Philos Stud
DOI 10.1007/s11098-015-0525-y

Why metaphors make good insults: perspectives, presupposition, and pragmatics

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Abstract Metaphors are powerful communicative tools because they produce 'framing effects'. These effects are especially palpable when the metaphor is an insult that denigrates the hearer or someone he cares about. In such cases, just comprehending the metaphor produces a kind of 'complicity' that cannot easily be undone by denying the speaker's claim. Several theorists have taken this to show that metaphors are engaged in a different line of work from ordinary communication. Against this, I argue that metaphorical insults are rhetorically powerful because they combine perspectives, presupposition, and pragmatics in the service of speech acts with assertoric force.

Keywords Complicity · Framing · Seeing-as · Pragmatics · Speech act · Illocutionary act

1 Irresistibility, complicity, and anti-deniability

Discussions of metaphor frequently begin with the observation that metaphors 'frame' their subjects, leading hearers to 'see' them in a certain 'light' that goes beyond any particular propositional content. These framing effects make metaphors powerful tools for transmitting complex, open-ended, intuitive, emotionally and imagistically evocative cognitive states, as exemplified by Romeo's oft-quoted speech:

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Published online: 05 August 2015

(1) But, soft! what light through yonder window breaks?
It is the east, and Juliet is the sun. (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.2.2–3)

These effects become especially palpable when metaphors are deployed as insults denigrating the hearer or someone he cares about, as in the following cases:

(2) But yet thou art my flesh, my blood, my daughter,
Or rather a disease that's in my flesh,
Which I must needs call mine. Thou art a boil,
A plague-sore, or embossed carbuncle
In my corrupted blood. (*King Lear*, 2.4.215–219)
(3) Chairman, you are a Bolshevik! (Cohen 1978, 8)
(4) George is a tailwagging lapdog of privilege. (Moran 1989, 90)
(5) The boastful Mussolini has crumpled already. He is now but a lackey and a serf, the merest utensil of his master's will. (Churchill 1941)

A number of theorists have claimed that such metaphorical insults engender a kind of 'complicity' even in recalcitrant hearers, in a way that undermines the effectiveness of denial. Ted Cohen introduces the notion of complicity while describing metaphors as devices for cultivating intimacy, which draws speaker and hearer together through the mutual recognition of nuanced, local conversational assumptions. He closes by warning that while an "invitation to intimacy" sounds pleasant,

> it is not, however, an invariably friendly thing, nor is it intended to be. Sometimes one draws near another in order to deal a penetrating thrust. When the device is a hostile metaphor or a cruel joke requiring much background and effort to understand, it is all the more painful because the victim has been made a complicitor in his own demise (1978, 12).

Wayne Booth illustrates the power of such "weapon metaphors" with a story about metaphor's power to subvert reason:

> A lawyer friend of mine was hired to defend a large Southern utility against a suit by a small one, and he thought at first that he was doing fine. All of the law seemed to be on his side, and he felt that he had presented his case well. Then the lawyer for the small utility said, speaking to the jury, almost as if incidentally to his legal case, "So now we see what it is. They got us where they want us. They holding us up with one hand, their good sharp fishin' knife in the other, and they sayin', 'You jes set still, little catfish, we're *jes* going to *gut* ya.'" At that moment, my friend reports, he knew he had lost the case. "I was in the hands of a genius of metaphor" (1978, 52).

He then elaborates Cohen's talk of 'complicity' with another metaphor about unwelcome intimacy:

> The speaker has performed a task by yoking what the hearer had not yoked before, and the hearer simply cannot resist joining him; they thus perform an identical dance step, and the metaphor accomplishes at least part of its work

> even if the hearer then draws back and says, 'I shouldn't have allowed that!' (1978, 54).

Where Cohen and Booth impute active engagement to the hearer, Richard Moran emphasizes the involuntariness of a weapon metaphor's effects in explaining the subsequent difficulty of denial:

> Part of the dangerous power of a strong metaphor is its control over one's thinking at a level beneath that of deliberation or volition… In the mind of the hearer an image is produced that is not chosen or willed… [T]he full appreciative comprehension of a metaphor can make any subsequent denial of the point it makes seem feeble or disingenuous, in much the same way that appreciative understanding of a joke can overpower any subsequent refusal of the point it makes. If someone is described as having all the charm of a damp kitchen sponge, it's no good simply to deny it, after he or she has registered an appreciation of the phrase….[S]ince the damaging effect is not carried by the assertion, it is not well countered by a denial of the assertion (1989, 90–91).

Putting together these descriptions of metaphor's rhetorical powers, it might seem natural to conclude with Moran (1989, 112) that metaphor functions "largely outside the language-game of assertion, agreement, and denial." If weapon metaphors disarm even recalcitrant hearers, getting them to do things that they find objectionable and leaving them without substantive recourse, then they must be "a powerful trope indeed" (Moran 1989, 91).

To assess these claims, we need to clarify the powers being imputed to metaphor. Cohen, Booth and Moran point toward at least three features in the passages above. First, the comprehension of an apt metaphor is *irresistible*: the hearer is ineluctably drawn into an act of interpretation. Second, this interpretive engagement produces a phenomenology of *complicity*: the hearer feels he has done something he shouldn't. Third, the hearer is left rhetorically impotent. The usual techniques of rejection leave the metaphor's effects untouched; in this sense the metaphor exhibits *anti-deniability*.

These three features are clearly related; for instance, straightforward denial is ineffectual partly because it comes too late. I will argue, however, that rather than producing a unique effect through a *sui generis* power outside the realm of conversation, metaphorical insults combine three complicity-inducing, deniability-undermining features, each of which is itself conversationally quite common—*perspectives, presupposition,* and *pragmatics*—into a distinctively powerful package.

In Sect. 2 through Sect. 4, I argue for the distinct roles played by perspectives, presupposition and pragmatics in producing irresistibility, complicity, and anti-deniability. In Sect. 5, I suggest that while Cohen, Booth and Moran have identified an important power of metaphor, the implicit model of hearers as powerless victims is too strong: recalcitrant hearers do have substantive cognitive and rhetorical tools at their disposal for combatting weapon metaphors.

Fig. 1 Old Lady/Young Lady

2 Perspectives

Our first task is to get clear on what the ubiquitous talk of metaphors' ability to produce perspectives or 'seeing-as' amounts to. Although some sort of appeal to perception is very natural in this context, it must refer to something other than literal seeing-as of the sort we engage in when looking at an ambiguous image like Fig. 1.

After all, we can't *see* life any way at all, even in our mind's eye, when Macbeth says "Life is but a walking shadow." And even when it is possible to visualize the subject *as* the frame, this is typically the wrong kind of imaginative activity: Romeo doesn't want us to visualize Juliet as a large, glowing orb. Rather, the operative species of 'seeing-as' is itself metaphorical.

I've articulated my view of perspectives and seeing-as elsewhere (Camp 2003, 2006a, 2008, 2009, 2013, 2015), so I will keep my presentation here brief. In perspectival thought, our overall thinking about some topic is organized into an intuitive structure, much the way the concepts OLD LADY or YOUNG WOMAN can organize our perception of Fig. 1. I call the thoughts that organize and get organized *characterizations*, with stereotypes being the most familiar species of this genus (Camp 2015). Characterizations attribute *clusters* of features, often highly specific, experientially-represented features, to some individual or type of object or event. Rather than straightforwardly predicating those features of that subject, though, characterizations present them as *fitting* for it, where a feature may be fitting even if it's not actually possessed (e.g. there's a sense in which George should have worked as a golf caddy in high school, even if he never did), or unfitting even if it's actual (e.g. there's a sense in which George shouldn't have majored in Comparative Literature, even though he did). More importantly, rather than merely attributing those features as all on a par, characterizations structure them along at least two dimensions. Some features are more *prominent* than others: they stick out relative to the background (Tversky 1977); while others are more *central*: the thinker treats them as causing, motivating, or otherwise

explaining many of the subject's other features (Thagard 1989; Sloman et al. 1998; Murphy and Medin 1985).

Structures of prominence and centrality are intuitive and holistic, as the analogy with perceptual gestalts brings out. When I switch between the two ways of seeing Fig. 1, the relative prominence and centrality of the figure's constituent elements shift dramatically; and this in turn affects those elements' representational import: the same set of pixels comes to be seen as a nose, say, or as a wart. Similarly with characterizations: the same property may be assigned different structural roles within the same overall set of elements, imbuing that property with distinct emotional, evaluative, and even conceptual significances. Thus, if I take George's jovial sociability to be highly central, his teasing remarks may seem like harmless attempts at bonding; while if I emphasize his desire for control, those same remarks will appear malicious and manipulative. And in turn, these interpretive differences may generate markedly distinct emotions, evaluations, and predictions.

When a speaker utters a metaphor, she invites her hearer to use one characterization as a *frame* for structuring another. Thus, in uttering (1), Romeo asks his hearers to use their (shared, contextually modulated) characterization of the sun to structure their characterization of Juliet; while in addressing the jury, Booth's Southern lawyer asks them to use their characterization of the relationship between a fisherman and a caught catfish to structure their understanding of the relationship between the large utility company and the small one. Framing one characterization in terms of another involves taking the most prominent features in the framing characterization, of *F* (e.g. of the sun, or of the catfish-gutting scenario); identifying relevant matches to those features within the subject characterization, of *a* (e.g. of Juliet, or of the large and small utilities' market practices), introducing appropriate matching features to *a* as conversationally warranted; and then raising those matched *a*-features in prominence. The result is a restructured characterization of *a*, one that highlights *a*-features that resemble *F*-features in relevant respects.

This brief sketch gives us the resources to explain why perspectives and frames are such powerful producers of irresistibility, complicity, and anti-deniability. First, framing produces *complicity* because merely understanding the utterance requires a hearer to mold his mind in the speaker's image: to structure his overall thinking so that the relevant features really are intuitively prominent and central for him, in a way that goes significantly beyond the hypothetical contemplation of a proposition. Characterizing also often involves attributing experientially- and affectively-loaded features—George walks or talks like *this*, it is fitting to feel *this* way around him—in a manner that brings those features to phenomenal consciousness and primes an ongoing association to the subject. Extensive evidence on affective priming, imaginative contagion, and stereotype threat attests to the power of these structural and associative cognitive effects, which linger after explicit cultivation has ended.[1]

Second, perspectives are *irresistible* because characterizing is an intuitive, holistic matter, only partly under voluntary control. Sometimes, as with one or the

[1] See e.g. Bargh et al. (1996), Dijksterhuis and Van Knippenberg (1998), Banfield et al. (2003), Anderson and Pichert (1978), Lee-Sammons and Whitney (1991).

other aspect of Fig. 1 for some people, we must actively try to apply a frame, by attending to certain features and attempting to subsume them under the relevant concepts. There is no guarantee that our efforts will succeed; indeed, no single set of successful concept-feature applications necessarily suffices to 'get' the overall perspective, which ultimately just clicks into place, if and when it does. More often, though, we apply perspectives more or less automatically: I just do see or interpret the subject in a certain way. Indeed, sometimes they intrude on us unbidden: I suddenly see my colleague's twitching nose as a rat's, and his nervous cough, wringing hands and deferential sniveling all snap together as part of a larger pattern. The intuitive frame provided by an apt weapon metaphor can lock onto its subject with just this spontaneous, potentially intrusive Gestalt effect.

Finally, perspectives and their resulting characterizations are difficult to *deny* because they are complex, open-ended, context-dependent modes of thought. Given that the perspective has indeed locked in, the hearer cannot straightforwardly deny that he has seen the subject in the speaker's intended light. Worse, repudiating any one feature leaves the overarching organizational structure, in its intuitive application, untouched.

Cohen, Booth, and Moran appear to be invoking perspectives in the passages quoted at the outset, and I've tried to spell out why perspectives do offer a plausible explanation of complicity, irresistibility and anti-deniability. However, the factors I've cited to this point apply to perspectives in general. And perspectives are pervasive across communication, including at least sarcasm (Camp 2012), slurs (Camp 2013), and just-so stories (Camp 2008).[2] Indeed, even such an apparently straightforwardly factual statement as

(6) John's new girlfriend? Oh, you know the type: she's taking a few semesters off, working as a barista and living with her parents.

may insinuate a host of factual assumptions and interpretive conclusions, thereby effectively framing its subject in a certain unfavorable but unstated light. Compared with other strongly perspectival utterances, metaphorical perspectives exemplify two additional features that significantly heighten their complicity-inducing effects. First, they are *novel* rather than conventional; and second, they are *analogical*, framing one subject in terms of something else, identifying clusters of features related in a common structure (Camp 2008; Gentner and Markman 1997; Markman 1997).

Metaphorical comprehension may introduce an entirely new interpretive frame—a "made to measure" characterization rather than a "reach-me-down," as Max Black (1954, 290) puts it—into the hearer's cognitive repertoire. But even when the frame itself is relatively stereotyped, its metaphorical effect depends on an

[2] Linguists sometimes invoke perspectives and frames to describe the sort of relativity displayed by expression pairs like 'come'/'go', or 'bought'/'sold' (Fillmore 1977, 1985), in predicates of personal taste like 'tasty', and in expressives like 'damn' (Lasersohn 2005, 2007). I take these terms to have as (part of) their lexical function the expression of psychological perspectives; in some cases the perspective in question is closer to literal (spatio-temporal) point of view, while in others it is a more abstract, and possibly richer, interpretive structure like those discussed here.

interactive application to the particular subject, as evidenced by the different effects of construing Juliet, Achilles, and Louis XIV as the sun. This interactive, subject-specific 'yoking' makes the change a metaphor wreaks on its hearer's mind more significant than the changes produced by rhetorical tropes, like slurs, that simply trigger established stereotypes.

Insofar as the speaker's generating assumptions about frame and subject are culturally and/or conversationally specific, metaphorical perspectives thus generate Cohen's "invitation to intimacy": the sense that "not everyone could make that offer" or "take [it] up" (1978, 9). At the same time, ironically, the fact that the speaker does not articulate these generating assumptions explicitly, and so that the hearer must do the cognitive work of identifying relevant matches between frame and subject, makes the reconfigured characterization seem more objective. That is, because a hearer must bridge the "enthymematic gap" (Danto 1981, 170) of a novel analogical perspective for himself, his ability to identify the resulting matched features can make it appear that they are out there for "anyone" who is suitably equipped to notice—where, as both Cohen and Danto emphasize, this 'anyone' may encompass only a select few. The claim that the interpretive activity required to process a metaphor produces this sort of "seductive cooptation" (Danto 1981, 170) is supported by the striking empirical finding that hearers encode unstated features that have been derived through analogical inference on a par with explicitly presented ones (Blanchette and Dunbar 2002), in a process that Perrott et al. (2005) dub "analogical insertion" into memory.

3 Presupposition

Many theorists take metaphor's effects to be exhausted by perspectives. Thus, Donald Davidson (1978, 41) claims that metaphors differ from juxtapositions and similes primarily in that the former "bully" their hearers into making a comparison that the latter merely "invite." Against this, I have argued (2008) that metaphors accomplish something more, and qualitatively different, than promulgate perspectives: they present propositional contents with assertive (or other primary illocutionary) force. Thus, for instance, when the prophet Nathan tells King David the parable of the rich man with many sheep who killed the poor man's only lamb to serve a guest, and then says to him,

(7) Thou art the man. (2 Samuel: 11–12)

he does more than pointedly hint at a comparison between that situation and David's taking Bathsheba as his wife while having her soldier husband Uriah killed in battle. By uttering (7), Nathan puts himself on the line, in the manner characteristic of assertion: he issues a speech act with illocutionary force and content, which becomes part of the conversational record and can be responded to in the usual ways, including via anaphoric reference. Thus, David might disagree with Nathan by saying

(7.1) I disagree/You are mistaken: what that man did was unjust, and I treat my subjects well.

Or he might repent (as in the story) and agree with Nathan, with something like

(7.2) Alas, you are right; and because I am, I shall pay fourfold for my sins.
(7.3) If what you say is true, then the Lord shall surely punish me.

By contrast, none of these responses are felicitous in response to the mere juxtaposition of the parable and David's actions, no matter how energetically and explicitly Nathan signals the analogy's availability.

The claim that metaphors present contents with assertive force might appear to conflict with our initial observation of metaphor's anti-deniability, and more generally with its apparent resistance to the usual devices for canceling commitment, like negation and conditionalization. The first important piece of the answer, offered by Moran (1989, 99–100) in response to Davidson and Booth, is that what metaphors assert (ask, order) is *not* that there is a resemblance between subject and frame. (I'll return to this as a contrast with similes in Sect. 4.) However, Moran often seems to suggest that the dimensions of assertoric meaning and perspectival effect are so different in kind that the relationship between them must be rhetorically unusual and merely causal or at best 'motivational'. I think the relationship is more familiar, and more intimate: metaphors *presuppose* their perspectives as a means to determining their contents.

In making a metaphorical utterance, a speaker asks her hearer to construe the subject *a* in terms of the frame *F*, as outlined in Sect. 2. The resulting reconfigured characterization of *a* is non-propositional, in the sense that it involves actually structuring one's intuitive thinking in the relevant pattern, and not just recognizing that such a pattern exists. But it also straightforwardly determines contents, including illocutionary contents. In the simplest cases, such as

(1.1) Juliet is the sun.
(2.1) Thou art a plague-sore in my corrupted blood.

where the uttered sentence's verb phrase, '*F*', provides the frame for construing the object literally denoted by the noun phrase, '*a*', the metaphor's assertoric content is that *a* possesses those fitting properties that are most tightly matched to the most prominent and central fitting features of *F*.[3]

It follows that the hearer cannot assign any appropriate illocutionary content without employing the speaker's intended frame to produce the reconfigured characterization of *a*. Framing *a* in that way is part of the cognitive background that the speaker (pretends to) assume to be common ground for interpreting her utterance; in this familiar Stalnakerian sense, it is presupposed. Moreover, this same frame will also necessarily be deployed by responses which address the asserted content by negating or conditionalizing it, just as a negated metaphor like

(8) No man is an island, entire of itself. (Donne, 'Meditation XVII')

[3] For details, including discussion of more complex cases, see my 2003.

claims that no man is the way that men would be if they were islands (Moran 1989, 100). A direct response thus not only fails to reject the original insult's operative perspective, but also risks making the hearer complicit in its perpetuation, both in his own thought and in the ensuing conversation.

Moran (1989, 104) treats resistance to denial, and more generally indifference to grammatical mood, as evidence that metaphor's framing effects lie outside the realm of communication, on the grounds that "communication involves a relation between assertion and belief, and is always resistible" (1989, 99). He notes that other uses of language, like tone of voice, *praeteritio,* and quotation, display a similar effect of anti-deniability; but he takes this to show that all these types of utterances have a crucially picture-like, non-communicative dimension or "aspect" to them. However, this sort of resistance to denial, and this sense of complicity, is highly characteristic of presupposition, as it occurs in the course of undeniably communicative utterances such as

(9) Has George stopped beating his wife yet?

More generally, all varieties of not-at-issue content, including conventional implicatures like

(10) Jane is poor but honest.

and appositives like

(11) Jones, a Communist operative, has exhorted his colleagues to join the union.

introduce contents into the conversational record in a way that escapes straightforward direct denials and other 'distancing' devices like conditionalization. Likewise, it has been widely noted that slurs have an aspect of meaning (which I have argued is also perspectival) that 'scopes out' of such commitment-canceling operators (Camp 2013).

So anti-deniability and its ensuing complicity are common in communication, often specifically in virtue of presupposition. At the same time, metaphorical insults do tend to induce a comparatively stronger sense of anti-deniability and complicity. I think this is because they differ from other presuppositional (and not-at-issue) devices in two important respects.

First, they presuppose perspectives rather than propositions—or rather, the speaker of a metaphor presupposes a particularly complex proposition, with particularly tangible contextual effects. In Stalnaker's terms, a speaker presupposes P if and only if "the speaker is disposed to act, in his linguistic behavior, as if he takes the truth of P for granted, and as if he assumes that his audience recognizes that he is doing so" (Stalnaker 1973, 448). But in this case, P is the assumption that a certain especially rich coordination of cognitive structures obtains: framing a in a certain way $\boldsymbol{a}$, in virtue of a certain characterization $\boldsymbol{F}$. Crucially, the hearer is not in a position to identify what the content of P is unless he actually frames a that way for himself.

As I emphasized in Sect. 2, perspectives and frames are non-propositional structures, binding many features together in a holistic, intuitive, and often

emotionally- and evaluatively-laden way. As such modes of interpretation, in contrast to the straightforward presuppositions triggered by expressions like 'stopped', they are not apt constituents for sentential operators like negation. At the same time, frames do have substantial cognitive and representational import. Among other things, the presupposed frame characterizes a collection of features and attitudes as fitting for the subject. Given sufficient time and cognitive labor, these attributions can be spelled out as a set of propositions. Indeed, even the complex structures of relative prominence and centrality that are so crucial to frames' intuitive immediacy and open-ended effects can be articulated in terms of—although they are not themselves reducible to—higher-order relational propositions (Camp 2006a).

Explicitly articulating these base-level and higher-order propositions renders those propositions available for challenge in the manner characteristic of presupposition, by redirecting the conversational focus onto them (von Fintel 2004). Thus, Regan might respond to Lear with something like

(2.1) Hey wait a minute! You're comparing me to a venereal disease. But let me ask you: how does one catch the clap in the first place?

At the same time, because frames are complex, nuanced, highly context-sensitive, and often significantly indeterminate, it is not always easy to identify exactly what those propositions are. Moreover, in the case of a 'weapon' metaphor, articulating them risks playing into the speaker's objectionable conversational aims, first by demonstrating that they are indeed recoverable and then by focusing attention on them.

The second difference from ordinary presuppositions lies in the presupposed frame's relation to the at-issue asserted (or otherwise illocuted) content. The presuppositions triggered by expressions like 'the', 'stop' or 'manage' are cross-contextually stable and straightforwardly empirical: the speaker assumes the truth of one proposition, in virtue of that expression's conventional meaning, in order to claim something else. Thus, even when the presupposition is not satisfied, it is still uncontentiously determinate what would need to obtain for the entire utterance to be true. By contrast, a metaphor's frame functions as what we might call an *expressive* presupposition: an implicit, context-local assumption that is required determine what the at-issue content even is, and thus to achieve even the most minimal degree of conversational participation.[4] In this respect, they are more akin to the assumptions that fix the values of 'supplementive' expressions like 'only', 'rich, or 'ready', whose semantic values depend in often somewhat flexible ways on the speaker's communicative intentions (King 2013). That is, with both a metaphor like (4) and a literal utterance like

(12) June is ready to get married—she's had a mani-pedi *and* a facial!

the hearer may want to reject a set of unarticulated, local background assumptions that contribute to fixing the content of the speaker's claim. (Indeed, in the case of a metaphor, the operative characterization ***F*** is doubly backgrounded: assumed for the

[4] Cf. Stalnaker (1998, 101).

purpose of framing *a* under ***a***, which in turn serves to determine the actual assertoric content.) But in both cases, any relevant response thereby reveals that the hearer has indeed identified them, and thus that they have sufficient contextual currency to be retrieved. This is true even when the hearer refuses to accomodate the relevant assumptions, either by articulating and then directly challenging them or by ostentatiously circumnavigating them. Moreover, with metaphor, because the requisite form of comprehension goes significantly beyond merely identifying certain propositions, and involves molding one's mind in a certain structure, any comprehending response demonstrates that the speaker has already achieved an important part of her objectionable communicative aim.[5]

4 Primary pragmatic content

The final feature that makes metaphors especially powerful when deployed as insults, even compared with other perspectival and presuppositional devices, is that their presupposed perspectives underwrite *primary* speech acts whose contents are determined *pragmatically*. This enables them to combine the rhetorical impact of assertion with an inexplicitness more characteristic of implicature.

I argued in Sect. 3 that metaphors have primary illocutionary force, introducing at-issue contents into the conversational record. With a declarative statement, the speaker undertakes a commitment to the claim that *a* possesses the properties most tightly matched to the most prominent and central features in the characterization of *F*, where the size of the set of asserted features depends on factors such as the richness of the operative frame and plausible matches, how much conversational weight the speaker accords to the metaphor, and how directly the utterance addresses the current question under discussion. Features of *a* that are matched to less prominent *F*-features but fall outside this set are merely implicated.

The fact that metaphors have assertive (or other primary illocutionary) force imbues them with a stronger rhetorical punch than perspectival tropes where the speaker's main conversational move takes place outside the central focus of discourse. We already observed this contrast with Nathan's parable of the rich man in Sect. 3. Metaphors also contrast in this respect with telling details, like (6) or

(13) Obama's middle name is 'Hussein'. I'm just saying.

whose at-issue assertive content is designedly uncontroversial, serving as a springboard for off-record perspectival insinuation (Camp 2008). Similarly, paradigmatic cases of sarcasm, like

[5] One might object that perspectives cannot be presupposed on the ground that they do not display the profile of plugging characteristic of presupposition. Moran, for instance, claims that "the framing-effect of a metaphor survives when the statement is denied, subsumed in a hypothetical or a part of a question, *or placed in quotation marks*" (1989, 101, emphasis added). A similar objection is sometimes lodged against content-based theories of slurs. In both cases, although perspectives do sometimes project across plugs like direct and indirect quotation, they are more often blocked. In this respect they again pattern more closely with expressive presuppositions.

(14) George is a fine friend.

avoid actually asserting any positive content at all, instead merely casting aspersions on, or at most denying, the proposition literally expressed (Camp 2012). Thus, speakers often deploy these rhetorical tropes to communicate perspectives and contents while insulating themselves from precisely the on-record conversational liability that Nathan undertakes by uttering the metaphor in (7).

The fact that metaphors actually assert that their subjects possess a set of features also differentiates them from their close cousins similes. Both metaphors like

(3) Chairman, you are a Bolshevik!
(4) George is a tailwagging lapdog of privilege.

and their correlative similes present their subjects under a novel analogical perspective with assertive force. But similes merely assert that subject and frame can be yoked together in *some* contextually relevant way; while metaphors assert *that* the subject possesses all or most of the contextually relevant properties delivered by the presupposed characterization $\boldsymbol{F}$. While this makes similes comparatively harder to deny, since their truth requires only the existence of some relevant matched property, it does so by significantly weakening the substantiveness of the speaker's on-record commitment.[6]

So on the one hand, metaphors present substantial contents with assertive force. But at the same time, the fact that perspectives are typically complex, context-sensitive, nuanced, intuitive, and open-ended also means there is often considerable indeterminacy about just what that content is. The determination of metaphorical content depends on which features of F are attributed within $\boldsymbol{F}$, what structures of relative prominence and centrality they are assigned, what the relevant question(s) under discussion are, and what matches between $\boldsymbol{F}$ and $\boldsymbol{a}$ are identified. Subtle differences along each of these dimensions can ramify to produce significant differences in content. Further, while the speaker's operative characterizations and communicative intentions strongly constrain and guide these values, often the speaker herself lacks fully specific, determinate assignments for all of these aspects. Moreover, even if she does have something specific in mind, she may not be in a position to intend for her hearer to fully replicate it.

The result of all this complexity, context-dependence, and indeterminacy is that speakers usually retain at least some wiggle room about just what they claimed. This in turn makes it especially difficult for resistant hearers to challenge a metaphorical insult's claimed content—let alone its presupposed perspective as a whole. So, for instance, a speaker of (4) might be taken to be claiming, among other things, that George grew up in swank surroundings. Given this, a resistant hearer might naturally respond with

[6] This is not to say that similes may not be more effective for certain rhetorical purposes in certain conversational contexts. In particular, because they focus their assertoric force on the perspective, rather than presupposing it, similes can sometimes be more evocative and open-ended than their correlative metaphors. The point is just that metaphors are more forceful along the dimension of illocutionary commitment to specific contents. Thanks to Robin Jeshion for discussion.

(4.1) That's not true! He bussed tables at Denny's in high school!

Even if this is a plausible response that falsifies part of what the speaker meant, she could still respond with something like

(4.2) I didn't say/claim/mean that he was born rich; I'm just pointing out how much he likes cozying up to fancypants types now.

At a minimum, the speaker is correct that she didn't *say* this. And even if she did in fact mean it, and it was sufficiently central to rise to the level of assertion, the metaphor's inexplicitness and nuanced context-dependency mean that the hearer is unlikely to be able to demonstrate that this is so. The hearer may thus lack the rhetorical resources to call the speaker on a response like (4.2), even if both parties know it to be disingenuous.[7]

Metaphorical meaning is not always indeterminate. In particular, the discourse context often imposes significant limitations on which candidate features could constitute relevant, at-issue conversational contributions. In some such cases, a resistant hearer may be able to pin a fairly specific claim on the speaker, and reject it directly. However, even then the metaphor's open-endedness may allow the speaker to shift to other respects of (purported) similarity. So, for instance, the speaker of (4) might concede that she was claiming George never worked a real job, but then re-justify her utterance with something like

(4.3) Well maybe you're right about that; but ever since he managed to rush Phi Delta Theta, he's been wearing Vineyard Vines and drinking vodka-crans.

Thus, even the demonstrated falsity of a proposition the speaker admits to having asserted may not suffice to undermine the metaphorical utterance, in either its illocutionary or its presupposed contents. The result is a particularly infuriating and persistent form of immunity to denial.

5 Complicity, passivity, and resistance

To this point, I have agreed with Cohen, Booth and Moran that weapon metaphors are distinctively potent rhetorical devices with the power to produce complicity and resist denial. I have argued, however, that this is not because they manifest a unique capacity for imaginative brainwashing. Other rhetorical tropes, such as telling details, just-so stories, sarcasm, and slurs, also produce perspectives with imaginatively robust, open-ended, holistic, intuitive, affectively- and experientially-laden framing effects. Metaphors are especially potent because their perspectives are novel and analogical. But this is also true of juxtapository tropes like parables and similes. Metaphors' complicity, irresistibility, and anti-deniability are further amplified by the fact that they presuppose their perspectives, in the service of primary illocutionary acts whose contents are determined pragmatically. This entails that a hearer must cultivate the speaker's perspective just to

[7] I discuss this phenomenon in the context of insinuation in my (ms.).

comprehend her proposed contribution to the conversational record; the fact that any relevant response reveals that the hearer has cultivated this perspective thereby imbues it with at least some conversational credibility. Finally, even as metaphors do assert contents, the complex, context-sensitive, open-ended mechanism by which those contents are determined often leaves the speaker significant wiggle room about just what her illocutionary commitment amounts to.

At this point, I want to address a more fundamental objection to the basic explanatory task as I have inherited it from Cohen, Booth, and Moran. There is a basic tension in the description of the phenomenon to be explained. All three authors emphasize that metaphorical insults produce unwanted effects; Booth says the hearer "simply cannot resist"; while Moran claims that metaphors take "control over one's thinking at a level beneath that of deliberation or volition." This claim is bolstered by empirical evidence about the automatic derivation of even unpalatable inferences through analogical reasoning—evidence that leads Perrott et al. (2005) to claim that "resistance is futile" against "unwitting analogical insertion" in memory. But how can hearers be *complicit* in something that merely *happens* to them? Complicity entails active participation; legal complicity, for instance, requires overt, knowing participation in an enterprise whose ultimate outcome one endorses or at least could plausibly foresee. The very irresistibility of weapon metaphors thus seems to undermine application of the notion of responsibility. It also seems to rule out application of the notion of meaning, since speaker's meaning requires that the intended effect be "in some sense within the control of the audience" (Grice 1957, 385). Instead, perhaps we should adopt Davidson's (1978, 46) analogy to a bump on the head, where we interpret what the speaker of a metaphor does to a hearer either as "striking a note on the keyboard of the imagination," in Moran's (1989, 92) apt, wry citation of Wittgenstein, or as a form of showing the hearer something in the world, like a set of similarities.

We now have the tools to see how metaphor's effects can be importantly unwilled, and certainly unwanted, without undermining the attribution of either hearer responsibility or speaker meaning. As I have emphasized, both perceptual and cognitive seeing-as are partly—but only partly—automatic affairs. As cognitive agents, we can direct our attention toward and away from certain features, and explicitly entertain certain concepts and images rather than others. Though the 'click' of intuitive understanding ultimately just happens, sometimes automatically and unbidden, we can promote certain modes of cognitive construal over others.

Hearers are not fully independent agents: a conversation is at least a minimally cooperative enterprise, and a hearer's most basic task is to comprehend his interlocutor's utterance. As thoroughly social creatures, we feel this normative constraint keenly, and satisfy it through an enormous amount of tacit, largely automatic processing. In particular, our deep-seated propensity for joint attention plays a crucial role in saturating conventionally context-dependent semantic contents, determining discourse relations, and achieving pragmatic understanding. This already involves a significant degree of perspective-taking. But metaphorical interpretation requires taking on the speaker's perspective in an especially rich way, one that is closer to empathetic imaginative engagement and that draws on

substantive, nuanced aspects of our actual cognitive make-up, producing an "invitation to intimacy" that goes well beyond ordinary conversation.

Thus, even when the interpretive process is largely automatic, it is still something the hearer enters into as an agent, in virtue of his role in a cooperative enterprise, drawing on rich aspects of his self over which he has at least some control.[8] But at the same time, because perspectives are complex, context-specific, intuitive, and holistic, the hearer can't know exactly what the result will be until he has tried it on. When he does, he finds it objectionable because it denigrates and distorts the subject, assigning inappropriate structural roles to features that are actually possessed, coloring them with inappropriate conceptual, affective and evaluative significance, and suggesting unpossessed additional features as fitting. But by then it is too late: he has already molded his mind in the relevant pattern and seen the subject through the speaker's eyes. He may thus rightly feel guilty for going along with a mode of construal he takes to be both inaccurate and immoral.

This establishes, I think, the coherence of the notion of complicity for metaphorical comprehension. But comprehension is not the end of the story; conversational response, and the larger dynamics of social engagement, are at least as important. We have seen that direct negations, conditionalizations, and the like render hearers complicit in perpetuating the insult's presupposed perspective, legitimating the speaker's utterance by continuing the conversational game on her objectionable terms. Further, even an indirect response that explicitly articulates or otherwise addresses the speaker's meaning still lends that content credibility, by demonstrating that the "enthymematic gap" between literal sentence meaning and intended metaphorical content can be bridged by assumptions that are interpersonally accessible at least in that context.

However, hearers need not be mere powerless victims in the face of weapon metaphors; they do have effective, non-complicit options which actualize their role as conversational, and cognitive, agents. The first option is flat-footed, pedantically literalistic incomprehension, such as

(4.4) I don't know what you could even mean by saying that. George is a man, not a dog.

(Camp 2006b). Such a blanket rejection rebuffs the speaker's "invitation to intimacy" and deprives her of the evidence of comprehensibility that a more relevant response would provide. As a refusal to acknowledge comprehension, it is potentially conversationally costly. But because understanding a metaphor involves so much more cognitive resources and labor than the composition of conventionally-determined (even if context-dependent) meanings does, such a refusal does not impugn the hearer's linguistic or even pragmatic competence in the way an analogously uncomprehending response to a literal statement would.

[8] Note in this context that Perrott et al's talk of the futility of resisting analogical insertion in memory is too strong. Their experiments showed that subjects recalled analogically derived propositions as having been explicitly presented by a target text. They did not test whether subjects came to actually *believe* those propositions; indeed, their own results provide evidence that they did not.

Flat-footed literalistic incomprehension is rhetorically most effective when sincere. But often, a hearer will have grasped both the speaker's perspective and its ensuing content all too well. Good weapon metaphors are powerful because they are highly *apt,* hooking on to actual, salient, and suggestive features of the subject, which the hearer cannot plausibly ignore or deny. Despite its aptness, the hearer might still have good reason to resist such a metaphor, both because he rejects its construal of properties that the subject does possess and because it imputes features that he thinks don't apply.

In such cases, the most effective response is often to re-frame the subject in one's own terms. One way to do this is by turning the metaphor back on itself, deploying a distinct characterization of the original frame in order to identify a different set of matches in the subject. Thus, for instance, Benvolio might respond to Romeo's infatuated monologue with something like

(1.2) Yup, Juliet sure is the sun: she'll burn and blind you if you get too close. Better to stay far, far away.

(Camp 2005, 725). When it works, such a response challenges the aptness of the speaker's presupposed perspective on its own terms, and undoes the cognitive complicity of comprehension by overwriting it with the hearer's own restructured pattern. However, no such neatly contra-valenced re-framing of the very same metaphor may be immediately accessible. If not, the hearer may turn to an alternative metaphor, perhaps one in the same conceptual family. Thus, Benvolio might try something like

(1.3) Juliet is most definitely not the sun: she's a bumpy little asteroid, wandering off in her own weird corner of cold dark space.

Similarly, in response to the Southern lawyer, Booth's friend might have responded with something like

(15) This utility company is not a poor, vulnerable catfish—it's a leech, sucking resources from the community by preying on the weakest among us: poor people with bad credit. The only way to keep them from getting fat off of your hard work is to make sure there's an alternative source available for people to get their power.

Such a response fights fire with fire, impelling its hearers to engage in its own species of presupposed perspective-taking in order to determine complex assertoric contents. Of course, it also brings along a commensurate vulnerability to metaphor's rhetorical weaknesses. Metaphor's indeterminacy and context-dependence may leave it unclear just how the hearer intends his response to combat the original utterance. His intended perspective may be more accurate in its overall structure, but lack the original's emotional or imagistic punch, or fail to overwrite its most objectionable features. It may itself be susceptible to manipulative re-interpretation. Still, if the hearer is sufficiently quick-witted and imaginative to generate such a riposte, it offers a way to effectively reject the original speaker's utterance, in its entirety, without perpetuating its objectionable perspective. It also thereby restores

the hearer's conversational agency. And for those of us who aren't quick enough on our feet to generate reframing responses in real time, an alternative metaphor can still relieve the nagging cognitive complicity of permitting the insult to govern our ongoing intuitive thinking.

The ultimate upshot, I think, is that we should not sequester metaphor from other forms of communication, either in denigration or in praise. Rather, we need to recognize that metaphor exploits, in an especially rich, nuanced, and forceful way, aspects of communicative and cognitive structure that are pervasive in ordinary life. As philosophers, we might fantasize that communication generally consists in the sincere proferring and subsequent acceptance or rejection of truth-conditional propositions in a joint truth-seeking enterprise. Such exchanges are indeed crucial mechanisms for achieving both practical and theoretical progress. But such interchanges are not the norm, either statistically or even normatively. Sometimes interlocutors have only partially, or barely, overlapping interests and aims. Sometimes their interests and aims concern something other than truth. And even when we do aim squarely at truth, perspectives and frames frequently play a key role in grasping it. The promulgation of perspectives need not be ancillary to, and certainly is not incompatible with, communication.

Acknowledgments This paper has benefitted from an enormous amount of feedback, especially from audiences at Queen's University, Nassau County Community College, the New School for Social Research, the University of Kentucky, Wake Forest University, Union College, the CUNY Graduate Center, the Joint CSMN and Balzan Workshop on Metaphor, Imagery and Communication, Dartmouth College, Leeds, and the Brooklyn Public Library. Special thanks to Mitch Green and Jeff King for very helpful discussion, and to Stephen Laurence for providing the drawing in Fig. 1.

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