



# Aristotle's Concept of Metaphor

Shibin Joseph\*

## Abstract

This article examines the philosophical significance of metaphor in Aristotle's works. Aristotle has a comprehensive theory of metaphor in which he defends the use of metaphor in philosophy. I argue in this paper that the scepticism concerning the cognitive significance of metaphor, comes from misinterpretation of Aristotle's theory of metaphor. Most contemporary theories of metaphor are responses to the various aspects of metaphor outlined by Aristotle in *Rhetoric* and *Poetics*. There is an apparent contradiction in Aristotle's view of metaphor in philosophy. The tradition has highlighted the aspect of embellishment but ignored the fact that Aristotle himself used metaphors in his writings. I highlight the defence of metaphor in the philosophical writings of Aristotle. I invoke his idea of *pròs hén* ambiguity in order to explain the place and role of metaphor in philosophy. In short, Aristotle rejects the kind of metaphors used by the Sophists in order to deceive the masses. We come to the idea that Aristotle emphasizes clarity of thought in philosophy where refined and context-dependent metaphors can be used.

**Keywords:** Metaphor, Aristotle, similarity, *Pròs hén* ambiguity, philosophical argument.

## 1. Introduction

Conceptual Metaphor Theory, as proposed by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, holds that metaphors are widespread in language and occur in almost every discourse. Their view is that we think, experience, and speak in terms of metaphor (Johnson & Lakoff, 1980). This view is a challenge to the conventional view where metaphor is purely a rhetorical phenomenon. Aristotle is the first thinker who suggested the idea that metaphor is a

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\* Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India; josephshibinsj@gmail.com

rhetorical phenomenon. As a result, a scepticism concerning the use of metaphor in any serious discourse is very much dominant even in contemporary times. At the same time, metaphor as a rhetorical phenomenon is just one of the aspects of metaphor according to Aristotle. Aristotle has indeed a long-lasting impact on the tradition of the development of the concept of metaphor in Western thought. Hence, this article tries to examine the role of metaphor in philosophy from an Aristotelian point of view. Does metaphor have any philosophical significance? If metaphor is purely a rhetorical phenomenon, then it cannot be used in philosophical discourse. Are there some species of metaphor which can be relevant in philosophy? In short, the article answers the question of whether a philosophical argument can be based on metaphor.

Marga Reimer and Elizabeth Camp (Reimer & Camp, 2006, p. 629) say that an adequate theory of metaphor should give:

- i. a definition of metaphor,
- ii. an account of metaphorical meaning,
- iii. the mechanism of metaphor (how metaphor works) and
- iv. an explanation of metaphorical truth.

We come across a conflict between the ‘literal’ and ‘metaphorical’ in almost every theory of metaphor. The central idea is that we consider the literal meaning first, and if it is found to be irrelevant or defective, then we look for a different meaning, which is the metaphorical meaning. Searle defends this view in his theory of metaphor, where he demarcates between ‘sentence meaning’ and ‘speaker’s meaning’ (Searle, 1979, p. 227). The word used as a metaphor does not refer to anything specific in the world out there, but it may refer to multiple entities. Metaphors which appear in discourses and conversations are highly context-sensitive. A background understanding is necessary for the comprehension of such metaphors. For example,

“Tom is a pig”

It is not an open-ended metaphor. It is highly context-sensitive, and to understand this metaphor, we need to know who Tom is and what a pig is. A pig in its natural habitat is not filthy, but there are certain conditions under which pigs behave in filthy ways.

There are many metaphors which are open-ended, and such metaphors are always relevant. For example, the metaphors of William Shakespeare still fascinate us.

“A lifetime is a day”

Emily Dickinson uses the metaphor of 'a lifetime is a day' in her poem entitled "Because I could not stop for Death." This metaphor says that birth is the sunrise, maturity is the noontime, declining age is twilight, and death is night. It captures the different aspects of life. Metaphors in poetry are found to be open-ended, and that is why we are able to find meaning in almost every poem and works of art.

## 2. Aristotle's theory of metaphor

A systematic conceptualisation of metaphor in Western philosophy began with the writings of Aristotle. It does not mean that metaphor as a figure of speech originated with the philosophical writings of Aristotle. Even though accounts of metaphor are found in the works of the early Greek literary figures like Homer, Isocrates, who introduced the term *metaphora*, and Plato, a serious treatment of metaphor as a concept is found in the writings of Aristotle.

Isocrates (not to be confused with Socrates) developed an account of *metaphora* based on a prose/verse distinction. He said that there is an everyday Greek which is used for ordinary situations, which is devoid of embellishment, and there is a Greek which is used by the poets (Kirby, 1997, p. 523). He said that the poets are blessed with ornaments. They can express even with foreign words, neologisms, and metaphors (*metaphorais*). The prose writers are not gifted with these tools.

Aristotle is the philosopher in the history of Western Philosophy who developed a systematic theory of metaphor (Marcos, 1997, p. 124). His theory of metaphor is so vast that almost every thinker who came after him was responding to its salient features. According to John Kirby,

"That being so, a sustained study of Aristotle's concept of metaphor needs no further justification, since it is to him that we owe the terms in which the debate was framed for many hundreds of years. Indeed, here as often, even those who wish to propose new or different parameters for the analysis of metaphor must do so against the grain of the Aristotelean tradition" (Kirby, 1997, p. 518).

For Kirby, the conceptualisation of metaphor is a reaction to the Aristotelian tradition, but Umberto Eco says that Aristotle had already given a comprehensive theory of metaphor. He says, "...of the thousands and thousands of pages written about metaphor, few add anything of substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle" (Eco & Paci, 1983, p. 217-218). This statement looks like an exaggeration, but a few other thinkers also agree with Eco and Paci. Louis

Mackey argues that we come across a minimal Aristotelianism in almost every contemporary theory of metaphor (Mackey, 1965, p. 283). Minimal Aristotelianism holds that some of Aristotle's key insights can be found in almost every later theory of metaphor. Some theories have more influence of Aristotle, whereas others have less. Mackey further says, "I believe that the Aristotelian account of metaphor and the view most commonly held by modern theorists may in fact complement rather than contradict each other" (Mackey, 1965, p. 272). According to this view, the modern theories are a continuation of the tradition of Aristotle and an explanation of the fundamentals that had been laid out by Aristotle. Aristotelian influence can even be found in the contemporary writings on metaphor by Donald Davidson and John Searle. Davidson argues against the idea of metaphorical meaning, "Metaphors mean what the words, in their most literal interpretation, mean, and nothing more" (Davidson, 1978, 32). We do not find an account of 'metaphorical meaning' in Aristotle, but for him, metaphor is a connection between things or relations based on similarity. Davidson agrees with Aristotle's idea that Metaphor is based on similarities between things, and imaginative employment of words results in unfamiliarity or strangeness. Davidson is indeed a faithful follower of Aristotle in contemporary philosophy of language. Searle is a contemporary thinker with an account of metaphor which is radically different from the Aristotelian tradition. He follows Max Black's tradition in defending the idea of metaphorical meaning in the philosophy of language. For Searle, metaphor is not just an activity of naming, but it is a genuine linguistic phenomenon which can be explained. He defends the idea of metaphorical meaning on the basis of his theory of speech acts (Searle, 1979, p. 78). For Searle, what happens in metaphor is a shift from literal sense to metaphorical sense, but for Aristotle, metaphor is the activity of applying the name of one thing to another, based on similarity. Searle does not include an account of Imagination in his theory of metaphor, but he agrees with Aristotle that metaphor gives fresh air to discourse.

Aristotle's major concern is to obtain knowledge concerning the nature of reality, and he thinks that language is a path to that knowledge. He says that metaphysics which is the 'first philosophy' and the highest possible wisdom is all about the rational knowledge concerning the ultimate principles. He says, "Clearly, then, wisdom is knowledge about certain basic causes and principles." (*Metaphysics*, 982a1). Aristotle was a nominalist. Nominalism is a philosophical standpoint which says that things are what they are only because we name them. There is no 'chairness' in which the particular chair participates, as we find in Plato's idealism. The major difference between Plato and Aristotle is that Plato was an idealist and Aristotle was a nominalist. Names are used to classify things, and

classification is not based on any Platonic ideals. As a nominalist, Aristotle was much concerned about the way we use language. He found that we use words in a variety of ways. According to Aristotle, there are three uses of language. They are: univocal, equivocal, and analogical. Univocal language is the case where we apply one word for many things, but we basically mean the same thing. Consider the following sentences,

It's a *bright* day.

It's a *bright* light.

In these two sentences, the word 'bright' is used with the same meaning. This is an example of univocal use of a word, where the meaning remains the same across sentences.

There are cases where we use the same word with different meanings in every case. There will be a radical difference of meaning in every case of the use of the same word. Consider these following sentences.

He deposited money in the *bank*.

He lost his money in the *bank* while catching fish.

In these sentences, the meaning of the word 'bank' is radically different. In the first case, bank denotes a financial institution, and in the second case, it denotes a riverbank.

In the case of analogical language, the meaning of the word varies proportionately with the thing that is described. The word 'healthy' can be used in different ways, such as: healthy food, healthy people, healthy drink, healthy diet, and healthy business. There can be a wide range of things, people, and institutions which can be called 'healthy'. But not all of these cases are healthy in the same sense. The meaning of the word 'healthy' varies proportionately with respect to the entity being described. Analogical use of language is central to Aristotelian metaphysics and his theory of metaphor.

Aristotle thinks that the errors in reasoning are the outcome of the confusion between the name and the referent or the object. He says,

"It is impossible in a discussion to bring in the actual things discussed: we use their names as symbols instead of them; and we suppose that what follows in the names, follows in the things as well" (*Sophistical Refutations* 165a6-7).

According to Aristotle, a metaphor is a kind of naming where we give the name of one thing to something else. It is not just an activity of naming for the sake of naming but for a better understanding of the thing named.

He argues that metaphor is an activity of naming a thing which lacks a proper name of its own (*Rhetoric*, III, 1405a35-b6).

The salient features of Aristotle's theory of metaphor are found in both *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*. The question concerning language is very important in these two works. The ornamental function of language is highlighted in these works. According to Larkin, "The question of language is very important in these works because both rhetoric and poetry make use of enriched and ornamental language in representing action and in conveying the speaker's feeling or appealing to the emotion of the audience" (Larkin, 1971, p. 39). We find that rhetoric and poetry gain more importance in Aristotle, which were rather sidelined by Plato. Even though we come across an idea of reformed rhetoric in *Phaedrus* of Plato, we do not have a clear picture of the same in Plato. It seems that Aristotle was responding to the challenge raised by Plato. When Plato denied the status of art to poetry and rhetoric, Aristotle wrote treatises which affirm their status as art. For Aristotle, metaphor is an important aspect of both rhetoric and poetry.

I will now highlight some of the salient features of Aristotle's theory of metaphor. Aristotle gives a definition of metaphor in *Poetics*, and further elaboration of metaphor is found in *Rhetoric*. Aristotle's theory of metaphor is rooted in his theory of signification, which is very implicit in his works. He says that all words have a natural and basic function, which is to signify objects or things:

"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" (*On Interpretation* 16a 4-8).

For Aristotle, words denote or signify things outside the mind via affections of the soul. The above passage indicates that written words are *symbols* of the spoken words. Spoken words are the *signs of affections of the soul*.

The signifying function is again discussed in *Sophistical Refutations*:

"We use their names as symbols instead of them; and we suppose that what follows in the names, follows in the things as well, just as people who calculate suppose in regard to their counters. But the two cases are not alike. For names are finite

and so is the sum-total of accounts, while things are infinite in number" (*Sophistical Refutations* 165a 6-14).

We come across a triangular rapport between affection of the soul, thing, and word in his theory of signification. John Kirby compares this triangular rapport with the account of sign in C. S Pierce which discusses "an interaction of a triad of semiotic elements" (Kirby, p. 535).

In *Poetics*, Aristotle says that metaphor is a kind of naming where we apply a name/word to one thing which belongs to another thing. What happens in metaphor is that a name which is generally used to signify one thing is given to another thing which is generally signified by another name. In short, the mechanism of a metaphor is that the name of one thing is transferred to another thing. For Aristotle, metaphor proceeds from one thing to another thing. It rules out the generally accepted idea that metaphor proceeds from a literal sense to a figurative sense. Metaphor in Aristotle is a kind of naming based on similarity between two things or relations. Aristotle has no account of an emergence of a new meaning during the transference which we later found in many contemporary theories of metaphor. Matthew Wood argues that Aristotle's theory of metaphor is a vertical theory of metaphor, which is misinterpreted by many later thinkers (Wood, 2017, p. 73). A vertical theory of metaphor says that the essence of a metaphor is a relationship between things and words. It rejects the contemporary idea that essence of a metaphor is a systematic relationship between literal meaning and speaker's meaning. Donald Davidson's view of metaphor is an example of a vertical view of metaphor and John Searle represents the contemporary view (Searle, 1979, p. 105). For Aristotle, metaphor is a kind of naming:

"*Metaphora* is the *epiphora* of the name (*onoma*) of something to something else." (*Poetics*, XXI, 1457b6-7)

The above definition of metaphor is found to be insufficient and hence he gives another definition. For Aristotle, the naming happens generally in four ways:

"Metaphor consists in giving the thing a name that belongs to something else; the transference being either from genus to species, or from species to genus, or from species to species, or on grounds of analogy." (*Poetics*, XXI, 1457b7)

Aristotle explains the existence of four kinds of metaphor. There can be some metaphors based on analogy. It is inaccurate to say that a metaphor is always based on similarity between two things or entities. This explanation is only correct for the first three categories of transference. It does not make sense in the case of metaphors which are based on analogy.

In the fourth category, which is metaphor based on analogy, the similarity is between structural relations, not with things. Wood says, “It is therefore true that, for Aristotle, all metaphors involve a statement of likeness between two things or relations (Wood, 2017, p. 85).

Aristotle gives importance to the fourth category:

“Of the four sorts of metaphor, the most popular are those by analogy, as when Pericles said that the youth killed in the war vanished from the city as if the spring had been taken from the year.” (*Rhetoric*, III, 10, 1411a1)

“Perspicuity plus pleasantness plus an air of unfamiliarity are most of all possessed by metaphor, and [the use of] metaphor cannot be acquired from anyone else. But the epithets and metaphors used in speaking should be fitting. And this will be based on analogy – otherwise, it will be evidently inappropriate, because contraries are most evident when set side by side.” (*Rhetoric*, III, 2, 1405a8)

“Metaphorical language is the most important. The right use of metaphors is a sign of inborn talent and cannot be learned from anyone else; it comes from the ability to observe similarities in things.” (*Poetics*, XXII, 1459a5)

Here Aristotle emphasizes the importance of metaphorical language. He considers metaphor as a sign of genius. It leads to the idea that almost everyone is able to create a metaphor, but not all the metaphors are effective and novel. There can be good metaphors and bad metaphors. He thinks that the capacity to create good metaphors is an art which we are born with. This is an inborn talent, and hence it cannot be taught or learned from an expert. Creation of novel metaphors is related to a higher degree of perception, where we are able to see the similarities which others do not see or fail to see. Davidson also agrees with this Aristotelian idea that metaphor creation is all about the perception of similarities. According to Davidson, metaphor is an effective tool of communication used by speakers but he subscribes to the idea that metaphor belongs to the domain of use, not meaning (Davidson, 1978, p. 33). Max Black, in his ‘interaction theory’ of metaphor, highlights the point of ‘similarity perception.’ He says that metaphor is not all about the perception of the existing similarities, but metaphors create new similarities (Black, 1955, 285). It leads to the idea that perception of similarities is an important aspect in cognition, and such similarities are revealed only to the highly refined minds. Poets and artists are gifted with the talent of similarity perception, and hence, they

effortlessly create metaphors. Aristotle argues in *Rhetoric* that philosophers, too can perceive such similarities:

“As I said before, metaphor must be by transference from things that are related, but not obviously so, as it is a sign of sound intuition in a philosopher to see similarities between things that are far apart.” (*Rhetoric*, III, 11, 1412a9)

In *Topics* too, he describes the connection between metaphors and the perception of similarities. He says that “... all those who use metaphors do so on account of some similarity” (*Topics* 140a 11-2). Metaphor results from our ability to perceive similarities. For him, the ability to create and understand metaphors indicates the sign of genius because it depends on a capacity to perceive resemblances in things which are far apart. We do not find an account of similarity in *Poetics*. When we turn to *Categories*, we come across his explanation of similarity. According to his analysis, similarity is a case of a category of relation (*Categories* 6b 10). Similarity is an awareness of what is common between two things or by what two things are related.

Aristotle gives an indication that metaphor is relevant in philosophy too. But at this point of time, we are not sure about the kind of metaphor he allows in philosophy. We also need to discuss what he means by ‘philosopher’. This is explored in the next section.

Aristotle says that metaphor is a tool that we use for effective teaching and learning. Teaching and learning become effective when we make it more pleasing. Metaphors help us to put complex ideas in simple terms. He says:

“To learn easily is in fact by nature pleasant to everyone, and names signify something, so whichever names produce learning in us are pleasantest. Exotic names are unknown, whereas we know the prevalent ones. Metaphor, by contrast, most of all produces learning. For when he says that old age is stubble, he produces learning and knowledge through the genus, since both old age and stubble are things that have finished blooming. The similes of the poets also do the same thing. That is why, if they do it well, they appear elegant. For a simile is a metaphor differing in how it is set out. That is why it is less pleasing, namely, because it is longer, and because it does not say that this is that, and so the [listener’s] soul does not inquire into it.” (*Rhetoric*, III, 10, 1410b11)

The Aristotelian idea that metaphor is an effective tool for teaching/communication is relevant even today. We always use metaphors to discuss abstract concepts and complex ideas in science. Aristotle says in

*Posterior Analytics* and *Topics* that metaphor should be avoided in scientific discourse as they can lead to ambiguity. In science we try to define things which requires a language devoid of ambiguities. Scientific definition requires coherence and strict unity. We find that Aristotle uses metaphors to explain scientific concepts, and hence metaphor has only an explanatory value in science. Scientists use metaphors to explain their complex theories to the laymen.

According to ‘Conceptual Metaphor Theory’, we use metaphors to discuss abstract concepts like time, justice, argument, death, and love. For example, we do not have the linguistic resources to explain our experience of time, and hence we use ‘spatial metaphors’ to explain our experience of time. In short, very often we use the metaphor of space to discuss time, as space is more concrete than time. Space is more accessible to our minds than time, and hence we tend to spatialize time. Metaphor is indeed an effective tool for communication as it helps us to comprehend something abstract in a concrete way. Such an exercise is pleasing for the teacher and the learner. It does not give the idea that metaphor is just a rhetorical phenomenon. Aristotle does not seem to subscribe to the idea that metaphor is a tool used by speakers to decorate language in order to deceive others. Aristotle’s idea that “metaphor pleases us” led to a widespread idea that metaphor only has an ornamental function, and hence it should not be used in any serious discourse like philosophy. The laymen’s idea concerning metaphor is that metaphor is a figure of speech which is used to decorate language. This view comes from a misunderstanding of the Aristotelian account of metaphor. The pleasure that comes from metaphor in Aristotle is a higher level of pleasure, which is different from a lower level of aesthetic pleasure. The pleasure that we derive from metaphor is similar to the pleasure that we derive while solving a puzzle or riddle. In this sense, our encounter with metaphor can be considered a case of puzzle solving.

Aristotle says that the difference between metaphor and simile is subtle:

“The simile (*eikon*) also is a metaphor (*metaphora*); the difference is but slight. When the poet says of Achilles that he leapt on the foe as a lion, this is a simile; when he says of him ‘The lion leapt, it is a metaphor.’” (*Rhetoric* 1406b 20)

He says that a simile is less pleasing as the similarity is explicit, and it is implicit in the case of a metaphor. For example, Romeo says:

Juliet is the sun.

In this case, there is a comparison between Juliet and the sun. The similarity between Juliet and the sun is implicit, and hence we need to look

for the similarities between them. This metaphor is a 'compressed simile.' The corresponding simile is 'Juliet is like the sun.' This simile says that Juliet behaves like the sun in the sky. What happens in the corresponding metaphor is the removal of 'as or like'.

In *Rhetoric*, he says about the primary virtue of a metaphor, which is "setting things before the eyes." (*Rhetoric*, 1411 a34 ). Placing things before the eyes is a primary virtue of metaphor. Metaphor represents things before the eyes in a state of activity. It discusses the dynamic aspect of metaphor. A metaphor lacks vitality if it lacks the notion of activity. He says that Homer presented lifeless things like living things with metaphors. It shows that the metaphor is vibrant if it conveys some action, and "the vitality of metaphor is to place something before the eyes" (O'Rourke, 2005, 169). Aristotle says that we turn to metaphor to represent the action of something. Metaphor is rooted in similarity between things, and this similarity is not that of substance but of activity. Beings from different genera can be similar not in terms of what they are (essence) but what they do (action).

Aristotle discusses the aspect of strangeness that a metaphor can create. The effect of a good metaphor is that it can create an ambience of unfamiliarity. He says that metaphor is an effective way to create unfamiliarity:

"For human beings feel the same in relation to style as they do in relation to strangers and fellow citizens. That is why one should give one's ordinary way of speaking an air of unfamiliarity. For people find wondrous what is far away, and what is wondrous is pleasant." (*Rhetoric* III 2, 1404b 9-11)

Metaphor directs our attention to the strangeness around us. This is an effect which metaphor has on the interpreter. Metaphor makes the familiar thing unfamiliar. What happens in a metaphor is the movement of a name from a proper setting to a strange context. In this sense, metaphor transports the listener or reader to a new horizon by liberating from the clutches of the present experience. O'Rourke says:

"With its power of estrangement, metaphor arrests our habitual relationship with the world. The miracle of metaphor is its power to evoke marvel and astonishment. According to Aristotle metaphor introduces the element of strangeness; he has in mind the strangeness of expression, but beyond language it also serves to make things strange. (O'Rourke, 2005, 187)

Metaphor defamiliarises the familiar and enables us to perceive the world in ever-new ways. Davidson explores this idea in his paper by saying that metaphor has some effect on us, which is to make us see things in a new light (Davidson, 1978, 45). Davidson emphasises the defamiliarising function of metaphor. He says that we encounter a collapse of familiarity with the world when literal meaning is applied in a different context.

According to Aristotle, metaphors are useful in poetry and rhetoric. What is the relevance of metaphor in philosophy? Metaphors are widely used by philosophers to explain their theories. Plato uses a number of metaphors to explain his metaphysics and epistemology. Aristotle himself depends on a large number of medical metaphors in his writings. Descartes used the metaphor of an 'evil demon', which is rooted in the catholic theology, in order to reach a certain foundation for his knowledge. Immanuel Kant, who is well-known for his straightforward writings, invokes many legal and boundary-dispute metaphors to explain his theory of knowledge and ethics. Still, the scepticism concerning the relevance of metaphor in philosophical language persists. The attempt in this paper is to discuss the possibility of metaphor in philosophy from the perspective of Aristotle. The major questions raised in this study are: What is philosophical language for Aristotle? What kind of language can be allowed in philosophy?

### 3. Language of proof and *pròs-hén* ambiguity

What is philosophical language for Aristotle? Can the language of the poets and the rhetoricians lead us to positive knowledge of reality? Is metaphor an aspect of philosophical language for Aristotle? His idea of the possibilities of metaphor in philosophical discourse can be found in other major writings, like *Metaphysics*, *De Anima*, and *Posterior Analytics*. This session, tries to explain the kind of language that he allows in doing philosophy in order to reach a positive knowledge of reality. He tries to reach knowledge of reality through language. His theory of signification or meaning tells us how words are related to things and how words have meaning. According to Aristotle, language is the defining feature of human beings. For Aristotle, "...nature operates for a determinate end, the power of speech, which is naturally a power of human beings, is ordered to the end of understanding and communication" (Larkin, 1971, 19). What happens in language is "the use of words to express one's meaning." (*Poetics* ch.6: 1450b14)

For Aristotle, virtuous people live together, and they share thoughts through language. (*Nicomachean Ethics*. IX: ch. 9; 1170b9-14). There are at least three different kinds of people, and these three think differently. The

majority of people belong to the world of practical affairs and tastes. There is another group of people who are experts in certain areas like medicine, crafts or teaching. They are called as the artists. And the third category of people are the philosophers. The philosopher is the one who pursues knowledge for its own sake. A philosopher is the lover of wisdom. Thinking can be practical thinking, artistic thinking, or theoretical thinking, and the use of language varies across these categories (*Metaphysics*, I: ch. 2; 981b28:982a4). The goal of speech in practical things is to discuss the injurious and the useful. We communicate knowledge about different things at this level. Not all of us are made to live on the domestic and artistic level. For Aristotle, "the wise man who knows the reason for all things, even the most difficult, and who is interested in knowledge for its own sake, is superior to the man who lives at the practical level" (Larkin, 1971, p. 20). Since the wise man or the philosopher uses language in order to signify the principles of things, his language is different from the language used by the laymen and the artists.

According to Aristotle, the language of philosophy is different, which is known as the 'language of proof.' Larkin says, "He refers to the language of philosophy as the 'language of proof' as distinct from the subtle language of the mythologists, Homer and Hesiod" (Larkin, 1971, p. 11). Speculative philosophy is different from poetry, rhetoric, and practical sciences. It is a theoretical endeavour pursued for its own sake. Aristotle says that philosophy begins with wonder. A philosopher is the one who gets flabbergasted by things that others take for granted. Wonder is a philosophical attitude. According to him, the terminal state of the pursuit of wisdom is the possibility of scientific knowledge concerning reality. This knowledge is distinct from the knowledge of the particulars that we derive from perception. The scientific knowledge is the knowledge concerning the universal. He says,

"Scientific knowledge is not possible through the act of perception ... for perception must be of a particular, whereas scientific knowledge involves the recognition of the commensurate universal." (*Posterior Analytics*, I: ch. 31; 87b27).

How do we reach the universals? He says that we grasp the universals after going through multiple cases of particular instances (*Nicomachean Ethics*, VI: ch. 6; 1140b31). For Aristotle, philosophy is not just clarification of language in general and terms in particular, but it is a science of the real. Hence, the kind of language used in philosophy refers to things outside the realm of the mind. Aristotle says that we need precision of language in order to talk meaningfully about reality and its first principles and causes.

According to Aristotle, the language of the philosopher is the ‘language of proof’ (*Metaphysics*, III: ch. 4; 1000a18-22). In the same chapter, he explains the idea of ‘language of proof.’ According to him, Empedocles can be considered as one who uses ‘language of proof.’ The difference between Hesiod and Empedocles is that the latter uses the language of proof. Larkin says,

“Language of Hesiod is the language of myth or fables whose referents are not real things providing a true explanation. The language of proof refers to real principles of explanation. The language of proof, then, must refer to real principles and causes, not the fictional elements of the theologians and mythologists.” (Larkin, 1971, p. 49).

Aristotle believes that Empedocles does not satisfy all the criteria of the language of proof as he uses metaphors and terms which are ambiguous. Aristotle criticised his metaphor of salty ocean as the sweat of the earth (*Meteorology* 357a 24-28). According to Aristotle, this metaphor is not fit for explaining the nature of things but is only a good ornament. He also targeted the metaphors used by the pre-Socratics (*Topics* 127a 17ff) and Plato. He considered Plato’s metaphor of ‘participation’ to be a bad one. He says,

“...to say that the Forms are patterns, and that other things participate in them, is to use empty phrases and poetical metaphors” (*Metaphysics*, 991a21-23).

We need to check whether Aristotle is against the use of metaphor in philosophy or the use of bad metaphors which are just ornamental in nature.

Aristotle makes a distinction between dialectic and rhetoric. Plato and Aristotle were responding to the challenges raised by the Sophists, who were experts in rhetoric. There is no place for poets in the Ideal State of Plato. His critical comments on the Sophists are found in the dialogues like *Gorgias*, *Ion*, *Republic*, and *Phaedrus*. Plato affirms refined forms of poetry and rhetoric in his writings. Aristotle’s works on rhetoric and poetry must be understood within the wider context of Plato’s critical study of rhetoric and poetics. Aristotle was not against rhetoric as such, but he rejected the moral purpose of Sophists who used language and metaphors to manipulate the public. Dialectic is a way of argumentation which is against the rhetoric of the Sophists, who convinced the aspiring young men of Greece. Rhetoric is all about deception, but dialectic is about certitude. Larkin says, “Aristotle often refers to dialectic as if it had the same certitude as demonstration in the strict sense” (Larkin, 1971, p. 50). Why does he

reject rhetoric? Rhetoric is a mode of persuasion based on the character of the speaker and conditioning of the audience, but speculative philosophy does not aim to persuade the audience through emotional appeal or personal character of the speaker, but it aims to reach certain knowledge concerning the first causes and principles of reality. According to Larkin, "For the purpose of speculative philosophy, then, demonstrative and dialectical proofs are those upon which Aristotle relies to attain knowledge of reality. The language of these proofs must be adequate to express this knowledge" (Larkin, 1971, p. 53). The language of proof is also known as the *apodeictic* language, which is the language used by the philosopher in arguments.

According to Aristotle, the orator should use metaphors to make the content interesting. Metaphor gives some foreign air to the speech which enhances communication, but an excessive use of metaphor would result in mere embellishment. His account of poetry admits the use of rare, foreign, ornamental, and metaphorical words. Metaphors in poetry and rhetoric should not be too ornamental but proportionate and appropriate. He defends metaphor in both the arts of poetry and rhetoric.

The aim of Aristotle is to remove obscurity in philosophy in order to reach clarity of thought. This leads to the possible conclusion that Aristotle would avoid ambiguity, metaphor, and equivocation. What is equivocation? He defines equivocation in *Categoriae* as "words that have the name in common, the definition corresponding with the name being different" (Larkin, 1971, p. 61). Aristotle demands precision of language in philosophy, and hence he rejects ambiguity of meaning and equivocation. The different senses of the same word should be made clear in advance by the discussant, and that is necessary for any successful philosophical discourse. Aristotle says,

"For as long as it is not clear in how many ways a term is used, it is possible that the answerer and the questioner are not directing their minds upon the same thing; whereas when once it has been made clear how many uses there are, and also upon which of them the former directs his mind when he makes his assertion, the questioner would then look ridiculous if he failed to address his argument to this. It helps us also both to avoid being misled and to mislead by fallacies; for if we know the number of uses of a term, we shall certainly never be misled by fallacy, but shall know if the questioner fails to address his argument to the same point; and when we ourselves put the questions we shall be able to mislead him, if

our answer happens not to know the number of uses of our terms.” (*Topics* I: ch. 18; 108a22-31)

According to Aristotle, both the Sophists and Plato failed to clarify meaning as they violated the criteria of clarity in their discourse. He did not acknowledge Sophists as philosophers, as they generally used one term with many meanings or confusing meanings. The weapon of the Sophists then is the ambiguity of meaning. According to Aristotelian thought, “Confused signification is of no value in philosophy.” (Larkin, 1971, p. 63)

Aristotle prohibits ambiguity and the use of metaphor in philosophy. A careful use of metaphor is allowed in rhetorical and poetic works. Metaphor happens in ordinary language, and the language of philosophy is not the ordinary language but the language of proof. Aristotle permits such confused meanings only in rhetoric and poetry. Does it mean that he completely forbids metaphor in philosophy? Aristotle’s scepticism concerning the use of metaphor in philosophical argument is found in *Posterior Analytics*. He extensively uses similes, analogies, and metaphors in his major writings, like *De Anima* and *Metaphysics*. *Metaphysics* is about the knowledge concerning reality and ultimate principles and causes. How is it possible to have knowledge concerning the ultimate reality and first principles? Can they become objects of our knowledge? He considers language and analysis of terms as means to gain knowledge concerning the ultimate reality. It does not mean that philosophy is just clarification of terms, as held by the contemporary analytic tradition.

We have seen that Aristotle avoids ambiguity and equivocation in philosophical discourse. Does it mean that we can use only univocal words in philosophy? If it is so, then the first philosophy or metaphysics is not possible. He analyses the concept of ‘being’ through an examination of the several senses of being. He says,

“...there are many senses in which a thing is said to be, but all refer to one starting-point; some things are said to be because they are substances, others because they are affections of substance, others because they are a process towards substance, or destructions or privations or qualities of substance, or productive or generative of substance, or of things which are relative to substance, or negations of some of these things or of substance itself. It is for this reason that we say even of non-being that it is non-being” (*Metaphysics*. IV: ch. 2; 1003b4-11)

If being has several senses or meanings, then a discussion of being is very difficult. How does Aristotle overcome this problem? Apparently, he

avoids metaphor in philosophical discourse as he considers metaphor as a mode of equivocation. We come across a contradiction in Aristotle's approach to metaphor in philosophy. He categorically says that metaphor and ambiguity must be avoided in philosophical discourse but we find that he uses metaphors and ambiguous words in his philosophy. Aristotle invokes the idea of '*pròs hén* equivocals' to defend his position. There are some words which are used in many ways, but they do not lead us to ambiguity. Aristotle discusses the ten modes of Being or categories in *Metaphysics*. These are the ten ways in which we can talk about anything. Substance, which is the first category, is considered to be the primary being, and the rest of them are considered to be secondary or dependent beings. He says,

"...after all, 'definition', like 'what a thing is', has several meanings; 'what a thing is' in one sense means substance and a 'this', in another one or other of the predicates, quantity, quality, and the like. For as 'is' is predicable of all things, not however in the same sense, but of one sort of thing primarily and of others in a secondary way, so too the 'what' belongs simply to substance, but in a limited sense to the other categories" (*Metaphysics*. VII: ch. 4; 1030a19-24).

We come across two kinds of equivocation in Aristotle. Larkin explains,

"What Aristotle refers to as equivocation or words said in many ways includes two kinds: (1) equivocation by chance, and (2) words related to *pròs hén*. Aristotle clarifies the meanings of *pròs hén* words, which are used in his metaphysics. He says that some of his usages in metaphysics are metaphorical, for example, the use of the term 'nature.'" (Larkin, 1971, p. 76)

Metaphor has indeed a place in Aristotle's philosophy. He does not outrightly deny metaphor in philosophy. It seems that he defends refined metaphors in philosophy. Words said in several senses are not completely removed from philosophy. The idea of *pròs hén* equivocal, enables Aristotle, to discuss the highest science, the metaphysics. He reaches a *pròs hén* theory of meaning which explains the connection of related meanings which are neither completely equivocal nor univocal. Larkin says, "It is by means of this *pròs hén* unity of meaning that Aristotle unifies the subject of the science of metaphysics" (Larkin, 1971, p. 77). Clarity in arguments does not mean that we need to avoid equivocation, metaphor, and ambiguities. He says that it is necessary to specify the definite meanings of words which have several meanings, which will enable us to avoid ambiguity and equivocation. A philosopher should make the clarification of language and

context so that the words may be directed to the definite referent. Aristotle forbids metaphors which are deliberately made to create ambiguity. He was targeting the Sophists who created metaphors just to deceive the crowd. They created metaphors without understanding and acknowledging the context of the masses. Aristotle's account of *pròs hén* equivocals defends the role of metaphor in philosophy. *Pròs hén* equivocals are "words said in many ways in which different senses are derived from and related to a prior meaning" (Larkin, 1971, p. 100). According to Aristotle, 'being' can be said in many ways, which means that 'to be' has several senses. It seems that the science of 'being *qua* being' is built on equivocation. But it is not. For example, let's consider the expressions, 'dining table' and 'logarithm table'. The word 'table' is not used in the same sense in these expressions, but in different senses. 'Being' in metaphysics is not expressed in this way. The term 'being' is not ambiguous as the term 'table' is for Aristotle. In Aristotelian metaphysics, being is not said in many ways, "but it is not merely (what he calls) 'homonymous', i.e., sheerly ambiguous. Rather, the various senses of 'being' have what he calls a 'pros hen' ambiguity – they are all related to a single central sense" (Cohen, 2020). This is explained by taking the example of the term 'healthy'. There is a range of things that may be called 'healthy'. There are: healthy organism, healthy food, healthy drink, healthy exercise and healthy complexion. In these cases, we have not used the word 'healthy' in the same sense, but these various meanings have something in common. They all refer to one meaning, a central thing, that is, health. A healthy organism or a person is healthy in the primary sense, and the other cases are related to the primary sense of a healthy individual. Cohen says, "Other things are considered healthy only in so far as they are appropriately related to things that are healthy in this primary sense" (Cohen, 2020). Aristotle uses the word 'metaphor' in a sense that metaphor is a *pròs hén* equivocal. We can say that for Aristotle, every *pròs hén* equivocal can be considered as a metaphor. Philosophy should include more than univocal terms and there is a space for metaphors. *Pròs hén* equivocals are needed to explain many concepts in philosophy. Aristotle premises metaphor in dialectical discussion. Philosopher, the wise man, contemplates the highest principles and causes. They know all things in general without knowing each of them individually. He avoids poetic metaphors which speak without any content. He is against metaphors which are impressive only on the peripheral level. There is a lack of content behind such impressive metaphors. Hence, dialectic discourse, which is thinking through concepts, allows metaphors in the forms of analogy and simile. Metaphors may be avoided in the scientific definitions, but there is a reality beyond scientific investigation which requires a different mode of thought. The ultimate universals are abstract in nature, which cannot be

demonstrated. In order to discuss these ultimate universals, which lie at the limits of conceptualisation, Aristotle turns to the use of metaphors.

#### 4. Conclusion

Contemporary theories of metaphor can be considered to be responses to the key themes in Aristotle. Donald Davidson is the only contemporary philosopher who agrees with most of the aspects of Aristotle's theory of metaphor. Both Aristotle and Davidson agree on the idea that metaphor helps us to see things under a new light, but Davidson says that this 'seeing as' is not 'seeing that'. Just like Aristotle, Davidson also denies the possibility of metaphorical meaning. The concept of metaphorical meaning is a later development, which we find in the theories of Black and Searle. A misinterpretation of Aristotle is found in John Searle's theory. Searle defends the idea of metaphorical meaning as the speaker's meaning. He rejects the fundamental aspect of Aristotelian theory, which is the comparison theory of metaphor.

Aristotle's theory of metaphor seems to be contradictory. We see that Aristotle rejects metaphor in some discourse and accepts them under certain conditions. The widely accepted contemporary view that metaphor is just a rhetorical phenomenon with an ornamental function results from the misinterpretation of Aristotle. He agrees with the fact that a metaphor is used in some cases to make the speech appealing to the audience. It does not mean that the sole purpose of metaphor is just the decoration of speech.

Metaphor is part and parcel of the philosophy of Aristotle. Aristotle defended metaphor in philosophy. His major writings, like *Metaphysics* and *De Anima*, are loaded with metaphors. His reliance on metaphor is an indication that philosophical arguments can be based on metaphors. It is possible to use metaphors in philosophical discourse, and complex philosophical ideas can be explained in terms of metaphor. Aristotle himself uses many medical metaphors to explain some of the key themes of *Metaphysics*. His metaphysics, or the first philosophy itself, seems to be impossible without metaphors. His idea of *pròs-hén* equivocal is very important here. He explains the 'ten categories' or the 'ten ways of being' with the aid of metaphors.

Aristotle defended metaphor, but he was against the inappropriate use of metaphor in discourse. He was against the sophists who deliberately made their speech obscure in order to appear to be profound. Aristotle has an account of the context-dependence of metaphor. Aristotle defends metaphor in philosophical discourse through his *pròs hén* theory of meaning. He himself explains the concept of 'being' metaphorically. For him, metaphor in philosophy should be context-specific and context-

sensitive. It means that we should not create and use metaphors without clarifying the meaning and knowing the context or the minds of the audience. He was against the way the Sophists invoked metaphors just for deception, but he argued for clarity of thought and defended metaphor in philosophical discourse. When Sophists used metaphor to obscure truth, Aristotle used metaphor to disclose it.

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