

Comment on Duncan's Paper: Further Reflections on the Intellectual Biography of Stephen Pepper

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This brief paper contains reflections on the evolution of Pepper's thought from the 1923 paper "Equivocation of Value" in the *University of California Publications* through his work on root metaphor from the 1928 paper "Philosophy and Metaphor" to the 1973 article "Metaphor in Philosophy." The evolution pointed out is from Pepper's early determination of "two kinds of value": "immediate" and "standard," which are *completely unrelated* to different values as *different ways of operating*, hence to the underlying hypothesis of the *root metaphor theory*. "Standards" are thus tied to, but not identified with, immediacy, as rules or habits of inference are tied to empirical facts. Finally, the question is raised whether selectivism is a fifth root metaphor or the foundation of the root metaphor theory itself.

Since Professor Duncan's paper is essentially a set of comments on the intellectual biography of Stephen Pepper, it calls less for a critical evaluation than for some reflections on the evolution of that philosopher's thoughts from the 1923 paper in the *University of California Publications* through his later work with particular emphasis on his root metaphor theory.

Pepper's focus on "two kinds" of value ("The many unrelated Smiths and Joneses") in "Equivocation of Value" as "immediate" and "standard" value, his description of the "vitality" of immediate value as compared to the "parasitic" nature of standard value, "mere form til filled with from without," is echoed in Pepper's 1928 paper entitled "Philosophy and Metaphor" in the *Journal of Philosophy* (Pepper, 1928). Here he speaks of the "early stages" of metaphor when an evaluation is made of past experience and certain structural elements of that experience are selected and generalized as guiding concepts for a world hypothesis. In the early stages the metaphors "glow with the vitality of myths" but, Pepper says, when extended over nature, stretched across regions less and less in harmony with the early metaphor, metaphors lose their "more sensuous characteristics, grow old and wizened and dry . . . as skeletons are left sticking up stark and inflexible" (Pepper, 1928, p. 130). The metaphor is never entirely left behind. It is meant to keep the system fresh by its empirical ties, but as it becomes more universal the tendency is to lose contact with that empirical center. "All objects handled as absolute criteria have been distorted as they are pulled over one shape and then another.

Ultimately they break under the strain" (Pepper, 1928, p. 130). Later, Pepper's fourth maxim in *World Hypotheses* is that "concepts which have lost contact with their root metaphors are empty abstractions" (Pepper, 1942, p. 113). Pepper's ideal here is that when working with a highly developed conceptual system, one must maintain continuity with the vitality of experience through constant testing and refining of concepts by the continual call for corroboration.

Pepper's early willingness to see "different kinds" of value as unrelated, "not even two species of the same genus," is left behind. This can be seen in two aspects of his thought: first, in his later admission that metaphor and value theory have *different ways of operating* and, therefore, we can accept several quite different values at the same time and these values may be equally legitimate ("adequate," Pepper, 1942, p. 115 ff.); and, second, in Pepper's life-long refusal to allow discontinuity while not identifying:

practice and theory
acquaintance and description
qualitative categories and evaluative categories
(conceptual and analytic categories)
common sense and cognitive knowledge
art, ethics and philosophy
metaphorical and formal approaches to theorizing

Shall we call this Pepper's submerged pre-conceptual constraint, the root metaphor of his root metaphor theory: empirical anchorage coupled with the actuation of the philosopher's judgment in selecting and refining categories that "fall out" of experience? Yet a system does not simply serve as a summary of experience. Its central function is to provide a set of rules or *habits of inference* by which the mind can move from premise to conclusion in a satisfactory way. We need not only rules (standards) but premises from which inferences can be drawn; these premises refer to empirical facts in the world. Here we can find Pepper's stress on the *active* role of ideas in giving pattern to human experience.

A few questions for reflection:

1. Does metaphor inevitably "break under the strain" because of such elements as the weight of the technical vocabulary, as the 1928 paper suggests?
2. Is the saving grace the conscious remembrance of the fact that the system of thought began from a root metaphor, as the 1973 paper implies?
3. Can we consider Pepper's later emphasis on the necessity of ongoing refinement of categories (actuation) the heart of Pepper's position? If so, is this Pepper's contextualist bias showing?

4. Is selectivism a fifth root metaphor or is it the foundation of the root metaphor theory?

References

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