

Aristotle's *mimesis metaphorike*: between semantic universality and ontological determinateness

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Abstract Aristotle's theory of metaphor is still considered one of the most relevant points of reference in the study of this particular kind of language. In this article the definitions of metaphor which are contained in his treatises on *Rhetoric* and *Poetics* are analysed and interpreted epistemologically and ontologically with reference to Aristotle's theory of the soul.

In the *Rhetoric* Aristotle defines the metaphor as «putting things before the eyes» (*pro ommaton poiein*), since a property of metaphors is to link the production of meaning to a sensible, pictorial or iconic quality. To account for the meaning of the *exhibition of a sensible or iconic component*, I will make reference to the doctrines of *koine aisthesis* and *phantasia*, as defined in the *De Anima*¹. Here the philosopher highlights a primary perceptive and pre-linguistic recognition of the object, which organises the formation of concepts. This means that the formation of a unitary condition is still fluid, “undetermined” (in epistemological rather than ontological sense) and approximate, and precedes the categories of language. The unitary condition emerges from the sensible forms, which the soul receives adhering to the worldly order, and which the soul will employ in the formation of certain meanings.

What matters is that a precondition for linguistic conceptualisation is *a predisposition to meaning-production, which belongs to the sphere of sensibility*. Through the activities of articulation, determination and dissection, language expresses the primary unitary conditions of experience.

Insofar as the categories are fundamental modes of predication, they are ruled by these primary perceptive configurations. Scientific language builds a system of axioms and definitions that determine how ordinary language can articulate this objectification. However, the pre-categorical unity of soul and sensible nature still persists inside scientific language and reveals its presence if the procedures of definition and objectification are considered from different linguistic perspectives.

Keywords: Metaphor, Aristotle, Mimesis, Form of Sensibility, Unity by analogy.

¹ Regarding this point, *De Anima*, B8, 420a 26-420b 4 and the third book of *De Anima* are particularly important.

0. Introduction

Despite the history of metaphorology has been developing steadily and for a long time, Aristotle's theory of metaphorical language remains a fundamental reference for scholars in the field. Either in order to critically oppose or to establish continuity with the Stagirite's theories, the dialogue between the contemporaries and Aristotle remains open².

Around the second half of the 20th century an increasing interest for metaphorical language renewed the urgency of confrontation with the Aristotelian theory of metaphor. This interest manifested itself in several theoretical fields: in linguistics, semiology, and philosophy of language, within the «new rhetoric», and in the more general field of philosophical speculation. Suffice to mention the important studies Derrida, Blumenberg and Ricœur have written on this theme. Ricœur, in *La métaphore vive* makes a synthesis and develops a passionate discussion of these different approaches to the theme of metaphor. Characteristically, this continuous, tight and productive confrontation with Aristotle never leads to a unitary paradigm generally agreed upon by the majority of interpreters. The fecund confrontation rather seems to produce multiple interpretations, often opposite and contrasting each other³.

On the one hand, the interpretative tradition of the Aristotelian theory of metaphor individuates a substantial unity between the theory of the Greek philosopher and classical rhetoric. From this perspective of continuity, metaphor is exclusively considered as one of the mechanisms of *lexis*. It is reduced to a figure of speech, a stylistic artifice with no semantic or cognitive implications, based on the idea of the substitution of a proper name with a figurative name⁴. This rhetorical view of metaphor emerges from the separation of the field of *lexis*, expression and elocution, from the level of *dianoia*, of thought. To this appeal the philosophical interpretations of the Aristotelian concept of metaphor as a gnoseology in which thought and language are separate fields. Here a dualist metaphysics between sensible and suprasensible is again proposed, thus reaffirming a substantial ontology of fixed forms, which find their expression in ordinary language and the proper name.

² The definitions of *metaphora* that Aristotle gives in *Rhetoric* III and in *Poetics*, 21 and 22 constitutes what will be later considered the first theory of metaphor. This notion however appears for the first time only in Isocrates' *Evagora*.

³ MONOD 2007: 536 has a different opinion: he individuates an Aristotelian paradigm in Aristotle's general questioning of contemporary theories: «De fait, c'est le plus souvent par contraste avec une 'vision traditionnelle de la métaphore' imputée à Aristote et à sa postérité dans la rhétorique et l'esthétique classiques que les écrits du XX siècle consacrés à la métaphore ont entendu ou prétendu construire une nouvelle théorie de la métaphore, ou une approche de la métaphore en rupture avec des pré-supposés qui, à travers Aristote, seraient ceux de 'la tradition philosophique' ou de 'la métaphysique' même».

⁴ On the relationship between Aristotelian thought and classical rhetoric, with particular reference to Cicero, see CALBOLI: 2005.

Metaphorical language is a deviation from the latter, either acquiring a merely stylistic value or referring to a hidden meaning⁵.

On the other hand, alongside this theoretical perspective, which is still present in metaphor studies, a new way of re-appropriation of Aristotelian thought has developed, appraising the cognitive value attributed by the Greek philosopher to metaphorical language. Sometimes this re-appropriation is formulated within linguistic or semiological readings, indebted to an idea of «formativity» of language, or within readings guided by an idea of language as the revealing locus of being. These interpretations are inadequate to account for the particular kind of knowledge that Aristotle attributes to metaphorical language⁶. This paper aims at removing the Aristotelian theory of metaphor from this hermeneutic alternative: on the one hand confining it to a tropological field, and on the other attributing modern categories to the Greek philosopher and an idea of language according to which knowledge is built creatively.

The cognitive value that Aristotle attributes to metaphor can be understood only through a referential conception of language – even though Aristotle’s referentialism is not banal – and from a metaphysical perspective of thought, according to which the *ratio cognoscendi* is dependent on the *ratio essendi*. Language is always considered by the philosopher for its fundamental ontological value, for its ability to communicate cognitive content that always has an ontological aspect, a reference to beings. This does not necessarily imply an immediate relationship of cause and effect between reality and cognitive content. Aristotelian realism is characterised by complexity and productivity, which this paper aims to investigate through the concept of *mimesis metaphorike*.

This reading of the Aristotelian theory of metaphor will follow the argument of the important scholar of Aristotle Pierre Aubenque, who, with others, such as Wolfgang Wieland, has proposed an interpretation of Aristotle’s ontology founded on the reality of motion. For Aristotle the fundamental reality of the sublunary world is motion. Starting from this point, Aubenque argues that *language is in motion and speaks the motion of the sublunary world*⁷. I will show how this theory may function as a guideline to understand the relationship between language, thought and being. I will carry out an intertextual comparative reading of *Rhetoric*, *Poetics* and *De anima*. This metareflexive reading, going beyond a literal interpretation, will try to frame the

⁵ In this respect, Derrida’s reading is exemplary (DERRIDA 1971: 277). Cfr. CAZZULLO 1987: 61, who laments that metaphorology has never properly analyzed the philosophical premises of the first important theorisation of metaphor. This interpretative perspective of metaphorical language is in a line of continuity with Heideggerian theories establishing the pair meta-phoric and meta-physics (HEIDEGGER 1957: 89). DONINI 1997: LVII, in his *Introduzione to Poetica* argues that metaphor plays a marginal role in the Aristotelian theory of tragedy because it belongs to a secondary aspect of *mimesis*, that of *lexis*. The Anglo-American school has also criticised the Aristotelian definitions of metaphor and its ontological basis, see RICHARDS 1936: 89-90, ORTONY 1993: 3 and also ARABIT & HESSE 1986: 230-1.

⁶ Ricœur’s theory of metaphor is a sort of summary of this interpretation. It problematizes the Aristotelian thought to re-interpret it according to a synthesis and reconciliation of theoretical positions from different areas of the 20th-century thought (RICŒUR: 1975). See also CARIATI & CICERO: 1992; for a linguistic-semiological reading see MANETTI 2005: 58-59.

⁷ See AUBENQUE 1963: 492-4.

mimesis metaphorike within Aristotle's general "system" of thought. This will help to avoid interpreting the *mimesis metaphorike* according to a theory of language that Aristotle could have never conceived.

1. To see the similar: determinateness and the universal

Let us begin from a definition of metaphor that Aristotle gives in the *Poetics*: «A metaphor is the application of a word that belongs to another thing: either from genus to species, species to genus, species to species, or by analogy» (*Poetics*, 21, 1457b, 5-10, transl. by S. Halliwell).

Ricœur gives a long interpretation of this definition. He shows that its central element is the phenomenon of *epiphora*, that is, the transferring process, the motion that leads to substitution (RICŒUR 1975: 24 ff), rather than the element of substitution of a name with another, which would better serve the stylistic purpose. This process would set the semantic order in motion, which would reconfigure the category order, thus also redefining the logic-linguistic order. What matters therefore is the underpinning process, not the extrinsic process of substitution. According to Ricœur, the transposition operated by the metaphor happens between logical poles, namely, in Aristotle's words, from genus to species, from species to genus, from species to species, or by analogy. Metaphor redefines a pre-existent order of genera and species and disrupts the logical structures of language⁸.

The metaphorical process in Aristotle subsumes all figures implying a repositioning or a motion redefining the logic-linguistic order. This process is foundational to all figures which have been subsequently separated under different names by rhetoric (synecdoche, metonymy, catachresis).

Ricœur's dialogue with Aristotle produces important interpretations, but his hermeneutic ontology shows some limits. It does not manage to convey the metaphysical perspective of the Stagirite on the relationship between language and being. The French philosopher's analysis of this passage from the *Poetics* highlights the first relationship between thought and language. But in Aristotle's view, the analysis of metaphor's gnoseological value cannot be restricted to a logic-semantic level, and must rather be dealt with from an ontological perspective. Aristotle is indeed more interested in the nature of the metaphorical process than in the different kinds of metaphors. He tries to understand how appropriate metaphorical transposition happens and what are its heuristic effects. This appropriateness is of meaning: the meaning expressed by the name should be adequate to the thing named. In agreement with Aristotle's belief in the ontological roots of language, this redefinition of language categories springs from metaphor's function to convey one of the levels of reality⁹.

But let's look closely at Aristotle's definition of the ontological value of metaphorical language: «but much the greatest asset is a capacity for metaphor. This alone cannot

⁸ See RICŒUR 1975: 30-2. These relationships necessarily recall the order of discourse and of work.

⁹ See CALBOLI-MONTEFUSCO 2004: 116. The author argues that the motion of *epiphora* happens primarily vertically, from the level of reality to the level of name (as emerges from the famous passage in *De Interpretatione* where Aristotle speaks of the relationship between *pragmata*, *pathemata* and *phone*) and only in second instance according to a horizontal shift from word to word.

be acquired from another, and is a sign of natural gift: because to use metaphor well is to discern similarities [*to homoion theorein*]] (*Poetics*, 22, 1459a 5-10). The «natural gift» motif, «*euphuias*», returns in *Rhetoric*, where Aristotle affirms with reference to the metaphor that «and it cannot be learnt from anyone else»¹⁰. Also in the *Rhetoric*, Aristotle says that metaphor with the power of «clarity» and «evidence» enacts a mechanism for unveiling truth:

Most smart sayings are derived from metaphor, and also from misleading the hearer beforehand. For it becomes more evident to him that he has learnt something, when the conclusion turns out contrary to his expectation, and the mind seems to say, 'How true it is! but I missed it.' (*The "art" of Rhetoric*, III, 11, 1412a, transl. by E. S. Forster).

In another passage from *Rhetoric* III, Aristotle argues that the metaphor produces pleasure because it leads to apprehending genus (*The "art" of Rhetoric*, III, 1410b). When Aristotle speaks of «natural gift» that cannot be learnt from others, he is not saying that the form or representation enacted by the *mimesis metaphorike* is an occasional image with a merely exterior value and deviant from the truth of ordinary language. He is not speaking of an inventive process as a discovery (as Ricœur argues). He is associating metaphorical *seeing*, «*to homoion theorein*», to the expert perspective of the philosopher and the scientist, who, representative of the virtues and excellence of human nature, can grasp the fundamental dynamic forms of the eternally moving sublunary world and discover the movements regulating human action. *Mimesis metaphorike*, as poetic art, is rooted in the human natural inclination to imitate. This is not a rare talent, but the innate characteristic that distinguishes humans from other animals: «man is the most mimetic of all, and it is through mimesis that he develops his earliest understanding» (*Poetics* 4, 1448b 4-ff). Through imitation, the man knows the world, and, through the production of images, he discovers the form and essence of beings. Comparing these definitions which Aristotle gives in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, it emerges that the veritative value of «seeing similarities», the pleasure of knowledge and the persuasive power are intrinsically linked. Seeing the similar, perceive likenesses means to discover the necessary

¹⁰ *The "art" of Rhetoric*, III, 2, 1405a 5-10: «It is metaphor above all that gives perspicuity, pleasure, and a foreign air, and it cannot be learnt from anyone else; but we must make use of metaphors and epithets that are appropriate».

connections of the events in the world of experience and praxis¹¹. Forms apprehended through metaphorical language are not fixed forms, but dynamic forms. They give a new strong sensory connotation to the language, usually overpowered by ordinary codification:

which is a metaphor and sets the thing before the eyes¹².

We must now explain the meaning of ‘before the eyes’ and what must be done to produce this. I mean that things are set before the eyes by words that signify actuality. [...] For in all these examples there is appearance of actuality, since the objects are represented as animate: ‘the shameless stone’ ‘the eager spearpoint’ and the rest express actuality. [...] And as Homer often, by making use of metaphor, speaks of inanimate things as if they were animate (*The “art” of Rhetoric*, III, 11, 1411b)

Metaphor is here defined as a language form in which the motion of discourse becomes the image of the motion of things¹³. This «setting before the eyes», «*pro ommaton poiein*», implies a sensible component, pictorial or iconic, in the production of meaning, which metaphorical language exposes as a fundamental step of the semantic process¹⁴.

Seeing things in action determines the ontological value of language. This ontological value does not depend on the destabilising logic of identity and univocal definition, but it is rather connected to the ability of discourse to redefine itself starting from a reality revealed in time and motion. This reality finds access to words thanks to language’s

¹¹ This definition of metaphor is seen particularly unfavourably by RICHARDS 1936: 89-90, who argues: «here at the very beginning of the subject, the evil presence of three of the assumptions which have ever since prevented the study of this ‘greatest thing by far’ from talking the place it deserves among our studies and from advancing, as theory and practice, in the ways open to it. One assumption is that ‘an eye for resemblances’ is a gift that some men have but others have not. But we all live, and speak, only through our eye for resemblances. Without it we should perish early. Though some may have better eyes than others, the differences between them are in degree only and may be remedied, certainly in some measure, as other differences are, by the right kinds of teaching and study. The second assumption denies this and holds that, though everything else may be taught, ‘This alone cannot be imparted to another’. I cannot guess how seriously Aristotle meant this or what other subjects of teaching he had in mind as he spoke. But, if we consider how we all of us attain what limited measure of a command of metaphor we possess, we shall see that no such contrast is valid. As individuals we gain our command of metaphor just as we learn whatever else makes us distinctively human. It is all imparted to us from other, with and through the language we learn, language which is utterly unable to aid us except through the command of metaphor which it gives. And that brings up the third and worst assumption – that metaphor is something special and exceptional in the use of language, a deviation from its normal mode of working, instead of the omnipresent principle of all its free action».

¹² *The “art” of Rhetoric*, III, 10, 1411a. For an interpretation of this definition of metaphor see MORPURGO-TAGLIABUE 1967: 256-ff.

¹³ See AUBENQUE 1962: 492. See also RICŒUR 1975: 392, who argues that Aristotle attributes to the poet the ability to «signifier l’éclosion de l’apparaître. S’il est un point de notre expérience où l’expression vive dit l’existence vive, c’est celui où le mouvement par lequel nous remontons la pente entropique du langage rencontre le mouvement par lequel nous régressons en deçà des distinctions entre acte, action, fabrication, mouvement».

¹⁴ On the iconic character of metaphorical language beyond *La métaphore vive*, p. 47, see RICŒUR 2002: *passim*.

power to reconfigure its own semantic categories. Sensible form is the first category exploited by metaphor through a negotiation of proper and improper use of terms. Metaphor generates knowledge of a genus, which has not yet reached a conceptual definition¹⁵, and only exists in the tension between identity and difference.

But let us analyse Aristotle's expression «*to homoion theorein*», «to see the similar», perceive the like «among very different things» as put forward in the *Poetics*. In a passage of the *Topoi*, Aristotle defines the type of learning produced by the process of seeing similarities. He shows its role within the epistemological knowledge and what type of *seeing* is involved:

Likeness must be examined in things belonging to different genera – as A is to B, so is C to D (for example, 'As knowledge is related to the object of knowledge, so is sensation related to the object of sensation'), and also, as A is in B, so is C in D (for example, 'As sight is in the eye, so is reason in the soul' and 'As Likeness is calm in the sea, so is absence of wind in the air'). In particular we must have practice in dealing with genera which are widely separated; for in the other cases we shall be able to detect the similarities more readily. We must examine also things which are in the same genus, to see if there is any attribute belonging to them all which is the same, for example, to a man, a horse and a dog; for they are alike in as far as any attribute which they possess is the same (*Topics*, I, 17, 108a 7-16, transl. by E. S. Forster).

The consideration of similarity is useful both for inductive arguments and for hypothetical reasoning and also for the assignment of definitions. [...]

It is useful for the assignment of definitions because, if we can see what is identical in each particular case, we shall have no doubt about the genus in which we must place the subject under discussion when we are defining it; for, of the common predicates, that which falls most definitely in the category of essence must be the genus. Likewise also the consideration of similarity is useful for the forming of definitions in dealing with widely separated subjects, for example, the statements that 'calm at sea and absence of wind in the air are the same thing' (for each is a state of quiet), and that 'a point on a line and a unit in number are the same thing' (for each is a starting-point). Thus, if we assign as the genus that which is common to all the cases, our definition will not be regarded as unsuitable (*Topics*, 108b 20-35).

Aristotle compares two modes of seeing the similar (*homoiosis*): one that leads to individuation of the common property called genus in defining statements, and

¹⁵ RICŒUR 1978: 148. The author argues that in the metaphorical process: «All new rapprochement runs against a previous categorization which resists, or rather which yields while resisting, as Nelson Goodman says. This is what the idea of a semantic impertinence or incongruence preserves. In order that a metaphor obtains, one must continue to identify the previous incompatibility *through* the new compatibility. The predicative assimilation involves, in that way, a specific kind of tension which is not so much between a subject and a predicate as between semantic incongruence and congruence. The insight into likeness is the perception of the conflict between the previous incompatibility and the new compatibility. 'Remoteness' is preserved within 'proximity'. To see *the like* is to see the same in spite of, and through, the different. This tension between sameness and difference characterizes the logical structure of likeness». This process, which Ricœur explains as a semantic fact linked to Kantian productive imagination, is characterised in Aristotle by an awareness of reality's internal relations. These are not beyond differences, but 'in spite of, and through, the different'. Metaphor does not contain a suprasensible level beyond multiplicity, but gathers different levels, revealing common traits which acquire meaning through the coexistence of the proper and the improper.

another that is *seeing* through mediations and similarities emerging from analogical relations. Yet both modes of «seeing the similar» lead to the apprehension of genus. In order to understand the difference between these two forms of genus apprehension, we can compare this excerpt with one of Aristotle's definition of metaphors in the *Rhetoric*:

so that all words which make us learn something are most pleasant. Now we do not know the meaning of strange words, and proper terms we know already. It is metaphor, therefore, that above all produces this effect; for when Homer calls old age stubble, he teaches and informs us through the genus; for both have lost their bloom (*The "art" of Rethoric*, III, 10, 1410b).

It is evident from both the *Topics* and the *Rhetoric* excerpts that the definition of «genus» is very different from the one presenting genus as that which «is predicated of its species in its proper sense»¹⁶: genus expresses a property of substance, a universal that is immediately recognised «in the common predicates, that which falls most definitely in the category of essence must be the genus».

The epistemological programme, as defined in the *Posterior Analytics*, employs ordinary language as its cognitive tool. Ordinary language must be normalised in order to become an instrument for univocal definitions (definitions expressing a universal from through genus and species), and banishes from the epistemological level the use of metaphorical language¹⁷.

In fact, Aristotle's programmatic refutation in the *Posterior Analytics* does not correspond to his use of metaphor in his own scientific treatises. The scientific treatises reveal a universe in motion, a complex order. The search and discovery of concepts, laws and principles develops according to a different process than induction (*epagoge*), which individuates universal substances defined by genus and species. The *epagoge* method, «the progress from particulars to universals» (*Topics*, I, 12, 105a 1), which Aristotle exploits for the scientific discovery, proceeds by conjecture, gradual approximations. It looks in multiple and heterogeneous natural processes for hidden relations, which do not unify beyond multiplicity, but rather show a genus configured as a sort of activity, an *energeia*. This enables us to perceive the causal relationship between phenomena and their explicative principles (*Topics*, I, 12, 105a 1). The principles justify this multiplicity rather than erasing it. Perceiving *energeia* or common genus discloses a new perspective for epistemological research, establishing new causal relations between things. Pointing at a new web of relations the metaphorical process is an extraordinary heuristic instrument. It guides the search for hidden properties that are not immediately evident to direct observation.

¹⁶ *Topics*, IV, 3, 123a 34-ff.: «You must also see whether your opponent has assigned as a genus a term used metaphorically, speaking, for example, of 'temperance' as a 'harmony'; for every genus is predicated of its species in its proper sense, but 'harmony' is predicated of temperance not in its proper sense but metaphorically; for a harmony consists always of sounds».

¹⁷ *Posterior Analytics*, II, 13, 97b 36-39: «and so advance to the general definition, taking care not to become involved in equivocation. If we are to avoid arguing in metaphors, clearly we must also avoid defining in metaphors and defining metaphorical terms; otherwise we are bound to argue in metaphors» (transl. by H. Tredennick).

Knowledge acquired through the metaphorical process does not lead to the erasure of difference. The genus highlighted through analogy by metaphor is not the discovery of a form obtained through intellectual intuition by different phenomena, which would lead to a unity beyond multiplicity. It is rather evidence of something shared, which at the same time highlights the common traits. It is a form that brings to light its fundamental link to material moving beings, which live in a universe of correspondences, producing a complex order¹⁸. Lucchetta in an interesting book entitled *Scienza e retorica in Aristotele* refers to a section of *Generation of Animals*, in which Aristotle builds a series of analogical chains between seed, plant and uterus-sperm-seed. Aristotle's aim, as the author notes, is to explain the two phenomena through the identity of functions in different fields. Yet the author argues that identity leads at the same time to an increasingly deeper discovery of characteristics and laws of the fields considered. So the analogic chain earth-seed-plant leads to the discovery of the less visible chain uterus-sperm-foetus. In scientific research metaphor's task is «to put before the eyes» that which would otherwise remain hidden or partially hidden, bringing to light a compound structure: «the physical being through motion, the living being through activity and the organ through its function» (DALIMIER 2004: 136-7)¹⁹. The proceeding of knowledge by metaphors and analogies is Aristotle's systematic method, in every area of knowledge, and it also fundamentally defines his metaphysical research.

When in the *Rhetoric* Aristotle refers to the metaphorical definition of old age as «stubble», he is saying that through it we learn genus, since both old age and stubble have lost their bloom. He highlights a method for the discovery of the reality's properties. He proceeds with a certain “approximation” and “indeterminacy”²⁰, underlining the ontological quality of language. This is not immediately linked to defining logic and univocality: its ability to approximate being, to discover properties, opens the way to a type of universal semantics that has lost the univocal traits and defining determinateness of epistemological knowledge. The cognitive imprecision corresponds to an increased ability to express the determinateness and

¹⁸ LUCCHETTA 1990: 43 analyses the classic metaphor setting an animal and a plant side by side, employed by Aristotle in *Generation of animals*, II, 4, 739b 34-ff.

¹⁹ While the programme of formal logic is an attempt to give foundation to science by detaching it from natural language's plurality and dynamicity, Aristotelian qualitative science is a science of the multiplicity of principles and it is characterised by a profound dynamism, as is shown by W. Wieland's (WIELAND: 1962) superb analysis of Aristotle's *Physics*.

When Aristotle speaks of the sublunary world's universality, he employs expressions such as «*epi to polu*» or «*anagkaion ex hypotheseos*». See *Metaphysics* XI, 8, 1065 a 4: «for all science is of that which is always or for the most part, but the accidental is in neither of these classes». In *Physics*, II, 9, 199 b 34-ff., Aristotle argues that all sublunary world beings are governed by a hypothetical necessity (*ex hypotheseos*).

²⁰ In *Posterior Analytics*, II, 14, 98a 20-23, as in the excerpts from the *Topics* quoted above, Aristotle speaks of objects with a «single natural substance of this kind». Their unity is not given by a definition of genus and species, but by analogy: «There is another method of selection, *viz.*, by analogy. It is impossible to find a single name which should be applied to pounce, spine and bone; yet the fact that these too have [common] properties implies that there is a single natural substance of this kind». MELANDRI 1968: 273 referring to *Posterior Analytics*, II, 24, 68b 38 ff. underlines that Aristotle considers analogical proceeding doubly inadequate for its imprecise terminology and incomplete inductive reasoning.

particularity of sensible beings, and therefore a more original ability to adhere to ontology²¹. For Aristotle, *metaphorein* is the talent to see the similar. Rather than being a consequence of the creative mechanism of language, metaphor's ability to produce knowledge is given by its collocation in between ontological determinateness and semantic universality. In this position, the *aporia* or tension between individual and universal substances develops into a form of knowledge. From these cognitive mechanisms, «a single natural substance of this kind», «*mias tinos phuseos tes toiautes ouses*», emerges, which is not explicitly defined epistemologically. It rather seems to become the preliminary and necessary level of every conceptual formation and every epistemic definition. Instead of becoming an epistemic instrument, once expurgated of the ambiguity and imprecisions of the pragmatic dimension, ordinary language is employed with its multi-vocal and polysemic aspects in science itself. The multi-vocal polysemic aspects of ordinary language are primarily linked to metaphorical and analogical cognitive logic, which is not constructed on identity, and on which all definitions, demonstrations and formalisations are based.

2. Metaphor and the unity of the senses

We have seen how «putting things before the eyes» (*pro ommaton poiein*), which is a property of the metaphor, links the production of meaning to a sensible, pictorial or iconic quality. To account for the meaning of the *exhibition of a sensible or iconic component* I will refer to the doctrines of *koine aisthesis* and *phantasia* as defined in the *De Anima*²². Here the philosopher highlights a primary perceptive and pre-linguistic recognition of the object, directing the concept formation. This means that the formation of a unitary condition, yet still fluid, “undetermined” (undeterminedness is here considered from a gnoseological, rather than ontological, point of view) and approximate precedes language categories. The unitary condition emerges from the sensible forms, which the soul receives adhering to the worldly order, and which the soul will employ for the formation of certain meanings.

Aristotle's doctrine of sensibility has no precedents in Greek philosophy. His theory recognises the complexity of sensibility, moving away from his predecessors' theoretical restrictions²³. The philosopher separates different levels in the field of sensory knowledge, to which he attributes «judgement» and critical ability. One of the sensory knowledge's modalities is defined by the «special senses» – which are always true – while the senses sensible by accident and the common senses are subject to error. Within the sensible sphere, a synthesis mechanism in which

²¹ See GUASTINI 2005: 10-11.

²² Regarding this point, *De Anima*, B8, 420a 26-420b 4 and the third book of *De Anima* are particularly important.

²³ See SORABJI 1992. The author highlights how Aristotle defines one of the most advanced doctrines of perception in the history of Greek philosophy.

phantasia intervenes is already in place as a connecting moment of the proper sensibles where error might occur²⁴.

In the eighth chapter of the second book of the *De Anima*, focusing on hearing, Aristotle affirms:

The varieties of resonant bodies are clearly distinguished by the sound they actually emit. For, as without light colours are not seen, so without sound we cannot distinguish high and low or acute and grave in pitch. These latter terms are used by analogy [*kata metaphoran*] from tangible objects. For the acute, that is, the high, note moves the sense much in a little time, while the grave or low note moves it little in much time. Not that what is shrill is identically rapid, nor what is low is slow, but it is in the one case the rapidity, in the other the slowness, which makes the motion or sensation such as has been described. And it would seem that there is a certain analogy between the acute and grave to the ear and the acute and blunt to the touch. For that which is acute or pointed, as it were, stabs, while the blunt, as it were, thrusts, because the one excites motion in a short, the other in a long time, so that per accidens the one is quick, the other slow (*De Anima*, B8, 420a 26-420b 4, transl. by R. D. Hicks).

The fundamental difference between acute and grave sounds is adopted from tactile sensations. In Aristotle's view, this is possible according to space-time parameters. The possibility to translate perceptions into time-space structures, which is proper to the common sense, enables us to convert a perception into another by analogies built on space-time relationships, thus enabling us to perceive something «accidentally». The interim processes of transposition and conversion of perceptions finds their conditions of existence in a space-time structure of sensibility.

When Aristotle speaks of «common sensibles» it is evident that he conceives the objects of perception as unities structured according to a spatial and temporal order. His description of dimensions, motion, number, figure and quiet as products of common sense prove it (*De Anima*, B8, 420a 26-420b 4).

However, as the excerpt clearly states, Aristotle thinks that this relational structure is interdependent on the “absolute” qualities that are defined through the «special senses». That is to say, the unifying operations at the basis of the space-time configuration of data of perception act according to rhythm, scansion, permanence, and reiteration. These are always defined through a “metrics” or “measure” irrevocably linked to a colour, a sound, or a tactile quality. This produces a law or a norm of synthesis in the space of continuity between soul and world. So, for instance, temporal duration is bound to colour permanence, while scansions depend on how a surface divides the tactile sensation it has induced in the hand.

An implicit organisational rule of the sensibles is thus produced. A proper sensible being absent, the rule allows to perceive a sound, a smell or a colour indirectly, by following a self-organised process based on the perceived data. These space-time rhythms allow us to shift analogically from a proper sense to another, on the ground of measure or “legality” of space-time, which creates connections between the senses.

²⁴ Here *phantasia* is conceived as the active side of perception. See NUSSBAUM 1992, HAMLIN 1968: 53. In fact *dynamis*, defined by Aristotle as a movement, in the *De Anima* has multiple functions, among which the fundamental mediation between sensible and intellectual forms.

Yet the moment of *koine aisthesis* is defined not as a unity of conscience, but rather as a common condition of the senses, founded on space-time compositional criteria *imitated* by the soul. The soul adopts the compositional criteria from the rhythms and the “legality” of motion’s objective reality: the figures of motion traced by common sense *imitate* the motion of individual realities. Representations of motion, dimension, figure, number, and unity are for Aristotle *mimetic* or *similar* representations of reality on two levels of the cognitive process: the moment in which individual reality gives its imprint on the proper sensible and when the first configurations of perceptions are defined²⁵.

Relations of *similarity*, which the cognitive process enacts, are always guided by a sort of trace, namely, the manifesting of individual substance. Metaphor therefore does not reveal an activity of the soul related to a constructive game of material given in the sensible sphere. Its work on meanings and relations between meanings is always oriented towards the definition of that “meaning”, which is the “zero degree” of representation, and which is the “manifestation” of the individual substance in the single intuition.

Aristotle speaks of figure, notion, dimension, quiet, and number. The Aristotelian analysis has no pretence of epistemological rigour. Probably this is because in his analysis of problems he begins from a metaphysical perspective. What matters is that linguistic conceptualisation has as its preliminary condition *a predisposition to meaning belonging to the sphere of the sensible*. Articulating, determining and sectioning, language expresses the primary unitary conditions of experience. Every object is seen in motion and in a state of quiet, through its figure and its dimension. In language we can objectify it, from time to time and according to the viewpoint from which we consider it, as a quantity, or through its collocation in space, or we can see the motion of things as explicitly positioned in the project of human action. Aristotelian categories as fundamental modes of predication are guided by these primary perceptive configurations, which the soul defines in a mimetic relationship with the order of the world. Scientific defining language stabilises and systematises. It builds a system of axioms and definitions that, according to principles, determine the fundamental modes according to which ordinary language articulates this objectification. But the modes of definition and objectification, according to different linguistic perspectives, refer to a pre-categorical unity with a sensible nature. For this reason according to Aristotle language is denotative, not merely because of *phone* (which conventionally expresses predefined meanings preceding language), but because language follows and redefines a pre-linguistic unitary condition, given by

²⁵ GUASTINI 2003 has shown the cognitive process in Aristotle to be a mimetic process. In the analysis of this author, the concept of mimesis is a kind of «*Grundwort*» in Ancient Greek thought: «La verità per i greci è calibrata prima sulla cosa che sul nostro sguardo» (*ivi*: 13) «l’essere si dà come già originariamente formato fuori di noi e nei confronti del quale alla nostra facoltà conoscitiva non resta altro che conformarsi e adeguarsi al meglio delle sue possibilità» (*ivi*: 12). Therefore, the truth is «*adaequatio intellectus cum rebus*, adeguazione e subordinazione dell’intelletto, attraverso la percezione sensibile, alle cose fuori di noi», and not «*adaequatio rei et intellectus*, come verrà inteso dalla scolastica medievale» (*ivi*: 13).

the “immediacy” between *pragmata* and *pathemata*²⁶. When we say that «x is something», we refer to any “object” although not yet determined (from a gnoseological point of view) and stable. However, the object must have already appeared in the soul. Language imitates or denotes a truth given on a pre-linguistic level, from which language depends. But by saying it, language assumes that truth and transforms it in a meaning subject to categorisations and the linguistic and communicative web of knowledge.

From this interpretation one can understand the privileged relationship between *pragmata* and *pathemata* in the well-known passage of *De Interpretatione*, where language seems to play a derivative role acquiring a denotative value in relation to the constitution of the subject matter of knowledge. Yet the referential value that Aristotle gives to language does not imply its reduction to mere external expression of a truth that exists already before its becoming *phone*: the word is the constitutive moment of transformation, of fixation, of generalisation and increase of a “meaning” which appears for the first time in the sphere of sensitiveness but that can only exist through its redefinition and stabilisation in the inter-subjective and communicative dimension. For Aristotle, the definition of the object occurs primarily through an act of sensitive adherence to the world, through an act of intentionality towards things which is prior to conceptual intentionality: communication and dialogue among men are introduced and interplay in a level of content which is already formed (though in a provisory manner) before language and communication²⁷.

This movement which puts the two levels of intentionality in relation is treated in *De Anima* through the activity of the *phantasia*, which assumes a double function: *phantasia aisthetike* and *phantasia bouleutike* or *logistike*. This *dynamis*, defined by

²⁶ See the famous passage of *On Interpretation*, 1, 16a 4-8: «Words spoken are symbols or signs of affections or impressions of the soul; written words are the signs of words spoken. As writing, so also is speech not the same for all races of men. But the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for the whole of mankind, as are also the objects of which those affections are representations or likenesses, images, copies» (transl. by A. P. Cooke). For an untraditional interpretation of this famous passage, see LO PIPARO 2003 who, confronting those interpretations that reduce this passage to rough referentialism, translates it as follows: «*Le articolazioni della voce umana e le operazioni logico-cognitive dell'anima umana sono tra loro differenti e complementari, così come lo sono le articolazioni scritte e quelle della voce*» (ivi: 66).

The author argues that mental images have their foundations in what he calls «epi-sensoriality»: «*Nell'uomo l'epi-sensorialità ha i tratti specifici della sensorialità linguisticizzata o linguisticizzabile tanto che la sua configurazione strutturale nel De Anima e nell'Etica Nicomachea viene descritta come simile a quella di un enunciato affermativo o negativo*».

Starting from the translation cited above, the author maintains that this passage can be reinterpreted as a relationship of co-originality and co-determination between *ta en te phone* and *ta en te phuke pathemata* (could one say, following Saussure, a relationship of interdependence between signifier and signified?). This establishes an immanent link between language and what is intended by it, which as Aubenque has rightly shown, can hardly be attributed to Aristotle.

²⁷ This is also the direction taken by phenomenology. See PIANA 1966. This author, interpreting Husserl, argues that «*Ogni giudizio che abbia forma “S è p” presuppone che vi sia già un oggetto di fronte a noi, l'oggetto appunto sul quale esso si pronuncia. Prima del giudizio, vi è già “qualcosa”: ma questo “qualcosa” deve avere già una struttura unitaria e una identità, dal momento che esso è già un oggetto ed è proprio “questa identità [...] che costituisce il concetto pregnante dell'oggetto”*. Di qui la necessità di mostrare in che modo si formino, a partire dalla fluidità del campo sensoriale, degli oggetti come possibili sostrati del giudizio. Ma come abbiamo visto il processo di oggettualizzazione si svolge in diverse fasi e vi saranno dunque anche diversi gradi dell'identità dell'oggetto. [...] solo nel momento in cui la conoscenza è affidata al linguaggio si può parlare di scienza» (ivi: 18).

Aristotle as a movement, in *De Anima* has multiple functions, among which the fundamental mediation between sensible and intellectual forms. In this sense, *dynamis* is fundamental to understand how the forms of perception are converted into linguistic meanings. The threshold between linguistic and extra-linguistic is configured like the relationship between these two levels of *phantasia*: the *phantasia aisthetike* and *phantasia bouleutike*²⁸.

3. Conclusions

Aristotle highlights the cognitive process' stratification. On the one hand, the definition of the object identity is assumed as an identity in itself, as an individual substance, which is already a unity of matter and form. On the other hand, the individual substance is considered, from within this same process as the efficient cause of its own motion, whose aim (which as we have seen is always relative) becomes a linguistic meaning, that is, the stabilisation of this meaning in a community of speakers. The cognitive process inserts itself in the more general intelligible order of the universe, where phenomena happens following a teleological development. The phases of this development are defined by potency and action as moments of being in motion. The act always contains potency excess. The aim of cognitive motion is a *telos*, which is continuously open to the reality of becoming.

The metaphorical process establishes a correlation between linguistic conceptualisation and a sensible unity. Putting «things before the eyes», it creates the condition for a potential widening of meanings, guided by a unifying motion originating from perception. This is gradually defined, it is interdependent on linguistic meanings, and it eventually settles in the approximate and “undetermined” genus that metaphor «puts before the eyes».

Metaphor is therefore a process that reveals the stratification of levels of “meaning”. It refers, on the one hand to an ontological level, and on the other to soul dynamics, in which it manifests itself and settles according to the individuation of congeneric aspects. Congeneric aspects represent the violation of *metabasis eis allo genos* – the prohibition to transgress categories. This is foundational to epistemological language. It provides the fundamental indications to understand and find unity by analogy, which Aubenque himself has designated as a problematic point in the history of the interpretation of Aristotelian thought (AUBENQUE 1962: 198 ff.).

Metaphorical language is charged of a strong sensible component. This seems to become the modality through which the linguistic universe “expresses” the determined component of individual substance. Beyond this linguistic threshold Aristotle knows well that there is no knowledge and no possible way to conceive being.

²⁸ Due to the limited space of this article, the notion of *phantasia* cannot be discussed here exhaustively. For an extensive discussion of this notion see TRAVAGLINI 2000: ch. 3, and, *ivi*: ch. 1, for an interpretation of the well-known passage in *De interpretatione*.

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