Why Metaphors Are Necessary and Not Just Nice[1]

By Andrew Ortony

At least since the time of Artistotle metaphor has aroused the curiosity of thinkers. Yet, the questions about it are ill-formed and the answers correspondingly unhelpful. Aristotle regarded the command of metaphor as the mark of genius. By contrast, the nineteenth-century French linguist, Bréal, who coined the word 'semantics', had a low regard for metaphors. He believed that they teach us nothing new and are "like the sayings of some peasant endowed with good sense and honesty, but not without a certain rustic cunning." [2] There is fairly wide agreement that metaphor involves, or is, the transfer of meaning. Indeed, etymologically it means "transfer," being derived from the Greek meta (trans) +pherein (to carry). According to Aristotle[3] a metaphor is a means of comparing two terms and this view is shared by Richards[4] who classified the two terms and the relationship between them as the "tenor" (today often called the "topic"), of which something is being asserted, the "vehicle," the term being used metaphorically to form the basis of the comparison, and the "ground," namely that which the two have in common. The dissimilarity between the two terms being compared determines what is called the "tension."

The view that metaphors are essentially comparisons is perhaps the nearest that we have to an accepted theory of metaphor. It does explain their intelligibility compared with anomaly but does not well explain the tension. Nor does it account for the important pedagogic value of metaphor. The purpose of this paper is to propose a view of metaphor which does account for these aspects; a view which while perhaps still not a theory has the comparative nature of metaphor as a consequence rather than an explanation. The view I shall put forward comprises three theses—the compactness thesis, the inexpressibility thesis and the vividness thesis. While all three are intimately related I believe them to be distinguishable.

Metaphors, and their close relatives, similes and analogies, have been used as teaching devices since the earliest writings of civilized man. The dialogues of Plato are full of them; there is the simile of the sails in *Parmenides* used to explain the nature of the relationship between Platonic Forms and the particular objects partaking of them, or there is the cave metaphor in *The Republic* designed to illuminate various levels of knowledge. The Bible is another good source of metaphor, and, of course, metaphor is the stock-in-trade of poets and writers. The widespread use of metaphor in even the earliest "teaching texts" however, suggests that Bréal is wrong and that metaphor is more than just a literary stylistic device. We shall argue here that metaphor is an essential ingredient of communication and consequently of great educational value.

Regardless of one's philosophical persuasions one aspect of human experience is beyond question (although the importance that one ascribes to it depends heavily on one's philosophical persuasions). As conscious perceivers what we experience is

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1. I am grateful for help and advice from Alan Purves and Hugh Petrie.

2. M. Bréal, *Semantics*, translated by Mrs. Henry Cust (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1964), p. 124.

3. See, for instance, Rhetoric, III, iv, 1-3.

4. I. A. Richards, *The Philosophy of Rhetoric* (London: Oxford University Press, 1936).

continuous. This fact, which so dominates the thinking of the phenomenologists and is frequently a philosophical starting point for such French thinkers as Bergson, Merleau-Ponty or Sartre, seems to be largely ignored by the bulk of British and American empiricists and, perhaps consequently, psychologists. Experience does not arrive in little discrete packets, but flows, leading us imperceptibly from one state to another. It is as though our very nature liked and needed it that way. Even in cases where one might wish to believe that there is or should be an experienceable "digital leap" rather than a smooth analog conversion, even then we often find ourselves forced into an artificial flow. Thus, when suddenly awakened by a hostile alarm clock or telephone bell we frequently feel that the noise was part of a dream—as though our (un)consciousness had constructed a bridge to take us more smoothly from one state to another. We do not experience an instant of waking up or falling asleep; as Wittgenstein put it in the *Tractatus*, "Death is not an event of life," although it must be acknowledged, in a rather different context.

The continuity of experience is not purely a question of temporal flow. It has ramifications for memory. Memory for what has been perceived incorporates some of this continuity. It has long been acknowledged by philosophers and more recently by psychologists and linguists that words do not have distinct, sharply delineated meanings. Wittgenstein in the *Investigations* expounds at length on this problem with respect to the single word "game." A recent study by the linguist Labov[5] demonstrates the fuzziness of the word "cup" and a few enlightened cognitive psychologists are currently investigating what they call "semantic flexibility." A moment's thought about a paradigmatic example of reference reveals that the range of applicability of a word is fuzzy. While there is fairly universal agreement as to what is a prototypical red, it is obvious that its limits are indeterminate. The concern of idealist philosophers with "concrete universals" is another indication of a similar point—one might phrase the question as: How much can one change an object before it ceases to be the object it was? Presumably, only when it ceases to be what it was do we finally (hopefully) cease to call it what we did.

The purpose of considering this kind of continuity for word meanings is to suggest that words have to be sufficiently flexible to cover the range of possible applications. It is the objects, events and experiences that continuously vary; words have to follow suit *when they are used*. Words partition experiences but the experiences they partition are not identical; consequently words have to be sufficiently flexible to enable the most varied members of the set partitioned to be referenced by them. If there is any sense in maintaining that words have fixed meanings it can only be that independent of context they relate to their prototypical non-linguistic counterparts. The continuity of experience, therefore, is not just a temporal continuity; it is, as it were, a continuity in "referential" space and it is the total continuity of experience which at once underlies and necessitates the use of metaphor in linguistic communication. Language and logic are discrete symbol systems. Thus, the task we have to perform in communication is to convey what is usually some kind of continuum by using discrete symbols. It would not be surprising if a discrete symbol system were incapable of literally capturing every conceivable aspect of an object, event or experience that one might wish to describe. A thesis of this paper is that this deficiency is filled by metaphor.

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5. W. Labov, "The Boundaries of Words and Their Meanings," in C. J. Bailey and R. Shuy (eds.), *New Ways of Analyzing Variation in English* (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 1973).

THE COMPACTNESS THESIS

The compactness thesis hinges on a "reconstructionist" view of language comprehension. Such a view regards language production as being analytic and language comprehension as being synthetic. Few philosophers or psychologists dispute that language comprehension is intimately connected with one's knowledge of the world. The problem arises when one tries to characterize the manner in which this knowledge is involved in the comprehension process. Suppose that I read in a newspaper that a man swam the English Channel in mid-winter. The reconstructionist view would suggest that in the process of comprehending the statement I in some sense "reconstruct" the event described and that I do so by bringing to bear a great deal of what I already know, not just about the language, but about the world. I build a representation which invokes what I know about men and their capacity to swim, about what I know or believe (or even imagine) to be some characteristics of the English Channel and so on. What I invoke is largely experiential, perceptual and cognitive, and to this extent generally similar, but probably almost never identical, to what others invoke. I infer that the man was probably covered with oil, that he was strong and muscular, that the sea was likely cold and rough, that the sky was perhaps gray and gloomy. I might also invoke my knowledge of likely public reaction, a reaction of admiration, incredulity, indifference or even alleged insanity. All these things and a host of others "come to mind," or many do. Perhaps the best way to construct such a representation furnished with details not specified in the literal message is to form a "mental image." Now this process of filling in the details between the linguistic signposts present in the message I call "particularization" and I take this to be an essential component in many normal instances of successful language comprehension. It has already been demonstrated empirically[6] that this is indeed an important component in language comprehension.

The point and virtue of particularization is that it enables language comprehension to take place without the need for the message to explicitly spell out all the details. Even if this were possible it would be too boring and time consuming for either or both the speaker or hearer in the normal course of events. But, particularization serves an even more important function—it is the language comprehender's digital-to-analog converter; it takes him nearer to the continuous mode of perceived experience by taking him further away from the discrete mode of linguistic symbols. What metaphor does is to allow large "chunks" to be converted or transferred; metaphor constrains and directs particularization.

Following Aristotle we will treat similes as a variety of metaphor, a variety good for illustration. Imagine our correspondent is trying to describe the way in which the swimmer entered the water and he writes: "He dived into the icy water like a *fearless warrior*." Let us examine what is actually being communicated. First, consider what we might be assumed to know about warriors. There are many characteristics peculiar to warriors, or at least to the stereotypical warrior. They include perhaps, bravery, strength, fearlessness, agressiveness, determination and so on; all these are what one might call abstract characteristics to be distinguished from perceptual ones such as muscular, perhaps large, riding a horse, armed, and possibly even wearing armor or

6. See, for example, R. C. Anderson and A. Ortony, "On Putting Apples into Bottles—A Problem of Polysemy" (Urbana, Illinois: Training Research Laboratory, University of Illinois, mimeo, 1973) [*Cognitive Psychology*, V. 7, 1975, in press]; or R. C. Anderson and B. McGaw, "On the Representation of Meanings of General Terms," *Journal of Experimental Psychology*, V. 101 (1973), pp. 301–306.

covered with war-paint. What we have listed are characteristics for which we have words in the language; different speakers would doubtless list different ones based on a variety of (presumably) indirect experiences of warriors. The simile is directing our attention to a subset of a subset of these characteristics.[7] The first subset is determined by *salience*. We have to select that subset of all the cognitive and perceptual features which we consider to be salient or distinctive. Thus, whereas it is a characteristic of a warrior that he, for example, has a nose, or that he breathes, such characteristics are not crucial to his being a warrior as opposed, let us say, to a cowhand. Thus the first subset is characterized by being the group of features which distinguish a warrior from a non-warrior. This we can call the "distinctive set" of characteristics. It should be noticed that this account does not require that the members of the set be itemizable. It would obviously be absurd, however, were one to suppose that the entire distinctive set should be transferred to the topic of the simile. The distinctive set comprises only the potentially transferable characteristics. In order to determine the subset of the distinctive set to be transferred we have to invoke what we know of the topic and eliminate those characteristics which give rise to the tension, namely, those which, however limited our knowledge of the topic may be, contradict or are conceptually incompatible with what we do know of it. The second subset is thus determined by *tension elimination*. The characteristics to be transferred must be conceivably transferable. Obviously the swimmer is no more clad in armor than he is riding a horse as he dives into the water. This resulting set of characteristics we might call the "appropriate distinctive set." Thus what the simile is doing is, effectively, saying "take all those aspects you know peculiar to fearless warriors which could reasonably be applied to a diving swimmer and predicate the entire set of them to the swimmer."

It is interesting to notice that some of these aspects may themselves only be applicable metaphorically. Thus, one might include within the appropriate distinctive set characteristics which themselves have been metaphorically interpreted in the same way. For example, the inclusion of "wearing armor" might enable some of the distinctive aspects of "armor wearing" (such as "providing protection," "giving a sense of security" and so on) to be transferred to the topic, thereby relating to the presumed oil cover for the swimmer.[8] This process, while possibly iterative, is not necessarily infinitely regressive. I believe that the notion of appropriate distinctive set here set out is much more precise and accurate than Black's[9] "system of associated commonplaces."

If we take this as the rule then what has been said in a word is something like "He dived into the icy water bravely, strongly, fearlessly, agressively, in a determined manner, etc., being muscular, large and so on." This "chunk" of unspecified features or characteristics is what is transferred, all parceled up in the two words "fearless warrior." It is quick, concise and effective and it invites and constrains the particularization of the comprehender.

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7. Technically the term "interval" is more appropriate than "set" since I do not wish to imply that there is a set of discrete elements. The term "interval" allows for continuously varying quantities. In the present discussion these can *to some extent* be discretized by language, but this discretization is subordinate to a continuous representation. The terminology of sets is less clumsy than that of intervals, but the distinction should be kept in mind.

8. I am grateful to Alan Purves for pointing this out.

9. M. Black, *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1962).

THE INEXPRESSIBILITY THESIS

While the compactness thesis argues that metaphor enables the predication of a chunk of characteristics in a word or two that would otherwise require a long list of characteristics individually predicated, the inexpressibility thesis argues that metaphor enables the predication by transfer of characteristics which are unnameable. Of course, *ex hypothesi*, such characteristics are difficult to give by example. Consider the following metaphor: "The thought slipped my mind like a squirrel behind a tree." If one attempts to translate such a metaphor into prosaic language one is always driven to other metaphorical expressions such as "the thought went away" or "the thought evaded me" and so on. Now thoughts only come and go and evade in a metaphorical sense—we have no literal language for talking about what thoughts do. The appropriate distinctive set that one might extract from the squirrel (slipping) behind a tree would doubtless include such characteristics as ungraspableness, suddenness, nimbleness, deceptively easy to catch, camouflage and many others. Already the difficulty of finding the appropriate words is evident, and any of these predicated of an idea would itself still be metaphorical. Thus there are cases in which it would seem that there is no possible way of literally saying what has to be said so that if it is to be said at all metaphor is essential as a vehicle for its expression.

The point is not that some things are by their nature not describable. Rather, the point is that as a matter of fact, for any given language, there are certain things which are inexpressible. For example, in English Krio there is an expression which is used to convey warm, friendly, concerned sympathy to people in distress from minor disappointments or pains. The expression is "ush ya" (originally derived from "hush you" addressed to a child). In British or American English it is simply untranslatable. There *could* be a word or expression, but there is none.

The inexpressibility thesis is not particularly surprising in itself. Locke subscribed to it nearly three hundred years ago. It is perhaps more reasonable to suppose that there are objects, ideas, events and experiences which cannot be literally described in some or all of their minutest details than to suppose that there is nothing which could not be so described. One might say "whereof one cannot speak literally, thereof one should speak metaphorically."

So we attempt to establish the inexpressibility thesis with two types of argument. The first is that the continuous nature of experience precludes the possibility of having distinctions in word meanings capable of capturing every conceivable detail that one might wish to convey; and this in spite of the flexibility of individual word meanings. The second is that it would appear more reasonable to hold the inexpressibility view than its alternative that there is nothing that cannot be conveyed literally in a language. Apart from anything else this latter view would entail perfect translatability between languages—something that is widely believed to be impossible.[10]

If there is a difficulty with the view it resides in the difficulty of ultimately distinguishing between metaphorical and literal language. But short of denying that dead metaphors are metaphors and claiming that there is nothing to be learned from etymology, such an objection could not easily get started.

If one combines the inexpressibility thesis with the compactness thesis it becomes apparent that the transferred chunks of characteristics from vehicle to topic may include all kinds of aspects which are not capable of being represented by the discrete

10. See, for example, W. V. O. Quine, *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1960).

elements within the confines of a particular language. It becomes more fruitful to think of the grounds of a metaphor, the appropriate distinctive set, as being a continuum of cognitive and perceptual characteristics with a few slices removed rather than as a list of discrete attributes. We would then say that metaphor permits the transfer of abstracted, but nevertheless nondiscretized, coherent, chunks of characteristics from the vehicle to the topic. These chunks are, as it were, predicated *en masse* and they bear a special relationship to cognition and perception because they have not (themselves) been internally discretized.

Some additional support for the claims of the inexpressibility and compactness theses can be derived by consideration of the reasons for certain kinds of failure in metaphors. Suppose someone said "Oranges are the baseballs of the fruit-lover." On being asked what was meant by this extraordinarily obscure remark, imagine the proud speaker to reply "Oh—that's a metaphor; don't you see, oranges are round and so are baseballs—it's clever isn't it?" Now according to our view the function of metaphor is to express succinctly what can only be said very circuitously if, indeed, it can be said at all. Our literary giant, however, anticipates an appropriate distinctive set comprising one easily nameable characteristic (if he anticipates anything). His metaphor fails because what he wanted to say was that oranges are round, and there was nothing preventing him saying just that! The tension in the metaphor was so great that after eliminating it almost nothing was left to appropriately transfer—he was guilty of stretching metaphor to a point of no return. People simply do not use metaphors to transfer *one* characteristic, even if it is a distinctive one, when there is a ready literal way of making the point. If the size of the transferred chunk were a measure of the quality of a metaphor, the baseball metaphor would not fare well.

THE VIVIDNESS THESIS

The compactness thesis and the inexpressibility thesis are largely concerned with the mechanism employed by metaphor. Together they attempt to explain what is happening in a metaphor and why. The vividness thesis is concerned with what seems to be a consequence of the view so far espoused. It relates to the distinction drawn earlier between the continuity of experience and the discreteness of symbolic systems. Earlier it was suggested that language is a means of reconstructing experience, or experience-like representations; it was also suggested that the construction of a "mental image" might be taken as paradigmatic of success. Now, if our account of metaphor is right, then it would follow that metaphor lies much closer to perceived experience than a non-metaphorical equivalent because the vehicle enables the ground to be predicated of the topic without the need for discretizing the individual characteristics and consequently, assuming the metaphor is comprehended, the process of particularization is greatly assisted. For instead of reconstructing an analog representation from totally discrete items the vehicle has already transferred a complete band. Thus metaphors would be particularly vivid because of their proximity to, and parasitic utilization of perceived experience; by circumventing discretization they enable the communication of ideas with a richness of detail much less likely to come about in the normal course of events.

The strong emotive force of metaphors can also be accounted for by the vividness thesis. Because of a metaphor's greater proximity to perceived experience and consequently its greater vividness, the emotive as well as the sensory and cognitive aspects are more available, for they have been left intact in the transferred chunk. Metaphors are closer to emotional reality for the same reasons that they are closer to

perceptual experience. To say of an unexpected event that it was a miracle is to say far more than that it was inexplicable: it is to express joy, admiration, wonder, awe and a host of other things without mentioning any of them. If emotions could not be grounds then poetry would be lifeless.

These features of metaphor give it its great educational utility. It has been amply demonstrated that imagibility correlates very highly with learnability.[11] Richness of detail in communicative potential provides a powerful means of moving from the known to the less well-known or unknown, and this, of course, is an important pedagogic function. The vividness of metaphor is not restricted to visual aspects alone; it extends to all sensory modalities as well as to emotive power. Noises from unknown sources are often described by similes—"It sounded as if an airplane was flying through the room." How else could one say it? The inexpressibility thesis almost forces the use of a metaphorical device in such an example.

The educational power of metaphors is thus twofold. The vivid imagery arising from metaphorical comprehension encourages memorability and generates of necessity a better, more insightful, personal understanding. But also, it is a very effective device for moving from the well-known to the less well-known, from vehicle to topic. As we shall see, there are potential dangers inherent in the use of metaphor in this respect, dangers associated with the presuppositions underlying the use of any particular metaphor.

Whereas metaphor can be used to supplement knowledge about some already quite well understood topic, it can also be used to describe very unfamiliar topics. The potential problem here is that the person who uses the metaphor needs to know how much he can assume about his addressee's knowledge of the topic in advance. If he makes an incorrect judgement in this respect a situation may arise in which his addressee cannot construct an appropriate distinctive set of characteristics because he doesn't know enough about the topic to eliminate tension-reducing ones. There can be two consequences. He may simply fail to grasp the metaphor and recognize his failure, or, worse, he may attribute inappropriate characteristics to the topic and go away misled. It may be that one of the reasons that metaphors can become quite complicated is that the author is adding information to assist the reader in constructing the grounds. This can be done by incorporating literally applicable qualifiers and by building up larger metaphors out of smaller ones. In poetry this is nicely illustrated by the following lines from Longfellow's "The Spirit of Poetry" (1825):

> ... Her hair
> Is like the summer tresses of the trees,
> When twilight makes them brown, and on her cheek
> Blushes the richness of an autumn sky,
> With ever-shifting beauty. Then her breath
> It is so like the gentle air of Spring,
> As, from the mornings dewy flowers, it comes
> Full of their fragrance, that it is a joy
> To have it round us, and her silver voice
> Is the rich music of a summer bird,
> Heard in the still night, with its passionate cadence.

It is clear that the boundaries of metaphor are but vaguely definable. At one end

11. See, for instance, A. Paivio, *Imagery and Verbal Processes* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1971).

we have metaphorical use of individual words as qualifiers; at the other, large blocks of text "working out" a larger, more specific picture.

From an instructional point of view it becomes very important to recognize how much guidance a metaphor should contain for constructing the ground, a consideration which grows in its importance as the audience becomes larger and more heterogeneous. A metaphor used successfully can give insight and comprehension; used unsuccessfully it can generate confusion and despair.

No attempt has been made in this paper to make a sharp distinction between simile, metaphor and analogy. I have treated simile as a kind of metaphor. Since the traditional distinction between them is made in terms of the presence or absence of words such as "like" and "as" I fail to see any important cognitive difference between them. It is often said that in addition similes make explicit comparisons while metaphors make implicit ones. This view is certainly representative of comparison theorists such as Aristotle and Richards. Adherents of the iconic theory share it. The iconic view is held by Henle[12] and Alston.[13] Alston gives the following quotation from Henle, which shows how little the theory does by way of explanation, even though Alston calls it "illuminating."

> First, using symbols in Peirce's sense, directions are given for finding an object or situation. This use of language is quite ordinary. Second, it is implied that any object or situation fitting the direction may serve as an icon of what one wishes to describe. The icon is never actually presented; rather, through the rule, one understands what it must be and through this understanding, what it signifies. (p. 178)

Of the difference between metaphor and simile Alston says:

> [It] is somewhat analagous to the difference between 'My son plays baseball' and 'I have a son and he plays baseball,' where what is presupposed but not explicitly asserted in the first is explicitly asserted in the second. (p. 99)

The idea, however, of attempting to discriminate between metaphors and similes on the basis that similes express an explicit comparison while metaphors are implicit seems to miss the point. Neither are in fact explicit. In simile, if there is comparison at all, rather than transfer, the comparison can only be *with respect to certain characteristics*. Determining what these characteristics are is what is involved in understanding the simile. In metaphor there is an apparent claim of identity, but again, only with respect to certain characteristics. Whether there be a claim of similarity or a claim of identity is neither here nor there. Since neither claim can be taken literally they both direct the interpreter to determine the respects which are appropriate. Only if we can discover an important difference between "x and y are identical *in certain respects*" and "x and y are similar *in certain respects*" can we claim any important difference between metaphor and simile; a difficult task indeed if one is aiming to distinguish anything other than the characteristics, which are, of course, implicit.

The distinction between metaphor and analogy is more difficult. It is tempting to

12. P. Henle, "Metaphor," in P. Henle (ed.), *Language, Thought and Culture* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 1958).

13. W. P. Alston, *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1964). Chapter 5.

think of metaphor as being concerned with the transfer of complexes of characteristics and analogy as being concerned specifically with transfer between relations, if only because the stereotypical analogy is of the form "A is to B as C is to D." This is suggestive of a simile expressing transfer from the vehicle, the relationship between C and D, to the topic, the relationship between A and B; or rather the appropriate distinctive set of characteristics of the relationship (remember they may be emotive and perceptual, so we are not committed to a bizarre view of predicating attributes, in the normal sense, of relations). Analogies, however, are not necessarily metaphors because the transfer may be possible directly—it may be that in these cases there are no inappropriate members of the distinctive set, or indeed, no *distinctive* set at all. There may be no tension in a non-metaphorical analogy (consider the use of analogy in algebra or geometry). When analogies are used figuratively they tend to be used in groups—requiring longer bodies of text to convey complicated interrelations between relations.

The great pedagogic value of figurative uses of language is to be found in their potential to transfer learning and understanding from what is known to what is less well-known and to do so in a very vivid manner. To appreciate these facts may be to make better use of them and to better understand them. Metaphors are necessary as a communicative device because they allow the transfer of coherent chunks of characteristics—perceptual, cognitive, emotional and experiential—from a vehicle which is known to a topic which is less so. In so doing they circumvent the problem of specifying one by one each of the often unnameable and innumerable characteristics; they avoid discretizing the perceived continuity of experience and are thus closer to experience and consequently more vivid and memorable.

Were our language to have a discrete word for every conceivable attribute one might wish to mention, it would be no language; metaphor saves it from such embarrassment. The power of poetry leans on shared experience. If robots are to understand sonnets they will first have to be sentient beings, for the demands made on them will indeed be great.

There can be no more fitting conclusion than the following excerpt from Coleridge. In his *Biographia Literaria* he writes:

> The poet . . . brings the whole soul of man into activity, with the subordination of its faculties to each other, according to their relative worth and dignity. He diffuses a tone, a spirit of unity, that blends, and (as it were) fuses, each into each, by that synthetic and magical power, . . . imagination. This power, . . . reveals itself in the balance or reconciliation of opposite or discordant qualities: of sameness, with difference; of the general, with the concrete; the idea, with the image; the individual with the representative; the sense of novelty and freshness, with old and familar objects; a more than usual state of emotion, with more than usual order . . . and while it blends and harmonizes the natural and the artificial, still subordinates art to nature.

R. S. Peters' Concept of Character and the Criterion of Consistency for Actions

By Dale Kennedy

In his 1962 article, "Moral Education and the Psychology of Character,"[1] R. S. Peters develops an elaborate concept of character as adequately as so few words permit and yet remain readable. The account is constructed with care and promises to be useful for educational purposes. In this article I intend, first, to give an accurate narration, I hope, of Peters' statement, in even fewer words than he himself allowed; and then from this background examine the notion of consistency which is critical to Peters' concept of character by an analysis of the situational conditions of rule following behavior.

Peters' account begins by noting that the concept of character is usually intended to pick out what is distinctive about people. But, since persons differ in many ways, it is necessary to determine what sorts of differences are differences in character rather than differences in other sorts of things, such as nature or personality. These distinctions are made as Peters describes what he takes to be the basic constituents or elements of character (the use of the term "elements" is mine for summary purposes).

THE ELEMENTS OF CHARACTER

(i) Character indicates "a manner or style of behaving without any definite implication or directedness or aversion."[2]

(ii) Character "does not indicate the sort of goals a man tends to pursue, but the manner in which he pursues them."[3]

These two statements allow character to be contrasted with terms such as motive, attitude, sentiment, inclination, desire, need or want, for all of these suggest goals, ends or directions in behaving.[4] Judgments of character and the ascription of particular character traits refer to *how*, the manner in which a person does a thing, but not *what* he does. He can be careful, dogged, honest, fair, considerate or ruthless. When considered in the context of attaining some end object, these terms perform an adverbial function. There are, however, many terms in the language which perform this sort of function and which refer more properly to what we call one's nature, temperament or personality, such as "stupidly," "nervously," or "out-going." Peters' next step is to provide a basis for distinguishing character-traits from these other sorts of traits. He does so by connecting character to a certain kind of regulation.

(iii) "Character is revealed in what he does about them [needs, desires, goals] in the manner in which he regulates or fails to regulate them."[5]

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1. R. S. Peters, "Moral Education and the Psychology of Character," *Philosophy*, The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy, Vol. 37, No. 139 (January 1961), pp. 37-56, and in Israel Scheffler (ed.), *Philosophy and Education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, Inc., 1966), pp. 263-286.

2. *Ibid.* (1966), p. 265.

3. *Ibid.*

4. This is not to suggest that character or a certain character trait cannot itself be an object of pursuit or a goal, for this is precisely the point of explicating character, that we might better understand what we are after when we seek to instill character as a function of education. This aspect of character will be taken up later.

5. Peters, *op. cit.* (1966), p. 266.