

nary achievement, however, is a task of a different order for the theorist of language.

Two comments will help clarify the character of our task. First, let's abstract away from *how* speakers and hearers respectively understand an utterance, the physiological and psychological abilities they employ in their processing, production, and perception of (metaphorical) speech. Instead let's focus on *what* they each know when they understand an utterance and its interpretation. If and when they succeed in communicating, there must be common understanding, an interpretation they both grasp. Our task is to identify that common object of knowledge and its structure.

Second, the word "interpretation" in popular usage is used to refer to a mixed bag of contents; in the case of metaphor, there is additional controversy over the particular contents that belong in the bag. (Indeed this book might be read as an attempt to argue for one particular kind of content to be included among those for metaphor.) For now, I shall simply stipulate what I mean by the term; the proof will follow in the eating. I demarcate my notion of interpretation along three dimensions.

(i) A metaphorical interpretation is propositional: it is *what is said* on an occasion of utterance, its informational content (leaving it open for now whether this consists in truth-conditions or something else).² Although many nonpropositional elements—feelings, attitudes, images, and other associations—may also be "conveyed" (to introduce a neutral term) by the utterance of a metaphor, I do not include them within its interpretation.

(ii) Like any utterance, a metaphor typically conveys more information than its interpretation; one knows that the speaker is speaking metaphorically, in English, addressing someone, in a tone expressing a particular emotional attitude, etc. Of these various conveyed pieces of information, the interpretation is the information that is either semantically encoded in or determined by the utterance relative to specified contextual parameters. (I spell out these latter notions in chs. 3–4.) In more familiar philosophical terminology, I am concerned with the proposition *expressed* by the utterance of the metaphor in its context of utterance. This semantic interpretation is not "everything" a metaphor "means"; sometimes it is not even what is most interesting about the metaphor. But whenever we understand an utterance, I assume that a central part of our understanding consists in knowing its propositional content—and the same holds for utterances of metaphors.

(iii) Among the propositional interpretations of the utterance of a metaphor, some but not others may be intended by the speaker. Let's say that an interpretation that meets the first two conditions is a *possible* interpretation of an utterance even when it is not what its speaker intended, had in mind, or occurrently entertained on the occasion. Of course, when we ask for "the" meaning of a metaphor, we are usually asking for the speaker's intended interpretation, the interpretation he meant, not simply a possible interpretation. However, what it is possible for a speaker to intend by a given metaphor depends on what it is possible to express with it. It is with all those possible interpretations that I am concerned, disregarding the additional teleological, intentional condition built into our ordinary usage.

For now, then, let's assume that at least some utterances containing expressions used metaphorically express possible propositional interpretations. The task of this book is to answer the question: What does a speaker-hearer³ know when he or she knows such an interpretation of a metaphor?

This question should be broken down into two subquestions. But before turning to them, we should distinguish a third question that has been widely discussed in the metaphor literature although I shall pursue it here only briefly. This is the question of how one knows *that* an utterance is a metaphor. What are the conditions, heuristics, clues, cues, trains of reasoning, or steps followed by speaker-hearers by which they identify or recognize particular utterances as metaphors, rather than as literal utterances or as nonliteral utterances of other kinds or as strings of nonsense sounds? Let's call this the "recognition" question.

Once upon a time (and in some quarters still nowadays), many philosophers would have responded to the recognition question with necessary and/or sufficient conditions that signal and even "warrant" the judgment that an utterance is to be interpreted metaphorically.⁴ The received story went like this: (i) Every utterance is presumed to be literal until proven otherwise, that is, unless it is "impossible" (in a sense that usually goes unexplained) to interpret it literally. (ii) A class of utterances *M* (for instance, our own example (1)), taken at their literal face value, are either grammatically deviant, semantically anomalous, explicitly or implicitly self-contradictory, conceptually absurd, nonsensical, category mistakes, sortal violations, pragmatically inappropriate, obviously false, or so obviously true that no one would have reason to utter them. Hence, each utterance in *M*, were it interpreted literally, would be "deviant" in one or

another of these ways (choose your own favorite). (iii) Presented with one of *M*, the hearer recognizes that it is “impossible” to interpret it literally and (iv), therefore, identifies it as a metaphor. (v) *M*, it is also assumed, contains all (and only those) utterances actually identified as metaphors.

Despite the venerable tradition of writers on metaphor who explicitly or tacitly endorse this account, it is subject to fatal descriptive and explanatory problems. Of course, many metaphors happen to be, as a matter of fact, literally “deviant” in one or the other of these ways. But there are also countless counterexamples to the conditions of (ii), counterexamples that are exceptional only insofar as philosophers have ignored (or repressed) them for so long. These counterexamples have perfectly good literal as well as metaphorical interpretations, and some are even “twice-true,” that is, true in the very same contexts *both* when they are interpreted metaphorically and when they are interpreted literally.⁵ A few examples:

(a) Mao Tse-tung’s comment, “A revolution is not a matter of inviting people to dinner.”

(b) The caption on a photo of Japanese nuclear reaction plants (in a *Time* article on the pros and cons of nuclear power following Chernobyl): “Japan: the land of Hiroshima and Nagasaki feels it has no alternative.”

(c) A description of a radical reinterpretation of “Endgame” for which Beckett sued the director: “Audiences today are accustomed to gospel versions of Sophocles or Paleozoic resetttings of Shakespeare. But Sophocles and Shakespeare live on Parnassus. Beckett lives in Paris” (*Time*, Jan. 21, 1985).

(d) “[H]e was esteemed by the whole college of physicians at that time, as more knowing in matters of noses, than anyone who had ever taken them in hand” (Lawrence Sterne).⁶

(e) “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference” (Robert Frost).

(f) An article on the merger of the two Wall Street investment houses Morgan Stanley and Dean Witter begins with the simile/metaphor: “If Morgan Stanley is like a buffed pair of calf-skin oxfords, then Dean Witter is a comfortable pair of broken-in loafers.” This is clearly figurative (and, as we shall see in ch. 5, a good example of a metaphor

schema or family). However, the following (italicized) clauses in the same article are metaphorical (or a mix of metaphor and synecdoche) *and* literal in the same context:

Those bridges [connecting the two firms] will connect vastly different cultures. Morgan Stanley's senior executives, *in their tasseled Gucci loafers and Armani suits*, make many millions of dollars a year as they jet around the world to do deals with government ministers and business tycoons. Their counterparts at Dean Witter, meanwhile, *favor Brooks Brothers suits and Dexter shoes and shuttle around on suburban highways*, where even the more successful earn at most several hundred thousand dollars a year hawking mostly plain vanilla mutual funds, stocks and bonds to Main Street America. (*International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 10, 1997)

(g) An example where an expression that could be taken either (both) literally or (and) metaphorically is to be taken literally *rather than* metaphorically: The publisher of the *Village Voice*, David Schnidermann, was reported to have said: "I want the *Voice* to be a journalistic player in this town and not a cute little thing from the '60s that amuses everyone from time to time with *its own internal food fights*" (my emphasis). Since we would naturally take the italicized phrase to be a metaphor, the reporter immediately added in parentheses: "He was not speaking metaphorically. An angry *Voice* writer once threw potato salad at the Letters Editor" (*International Herald Tribune*, Feb. 21, 1997, p. 22).

(h) "Man, after all, is not a tree, and humanity is not a forest" (Levinas 1990, 23).⁷

From a simply descriptive perspective, these counterexamples demonstrate that the received account that relies on some kind of deviance condition cannot be the whole story. Furthermore, even if some version of the deviance condition were satisfied, its explanatory significance is not obvious. At most the deviance would explain why the sentence is *not* taken literally, not why it *is* interpreted metaphorically, a point that requires further explanation because a single string frequently admits alternative nonmetaphorical (but nonliteral) as well as metaphorical interpretations.⁸

There is also a deeper difficulty with the received story. The deviance account proceeds on the presumption that every utterance is first interpreted literally. Following a serial or linear model of processing, the speaker-hearer turns to a nonliteral interpretation only after the literal interpretation has been eliminated. However, it is equally possible—and

we now possess confirming evidence for this alternative—that both literal and nonliteral interpretations are processed and evaluated in parallel or simultaneously. Among such parallel alternatives, the preferred interpretation is the one that is most *accessible* (where accessibility is itself context relative) rather than the one that is most literal.⁹ Such a parallel-processing model is also indirectly supported by the observation that the criteria we use to select a metaphorical (or any other kind of nonliteral) interpretation over a *literal* one cannot be sharply distinguished from the varied criteria we use to select *among* alternative *nonliteral* interpretations of one utterance. Just as there is no one condition in the latter case, there is no reason to think that there is a single necessary and/or sufficient condition that overrules the literal for the metaphorical. Adherents of the grammatical deviance condition narrowly focus on the limiting case where the metaphorical interpretation is the *only possible* interpretation of the utterance. But their tunnel vision obscures the fact that we may select one over another interpretation because it is the *best* (or better) rather than the *only* candidate. And judgments about the *best X* typically depend on multiple balancing factors rather than necessary and/or sufficient conditions. Moreover, among these factors it is not the actual syntactic and semantic properties of the sentence uttered that matter the most, but the speaker-hearer's beliefs and presuppositions about those properties as well as about the purpose and setting of the utterance. These factors make metaphor identifications more like judgment calls with no single determinate answer than like warranted judgments.

Jonathan Culler gives us a good example of the subtle interplay and unresolved indeterminateness of metaphor recognition on a parallel-processing model. When we read the sentence in *Hamlet*, “Look, the morn in russet mantle clad Walks o’er the dew of yon eastern hill,” we face multiple interpretive possibilities: Either we can assume “that in the world of this play (which does, after all, contain ghosts) morn is a figure that walks over hills; we could posit that Horatio is hallucinating (the ghost has been too much for him); or we could assume that the morning here behaves in accordance with our usual models of verisimilitude and that the false assertion that morning ‘walks’ should lead us to reflect on the qualities of dawn.”¹⁰ On the first two alternatives we take the sentence literally, as the description of something either fantastic or illusory; only on the last alternative is any expression in the sentence interpreted metaphorically (and there are obviously further metaphorical alternatives). In “deciding” on one of these interpretations, or in evaluating them, it should be noted that Culler does not appeal to any sentence-internal fea-

ture of the utterance (which, as a matter of fact, is deviant); rather, to varying degrees, he presupposes some (partial) understanding of what the interpretations of the sentence on its various literal and nonliteral alternatives *would* be. In any case, he concludes, there is no single unique kind of interpretation that we can confidently assign to the utterance once and for all. Depending on subtle preferences that will vary with the context, one or the other of the interpretations will be more or less appropriate.

Although we undoubtedly do exploit a wide range of contextual cues in this task of identification, it is essential to distinguish this role of the context in selecting among types of interpretations from its other role(s) in determining the content of an interpretation.¹¹ We can know *that* an utterance is to be interpreted metaphorically—rather than literally or in some other nonliteral way—without knowing *what* its metaphorical interpretation is (or would be), and, inversely, we can know what the metaphorical interpretation of an utterance *would* be even when we do not know whether it should be recognized as a metaphor on that occasion. The competence or abilities involved in the one task should be distinguished from those of the other. And for the remainder of this book, I'll be concerned with metaphorical interpretation rather than recognition.

Bracketing the recognition question, it will be helpful at this juncture to distinguish two subquestions about the interpretation of a metaphor:

1. What kind of knowledge, or ability, enables a speaker-hearer to interpret a metaphor? Is it part of one's general knowledge of language, a species of one's semantic knowledge, the same competence that underlies one's ability to interpret nonmetaphorical, "literal" language? Or is it, in whole or part, extralinguistic? And in the latter case, is it a yet-to-be-identified power that lies *beyond* the ordinary speaker's repertoire—a kind of genius, as Aristotle and perhaps Kant hinted? Or is it simply one among the many ordinary (though no less remarkable) abilities we all possess to *use* ordinary language in an indefinite number of ways?
2. What type of knowledge, cognitive content, or information—if any—does the utterance of a metaphor express or convey? Is it a kind of information or cognitive content that can only be communicated, or expressed, by a metaphor (the same or another)? Or could it be expressed equally well in literal language?

The first of these two subquestions addresses, I shall say, our knowledge *of* metaphor; the second, our knowledge *by* metaphor. Although the two questions are distinct, they are frequently conflated. Suppose a speaker's knowledge of metaphorical interpretation is part of his gen-

eral linguistic competence, knowledge that includes a stock of concepts that constitute the linguistic or lexical meanings—literal meanings, if you will—both of the simple words in the language and—together with knowledge of their modes of composition—of the complex expressions that can be composed from those simple words. Then at least “in principle”—that is, assuming he possesses the literal vocabulary—any concept or meaning he is able to express with a metaphor should belong to the stock of linguistic, or literal, meanings he knows in virtue of his knowledge of language. Hence he should be able to express any of those concepts using some word(s) literally (even if more awkwardly). Thus the one position on our knowledge *of* metaphor would seem to entail a correlative position on our knowledge *by* metaphor.

On the other hand, if one’s ability to interpret a metaphor is something other than, or in addition to, his general linguistic competence, it should at least be possible for the contents of at least some metaphors to be inexpressible by any literal expression. The extralinguistic ability underlying metaphorical interpretation might be common or singular but, in either case, there would be no reason to think—and, in some cases, perhaps good reason not to think—that it must be possible to put the meaning or concept expressed *by* the metaphor into literal words, words that express concepts or meanings the speaker-hearer knows simply in virtue of his knowledge of language. Again, the second position on our knowledge *of* metaphor would seem to entail a corresponding position on our knowledge *by* metaphor.

Following these lines of reasoning, our knowledge *of* metaphor and knowledge *by* metaphor go hand in hand. This, in turn, encourages the view that if our knowledge of metaphor is part of our general semantic competence, and everything the metaphor expresses is (in principle) expressible literally, the metaphorical mode of expression is cognitively dispensable. From which it is next argued that, because no literal paraphrase of a metaphor ever is adequate and the metaphorical mode of expression is manifestly not eliminable, our knowledge of metaphor is *not* part of our semantic competence. In this book I shall argue that this conclusion does not follow.¹² There is an essential component of a speaker’s knowledge of metaphor that lies within his general semantic competence—although this knowledge is just a component and is never by itself sufficient to yield knowledge of a metaphorical interpretation (for which knowledge of context is also necessary). Furthermore, this semantic knowledge of metaphor is the same kind of competence that underlies a speaker’s knowledge of a significant subclass of so-called literal language, namely,

demonstratives and indexicals. Finally, it will turn out that this very same competence enables the speaker to express knowledge, or information, *by* a metaphor that is not expressed in literal paraphrases of the interpretation of the metaphor; indeed it is not expressed except through the metaphorical mode of expression of the metaphor.

The arguments for these complementary claims constitute the bulk of this book. But because it will require some preparatory work to lay out the account, in the next section I'll present an overview of the theory. This sketch will hopefully raise the reader above the trees so she can glimpse our destination despite the winding path through the dense forest that our argument will follow.

II Metaphor and Context-dependence: A Quick Tour of the Argument

Consider again (1),

(1) Juliet is the sun,

its literal meaning *L*, and the various things it conveys (again, to use this as a neutral term) metaphorically about Juliet—that she is exemplary and peerless, worthy of worship and adoration, one without whose nourishing attention another cannot live, one who awakens those in her presence from their slumbering, who brings light to darkness. Call these features *M*.¹³ The question at the center of the major disagreements over metaphor among philosophers, linguists, and others in recent years concerns the precise way to characterize the relation between the utterance of a sentence like (1), its literal meaning *L*, and the various possible metaphorical conveyances in *M*. Everyone agrees that *L* is—at least if anything is—a semantic interpretation of (1), something we know in virtue of our semantic competence. Everyone also agrees that somehow, *by* uttering (1), the speaker conveys something metaphorically about Juliet, one or another of the features in *M*. Where writers disagree is over the nature of the relation *R* between these three entities: the utterance, *L*, and *M*. Is *M* (or some of its elements) something that the hearer is *caused* to notice or to infer as an *effect* of the utterance of (1) with its literal meaning *L*? Or is *M* something the *speaker* means as opposed to the (literal) meaning *L* of the sentence? Or is *M*, though not literal, nonetheless an *interpretation* determined by the semantics of the language much as is *L*?

There is no lack of answers to these questions but the vast majority of authors in the metaphor literature have answered the last question—whether *R* is a semantic relation—with a resounding “No.”¹⁴ Since we

shall touch on the many reasons for this denial in coming chapters, I shall not review them all here. However, to motivate my own account whose starting place is the “context-dependence” of metaphorical interpretation, let me begin with one deeply held source of resistance to semantic approaches to metaphor.

Suppose our ability to interpret a metaphor were solely a matter of our semantic competence; then all semantically competent speakers ought to be able to interpret all metaphors. But not all speakers can. Therefore, there must be something else to metaphorical competence. Either it is a special power, like the kind of singular genius Aristotle and Kant may have envisioned, or it is an ordinary skill of speech that, for lack of a better word, we can subsume under the umbrella word “use.” On either alternative, the idea is that, unlike standard cases of semantic interpretation, the interpretation of a metaphor varies so irregularly, idiosyncratically, and unpredictably that no theory, let alone a semantic theory, could aspire to explain it. In a pejorative sense, this is also what authors sometimes mean by the slogan that metaphor is context-dependent, in contrast to literal interpretation, which is claimed to be context-independent: invariant, predictable, and regular—hence within the domain of a *theory* and in particular a theory of *meaning*, as opposed to atheoretical (or antitheoretical) use. Thus Richard Rorty:

[S]emantical notions like “meaning” have a role only within the quite narrow . . . limits of regular, predictable, linguistic behavior—the limits which mark off (temporarily) the literal use of language. In Quine’s image, the realm of meaning is a relatively small “cleared” area within the jungle of use. . . . To say . . . that “metaphor belongs exclusively to the domain of use” is simply to say that . . . [it] falls outside the cleared area.¹⁵

In this sense, its “context-dependence” or status as “use” would seem to render metaphor impregnable to any kind of theoretical explanation and to semantic theory in particular. Donald Davidson gestures toward the same view when he groups metaphors together with works of art and dreamwork, all of which he locates in the realm of the imagination where, we are given to believe, anything goes: “understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules.”¹⁶ This description, which recalls Aristotle’s and Kant’s discussions of genius, might fit the creations of some *masters* of metaphor, but it is a far cry from the metaphorical competence required for its *mastery* by the ordinary interpreter. Indeed the opposite is the case: much more regularity and predictability characterize metaphorical interpretation than the impression fostered by Rorty and Davidson suggests. First, there is evi-

dence of substantial interpersonal agreement among speakers over the classification of utterances as metaphorical rather than literal and over paraphrases of particular metaphorical interpretations (in contrast to paraphrases of sentences classified as nonsense).¹⁷ This argues against the perception that metaphor is entirely unpredictable and idiosyncratic, although it does not yet support the view that metaphor is *semantically* regular or law-governed. Second, and more relevant for our semantic claim, when we look beyond the individual interpretations of particular utterances of metaphors to reoccurrences of the same expression, each time used metaphorically, in different sentences uttered on different occasions, we find a second kind of interpersonal regularity. For example, contrast the interpretation of ‘the sun’ in (1) with its interpretation in

(2) Achilles is the sun

where it expresses Achilles’ devastating anger or brute force; or in

(3) Before Moses’ sun had set, the sun of Joshua had risen (BT *Qedushin* 72b)¹⁸

where it expresses the uninterrupted continuity of righteousness, which, according to the Talmud (based on Eccl. 1: 5), preserves the world; or in

(4) “The works of great masters are suns which rise and set around us. The time will come for every great work that is now in the descent to rise again.” (Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*)

in which ‘sun’ expresses the cyclicity and eternal recurrence of greatness, that things once great will be great again; that descent will be followed by ascent, by descent, and so on. Or consider the different metaphorical interpretations of ‘is a bubble’ in

(5) Life is a bubble

and

(6) The earth is a bubble¹⁹

or the two metaphorical uses of ‘hill’ by John Donne in (7) and (8):

(7) ... On a huge hill,/Cragged, and steep, Truth stands, and he that will/Reach her, about must, and must go ... (Satire 3)

(8) The Church is such a Hill, as may be seen every where. (Sermon 13)

According to the eminent Donne scholar John Carey, the poet’s choice of ‘hill’ in (7) expresses the idea that “it is necessary to take a circuitous route, investigating the claims of different churches, before reaching [the

truth],” while in (8) it expresses the contrary thought that the position of the church “allows it to be seen unmistakably from all sides, so there is no need to investigate the claims of different churches.”²⁰ Or, finally, compare these two metaphorical interpretations of ‘is (like) a martini’:

(9) A great diamond is like a perfect martini—cool and sexy. (Timothy Green, *The World of Diamonds*)

(10) The University of Chicago is like a martini. There are some people who find it an acquired taste. (Charles O’Connell, former Dean of Students, The University of Chicago)

Ignoring details, we should agree first that there is *some* difference between the metaphorical interpretations of the members of each of these sets. Second, we should observe that these differences seem to correspond to some difference related to a feature of their respective contexts. As a first conjecture, we might think the relevant difference in context is linguistic: the different subject noun phrases with which the metaphor, in predicative position, co-occurs (or, in Max Black’s well-known terminology, the different frames in which the same metaphorical focus occurs). However, it is easy to see that the same kind of difference of metaphorical interpretation can also arise where different tokens of one sentence occur on different occasions with different beliefs or attitudes associated by the speaker-hearer with the noun phrase (or frame). In contrast to Romeo’s utterance of (1) in the context depicted in Shakespeare’s play, imagine an utterance of (1) in a context in which Paris’s opinion of Juliet is that she is the kind of woman who destroys admirers who try to become too close or intimate with her. In that context, (1) might be used to warn Romeo not to get involved with Juliet. As this example shows, the relevant difference in context must include extralinguistic, and nonverbalized, attitudes (however we work out the details). The moral I draw is this: There may be little systematic or predictable so long as we look just at the particular contents of the different metaphorical interpretations one by one, but at one level of interpretation more abstract—at a level that relates each content of the same expression used metaphorically to a relevant feature of its respective context of use (whatever the relevant feature of context turns out to be)—metaphorical interpretation does seem to follow patterns and to support predictions. Same expression, same context, same interpretation; same expression, different contexts, different interpretations. Thus the degree to which we find metaphorical interpretation to be regular and predictable depends on the level we focus on. As we shift our attention one notch upward, we discover regularities and systematicities

that otherwise go unnoticed. The structure of these variations, as we shall see in later chapters, is essential to understand both the productivity of metaphor and speakers' mastery of the mechanism of metaphorical interpretation.

A second group of philosophers who are no less antithetical to a semantics of metaphor rejects this "nihilistic" reading of the slogan that metaphor is context-dependent. Their resistance stems from a second source that holds that our knowledge of metaphorical interpretation is context-dependent or a matter of use in that it is a function not, or not only, of our knowledge of language but (also) of all sorts of extralinguistic—hence, contextual as opposed to linguistic—knowledge, beliefs, and skills. Metaphorical interpretations are either built up out of our extralinguistic beliefs, common knowledge, and presuppositions—about extralinguistic entities such as Juliet, martinis, the Church, and the University of Chicago—or they are a function of psychological abilities such as the perception of similarity or analogy, abilities or skills that are not language-specific and that are employed in all sorts of nonlinguistic modes of communication or symbolization. These abilities and the faculties responsible for the relevant presuppositions fall beyond a speaker's semantic competence proper; hence, metaphorical interpretation also falls outside the scope of semantics—and instead in either pragmatics, theories of language-use or speaker's meaning, or general accounts of cognitive or symbolic activity.²¹

This inference from use or context-dependence to the nonsemantic status of metaphor cuts to the heart of my own position. I also begin from the observation that metaphorical interpretations are composed out of presuppositions and beliefs that are not part of our knowledge of language proper, that are instead acquired through general symbolic skills. What is right about the second view is that metaphorical interpretation is not *exclusively* a function of linguistic competence. However, in contrast to the second view, I shall argue that the extralinguistic context-dependence of a metaphor is nonetheless compatible with and, indeed, requires semantic knowledge in order to *constrain* the kinds of interpretations it is possible to assign an expression used metaphorically. Indeed the greater the role of its extralinguistic context in determining the content of a metaphor, the more we need to explain why only some and not other interpretations can be expressed by the given expression. A primary function of the notion of meaning is to furnish such constraints on interpretations that draw on extralinguistic resources. So, rather than exclude a semantics

of metaphor, its context-dependence exposes the proper role of semantic knowledge—as knowledge of constraints—in metaphorical interpretation. Furthermore, although semantic competence by itself is not sufficient for metaphorical interpretation and contextual input is absolutely necessary, semantics plus context are *all* that are necessary. There is no other special power or skill needed for a mastery of metaphor, even while some of us are more accomplished masters of metaphorical use than others.

This marriage between context-dependence and semantic knowledge may appear to create an odd couple, but in fact metaphor is hardly unique. There are many topics concerning the interaction between context and language—for example, speech-acts and conversation—that fall outside the scope of semantics, but one set of questions concerned with the role of context in determining the interpretation of an expression on an occasion is squarely semantic. Following David Kaplan (1989a, 522, 546), let's distinguish between the study of *sentences-in-contexts* and the study of *utterances* and *speech-acts*. An utterance is a spatiotemporal event that requires a speaker who uses a sentence to make a statement (or perform some other act). An utterance is also subject to nonlinguistic constraints, for example, the physical/biological fact that no human can typically make more than one utterance at any one time and (if contexts are individuated by their times) that no more than one utterance can occur in any one context. A sentence, on the other hand, can *occur* in a context even if the speaker of the context does not *utter* it; likewise, an indefinite number of sentences can simultaneously occur in one context (in order to render it possible to evaluate them as the premises and conclusion of a single argument). Given this distinction, we can then take the job of semantics as the characterization of a *sentence being true-in-a-context* rather than either the narrower study of sentences in isolation from all context (or in the null context) or the much broader study of utterances and speech acts. Semantics with this contextual edge is not new. The analysis of a whole class of expressions of exactly this kind—namely, the demonstratives (e.g., 'this' and 'that') and indexical expressions (e.g., 'I', 'now', and 'here')—has long been assumed to fall within semantics. But now, with David Kaplan's seminal work on demonstratives (a term I'll use generically to include indexicals), we finally have the beginnings of a rigorous formal theory that also does philosophical justice to the subtleties of these context-dependent expressions.

To return now to metaphor: instead of allowing its context-dependence to be an *obstacle* to its semantic candidacy, I'll argue that the *key* to its

satisfactory semantic analysis is to embrace its context-dependence. To go one step further, I shall treat a metaphor as a type of context-dependent expression of the same general kind as the demonstratives. What is needed for such an account is to show that metaphors and demonstratives share the same formal structure, to isolate the contextual parameter (like the speaker for 'I' and time for 'now') that determines a metaphorical interpretation, and to specify the rules that determine the contents of metaphors in each of their contexts of utterance.²²

To motivate the parallel between demonstratives and metaphors, I might also mention that the same argument from context-dependence that locates metaphors entirely outside semantics can be made for demonstratives—and deserves the same kind of reply. Suppose (as Russell once did) that a speaker's context-dependent knowledge of demonstrative reference is simply knowledge of the entity to which one actually refers on each occasion with a demonstrative token, like one's knowledge of the referent of a proper name. In that case, one's knowledge of demonstrative reference would be entirely extralinguistic; there would be no isolable language-specific knowledge the speaker would possess. What, if anything, would be missing from such an extralinguistic account of demonstrative reference?

Knowledge of the *propositional content*, or truth-conditions, of an utterance containing a demonstrative, say, of 'this is red', requires, of course, extralinguistic knowledge of the thing demonstrated on the occasion, the actual referent of the token of 'this'. But when we *understand* this utterance we also know the *kind* (however general it may be, such as an object rather than property) of the extralinguistic entity that is admissible as the referent of the demonstrative. We might, therefore, factor our knowledge of demonstrative reference into two parts: (i) knowledge of the *kind* (or range) of values that (any token of) the demonstrative (type) can be assigned on any occasion of use; and (ii) knowledge of the *actual value* of the demonstrative (token) on a particular occasion of utterance. These pieces of information are clearly distinguishable. A speaker-hearer can know the first without knowing the second, and a theory of the first is independent of the particular form we adopt for an account of the second. But knowledge of the first type is exactly what we would predict an object of linguistic, or semantic, competence to be. Any account of demonstrative reference that failed to distinguish it would fail to capture a significant dimension of the speaker's knowledge.

For the same reason, the speaker's knowledge of the *type* of parameter on which a metaphorical interpretation depends should be distinguished

from his knowledge of the *value* of the parameter in particular contexts for particular utterances of metaphors. Knowledge of the first kind, as we would expect of linguistic knowledge, remains invariant from one to another utterance of the metaphor despite the fact that the extralinguistic factors that constitute the parameter will vary over contexts, yielding different interpretations for the metaphor on the different occasions. Here, for metaphors as for demonstratives, the speaker's knowledge should therefore be divided into two distinct components, (only) the first of which will fall in his semantic competence proper.

To articulate the difference between these two types of knowledge involved in metaphorical interpretation, I'll adopt David Kaplan's distinction for demonstratives between two semantic "levels" that were originally conflated in Frege's notion of sense. Kaplan calls the first level *content*, the second *character*. Content is (roughly) what we have been calling the interpretation of a metaphor: what the metaphor says, its propositional component, or truth-condition(al factor). So, just as the content of a (singular) demonstrative is an object or individual, the content of a (predicative) metaphor is (something like) a property. Character roughly corresponds to the (linguistic) meaning of an expression: a rule known by speakers as part of their linguistic competence that determines the content of the expression in each context of utterance (like the rule for 'I' that each of its utterances has its individual utterer as its content). Both demonstratives and metaphors have *nonconstant* characters: characters that determine different contents in different contexts.²³ This is obvious in the case of demonstratives but, as our earlier examples (1)–(10) make clear, the same is true for metaphor. One expression type, say, 'is the sun', is interpreted metaphorically in (1)–(4), hence with one metaphorical character; yet the one character yields different interpretations, or contents, in different contexts (where, as I'll argue, the relevant difference in context is due to different contextual presuppositions).

An expression interpreted metaphorically has, then, a "metaphorical meaning" in addition to a literal meaning. But this notion of meaning, it should be noted, is rather different in kind from what previous writers—especially its detractors—have assumed a metaphorical meaning would be. Its critics take the "meaning" of a metaphor to be something like the property it expresses in a context. But that is what I take to be the content of the metaphor in a context. On my account, the meaning of a metaphor is the rule that determines its content for each context, that is, its character. If we carefully bear in mind the character-content distinction, we can

answer a slew of questions that have standardly been raised to challenge the legitimacy of a notion of metaphorical meaning and the possibility of constructing a semantics for metaphor. For example:

1. If sentences (containing an expression) interpreted metaphorically are semantically significant, then, like other compound semantically valued expressions, they must be compositional in structure. What kind of metaphorically relevant semantic structure can we articulate within them in order that their truth-value be a function of the semantic values of their parts?
2. It is a truism that the interpretation of a metaphor “depends on its literal meaning.” Is that “dependence” semantic functionality? If so, what is the function?
3. If the metaphorical interpretation of an expression Φ depends on its literal meaning, then Φ must still “have” (in some sense) its literal meaning, even while it is interpreted metaphorically. How? In what sense of ‘have’?
4. If an utterance of a sentence interpreted metaphorically has a truth-value that is (or might be) different from what its truth-value would be were it interpreted literally, then we would also reasonably think that it differs in meaning from its literal interpretation. What kind of meaning might that be and how is it related to our notion of literal meaning? Does metaphorical interpretation render an expression ambiguous or polysemous? Does the expression *change* its meaning when it is interpreted metaphorically? How does this kind of change of meaning relate to other changes of meaning?

Two additional consequences of the character-content distinction for metaphor deserve mention. First, the “received” conception of semantics “gives the meaning” of sentences in the form of an account of the speaker’s knowledge of the full-blooded truth-conditions or propositional contents directly assigned to the sentences. But semantics can maintain this aim only as long as it innocently directs its attention at eternal, or context-independent, expressions. When we focus on context-dependent expressions like demonstratives, a direct assignment of truth-conditions to expressions is ruled out. For these expressions, where context intervenes, either we conclude that there is no semantic assignment at work, that their “meaning” lies outside the scope of semantics, or we must revise our conception of semantics. Rather than concern itself with truth-conditions or contents directly assigned to sentences, semantics now becomes a theory of a speaker’s knowledge of the *form* of truth-conditional or propo-

sitional interpretations of sentences, that is, of the form or structure of sentences that displays the contextual conditions or parameters with respect to which their interpretations vary. In a word, semantics is now the study of our knowledge of character rather than content—and similarly for a semantics of metaphor.

Second, the nonconstant character of a demonstrative (e.g., the rule for 'I' that each of its tokens refers to its utterer) *underdetermines* its content or interpretation, namely, an actual individual. For the same character (e.g., of 'I') yields different contents in different extralinguistic contexts (namely, those containing different speakers). Hence any theory of a speaker's *semantic* competence in demonstratives—a theory of her knowledge of their character—will be, in one sense, "incomplete" as an account of her knowledge of their interpretation. Analogously for metaphors: Their interpretations, or contents, which also depend on all sorts of extralinguistic abilities, beliefs, and associations, are underdetermined by their respective characters, or meanings.²⁴ As we saw when we contrasted (1) first uttered by Romeo in Shakespeare's context and then uttered by Paris as a warning to Romeo, the same sentence, with the same metaphorical character, or meaning, can yield entirely different, even incompatible interpretations, given different presuppositions and attitudes. Thus a *semantic* theory of metaphorical interpretation—a theory of the speaker's knowledge of the character of the metaphor—will also be "incomplete" as an account of her knowledge of the full interpretation. This kind of incompleteness does not, however, signal a deficiency in the approach. Just the opposite. The virtue of the incompleteness is that it enables us to discern the substantive contribution our semantic knowledge specific to metaphor, our knowledge of its character, makes to our understanding of metaphorical interpretation.

In sum, I shall argue that by exploiting the parallel between demonstratives and metaphors, we can identify a type of knowledge underlying a speaker's ability to interpret a metaphor that belongs to his semantic competence. Yet many readers may still not be persuaded that metaphor *should* be explained by semantics, rather than by pragmatics or by a theory of use. For the costs, one might object, especially the complications that accrue to our overall linguistic theory as a result of incorporating metaphor in semantics, outweigh the benefits. In reply, I will argue, the actual costs are negligible. We complicate our overall semantic theory by including metaphor only if that requires us to introduce apparatus not *already* and not *independently* necessary for the semantics. But if our parallel between demonstratives and metaphors holds, the *semantic* rules

underlying our ability to interpret metaphors are of the very same kind as those that underlie our ability to interpret demonstratives. Those rules (or something like them) *already* constitute part of our semantic competence in *nonmetaphorical* language, our competence in demonstratives. (All that is additionally necessary, I will propose, is one general operator added to the lexicon and one rule governing its operation.) So, if knowledge of demonstratives belongs to linguistic competence, so should the corresponding knowledge governing metaphorical interpretation. Given a semantics for demonstratives, metaphor can be had (virtually) for free.

With this overview of the argument in hand, let me conclude this section with an outline of the chapters to follow.

Given my focus on context-dependence, the obvious, natural place to locate metaphor within an all-inclusive linguistic theory is in pragmatics or a use-oriented account; and this is, as we have said, the datum from which many writers in fact conclude that metaphor should be explained as a type of use or speech performance. To motivate my turn instead to a semantic account of metaphor, I therefore begin, in chapter 2, with a closer look at pragmatic or use theories. Concentrating on the influential essays of Donald Davidson, I argue that use theories *need* semantics precisely in order to constrain their too-powerful resources—to explain why specific expressions can be used to express only specific metaphorical contents. A close critical look at Davidson's truth-theoretic semantic treatment of context-dependence (e.g., demonstratives) within his use theory also serves a second purpose: to motivate my own use of David Kaplan's semantic framework that focuses on character rather than content for my account of metaphor.

With this motivation in hand, chapter 3 lays out the necessary semantic background adopted from David Kaplan's seminal work on the logic of demonstratives. I concentrate on two themes that play central roles in my story: Kaplan's distinction between character and content and his invention of the operator 'Dthat' to lexically represent demonstrative interpretations (or uses) of (arbitrary, eternal) definite descriptions.

In chapter 4, I begin to lay out my semantic theory of metaphor as a kind of context-dependent interpretation of an expression on the model of demonstratives. I spell out the relevant feature of the context on which the interpretation of a metaphor depends, a contextually given (sub)set of presuppositions, and the semantic rule of character that constitutes the meaning of the metaphor, the rule that determines its content or interpretation in each context. In our earlier terminology, this is an account of our semantic knowledge *of* metaphor.

In chapter 5 I turn to the first brand of our knowledge *by* metaphor, concentrating on information conveyed as the *content* of the metaphor in a particular context. This discussion helps my argument along in a number of ways, apart from offering a first explanation of how our semantic knowledge of metaphor enables us to express contents not expressible by nonmetaphorical language. It also offers the first detailed illustrations of applications of our semantic knowledge to contextual presuppositions, which in turn give a sharper view of the different kinds of knowledge involved in the pragmatics of metaphorical interpretation and the not-language-specific symbolic skills (such as the perception of similarity or exemplification) that enter at this juncture. Finally, as part of my explanation of these skills, I introduce the role of networks of expressions in metaphorical interpretation; these networks also play an important role in capturing the knowledge by metaphor conveyed at the level of metaphorical character, the topic of chapter 7.

Before turning to this last topic, however, I return in chapter 6 to the relation between metaphorical character and meaning, and I use my account to solve some outstanding problems about the pretheoretical notion of metaphorical meaning and the formal problems raised by the semantic data introduced at the end of chapter 2. Finally, I turn to the relation of metaphor to other figurative and nonliteral uses of language, contrast my account with three other semantic theories in the literature, and conclude the chapter with replies to a number of anticipated objections.

I finally turn, in chapter 7, to the “character-istic” information or significance metaphors carry. This information is manifest in a variety of ways—in the explanatory power of beliefs containing metaphors, in the sense of surprise associated with metaphor, and in the often repeated claim that metaphors make us *see* one thing *as* another. Furthermore, since this “character-istic” information is not expressed in the content of the metaphor in a particular context, it is also not contained in paraphrases of those contents. Through this variety of ways, our semantic knowledge of a metaphor—our knowledge of its character—enables us to acquire information by the metaphor that we cannot grasp except through knowledge of its character. On the one hand, then, the significance of a metaphor is not exhausted by its content in a context; on the other, there is nothing about that significance that is antithetical to a semantics of metaphorical interpretation.

Finally, chapter 8 briefly demarcates the boundaries of metaphor—linguistic versus pictorial metaphors, dead versus live metaphors, and the literal versus the metaphorical.

III Methodological Preliminaries

Before beginning I want to raise several methodological and terminological issues concerning (i) the unit of metaphorical interpretation, (ii) the literal, (iii) the truth of metaphors, and (iv) the use of examples and evidence. The first three discussions will be brief, the fourth more detailed.

(i) The Unit of Metaphorical Interpretation

We should all agree both that the proper name ‘Juliet’ has the same interpretation (take your pick: extension, referent, content, intension, etc.) in Romeo’s utterance of

(1) Juliet is the sun

in Shakespeare’s context as it has in

(11) Juliet is Romeo’s beloved

and that ‘is the sun’ (or ‘the sun’) has a different interpretation in (1) than it has in

(12) An especially bright star in our solar system is the sun.

We typically, and innocently, describe the different interpretation of ‘is the sun’ in (1) as “metaphorical” in contrast both to its interpretation in (12), which we call “literal,” and to the interpretation of ‘Juliet’ that undergoes no change from (1) to (11). And based on this kind of familiar data, we should say that the basic unit of metaphorical interpretation is the specific subsentential constituent whose interpretation (whatever you take that to be) undergoes change, namely, ‘is the sun’, not the whole sentence (1) and not even the pair of constituent expressions <‘Juliet’, ‘is the sun’>.

Despite this seemingly straightforward way of identifying ‘the (a)’ metaphor, say, in (1), several philosophers and linguists have other candidates. Max Black (1993, 24) says that “metaphor” is always short for “metaphorical statement” and that “statement-ingredients (words and phrases used metaphorically)” are only derivatively metaphorical.²⁵ George Lakoff (1993) says that in “contemporary research” a metaphor is really “a cross-domain mapping in the conceptual system” and that the so-called metaphorical expression is nothing more than a linguistic item that “is a surface realization of such a cross-domain mapping” (203).²⁶ Eva Kittay (1987), who assumes a version of the deviance condition, says that “a unit of metaphor is any unit of discourse in which some conceptual or conversational incongruity emerges” (24), and within the

metaphor she distinguishes a focus and frame. And, most recently, Roger White (1996) has challenged “the widespread assumption” that “in every metaphor there is an isolable word or phrase which is the word or phrase being used metaphorically” (57).

What is at issue is not terminological but a matter of distinguishing between the unit whose interpretation is being determined and the units that determine the interpretation. Black is right to focus on the whole statement insofar as its utterance is the minimal speech unit and all constituents of an utterance can play a role in determining the metaphorical interpretation of any single constituent.²⁷ Lakoff is right insofar as it is only generally as part of much larger linguistic (or, as he calls them, conceptual) networks that individual expressions acquire their metaphorical interpretations. Indeed I’ll argue that the context in which an expression is interpreted metaphorically must be broadened to include not only its immediate linguistic environment, but also its extralinguistic situation (including nonverbalized presuppositions and attitudes). But none of this changes the fact that *what* is interpreted metaphorically in a context may be a proper constituent within the sentence. Of course, the metaphorical constituent is not always a simple expression rather than a phrase; more than one expression can be interpreted metaphorically in a given utterance; and we cannot always individuate or identify the metaphorical constituent by looking merely at the (phonologically interpreted) surface structure of the sentence uttered. It is also possible for an expression interpreted metaphorically to be concurrently interpreted literally in the same utterance in the same context, in which case it will be lexically ambiguous, and it is possible for an utterance to admit multiple syntactic analyses, each of which yields not only a metaphorical interpretation but a different one. By saying that the metaphor can be a constituent expression, I should also not be taken to imply that its change in interpretation (extension, referent, content, intension, etc.) “exhausts its metaphorical significance.”²⁸ As I’ll argue at length in chapter 7, the character of a metaphor carries information beyond that of its content (in its context), part of which is also a function of the networks to which it belongs.

The question of the proper unit of metaphorical interpretation is bound up with many issues we will take up in later chapters. For now, simply as a matter of terminology, I shall mean by *metaphor*: ‘(a token of an) expression (type, simple or complex) that is interpreted metaphorically in its context of utterance’, and by *sentence interpreted metaphorically* or *metaphorical sentence*: ‘a sentence containing at least one expression that is interpreted metaphorically in its context of utterance’. For brevity, I shall

also say that a metaphor is true or false, meaning that an utterance of the (containing) sentence in which the given expression is interpreted metaphorically is true or false. Finally, a metaphorical sentence (statement, utterance) is not something that is only metaphorically a sentence (etc.), but a sentence (etc.) interpreted metaphorically.

(ii) The Literal

The term “metaphor” is often said to have two senses, one wide, one narrow. In the wide sense, the metaphorical is contrasted with the literal and includes the full range of nonliteral or figurative interpretations of language—irony, metonymy, synecdoche, hyperbole, and so on. In the narrow sense, the metaphorical is contrasted not only with the literal, but also with these other figures or tropes. I shall use the expression (unless noted otherwise) in the narrow sense—metaphor as distinguished from both the literal *and* the other tropes. But (to anticipate my discussion in ch. 6) I shall argue that our *semantics* for metaphor (in the narrow sense) could be extended to certain of the other figures though not to others: to metonymy and synecdoche, for example, but not to irony or hyperbole. The notion of metaphor that will emerge from our analysis will be both narrower and more variegated than the one in common circulation.

I rely on *some* distinction between the metaphorical and the literal and I accept the truism (in a sense yet to be explicated) that the metaphorical depends on the literal. But I shall not defend either of these assumptions at this stage. For one thing, critics who baldly deny the distinction owe us, in my view, a clear statement of what they think they are denying; for another, I cannot yet clearly articulate the distinction I wish to draw without much more groundwork. Indeed, different notions of the literal will emerge in the coming chapters and, as I'll argue in chapter 8, the notion of the literal is in worse theoretical shape than the metaphorical. As a working hypothesis, I shall assume that the literal meaning of a *simple* expression is whatever, according to our best linguistic theory, turns out to be its semantic interpretation, and that the literal meaning of a sentence is the rule-by-rule composition of the literal meanings of its simple constituents.²⁹ As a matter of fact, current semantic theory is not yet in a position to state with any authority *what* the semantic interpretation of a simple expression is, but it should also be noted that we do know it is nothing like a set of necessary and sufficient descriptive conditions. Minimally, it contains the extension or referent of the expression and the constraints and conditions that govern both its interaction with the syntax and with the extralinguistic context.

Finally, to explain how the metaphorical interpretation of a token of (a type) Φ depends on its literal meaning, I'll need the vocabulary to say that the token (in one sense) "has" its literal meaning and (in a second sense) does not "have" it. For that purpose, I'll use the term of art *literal vehicle* to refer to the expression type Φ *with its literal meaning* when the token of Φ is interpreted, or used, metaphorically.

(iii) Metaphors and Truth

In proposing a semantic theory of metaphor, I have assumed (without argument) that metaphors—or declarative sentences in which at least one expression is a metaphor—are truth-bearing entities; that they are true or false no different from literal sentences like 'snow is white'; equivalently, that they express propositions. This assumption is far from uncontroversial, so it might be objected that I am assuming the crux of what I claim to demonstrate in this book.

For a start, the best defense is a good offense. It certainly *looks like* metaphorical (declarative) sentences are true or false. Many of our innocent assertions employ metaphors. To the man on the street unversed in philosophical semantics, the assumption that utterances containing metaphors are true or false (as the case may be) would be beyond reproach. When Romeo utters (1), he not only wants to "call our attention" to a (particular) similarity between Juliet and the sun; he also intends to say something true about Juliet, to assert that she has a certain property (or set of properties) "corresponding" to the predicate 'is the sun'. Now, whatever it is that he is asserting, and thereby representing himself as believing to be true, it is *not* what is expressed by (1) interpreted literally. What, then, would be simpler than claiming that the property he believes to be *true of* Juliet is a property metaphorically expressed by the predicate 'is the sun'? That he is asserting a proposition metaphorically expressed by (1) that he believes to be true?

Suppose that Count Paris disagrees with Romeo's utterance of (1). He is surely not denying the proposition expressed by (1) interpreted literally. Romeo and Paris agree about *that* proposition that it is false. So what is the common thing Romeo asserts and Paris denies? Isn't it the proposition asserted by (1) when it is interpreted metaphorically? Indeed why not?

In short, the ordinary appearance is that utterances of sentences that contain metaphors are truth-valued, express propositions, and can be used to make assertions (or other speech acts that presuppose assertion). The burden of argument, therefore, falls on those who deny that this appearance is reality. To be sure, there is no lack of arguments for the

other side. These range from observations based on our ordinary use of metaphors (to “call our attention to a certain likeness,” or “invite” us to “appreciate” a resemblance, or “inspire” a certain vision, or “propose” that things be viewed a certain way) to theoretical considerations about compositionality and the formal structure of a semantic theory. I shall address these objections in the course of the book, but I defer them until I can first set out my own alternative theory.

One last methodological remark on this issue: Despite the ordinary presumption to which I have appealed, the thesis that metaphorical interpretation falls within the scope of semantics cannot be settled simply by appeal to “facts” like our practices to use metaphors in assertions. On the one hand, actual practice can always be interpreted and explained in a variety of ways consistent both with the assumption that metaphors are truth-valued and with the assumption that they aren’t. On the other hand, even if ordinary practice were different, the decision to treat metaphors as truth-bearers could be justified on theoretical grounds. Truth-values are theoretical entities. They serve as the semantic values or roles of sentences in a complex, systematic, powerful theoretical framework that aims to account for our understanding of language. If this same framework provides an illuminating account of metaphor, the assumption that metaphors are truth-bearers will be warranted—like any theoretical posit that is justified by the evidence for its containing theory and by its explanatory success.

(iv) Examples and Evidence: Living vs. Dead Metaphors

Theories of metaphor are often a function of their authors’ examples.³⁰ Philosophers and linguists focus on metaphors heard in “ordinary speech”; no wonder, it is charged, that their theories best, or only, fit “conventional,” “frozen,” or “dead” metaphors. Literary critics and rhetoricians analyze the “novel,” “imaginative,” and “creative” metaphors of poetry and literature—whose complexity and subtlety tend to make them suspicious of the possibility of any linguistic theory of metaphor, period. As a description of current practice, this observation contains a grain of truth. However, some theorists go further, claiming that there are also good *reasons* to take one or the other kind of example as the paradigm of a metaphor. Others, typically in the course of polemically defending their own theory, charge that counterexamples of the other kind are not “real” metaphors—hence are not counterexamples.³¹ A familiar complaint of this sort is that philosophers’ and linguists’ theories are inadequate to deal with the subtleties of poetic metaphors because they are

based on simple (or is it simplistic?), tired, and sometimes dead examples (e.g., ‘Man is a wolf’).³² On the other hand, certain linguists have recently claimed that theories that focus on poetic metaphors miss the systematicity and conventionality exemplified by the ubiquitous metaphors of ordinary, normal speech, properties that these authors further argue are essential characteristics of metaphor (and, once identified in ordinary speech, can also be found to underlie poetic metaphors).³³

These debates frequently appeal to the distinction between live (or, better, living) and dead metaphors. This is a time-worn distinction calling out for reconsideration, to which I shall return in chapter 8. Here I want to address a prior, methodological question: Are there principles that ought to govern our selection of examples? Are some types of metaphors to be preferred over others? What of the charge that a theory ignores a whole sample space of metaphors?

To begin with, I want to distance myself both from the populism advocated by the spokesmen for metaphors of ordinary speech and from the elitism fostered by the cognoscenti of poetry. From a semantic point of view, there is one metaphorical competence that underlies our ability to produce and comprehend all metaphors regardless of their context of use, be it poetry or ordinary speech. All that distinguishes these different metaphors are the different skills and sensibilities recruited in addition to our semantic competence to complete their actual interpretations in their respective contexts. At the level of semantic explanation, the linguistic phenomenon of metaphor should not be identified exclusively, or even too closely, with any one particular brand, or use, of metaphors.

On the other hand, the evaluation of a semantic theory of metaphor need not depend, first and foremost, on whether it “covers all the data” equally well. As evidence for or against a particular theory, it does not follow that one metaphor is never more relevant than another. Not that there are “don’t cares.” Every theory must account for some class—some interesting class—of data, but no theory must (or can) account for “all” the data. A theory need only account for the relevant data and, most important, it is the theory itself that provides the criterion of relevance.³⁴ Examples, to be examples, should be representative of the explanandum, but what counts as representative of a phenomenon *X* cannot be determined independently of, or prior to, a particular theory of *X*.

These general lessons apply equally to metaphor. Our concern is with the semantic competence underlying metaphorical interpretation that consists in knowledge of context-sensitive rules that determine the structure of metaphorical interpretations; it is not with the interpretations

themselves or with their effects. Our examples should accordingly be ones that bear on the context-dependent structure of those rules and, not surprisingly, these will be metaphors whose interpretations maximally depend on their context—"living" metaphors in one sense of the term. Interpretations that are dead to their context of utterance—that are called "metaphorical" only because of their historical origin—simply do not tell us much, pro or con, about the claims of our theory. And the more borderline—the less context-sensitive—the example, the less desirable it will therefore be for our purposes. But matters could be otherwise. For another purpose, say, to explain why some but not other metaphors endure, or to explain what makes a metaphor rhetorically or aesthetically effective, it may well turn out that (certain) dead metaphors are better examples than live ones. As Borges reminds us:

When I was a young man I was always hunting for new metaphors. Then I found out that really good metaphors are always the same. I mean you compare time to a road, death to sleeping, life to dreaming, and those are the great metaphors in literature because they correspond to something essential. If you invent metaphors, they are apt to be surprising during the fraction of a second, but they strike no deep emotion.³⁵

Apart from metaphors whose interpretations are relatively dead to their contexts, I should also mention here a second class of metaphors that are not maximally germane to my theory. These are metaphorical interpretations that *extend* the (literal) meaning of an expression, say, by dropping at least one condition in the (literal) meaning, in contrast to interpretations that involve changes (say, of extension) of the type Aristotle called *transfer*. When we say, for example, that Quine *demolished* Carnap's argument, we drop, as it were, one or another condition of application associated with the (italicized) term under its literal interpretation, so that the resulting metaphorical interpretation extends, and properly contains, the original one. Such extensions might be context-dependent in that the context determines the conditions to be dropped on the occasion, and different conditions might be dropped in different contexts. However, these extended interpretations are context-*independent* insofar as they do not draw upon extralinguistic presuppositions for the content of the metaphorical interpretation.³⁶ In the case of transfer, we interpret the expression to express a particular content depending on contextual presuppositions somehow associated with the term, such that the resulting interpretation is applicable to a domain disjoint from its original one (or sufficiently disjoint for the change to count as one of transfer). For example, what is metaphorically expressed by 'the sun' in 'Juliet is the sun'

is transferred from, rather than an extension of, its literal meaning. For the purposes of my theory, we will be primarily concerned, then, with transferred rather than merely extended interpretations—even though my account can be broadened to cover extended interpretations.

In sum, a theory (like mine) that claims to apply to all metaphorical interpretations need not, and typically will not, be equally confirmed by all metaphors (or disconfirmed by just any). Furthermore, *which* metaphors are germane to the evaluation of the theory will be determined, at least in part, by the very theory. Finally, the kind of metaphor that *is* germane evidence for my semantic theory, I now want to argue, is not appropriately described either as the conventional, dead metaphor of ordinary speech or as the novel, creative, living metaphor of poetry.

Let me return for a minute to the distinction between dead and living metaphors. Although I will defer a full discussion of what makes a metaphorical interpretation living or dead until chapter 8, I have already suggested that the liveliness (in one sense) of a metaphor is at least in part a function of its degree of dependence on its context. Notice, however, that this distinction between the living and the dead is not between kinds of *expressions* but between *interpretations* in contexts. Obviously some metaphorical interpretations of some expressions are dead in some contexts, but even the received interpretation of a time-honored dead metaphor like ‘leg of a chair’ only happens to be dead most of the time in most contexts. The same expression might yet be given a different living metaphorical interpretation; indeed even its dead metaphorical interpretation might be brought back to life or resuscitated in another context. Someone might tell us to look at the sexy legs of a couch; ‘hot as hell’ gets new life as ‘hot as the hinges of hell’, and ‘full of wind’ becomes, in a poem of Yeats, ‘an old bellows full of angry wind’. Sometimes, too, we can verbally resuscitate a dead metaphor by extending it, that is, by making explicit the family of metaphors to which it belongs. Thus each metaphor in the following passage would be more or less dead standing alone in an isolated context. But juxtapose them and they start breathing with life:

Although George’s own claims were *indefensible*, he *attacked* every *weak* point in my argument. I *won* the argument with him—despite his criticisms which were often *right on target* and despite his attempts to *shoot down* all my own claims—only because I managed to *demolish* him.³⁷

Furthermore, whether a metaphor is dead or living can never be determined simply by “looking” at it, either at the concrete expression itself or at its metaphorical interpretation.³⁸ We must also know how that meta-

phorical interpretation was arrived at in its respective context, which depends both on its logical form (or character) and on the role of the context in the assignment. And this way of distinguishing living and dead metaphors cuts across the distinction between poetry and ordinary speech. Living, creative, or novel metaphorical interpretations can be found in ordinary exchanges as well as in poetry or literature, and dead metaphors might equally well turn up, and be used effectively, in poetry (or literature, as Borges said). *Time Magazine*, one of my own favorite sources of metaphors, is a publication whose understanding surely requires no special literary sensibility; yet its metaphors are frequently novel, imaginative, witty, and full of life. Here is one example:

At Checkpoint Charlie, the hideous maw of the Berlin Wall gapes briefly, affording a narrow passage into the divided German soul. On its Western side, a sea of sensuous color rushes down the Kurdamm, past the ruins of the Kaiser Wilhelm Memorial Church, and spends itself violently but impotently in a scatological orgy of graffiti against the cold barrier. . . . Propelled by the engine of the postwar Wirtschaftswunder, the capitalist Federal Republic of Germany is a sporty blond racing along the autobahns in a glittering Mercedes-Benz. The Communist German Democratic Republic, bumping down potholed roads in proletarian Wartburgs and Russian-built Ladas, is her homely sister, a war bride locked in a loveless marriage with a former neighbor. (*Time*, March 25, 1985)

In sum, living metaphors should not be identified with poetic metaphors. Although we have good reason to prefer examples that are living (i.e., maximally context-sensitive) metaphors, we need not look specifically to poetry to find them.

Nonetheless, despite the reasons I have given—and indeed, one suspects, despite *any* reasons *anyone* might give—many, especially literary, theorists will be unmoved by what I have said. They will insist that we misrepresent the nature of metaphor if we really think that “ordinary” metaphors are as vital and as representative of the phenomenon as poetic metaphors. What more can we respond to this point of view?

Resistance of this kind runs very deep, resting on deeply ingrained attitudes rather than on reasoned arguments, on attitudes for which there are undoubtedly a number of sources, however difficult it is to pinpoint them.³⁹ One source might be Aristotle’s well-known claim that “true” metaphors are a “sign of genius” (*Poetics* 1458b), though he does not single out poetic metaphors in this passage. Yet, insofar as the ordinary speaker’s understanding of his metaphors does not involve genius, it might be thought that Aristotle is describing one special class of metaphors, namely, those of poetry.⁴⁰

A second source is a complex of motifs. One of these is the *identification* of metaphor and poetry. Each live, novel, or creative metaphor is treated as if it were itself a work of art or poetry; alternatively, the most basic form of literary art, or poetry, is claimed to be the individual metaphor.⁴¹ A second motif holds that there is a subject-specific “proper” mode of inquiry to study, or understand, works of art or poetry, and hence, to study or understand metaphor. It is almost impossible to spell out this “method” but the idea rests on an opposition between the humanistic disciplines, exemplified by poetry and art, and the methods of physical science. Underlying this second motif we can already detect a slew of familiar dichotomies: science versus art, reason versus feeling, poetic versus nonpoetic language.⁴² A third motif is that metaphor is claimed to be *the* essential kind of language in general, “the most vital principle of language and perhaps of all symbolism.”⁴³ In this last step, the attitude that at first was specific to metaphor is now generalized to embrace all language: It opposes any attempt to subject language to naturalistic methods of study and instead views it as if it were “something ‘higher,’ mysterious, ‘spiritual,’” something that cannot be studied on a par with natural phenomena.⁴⁴

Like many attitudes, this stance toward metaphor is not one against which one can argue directly. We can change peoples’ attitudes of this sort only by addressing their underlying fears and concerns, by showing them how to do what they fear cannot be done by a theory. We must subject metaphor to rigorous analysis and prove by example that to do so is not to do injustice to its subtleties.

One final methodological point about the opposition between the poetic and nonpoetic: Those who insist on this dichotomy only emphasize the difference between metaphors *in* and *out* of poetry; they indiscriminately lump together all (living) metaphors *within* poetry without acknowledging *their* significant differences. Among living poetic metaphors, I would also argue, there are some our theory should not attempt to explain, at least not directly.

To borrow some terminology from Chomsky, let’s distinguish *core* as opposed to *peripheral* metaphors. This is not a distinction of kind but of degree and it is highly theory relative. If the aim of our semantic theory of metaphor is to discover the general (and presumably universal) semantic principles governing metaphorical interpretation, *core* metaphors are those whose properties most directly bear on those principles; peripheral metaphors are those whose exceptional properties require significant additions to our general theory. There is also a second way to draw this

distinction: To the extent to which the general principles of metaphorical interpretation are semantic universals (or are determined by such universals), core metaphors whose properties are explained by those semantic principles involve no true learning. Peripheral metaphors, on the other hand, are marked; to the degree to which they involve exceptional properties, that is, properties not explained by universal semantic principles, their *rules* of interpretation must be explicitly learned. Both core and peripheral metaphors may, then, be dependent on context-specific presuppositions (the content of which, if extralinguistic, must be learned for both) and be dependent in one, specifically metaphorical way. But they differ in that peripheral metaphors require, *in addition*, training or learning in order for one to fully grasp their *technique* of interpretation, a technique that still presupposes the semantic competence to interpret metaphors.⁴⁵ Now, there are very specific, different kinds of poetic metaphors that are peripheral in this sense, but they are highly prominent in the work of modernist, surrealist, symbolist poets, such as Rilke, Celan, Mayikovsky, or Pound. These metaphors require a theory of interpretation, but it will not consist *solely* of our semantic theory (supplemented by our knowledge of the extralinguistic context).⁴⁶ By distinguishing them from the core metaphors, my point is not that we should disregard them. Rather, if we give them undue emphasis, we obscure the general principles of metaphorical competence they presuppose. And it is these general principles that are our primary focus in this book.

