

The Hyperphilosophy of Extraordinary Communication

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The power of language is well documented throughout the book of Proverbs, and the ancients demonstrated good understanding about how words either generate or assassinate. Consider Proverbs 18:21: “Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits.”¹ Biblical texts are rich in demonstrating the use of figurative language with various interpretations. For example, employment of metaphor in the book of Psalms portrays God in unexpected ways that relate to and connect with the psalmist. While one would expect God to be described as King, Lord, or the Almighty, one wouldn’t expect God to “cover thee with his feathers” as though he was an old broody hen.² But the magic of metaphor opens up new ideas by pulling meaning out of the hat thought empty.

The indirect communication of metaphor creates opportunities to move ‘beyond communication’ as new or concealed meanings are unveiled. Initially, I hope to explore this avenue through Kierkegaard’s discussion in his *Postscript* about the paradox of faith and link it with the paradox of metaphoric language. Additionally, I want to review how Kierkegaard also uses the paradox of irony as indirect communication with hidden meaning. As the discussion proceeds, it is important to keep in mind the key difference between metaphor and irony: metaphor’s hidden meaning serves the purpose of discovery, while irony’s hidden meaning serves the purpose of concealment.

As both metaphor and irony are examined, my exploratory question is twofold: 1) Are words used in a connecting or disconnecting manner? 2) What is the existential effect regarding each use? Elaborating further, how does language either promote or inhibit meaning for life? What paradoxes are inherent as one speaks and another listens? How does the use of figurative language, in its ambiguity, open windows of understanding beyond direct communication? How does the philosophy of language move from the demand for

linguistic precision to allow for the messiness of metaphor – to move from ‘philosophy of language’ to the ‘hyperphilosophy’ of extraordinary communication?³

Alongside Kierkegaard’s *Postscript*, additional perspectives about direct and indirect language are provided through commentary work by Paul Ricoeur, Marie George, and Andrew Cross. Also included is an essay by Robert A. White, Jr. entitled, “Can These Bones Live? The Renewing Power of Preaching with Metaphor.” I hope to demonstrate through the course of my discussion that the paradox of metaphoric language is the ‘leap of faith’ necessary to move beyond the finite obvious to the infinite possible.

Initial Exploration of Topics and Language in the *Postscript*

The central theme of Kierkegaard’s *Postscript* concerns the matter of *becoming*. Kierkegaard emphasizes the critical importance about individual relationship to Christianity as the essential ingredient in becoming to achieve eternal happiness.⁴ To accomplish the emphasis of relationship, he employs the contrast of opposites, i.e., the paradoxical: the subjectivity/relationship of faith against the acquiescence of objectivity/orthodox belief of Christianity.⁵ Kierkegaard, contrary to the worldview of his time, shows that the very nature of faith is a suspension of surety in favor of constant internal dialectic. Thus, the important use of language is immediately evident in *Postscript* as Kierkegaard employs binary terms: subjectivity/objectivity; relationship/belief; internal dialectic/surety. He establishes from the onset that there is a way of life and a way of death. In order to realize life and becoming, Kierkegaard advocates subjectivity, relationship, and the internal dialectic. Following these components keeps possibility open by way of revelation as the subject engages in the creativity of ‘poetic participation.’ The subject flows within the freedom of faith, unhampered by the stringency of set orthodox beliefs. Conversely, reliance upon objectivity, belief, and surety establishes a premise of death. The reliance upon literal meaning demands adherence to entombed facts. Movement of thought and spirit is disallowed, and the soul lies in stasis.

Respectively, these three characteristics (subjectivity/relationship/internal dialectic and objectivity/belief/surety) constitute a movement for the individual, just as the paradox

contained within metaphor constitutes a movement within thought and language. The implication is one of living potential versus stagnating decay. The outward movement of objectivity can be measured directly as the assessment of ethical correctness. But objectivity forfeits creativity and generation because of its continual conformity. Objectivity may be likened to Kierkegaard's reference to 'dead' metaphors, those that "have been made banal through widespread use."⁶ However, the inner movement of subjectivity embraces creativity and generation, i.e., divine passion that is immeasurable in direct terms, and expressible only in the freshness of metaphor.

If the idea of divine passion is extended to the creativity and generation of metaphor, metaphor is an embodiment of human desire as divine passion – the passion to communicate fully. Metaphor portrays human longing for intimate expression. Such passion is further explained by Kierkegaard as he elaborates upon subjectivity in the *Postscript*: "Christianity is spirit; spirit is inwardness; inwardness is subjectivity; subjectivity is essentially passion, and at its maximum an infinite, personally interested passion for one's eternal happiness."⁷ It is the spirit of passion within faith that Kierkegaard pits against the spirit of dispassion within orthodoxy, and it is the paradox within metaphor that protests the conformity of meaning and understanding within direct language. Dispassion closes the door to expectation; there is no entertainment of possibilities if one is certain of the answers. Direct facts and direct communication disclose all; there is nothing to think or dream about and no longing. But passion, specifically, *infinite passion*, is the essential life-giving element in faith. It is passion, the *eros* for and of God, which opens the door of expectancy and possibility. In the subjective passion of faith, longing is the cardinal element, just as longing is the subjective passion within metaphor.

The subjective passion inherent in metaphor may be illustrated through divine *eros*. The *eros* for God is continual longing. It is the ultimate desire to be with the Infinite and to experience unity, the stretching forth of one's arms and mind and heart for the very essence of the Infinite. *Eros* desires to share the essence of oneself in the secrecy of personal intimacy and to be continually intimate in communion with the Infinite.⁸ Herein lies the ongoing process of the internal dialectic as Kierkegaard

avoids direct communication. He relies upon the secret, indirect language of metaphor – passion and *eros* – rather than the direct language of doctrine and orthodoxy to describe reciprocity in the God relationship. The reciprocity creates the bridge characteristic of Kierkegaard’s ‘double movement.’

The Extended Use of Metaphor

The bridge created by Kierkegaard’s double movement continues as language is used literally and non-literally. Paul Ricoeur, in his work *Interpretation Theory*, contrasts two terms – *langue* and *parole* – to distinguish the difference between words as ‘system’ and words as ‘discourse.’⁹ The link with Kierkegaard’s writings about subjectivity and objectivity are easy to spot here, as are the ideas about words as life-giving or death-dealing. Ricoeur identifies the inherent problem: language is classified as ‘structure and system’ rather than recognized in its use.¹⁰

He pursues this idea further as he describes *langue* as a code that is collective and anonymous, a self-sufficient system.¹¹ *Langue* employs words in a way synonymous with Kierkegaard’s objective worldview. *Langue* is the wording of science and of the factual; it is external; hearers must accommodate themselves to the message. When language is used in the structural/systemic mode, language is rendered marginal.¹² By extension, structurally based language applied in communication or description renders the ‘other’ as marginal as well. *Langue* objectifies the other and closes possibilities of meaning. It is the depersonalizing, all-consuming aspect of *langue* as a code that enables words to tender death toward the hearer.

But *parole* is a message that is individual and intentional.¹³ *Parole* allows for more interpretive meaning within sentences and creates openings for various understandings. In terms of ‘use’, it is *parole* that is described (by Wittgenstein) as a “form of life.”¹⁴ *Parole* opens possibilities and creativity – a sense of exploration and discovery of meaning. *Parole* subtly establishes relationship and is conducive to subjectivity. Words can be used in various ways to express thought. Diverse kinds of words, in either poetry or metaphor, convey a personal message for the hearer and may be received in flexible interpretation. Ricoeur classifies this phenomenon as the “paradox born by the sentence.”¹⁵

Ricoeur's essay, "The Metaphorical Process" further elaborates upon Kierkegaardian thought about the language of paradox. Just as the paradox reflects the dichotomy between the infinite passion of inwardness and the objective uncertainty, the metaphor extends the obvious meaning of words into something that creates doubt.

Ricoeur states: "Metaphorical interpretation presupposes a literal interpretation, which is destroyed . . . transforming it . . . into a meaningful contradiction."¹⁶ The indirect communication of metaphor causes reflection and wonder as one muses about hidden meaning. Meditation about the intended meaning and received meaning is the paradox of metaphor, the meditation about the apparent contradiction between what is said and what is not said. One is uncertain of the metaphor's meaning as one interprets and makes a decision how to respond to it. Decision about the interpretation of metaphor involves risk – both the risk of misunderstanding as well as the risk of new discovery. The contradiction within metaphor is like the paradox found in the leap of faith. Similarly, the paradox involves risk as one considers the 'contradiction between the infinite passion of inwardness and objective uncertainty.'¹⁷ The moment of decision is the leap of faith.

The Different Meaning and Purpose of Irony

The relational paradox created by metaphor also continues in the form of irony. In "The Perils of Reflexive Irony" Andrew Cross examines Kierkegaard's use of irony "not as a verbal strategy but as a way of life."¹⁸ Irony was Kierkegaard's way of dealing with the public; in the tension of paradox, he simultaneously engaged them and distanced himself from them. Only he knew his inner life, and he sanctified it by concealing it. The use of irony enabled Kierkegaard to dialogue publicly *with* the system while speaking out *against* it. He knew the existential importance of maintaining life within subjectivity and refused to acquiesce to the objective worldview with direct dialogue. It was his way of being in the world, but not of it. Therefore, Kierkegaard's writings proffer the subtle mockery of irony as his outer persona; the internal dialectic with God remained behind a veil, in *silencio*.

Irony as indirect communication serves as a protection for subjectivity by drawing attention away from the speaker and

toward the puzzle of spoken words. Cross speaks about “irony as exclusionary” and describes the interpretation of irony as either understood by the “superior initiated” or misunderstood by the “inferior uninitiated.”¹⁹ The relational essence of the two titles illustrate the paradox; either one discerns meaning from words used in a manner to describe something non-literally, or one does not. The discernment process requires critical assessment by the hearer since the message is indirect. The hearer who misunderstands irony does so because of literal interpretation. The interpretation of the paradox within irony is similar to the one found in the interpretation of metaphor.

The terms “superior initiated” and “inferior uninitiated” may also be linked back to Ricoeur’s work with *langue* and *parole*. The relationship between superior and inferior is itself paradoxical. On the one hand, it accesses the ‘code/system’ of language that marginalizes. On the other hand, it also could embrace subjectivity by provoking it with irony. The puzzling over ironic meaning may well lead to internal dialectic, and perhaps this is why Kierkegaard used irony so predominantly.

The idea of ‘superior’ and ‘inferior’ leads to acknowledgement of the freedom within the use of irony. Kierkegaard outlines this freedom in *The Concept of Irony*. “If . . . what I said is not my meaning or the opposite of my meaning, then I am free in relation to others and to myself.”²⁰ Andrew Cross explains the freedom of ironic speech by stipulating: “When we speak in direct, non-ironic mode, we both express and make commitments of various kinds.”²¹ Literal speech involves some kind of truth claim and obligates us to it and to others.²² Since Kierkegaard wished to make no commitments to the dominant objectivity of society or its participants, he employed irony to speak and yet not speak – to engage in public life, yet make no commitment to it. He wanted to leave people in doubt as to what he really meant – to have them thrash about mentally and engage critically so as to provoke the dialectic. Kierkegaard enjoyed leaving people in linguistic synapse.

And yet, Cross refers to the “indifference of the ironist’s attitude toward the hearers.”²³ This is the negative aspect of irony. While irony serves subjective freedom, “the ironist’s freedom is merely negative . . . in that it constrains immediacy, but is not positive in realizing a life of one’s own.”²⁴ Kierkegaard’s statement that “Irony is the awakening of

subjectivity" assents the freedom of irony while conceding its inability to mature the process of subjectivity.²⁵ Irony uses sarcasm to delineate between the real and the unreal, identify the self from others, and create distance with doubt about meaning.

But irony is only the outer protective shell; it does not involve the dialectic of the inner life. Irony engages but distances; it is objective and subjective in its application; the inherent cynicism of irony simultaneously acknowledges and denies subjectivity in others. In contrast to metaphor's promise by revelation, irony's paradox is preservation by concealment. Because of the effort to conceal, practicing the freedom of irony is different from the freedom of metaphor.

The Coup d'Etat of Figurative Language

Regardless of whether metaphor or irony is used, both styles of figurative language engender a kind of overthrow from 'literal bondage' into 'linguistic freedom.' Marie George, in her essay "Figurative Speech in Philosophy" strongly advocates restraint regarding the use of metaphor in philosophy.²⁶ While George acknowledges philosophers such as Aristotle and Aquinas used metaphor with great skill, she objects to metaphor's lack of clarity. It is not 'proper speech', i.e., literal.²⁷ George then refers to work by Msgr. Maurice Dionne. In his *Initiation à la logique*, Dionne speaks of certain philosophers proceeding by 'grands coups de syllogisme' in order to convey how proceeding uniquely by syllogisms exceeds the human intellect's capacity, and thus risks resulting in intellectual harm."²⁸ I agree with Msgr. Dionne - metaphorical syllogism means risk, but I disagree that it necessarily means harm, intellectual or otherwise. George cites the example to illustrate her conviction that metaphor is inappropriate for establishing philosophical truth claims. She continues her suit against metaphor because it is not purely cognitive - which is the element George sees as essential to philosophy. George categorizes metaphor as "pleasurable . . . touch(ing) upon the emotions . . . allow(ing) us to use our imaginations to fill in things . . ." ²⁹

I respect Marie George's position and acknowledge the value of construing philosophical arguments so as to support truth claims. I especially enjoyed her linguistic precision and the clarity of her presentation. But many philosophical (and

religious) queries do not concern literal truth claims, but reflect the necessity of the Kierkegaardian approach to questions about meaning and about life. And for this purpose, metaphor is eminently suitable for philosophy.

In a paradoxical wordplay, I would like to extract some of George's ideas from her essay to further support the efficacy of indirect communication. She speaks eloquently about metaphor as 'ornamental' and how metaphors 'evoke images.'³⁰ As George speaks of the common confusion between connotation and meaning, she talks about words that ". . . have a subtle effect on our thought."³¹ She continues to identify four ways in which "metaphors are more enjoyable than proper speech: 1) they involve an easy and rapid making of *connections*; 2) they cause the pleasure of surprise by suggesting similarities between things that are very different; 3) they engage our imaginations and 4) (they engage our) emotions."³²

In subsequent paragraphs, George embellishes her dissertation about metaphor. Metaphor *uncovers*; metaphor elevates the qualities of *freshness*, *vitality*, and *beauty*; metaphor elicits *surprise* and *wonder* in the new and unfamiliar.³³ George succinctly states: ". . . sometimes part of the pleasure of a metaphor lies in the fact that other connections can be made starting from it; *one can take it in other directions*."³⁴ (Italics mine.) It is "the novelty of seeing (a likeness) for the first time . . ."³⁵

And in the novelty of seeing a likeness for the first time, George (unintentionally?) makes a beautiful link with Kierkegaard's notion of the internal dialectic. She comments, then quotes from *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* about the teacher-student relationship. George states: ". . . the acquisition of knowledge depends principally upon an *internal activity* of the student . . ." (italics mine). She then quotes from the *Dialogues*: "The many admirable truths they bring to birth have been discovered by themselves from within. But the delivery is heaven's work and mine."³⁶

Metaphoric Preaching

Every preacher concerned with conveying an effective sermon knows that "the delivery is heaven's work and mine." As ministers deal continually with people caught in the paradox of living, they seek to bridge what pastor Robert White calls 'the collapsing center.'³⁷ Another way one might think of this is

'deconstructing deconstructionism.' By this I mean that the pastor must discover a way via metaphor to create and convey meaning to what appears meaningless – to provide what Ricoeur calls 'meaningful contradiction.'³⁸ Deft combination of words "creates an unusual union that calls for a new hearing."³⁹ It is Ricoeur's *parole* that is required here rather than *langue*.

White quotes from Ezekiel 37: "Can these bones live?" The question demonstrates intriguing metaphor that prompts the paradox of faith. How can bones, bleached white by years in the sun, be connected with life? The possibility offered by skillful metaphoric preaching can move the afflicted from despair to hope, from withdrawal to engagement. The minister's task is to present a message that is veiled just enough to pique the interest, arouse divine *eros*, and inspire the internal dialectic.

While White's essay approaches deconstruction from its oft-viewed negative standing, his comments do not necessarily apply to people in crisis. Many of the author's ideas about metaphoric preaching connect well with aforementioned concepts. Recall Kierkegaard's affirmations about expectancy, passion, freedom, and double movement. Ricoeur's assertions about *langue* and *parole* illustrate the necessity for words that hold 'individual and intentional' messages – again, what Wittgenstein calls a 'form of life.' The protective shell of irony (bitterness?) discussed by Andrew Cross demands to be broken open by metaphoric preaching. The *coup d'état* implemented by metaphor can explode barriers created by fear and hopelessness. Metaphoric preaching brings the elements spoken of in Marie George's essay, i.e., beauty, freshness, and vitality that takes one in a different direction.

Preaching with metaphor is "translates ancient symbols into living truths; it helps people make application of the ancient story to modern times."⁴⁰ Metaphoric preaching "bridges the gap between two worlds . . . it is a word of hope that goes beyond this life . . . (it) brings the gospel and lived experience together."⁴¹ Metaphor is the language beyond language, the hyperphilosophy of extraordinary communication. Metaphor bridges the gap between the obviously finite and the infinite possibilities, moving from communication to communion. Whatever linguistic sacrifice involved is not one of death, but of life to life. The lyricism of metaphoric preaching possesses an artistry that envelopes the paradox of faith to assist the leap of

faith. It is “grace at the intersection.”⁴²

Notes

¹ *New Oxford Annotated Bible*, eds. Metzger, Bruce and Roland Murphy, Oxford U. Press, New York: 1991.

² *Ibid.*, Psalm 91:4.

³ Ricoeur, Paul. “Philosophy After Kierkegaard.” *Kierkegaard: A Critical Reader*, Blackwell Publishing, Malden: 1998, p. 15.

⁴ Kierkegaard, Soren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, eds. Hong, Howard and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, New York: 1991, pp. 15-17.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁶ Cross, Andrew. “The Perils of Reflexive Irony.” *Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, eds. Hannay, Alastair and Gordon D. Marino, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge: 1998, p. 127.

⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*, eds. Hong, Howard and Edna H. Hong, Princeton University Press, New York: 1991, p. 33.

⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 202, 231.

⁹ Ricoeur, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Texas Christian University Press, Fort Worth: 1976, p. 2.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3.

¹⁶ Ricoeur, Paul. *Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Crossan, John. Scholars Press, Missoula: 1975, p. 311.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, Soren. *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*. P. 204.

¹⁸ Cross, Andrew. “Neither Either Nor Or: Perils of Reflexive Irony.” Cambridge Press, Cambridge: 1998, p. 125,126.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

²⁰ Cross, Andrew. “Perils of Reflexive Irony.” Cambridge Press, Cambridge: 1998, p. 130.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 134.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

²⁵ Cross, Andrew. “Perils of Reflexive Irony.” Cambridge Press, Cambridge: 1998, p. 137.

²⁶ George, Marie. “Some Considerations Regarding the Use of Certain Forms of Figurative Speech in Philosophy.” *Philosophia Perennis* (3)2, 1996: pp. 95, 146.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 96.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

²⁹ George, Marie. “Some Considerations Regarding the Use of Certain Forms of Figurative Speech in Philosophy.” *Philosophia Perennis* (3)2, 1996: p. 108.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³² George, Marie. “Some Considerations, etc. re: Figurative Speech.” *Philosophia Perennis* (3)2, 1996: p. 109.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

³⁴ Ibid., p. 110.

³⁵ Ibid., p. 111.

³⁶ Ibid., p. 117.

³⁷ White, Robert Jr., "Can These Bones Live?" *Preaching*, Preaching Resources, Inc., Louisville: 1997, p. 24.

³⁸ Ricoeur, Paul. *Biblical Hermeneutics*, ed. Crossan, John. Scholars Press, Missoula: 1975, p. 311.

³⁹ White, Robert Jr., "Can These Bones Live?" *Preaching*, Preaching Resources, Inc., Louisville: 1997, p. 26.

⁴⁰ White, Robert Jr., "Can These Bones Live?" *Preaching*, Preaching Resources, Inc., Louisville: 1997, p. 25.

⁴¹ Ibid., p. 26.

⁴² Ibid., p. 26.

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