ‘These particles are incorrigible embezzlers’ might attribute an entirely determinate property to the particles—one that the audience is able to grasp, but which nonetheless cannot be literally attributed in their language.¹⁰ Moreover, grasping the content of such a metaphorical utterance will not generate a further Manner implicature that would allow a Type 2 paraphrase: the speaker expects the hearer to be aware that the content is not literally expressible in the language, so expressing that content metaphorically will already appear maximally cooperative. Similar considerations apply with respect to semantic gaps (however rare they may be) that do not relate to scientific discoveries.

4.2 How can Type 2 paraphrases be adequate given that they seem less likely than the original metaphorical utterance to bring about the speaker’s desired effects?

It might seem troubling that Type 2 paraphrases are likely to be much less effective than the original metaphorical utterance at obtaining the hearer’s compliance. Uttering ‘Lila is Mount Everest!’ seems likelier to prompt meaningful reflection about the similarities between the two than uttering ‘Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila’ would be. This might seem to suggest that the latter isn’t an adequate paraphrase of the former, and that that dimension of metaphor is not capturable in a paraphrase (*cf.* Moran 1989, pp. 90, 112).

¹⁰ It’s worth noting that this claim presupposes that thought is not entirely dependent on language, if thought being dependent on language entails that our thoughts are limited to what we can literally express using our language. But the claim in the main text *is* perfectly compatible with the view that the capacity for some higher-level kinds of thought is dependent upon our having a language (see Searle 2009, pp. 95–96). Perhaps having a language acts as a kind of springboard that allows one to have thoughts that were previously inaccessible, although the content of those thoughts may go beyond the semantic contents expressible in that language, by means of devices such as metaphor. There is, of course, quite a bit more to say here, but questions about metaphorical thought lie beyond the scope of the present paper.

However, as others have noted, a paraphrase of a metaphorical utterance (and paraphrases more generally) may not have all of the same perlocutionary effects as the original (*cf.* Manns 1975, p. 364; Bache 1981, p. 323; Camp 2006, p. 9; Hills 2008, p. 15). Particularly in the case of an indirect directive, it's actually unsurprising that the indirect version would be more successful than the direct version at bringing about the perlocutionary effect of compliance. For instance, uttering 'I'd be so grateful if the dishes were clean' rather than 'Wash the dishes!' (or even 'Please wash the dishes') is often more effective.

This issue connects to a question that has been lurking in the background but which we have not yet explicitly addressed: the question of what makes a paraphrase of a metaphorical utterance *adequate*. Stated most plainly, my answer is that a paraphrase is adequate so long as its literal truth (or other) conditions match the metaphorical utterance's non-literal truth (or other) conditions. Then, in the case of metaphorical utterances that admit of two levels of paraphrase, the claim is that the original metaphorical utterance had two levels of non-literal truth (or other) conditions (*cf.* Camp 2006, p. 2). Importantly, in the case of a Type 2 paraphrase, adequacy does not require the paraphrase to be equally successful at getting those conditions *met* by means of the hearer's compliance with the directive.

Another important factor with respect to adequacy is that there is no need to add an 'and so on' or '*et cetera*' to our paraphrases. It's true that engagement with many metaphorical utterances is open-ended, but the open-endedness has now been moved entirely to the perlocutionary side, with the utterance's content being an entirely determinate directive.

4.3 How can Type 2 paraphrases ever be correct, given that language users don't think of themselves as issuing indirect directives when they produce metaphorical assertions?

Another concern one might have about Type 2 paraphrases is that we don't ordinarily think of ourselves as issuing indirect directives when we produce metaphorical utterances in the indicative mood. The Gricean picture of conversational implicature to which I've been appealing seems to incorporate quite a bit of awareness on the speaker's part: the speaker is supposed to believe or intend that the hearer will be able to recover the implicature in a certain way (Grice 1989, pp. 30–31). If we don't think of any of our metaphorical assertions as indirect directives, how could they possibly *be* indirect directives? By way of contrast, in the 'I'd be so grateful if the dishes were clean' example mentioned above, the speaker almost certainly has a clear awareness that her utterance is an indirect directive.

The broader issue—that speakers don't always seem to consciously have the mental states that Grice portrays as central to conversational implicature—affects more than just Type 2 paraphrases for metaphorical utterances (for instance, see Grice's (1989) discussion of a closely related issue (pp. 221–223)). My view is that speakers can be said to have the required beliefs or intentions even if they cannot bring them to conscious awareness, as long as they have a tendency to act as though they have those beliefs or intentions. For instance, although *A* in Dialogue 2 might not judge 'Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!' to be a good paraphrase of her utterance if we offered it, nonetheless she will probably go on to behave in ways that reveal that she wanted *B* to recover and comply with that command. She will express dissatisfaction if *B* just denies that Lila is identical to any mountain at all, let alone

Mount Everest, or if *B* makes it evident that she attributes a single, determinate assertive content to the metaphorical utterance.¹¹

But then, in light of the response just offered, one might worry that it will turn out that all (or nearly all) utterances are indirect directives—that is, that utterances generally convey not only the content we'd ordinarily associate with them, but also indirect commands to bring about the speaker's desired perlocutionary effects. After all, speakers often behave in ways that reveal that they intend or believe that particular perlocutionary effects will result from their utterances.

But recall again the key role that Manner plays in generating the Type 2 paraphrase for the metaphorical utterance in Dialogue 1. There, the command to associate Lila with Mount Everest is communicated indirectly because once the hearer recovers the relatively straightforward claim being made about Lila (*i.e.*, "Talking to Lila about my new project is a major achievement that required effort"), the speaker's choice to convey that content by means of the odd claim that Lila is Mount Everest appears uncooperative. And that strangeness of manner is what makes it the case that the best explanation of the speaker's behavior that would preserve the assumption that she is behaving cooperatively is that the speaker also intends to convey the command "Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!"

¹¹ See Bennett (1976) for more on this approach of "treating mental items as theoretical entities which are postulated by a certain kind of theory to explain behaviour" (p. 3). The question of *why* speakers are sometimes unable to bring beliefs or intentions that are evident in their behavior to conscious awareness is complex, but the answer likely has to do with our high level of skill with metaphor. Much like a skilled athlete may behave in ways that evidence beliefs or intentions about other players' behavior of which she is not (and perhaps cannot become) aware, we skilled language users may behave in ways that evidence beliefs or intentions about hearers' behavior of which we are not (and perhaps cannot become) aware. A sports commentator might say of a basketball player: "She cut left because she believed her opponent would go right," and this might be true even if the player in question never consciously experienced such a belief because her attention was focused on a plan to get into a certain formation with her teammates. Similarly, a speaker might produce a metaphorical utterance with beliefs or intentions about the hearer's future behavior of which she is not conscious because she is focused on a broader plan of convincing the hearer of something. See Christensen *et al.* (2016) for more on this idea of conscious focus on just "higher-level action control" in skilled activity (p. 38).

Contrastingly, consider a case in which *B* tells *A* that Lila went to high school with *B*'s cousin. We'll stipulate that *B* intends to produce a particular perlocutionary effect: that *A* will mention this to the cousin (who, we'll assume, is nearby), and then the cousin will tell *A* how unpleasant Lila was in high school. But this does not generate an indirect directive with the content 'Ask my cousin about Lila!' because the literal content of the utterance does not fail to conform or appear to fail to conform to any conversational maxims—it is (in easily imaginable fleshed-out contexts) true, sufficiently informative, *etc.* More precisely, what matters is that the utterance does not fail to conform (or appear to fail to conform) to any conversational maxims in a way that pressures *A* to infer that *B* wants *A* to approach *B*'s cousin and discuss the high school connection; the utterance might give rise to some other conversational implicature while still not implicating the command to approach *B*'s cousin and discuss the high school connection.

4.4 How is the talk about different types of paraphrases being appropriate for metaphorical utterances in different kinds of contexts compatible with the key role for speaker meaning—and thus, intentions—in our discussion of conversational implicature?

There are two strains running through this paper that might seem incompatible. On one hand, we've described different types of paraphrases as being appropriate for metaphorical utterances in different kinds of *contexts*. On the other hand, we've also described the non-literal content of metaphorical utterances as determined by what speakers mean by their utterances, or in other words, by speakers' communicative *intentions* (Grice 1989, p. 219). This generates a tension within the paper that can be brought out more pointedly by asking: why should the non-robustness of the context in Dialogue 2 make it the case that *A*'s metaphorical utterance can receive only a Type 2 paraphrase? Couldn't *A* have communicative intentions

such that what she means by her utterance is just that Lila is taller than the average woman, despite the non-robustness of the context, and wouldn't 'Lila is taller than the average woman' then be the correct paraphrase?

Here it's important to remember the close connection between intentions, and predictive expectations of success (Donnellan 1968, p. 212). Assuming that *A* is aware of the non-robustness of the context in Dialogue 2, she cannot realistically expect *B* to recover the implicature that Lila is taller than the average woman, so she will be unable to form the intention to communicate that content. The *only* thing *A* can reasonably expect is that *B* will engage in open-ended comparison of Lila to Mount Everest.

Nonetheless, speakers do sometimes operate under mistaken assumptions—perhaps *A* believes that *B* overheard *A*'s recent conversation with *C* about Lila's height, and so thinks that their shared context is robust. In that kind of case, I do want to say that the speaker's intentions ultimately determine the utterance's metaphorical content, although communication is unlikely to succeed. As a result, our discussion of different kinds of contexts for metaphorical utterances can be thought of as a discussion about kinds of contexts in which particular kinds of communicative intentions are likely (and reasonable) on the speaker's part.

4.5 The examples of metaphorical utterances thus far have included only simple assertions of the 'X is Y' form.

How could metaphorical utterances that diverge from this form be paraphrased?

Because we've been focusing on simple metaphorical utterances in the indicative mood, it's reasonable to wonder how the notions of Type 1 and 2 paraphrases could be extended to cover metaphorical utterances of other forms.

First, let's consider metaphorical utterances involving negation. For instance, if *A* had uttered 'Lila is not Mount Everest' in Dialogue 2, the paraphrase would be something along

the lines of: ‘Look for salient and significant differences between Mount Everest and Lila!’ For Type 1 paraphrases, the extension to metaphorical utterances involving negation is even easier—it will just be a negation of the attribution of the relevant property.

One might also wonder about indicative metaphorical utterances in which the expression used metaphorically is something other than a noun phrase or adjective. Consider, for instance, an utterance of ‘Harold exploded with anger’ in which ‘exploded’ is used metaphorically. In a robust context, Type 1 paraphrase will still be fairly straightforward. Depending on the context, the paraphrase might be, for instance, ‘Harold expressed anger suddenly and forcefully’ or ‘Harold became violent due to anger.’ For a Type 2 paraphrase, instead of comparing Harold to some object (as we did for Lila and Mount Everest), it would be, ‘Think of an explosion, and compare what Harold did to it!’ Or, if the audience did not observe Harold’s actions, perhaps: ‘Think of explosions and consider what properties they have that might be shared with what Harold did!’

We should also discuss metaphorical utterances that take the form of conditionals (*e.g.*, if in an alternate version of one of our dialogues, *B* had been the one to speak metaphorically, uttering ‘If Lila is Mount Everest, then you are courageous’). For Type 1 paraphrases, the extension is again relatively straightforward. In a context similar to Dialogue 1, the paraphrase might be: ‘If talking to Lila about a new project is a major achievement that requires effort, then you are courageous.’ Because that metaphorical utterance would not be trite, a secondary, Type 2 paraphrase of the usual sort would also be appropriate: ‘Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!’ But things get more complicated in non-robust contexts, where a Type 1 paraphrase is unavailable—an issue to which we’ll return momentarily.

First, let’s consider metaphorical utterances in the form of promises, commands, questions, or some other non-assertive speech act. If I make a promise that I will circle the

globe for you after we've been talking about your craving for a particular brand of chocolate bar, it may be quite clear what I've promised: that I'll visit every grocery store in our town if necessary, to find the kind of chocolate bar you crave (that would be the Type 1 paraphrase). Similar considerations could apply if you request that I circle the globe for you, or if you ask me whether I'm going to circle the globe. And again, there may be a secondary, Type 2 paraphrase available, though probably not for this particular example, which is rather trite. Before that kind of metaphorical utterance became so trite, a secondary Type 2 paraphrase would have been something along the lines of 'Think of traveling around the Earth and associate it with my future action!'

For both conditionals and non-assertive speech acts, there are serious complications in non-robust contexts, where Type 2 paraphrases would ordinarily be the only option. When someone has uttered 'If Lila is Mount Everest, then you are courageous,' then 'Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!' is not a plausible *sole* paraphrase of what she meant, because it is derived from only the antecedent of the conditional. Why would a speaker utter the entire conditional, if all she wanted to convey was something that could have been conveyed by uttering just the antecedent? The only apparent alternative—namely, trying to incorporate 'Think of Mount Everest and associate it with Lila!' into a larger paraphrase that itself has the form of a conditional—does not seem plausible. A directive is not of the right form to serve as the antecedent of a conditional. A similar concern applies to any attempt to incorporate 'Think of traveling around the Earth and associate it with my future action!' into a paraphrase that takes the form of a promise.

I don't see these obstacles as posing a genuine problem, however, because I think they just show that a metaphorical utterance in the form of a conditional or a non-assertive speech act will be defective in non-robust contexts. This isn't to say that no one will ever produce

such utterances; rather, it's just to say that if I utter 'I promise to circle the globe for you' without intending to promise to perform some determinate action, I won't succeed in promising. Similarly, if someone utters 'If Lila is Mount Everest, then you are courageous' without intending to ascribe a determinate property to Lila in the antecedent, she won't have succeeded in asserting anything. Such utterances are unproblematically unparaphrasable (aside from a standard paraphrase of their literal content), because there is just no further content there to paraphrase.

Before moving on to the next question, it's also worth noting that although our focus in the present paper is just on metaphor, simile can be treated similarly. An utterance of 'Lila is like Mount Everest' in an ordinary conversation flouts Quantity due to being trivially true (it's trivially true because Lila obviously shares *some* properties with Mount Everest, such as being located on Earth, made of organic materials, and having mass) (*cf.* Davidson 1978, pp. 39, 42). Then, if the context is robust, there will be a determinate property that is not trivial and which the speaker must be attributing to Lila if she is cooperating, leading to a Type 1 paraphrase (with a secondary Type 2 paraphrase likely as well for this particular example), or there will be no such property and only a Type 2 paraphrase will be appropriate.

4.6 Does the claim that some metaphorical utterances in the indicative mood admit of only Type 2 paraphrases fail to respect their status as assertions?

Moran raises a worry about a proposal that significantly resembles the claims I have made about indicative metaphorical utterances that admit of only Type 2 paraphrases:

Speaking of the adoption of a perspective is useful precisely because it is neutral with respect to belief and assertion. But if this were the only dimension of metaphor, then we couldn't explain, among other things, what denying the statement comes to. For the denial is not the refusal to adopt the perspective, any more than the original statement is simply the invitation to take up that perspective. The speaker does not say, "Imagine Juliet as the sun"; rather he makes a statement *about Juliet*. She is the

object of his thinking, and various beliefs of his about her are necessary to account for his original adoption of this perspective. And someone who denies that statement will be sharing that perspective for the moment, but disagreeing with some of what Romeo believes (Moran 1989, p. 108).

Imagine that an actual 21st-century person, Romeo, utters 'Juliet is the sun' in a non-robust context, in the presence of an actual Mercutio, rather than as part of a soliloquy (in other words, we'll treat this as a case of ordinary conversational metaphor). On my view, the only available paraphrases would be directives along the lines of 'Think of the star at the center of our solar system and associate it with Juliet!' Moran's worry is that if Mercutio were to respond by uttering 'No, she isn't,' a view such as mine could not make sense of the fact that Mercutio would seem to be rejecting some statement of Romeo's about Juliet.

First, let's consider the literal, semantic content of Mercutio's reply. On my view, the literal content of his utterance would be a denial of the literal content of Romeo's utterance, and thus it would amount to a denial that Juliet is the star at the center of our solar system. Romeo would, of course, not take this content to be what Mercutio actually intends to convey, because its truth would be obvious to both of them. But to see what Mercutio actually would be trying to convey, we don't need to appeal to some indirect statement made by Romeo about Juliet. Rather, Mercutio's obviously uninformative utterance (flouting Quantity) would lead Romeo to search for something else Mercutio might mean. Under the assumption that Romeo's metaphorical utterance admitted of only a Type 2 paraphrase, Mercutio's denial may be best paraphrased as 'No fruitful comparison can be made between Juliet and the star at the center of our solar system.' Depending on the rest of the context, there may then be a further implicature that, for instance, Romeo's evaluations of Juliet more generally are hyperbolic and

inaccurate. In this way, we can make sense of Mercutio's denial without having to attribute a metaphorical statement to Romeo.¹²

And of course, if Romeo uttered 'Juliet is the sun' in a robust context, he really *would* be making a statement about Juliet, and Mercutio's denial would be an indirect denial of that statement, though if Romeo's utterance then also admitted of a secondary Type 2 paraphrase (as it probably would), the denial that the comparison is fruitful might be a suitable additional paraphrase of what Mercutio meant.

5 Conclusion: The value of metaphor

Black (1955), one of the opponents of paraphrase, suggests that if metaphorical utterances were entirely paraphrasable, metaphor would be just "stylistic," a mere matter of "pleasure" and "decoration" (pp. 281–282). I'd like to end by, hopefully, forestalling this kind of conclusion. My aim has been to demystify metaphor by showing how even the most evocative and open-ended metaphorical utterances can be paraphrased in literal terms, but not to trivialize metaphor by portraying it as merely ornamental. So, I'll discuss several different ways in which metaphor is valuable, on my view.

First, there is a kind of aesthetic value to metaphorical utterances that allow for Type 2 paraphrases that goes far beyond Black's dismissive notion of "decoration." The experience of being hit over the head by a particularly apt metaphorical utterance is not at all similar to

¹² In light of the previous subsection (4.5), one might wonder why the paraphrase of Mercutio's denial isn't 'Look for salient and significant differences between the star at the center of our solar system and Juliet!' After all, this is the treatment I would offer if Mercutio, in the absence of Romeo's utterance and in a non-robust context, were to utter 'Juliet is not the sun,' and it might seem as though that's precisely what his utterance of 'No, she isn't' should amount to. However, in my view, to respond to a metaphorical utterance with a denial is not necessarily to produce another metaphorical utterance oneself. Once we know that the metaphorical content of Romeo's utterance is a directive involving a comparison between Juliet and the sun, we can make sense of Mercutio's utterance by attributing to him just a denial that such a comparison is worth making; we do not have to attribute to him an intention to prompt Romeo to look for actual *differences* between Juliet and the sun.

the experience of noticing that someone has added a flattering new set of curtains to their living room. The process of obeying the command in a Type 2 paraphrase can be absolutely stunning, leading to entirely new ways of thinking and conceiving of an object that once seemed entirely ordinary (*cf.* Moran 1989, p. 100). These kinds of experiences have significant aesthetic value, if anything does.

Another valuable aspect of metaphor has already surfaced in our discussion (in Section 4.2) of the fact that when it comes to the content in Type 2 paraphrases, the metaphorical utterance is much likelier to lead to compliance with the indirect directive than a direct version of that directive would have been. So, metaphorical utterances that admit of Type 2 paraphrases (regardless of whether they also admit of other paraphrases) are clearly more than just decoration—they are a particularly effective means of issuing a directive to the hearer to engage in some comparison. Compliance with this sort of directive can have a wide range of other effects on the hearer, such as changing the hearer’s attitude toward the things that are compared to each other, or getting the hearer to notice new aspects of something that may affect her beliefs and actions involving it (*cf.* Bergmann 1982, p. 244; Camp 2017, p. 51; Moran 1989, pp. 100, 110).

Metaphorical utterances also have a similar kind of value in connection to the more straightforward Type 1 paraphrases. Consider the utterance of ‘Lila is Mount Everest!’ in Dialogue 1, which had the following Type 1 paraphrase: ‘Talking to Lila about my new project is a major achievement that required effort.’ Here, *A* makes a simple assertion that could have been made literally with much less interpretive effort for *B*. As we’ve discussed, in relation to the cooperative purpose of *A* and *B*’s conversation, the justification for the extra strain for *B* is that it allows *A* to implicate the kind of directive content that a Type 2 paraphrase expresses. But there is an additional rhetorical benefit that *A* gains, which falls outside of the cooperative

purpose of the conversation, and in which only the Type 1 paraphrase plays a role. Rather than just uttering ‘Talking to Lila about my new project is a major achievement that required effort,’ *A* instead sets up conditions in which *B* will have the experience of seeming to recognize that specific fact about Lila for herself (*cf.* Moran 1989, p. 100 n. 20; Camp 2017, p. 53). *B* will be the one to recognize that sharing a new project with Lila, like climbing Mount Everest, could be seen as a worthy challenge, and the process of coming to this recognition herself will make *B* likelier to think that sharing a new project with Lila really *is* a worthy challenge. In other words, an indirect statement can be more effective than a direct one, just as an indirect directive can be more effective than a direct one.

In the case of metaphorical utterances that admit of *only* Type 1 paraphrases (such as our ‘Hector is a mouse’ example), the directive element is absent, and the comparison is too obvious to prompt a sense of discovery in the hearer. These metaphorical utterances are less valuable, and their use is probably more a matter of simple variation in word choice than anything else. But of course, the fact that such metaphorical utterances are less valuable was already foreshadowed by our early description of them as trite.¹³

To conclude, it will be helpful to return, briefly, to the beginning. We started with Davidson’s contention that metaphorical utterances are unparaphrasable because attempted paraphrases always seem incomplete, and thus, inadequate. This idea—that metaphor gives rise to open-ended, nebulous effects on the hearer—has been a source of persistent skepticism about the possibility of paraphrase, and it generates a temptation to mystify metaphor. The key contention of this paper is that the nebulous and open-ended effects of many metaphorical utterances do not make them any harder to paraphrase, because we can think of a command to realize those effects as itself the paraphrase. But importantly, as we’ve just seen, this

¹³ See Grant (2010, p. 269) for a good additional discussion of the value of metaphor.

approach in no way impugns the *value* of metaphor—it is (as we’ve known all along) a device well worth using.

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