

Metaphor: Perceiving an Internal Relation

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Abstract: The problem of metaphor has come to a noteworthy revival in the analytical philosophy of today. Despite all progress that has been made, the majority of important studies consider the function of metaphor as an analogue to visual perception. Such comparison may be conceived as metaphor as well. In his late philosophy, Wittgenstein spent a lot of effort to explain the use of the expression “seeing as”. I argue that his explanations can be transposed to the explanation of the function of metaphor. Firstly, it is shown that all earlier attempts to do that are not satisfying. The occurrence of the expression “to see as” in everyday language led Wittgenstein to the elaboration of the notion of “aspect”. Primarily these ideas should be employed in order to explain metaphors in everyday or even poetic language. My conclusion is that an internal relation can be perceived and thought of in the metaphor.

Many authors have noticed a link between metaphor and perception. Aristotle says that “to make metaphors well is to observe what is like [something else]” (Aristotle 1987, 1459a). The most significant recent studies on this topic, given by Max Black and Donald Davidson, conclude that the metaphor is to be likened to *seeing-as*. Davidson furthermore mentions Wittgenstein’s “duck-rabbit” and maintains that “seeing as is not seeing that” (Davidson 2001, 263). In the metaphor “A is B” thus the subject A is *seen as* the predicate B. To be sure, such a comparison may be conceived as metaphor as well. The seeing-as in a metaphor should be alike or somehow analogous to the seeing-as in visual perception. My intention in this essay is as follows: to elaborate an account of how such an analogy is to be conceived. How far does the analogy between these two similar structures go? Or are we misled by that analogy? These are general questions about the philosophical inquiry which Wittgenstein asks himself in his *Blue Book* (cf. Dc 309, 45). I begin by stating Wittgenstein’s basic views about the “seeing-as” or “seeing an aspect” which might be transposed to the metaphor; I am going then to discuss recent accounts of Hester and White, showing why neither of them conforms to my requirements; then I shall give grounds in favor of my view of the analogy; and finally I will briefly indicate the consequences of my view for a theory of the metaphor.

Wittgenstein used the duck-rabbit figure to show an example of a rare phenomenon which makes the expression “something is seen as something else” meaningful in everyday language. That led him to distinguish between the “continuous seeing” of an aspect and the “dawning” of an aspect. The distinctive feature about the figure is its intentional ambiguity on the author’s part. Furthermore, the aspects of the ambiguous figure have to be mutually exclusive: you can successfully see it in either way, but you can never see it in both ways at once. Davidson (2001, 263) emphasizes that a concrete seeing-as can be caused by a literal statement. The statement “It’s a duck” can cause one’s seeing of the figure as a duck. Due to a holistic trait of the aspect, it is sufficient to point to a part of a duck, e.g. the nib or the neck; a part determines the whole. These causal and holistic characteristics of perception are to be transposed to the metaphor. However, there are problems which hold an immediate transposition back. There are metaphors concerning abstract terms which cannot be literally *seen*. How can justice be seen as a blind woman with a twin-pan balance? Another difficulty

is the author's intentional ambiguity of the figure. Would it mean that all metaphors are ambiguous in our analogy as well?

There are three items: the duck, the rabbit and the duck/rabbit figure. What is corresponding to them in our analogy? Let me first discuss an account of Marcus Hester (Hester 1967, 179). He claims that in Wittgenstein's example we are given the duck/rabbit and the problem is to see the duck and the rabbit in it. In the metaphor, on the other hand, we are given the duck and the rabbit and the problem is to see the duck/rabbit. In the metaphor "A is B", the concepts (or images of) A and B should blend in order to discover the common *Gestalt* between them. For example, in Keats' metaphor of his imagination as a monastery¹ both elements should merge into a single image which can be seen as imagination or monastery. This resembles Francis Galton's process of *composite photography* merging several portraits into a single one in order to reveal common qualities of the group.

Hester's account cannot deal with abstract terms: How can an image be imagined that is to be seen as imagination and monastery? It cannot be an image which will have common properties of both terms. There are no such properties for the most metaphors. This is the question from the very beginning and Hester's account gives us no answer. Furthermore, both aspects are mutually exclusive and so the merged image cannot be seen both ways *simultaneously*, for then the holistic trait of the aspect would not be preserved.

Another account of the analogy is offered by Roger White: "We may [...] regard the metaphorical sentence as a 'Duck-Rabbit'; it is a sentence that may simultaneously be regarded as presenting two different situations; looked at one way, it describes the actual situation, and looked at the other way, an hypothetical situation with which that situation is being compared." (White 1996, 115). So we are supposed to take the abovementioned metaphor of Keats, in analogy to the duck/rabbit ambiguity, as presenting in one reading the imagination (i.e. the actual situation) and in another reading a monastery (a hypothetical situation). The holistic trait of the aspect remains preserved here. But the recipient won't be dubious about the two aspects. Both of them are given together with the duck/rabbit. And now we are told that both situations, i.e. aspects, should be compared. Also, what the analogy yields is only that in the metaphor "A is B" both terms should be compared. If all three elements are already given, why should the reader compare the situations? I do not want to question that White gives a plausible explanation of such comparison, but it is not a consequence of this analogy.

Nevertheless, both accounts share, in my view, the same defect: there are given two situations/aspects which should be compared or merged. But we do not know how. Furthermore, both authors do not use Wittgenstein's subsequent reflections about the dawning of an aspect and about the role played by concepts in the perception. A dawning of an aspect is for Wittgenstein "half visual experience, half thought" (Ms 144, 45 [PI II, xi]), it is "an amalgam of the two" (ibid, 46). These considerations have to be employed in our analogy.

Let me outline my positive view. As aforesaid, Wittgenstein uses the duck/rabbit as an example for a potential experience of a change (or dawning) of aspect: "Only through the phenomenon of change of aspect does the aspect seem to be detached from the rest of the seeing. It is as if, after the experience of change of aspect, one could say 'So there was an aspect there!'" (Ts 229, 228 [RPP I, § 415]). But aspects can change without getting this specific experience, e.g. someone can fail in recognizing the ambiguity of the figure. He

¹ "My imagination is a monastery, and I am its monk." *Letter to Percy Bysshe Shelley*, August 1820.

cannot speak of aspects, but something has changed which is Wittgenstein calling “conception” or “way of taking” (*Auffassung*): “If there were no change of aspect then there would only be a *way of taking*” (Ms 137, 9b, original italics [RPP II, § 436]). Aspect-blind people never see an aspect but only various conceptions. If someone wants to report an aspect, he has to take a conception. Thus: “An aspect has admittedly a name of a conception, but a conception can persist without the persisting of an aspect.” (Ms 132, 182, my translation). The aspect coincides with the conception on the language side. The statement “It’s a duck.” can stand either for (an exclamation of) the aspect or only for (a report of) the conception.

Being equipped with this distinction, we can more precisely analyze the concept of aspect. Wittgenstein says: “what I perceive in the dawning of an aspect is not a property of the object, but an *internal relation* between it and other objects.” (Ms 137, 128a, mine italics [PI II, xi]; cf. Ms 138, 5a). The concept of the internal relation is not as eminent in Wittgenstein’s late writings as in the *Tractatus*. In his early writings, an internal relation is a relation between the sign and the thing signified (or between proposition and its reference). There are, in addition, internal relations between two or more propositions, e.g. logical relations. It is impossible for a thing not to have some internal relations. For Wittgenstein’s late philosophy holds up that there is an internal relation between thinking and seeing which can be perceived in the dawning of an aspect.

But from the last quotation it is difficult to infer what the objects involved are. Ter Hark is considering three possibilities: “(i) One object is the geometrical constellation, the other is either the duck or the rabbit. (ii) One object is the duck, the other is the rabbit. (iii) One object is the change of aspect, the other is either the duck or the rabbit.” (Ter Hark 1990, 182f.). The second possibility is out of the question because the duck and the rabbit are two exclusive ways of seeing. Ter Hark argues against (i) also as follows: (a) the duck/rabbit can be identified independently of the duck or the rabbit and (b) the duck/rabbit is not necessary to describe the aspects. Therefore, there has to be an external relation between the duck/rabbit and the duck or the rabbit. These objections are valid only if the constellation would be seen neither as the duck, nor as the rabbit (cf. Jantschek 1996, fn. 75). But then the duck and the rabbit are standing for conceptions, not for aspects and thus there would be no relation at all, neither internal, nor external. Ter Hark concludes in favor of (iii). Surely, there must be an internal relation between the experience of the change of aspect and the conceptions involved. But this is not the relation Wittgenstein means. The quotation above implies that one term in the relation is the perceived object, i.e. the duck/rabbit. The formulation (i) should be thus refined so that in the dawning of the aspect there is perceived an internal relation between the considered object (i.e. the duck/rabbit) and the duck-aspect or the rabbit-aspect respectively.

Before we go back to our analogy, I would like to emphasize a connection between an internal relation and the concept of the organization. There are many kinds of internal relations and many kinds of aspects. In the seeing-as, we are dealing with aspects of organization: “One *kind* of aspect might be called ‘aspects of organization’.” (Ms 144, 64, original italics [PI II, xi]). In one his manuscript, Wittgenstein notes in a cryptic remark: “The internal relation of structures is the organization which generates the one from the other one.” (Ms 127, 215, my translation). We can infer that in an internal relation, one term is *organizing* the other one.

How can these considerations be related to the seeing-as in the metaphor? We have to get over the intentional ambiguity of the duck/rabbit figure. A spectator does not need to

know about the ambiguity of the figure. They might consider it at first as a duck and only later on experience the change of aspect. In such cases they might say: "Now I see this duck as a rabbit" or more metaphor-like "this duck is now a rabbit". Anyway, we do not need to suppose that a spectator would identify the figure as duck/rabbit, but only as tangle of lines (*cf.*, e.g., Ms 137, 14b; Ms 144, 47).

I propose the analogy as follows: The subject A of the metaphor "A is B" corresponds to the duck/rabbit and the predicate B is one of the aspects, e.g. the duck. From our reformulation of (i) it follows that what is perceived in the metaphor is an internal relation between the subject A and the predicate B insofar they are both perceived and thought of. Moreover, it is perceived a conceptual relation between the involved terms which has an irreducible subjective side as well. This means that in a metaphor, the predicate B organizes the subject A. In our example above, the concept of a monastery organizes the concept of Keats' or even someone else's imagination.

Due to the notion of the aspect, the causal as well as the holistic trait of the seeing-as is preserved in the analogy. My first consequence for a theory of the metaphor is that metaphors cannot be fully paraphrased in literal language because of the subjective experience of the change of aspect. Further, an internal relation cannot be predicated or *said*, it can be only *shown*. The consequence is that there cannot be a secondary metaphorical meaning expressed in the metaphor. The main objection against theories of a metaphorical meaning is that they are reducing the aspect to a conception and leaving aside the subjective experience of the change of aspect. On the other hand, there are theories that see the function of the metaphor in the evoking of an emotive or perlocutionary effect. They are reducing the aspect to the subjective side leaving the language part aside. Furthermore, if the point of the metaphor is an experience of the change of aspect, then it would be perceived only an external relation in the metaphor because the experience is a concrete event which is causally linked to the metaphor.

The aim of my analysis was to demonstrate that elaborating Wittgenstein's notion of the seeing of an aspect can be profitably used in an analogy to the seeing-as in the metaphor. Let me finish with a paraphrase of Aristotle that to make metaphors well is to observe internal relations.

References

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