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Focus: Philosophy as Literature
Schwerpunkt: Philosophie als Literatur

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Mohr Siebeck

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Focus: Philosophy as Literature
Schwerpunkt: Philosophie als Literatur

The Eve of Philosophy

On “Tropic” Movements and Syntactic Resistance
 in Derrida’s *White Mythology*

by

RODOLPHE GASCHÉ (University at Buffalo)

“White Mythology” is generally considered Derrida’s most fundamental text on rhetoric even though as the subtitle – “Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy” – indicates, only one figure of rhetoric primarily occupies the foreground of the discussion.¹ Even though this figure is also rhetoric’s most important figure, indeed almost indistinguishable from it, “White Mythology,” in the same way as all the other texts in which Derrida broaches the question of rhetoric, does not address this question in a frontal manner. Yet, admittedly, this debate on metaphor, that is, on a figure singled out because, from the start, it is never simply *one* figure, but, for essential reasons, inevitably plural, aims at questioning “the separation (and order) between philosophy or dialectics on the one hand and (sophistic) rhetoric on the other, the separation demanded by Plato himself.” “Directly or not,” “what we must question here,” Derrida emphasizes, is “this separation and this hierarchy”.² The aim involved in questioning philosophy’s attempt to set rhetoric clearly apart from itself is not, as will be manifest, to simply invert the classical relation of hierarchy between both. Indeed, beyond this, more recent philosophical conceptions according to which there is no difference between philosophy and rhetoric such that hold that philosophy is just another variant of rhetoric, if not even of literature, are critically investigated as well. A detailed analytic reading of the essay as a whole would, of course, be required, in order to explore how “White Mythology” accomplishes

¹ See, for example, MARCOS SISCAR, Jacques Derrida, *Rhétorique et philosophie*, Paris 1998, pp. 71–72.

² JACQUES DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, in: IDEM, *Margins of Philosophy*, translated by Alan Bass, Chicago 1982, pp. 207–272, here p. 224.

this questioning of the classical separation of philosophy and rhetoric by way of a discussion of the figure of metaphor in philosophy. However, for economic reasons I must forgo such an undertaking. Instead I will limit myself to a reading that seeks to establish Derrida's programmatic agenda throughout the essay in question.

Needless to say, in order to not lose sight of the overall argumentative strategy at work in "White Mythology," a rigorous protocol of reading this text must be observed, that is, rules that must preside over any reading of it. Given that Derrida, in his discussion of Aristotle's definition of metaphor, for example, or of the terms in Aristotle that have been translated by the word *proper*, observes such a strict protocol of reading, it is only fair to read him in the same way. Failure to do so has produced all the notorious misreadings of this text with which we are all too familiar, beginning with Paul Ricœur's contention in *The Rule of Metaphor* that "White Mythology" associates philosophy with dead metaphors and overlooks its vivid, or living, metaphors, continuing with Jürgen Habermas's claim in *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* that Derrida abolishes the distinction between argumentative discourse and literary rhetoric, and including more recent discussions devoted to this essay, some of which center on certain topics, themes, figures in the essay (the figure of catachresis, the sun, the ship, the term "*usure*," to name only a few) that, in spite of their unmistakable significance, nonetheless deflect from what drives this essay as a whole.³ What, in particular, a rigorous protocol of reading is to prevent is the confusion of the different voices that speak in the essay, a confusion that has led numerous readers to attribute positions to Derrida, that, in fact, are those that are under investigation. Therefore, bringing the overall agenda of "White Mythology" into view, is what I will try to accomplish here.

Inattention to the argumentative voices in the essay begins with the critics' evaluation of its title. "White Mythology" is a citation from Anatole France's *The Gardens of Epicurus*, a dialogue between Polyphilos and Aristos about the relation of philosophy and rhetoric whose analysis by Derrida occupies the first chapter of the essay entitled "Exergue." Inscribed in the exergual space, the positions of the two protagonists of the dialogue will eventually become effaced by the issues that will occupy Derrida in the remaining chapters of the essay. These issues concern, above all, the inscription of the possibility of a metaphorization of metaphor, that is, of the "bottomless overdeterminability" in the structure of metaphor, notwith-

³ Not that these readings on specific themes broached by Derrida are always wrong, but they center on isolated statements in complete disregard of the context in which they are made, or are inattentive to the voice that utters them.

standing Aristotle's effort to define it by anchoring it in a proper referent;⁴ the "'tropic' movements" that no concept of metaphor can dominate and that come into view through an analysis of the ultimate impossibility of a metaphorology, whether it concerns the entirety of the metaphors in the work of one single philosophical thinker or the founding tropes in the text of philosophy as such;⁵ and, finally, the recognition that, despite "the subordination of the syntactic" by "the most invariable characteristics of the concept of metaphor,"⁶ any metaphilosophy, for instance, in the style of Bachelard's meta-poetics is unable to keep in check the syntax that comes with the irreducible plurality of metaphors, or the metaphoric, and is, ultimately, not compatible with the concept of metaphor itself.⁷ None of the antagonistic positions voiced by the participants in the dialogue are retained by Derrida. Indeed, although in this dialogue Polyphilos declares that all of philosophy, or logical argumentation, is a white mythology, bleached of its concrete, sensible myths, the title of the essay in no way suggests that the gist of its argument is simply to repeat that claim. Or, when we learn that the expression "white mythology" also refers to rationalism and universalism as the mythology of the Western white man, this does not mean that Derrida would side with "Aristos, the defender of metaphysics".⁸ Both metaphorical meanings of whiteness concern philosophy, and both are operative within a dialogue about the nature of philosophy that is itself entirely philosophical. Furthermore, a careful reading of the dialogue reveals that both positions are intimately interlinked. Derrida never endorses any one of them. Once the exergue has become effaced, the very possibility of making claims like those of the protagonists of the dialogue is put into question. But, holding that these claims are paradigmatic of the discussion of metaphor in philosophy, Derrida is interested in their relations, exchange, commerce, or complicity, and it is only in that context that, perhaps, one can detect 'properly' Derridean statements on metaphor. Now, although Derrida does not identify himself with any one of the philosophical alternatives regarding the status of metaphor in philosophical thought, he, nonetheless, takes Polyphilos's thesis (or, for that matter, Nietzsche's or Renan's similar theses) that all

⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 243.

⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, pp. 265–266.

⁷ If the discussion of the projects of a philosophical metaphorology and a metaphilosophy plays such an important role in "White Mythology," it is because of the primary concern of Derrida's seminar on the "Theory of Philosophical Discourse" at the Ecole Normale Supérieure in 1969–70, of which "White Mythology" was a part. The overall aim of the seminar was to develop a "theory" of the philosophical discourse that was neither a logic of philosophy nor a philosophical metaphorology.

⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 212.

philosophical concepts are worn out metaphors as the starting point of an, at least, double pronged elaboration.

As the subtitle of the essay indicates, the double meaning of “white mythology,” its reference to philosophy’s evacuation of all sensible imagery from itself and to its ethnocentric pretension to universality, is an incentive to inquire into “Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy.” As the opening sentence, “From philosophy, rhetoric (*De la philosophie, la rhétorique*),” suggests, at issue is the rhetorical nature of philosophy, but also rhetoric as a discipline that is an intrinsic part of philosophy itself. Resultantly, the commonly assumed opposition between philosophy and rhetoric, including their hierarchical relation, is to undergo questioning. But, as I suggested already, this double relation of philosophy and rhetoric will not be addressed by Derrida in a frontal manner. As the second sentence of the first chapter – “Metaphor *in* the text of philosophy” – indicates, this relation will be problematized primarily by way of the status of one, however principle, figure of rhetoric in the philosophical text, namely, metaphor, which is also, as Derrida reminds us, an eminently philosophical concept. Here too again a double question is asked: one concerns the ways in which, in the text of philosophy, philosophy is worked by a metaphoric, and the other concerns “metaphor” as a strictly philosophical concept. However, these twofold questions regarding the status of metaphor within philosophy, questions that Derrida has already in view when, in the “Exergue,” he discusses the two antagonistic positions of Polyphilos and Aristos in France’s dialogue, not only serve as a pretext for an inquiry into the underlying presuppositions of their debate, but also announce a third way of approaching the issue of philosophy *and* rhetoric. Indeed, in conclusion to his remarks on the dialogue in question, Derrida evokes the need to open up “the wider space of a discourse on figuration”⁹ and to explore the exchange that “dominates the field of rhetoric *and* philosophy.”¹⁰ With this, the stakes of “White Mythology’s” inquiry into metaphor in philosophy become tangible. Rather than playing out one of the opponents’ stances in the dialogue against the other, that is, the thesis that highlights “the metaphorical sedimentation of concepts”¹¹ against the contention that philosophy is free of metaphors, the analysis of the antagonistic positions in question aims at opening up a problematic that brings an additional vista to bear on the question regarding “metaphor” in philosophy. Let me already note that the “wider space of a discourse on figuration” hinted at will be made up by what Derrida

⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 216.

¹⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 218.

¹¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 214.

refers to as “‘tropic’ movements” and “syntactic resistance,” both of which are no longer part of rhetoric, and thus also no longer of philosophy. As a consequence it will become increasingly manifest that “metaphor is less in the philosophical text (and in the rhetorical text coordinated with it) than the philosophical text is within metaphor.”¹² However, how “metaphor” or the “metaphorical” are to be understood if this argument is to hold up is one of the main issues of the essay.

For lack of attention to the argumentative strategy of “White Mythology,” Polyphilos’ position in the dialogue has been construed by many readers as Derrida’s own position. Against Aristos, who, as the representative of philosophy’s classical self-understanding (say, from Aristotle to Husserl), professes the opinion that in spite of the imperfections of language, philosophy’s *telos* is to free itself systematically from all figuration and to achieve the univocity of the concept, Polyphilos argues that all philosophical concepts are just dead metaphors, that is, metaphors whose sensory effigies have with time been worn off just like the effigies on coins, but metaphors that can also always be reactivated again. Whereas Aristos represents the classical metaphysical take on the difference between concept and metaphor, Polyphilos asks philosophy to justify itself before rhetoric. But, as Derrida also notes, every rhetoric implies a philosophy, and, moreover, by using a concept – the concept of metaphor – that is a thoroughly philosophical concept, the ground of Polyphilos’ critique is itself eminently philosophical. Although seemingly subversive of philosophy, Polyphilos’ position is no less philosophical than that of his opponent. Furthermore, as is clear from the start, both claims make use of oppositions that are completely philosophical, above all the opposition of the sensible and the intelligible. Now, although in this asymmetric dialogue in which the rhetorical skills of Polyphilos get the better of his opponent Derrida discusses at great length Polyphilos’s claim, the issue is neither, as he emphatically states, to capitalize on what the former himself characterized as a “reverie,”¹³ nor to “reaffirm what Polyphilos chooses as his target.”¹⁴ Derrida’s aim is neither to take the latter’s thesis as a pretext to provide further substance to what is termed a reverie, namely, the claim that it can be shown that all concepts are effaced metaphors and that they can at all times be reactualized, nor to defend the classical thesis that philosophical conceptuality and ideality is capable of stripping itself completely of all figuration, a thesis that is no less a reverie. Derrida makes four points with respect to Polyphilos’ overwhelm-

¹² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 258.

¹³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 210.

¹⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215.

ing argumentative stance, which leaves Aristos no other way out than to quit the dialogue. Specifically, Derrida points out 1. that Polyphilos' discourse belongs to a specific historical and theoretical configuration; 2. that a symbolist conception is involved in his understanding of language and metaphor, which, by stipulating a natural necessity of the relation of the signifier to the signified, accounts for metaphor by privileging "diachrony at the expense of the system;"¹⁵ 3. that a "*continuist presupposition*" underlies his conception of the value of *usure* that he employs to explain the passage from metaphor to concept that serves to reduce the displacement that metaphor engenders;¹⁶ and, finally, 4. that a "more general analogy" between the realms of language and the paradigm of the coin undergirds Polyphilos' discourse, which he must presuppose in order to be able to compare metaphor to a coin. These remarks demonstrate that his aim is "to deconstruct the metaphysical and rhetorical schema at work in [Polyphilos'] critique, not in order to reject and discard them but to reinscribe them otherwise, and especially in order to begin to identify the historico-problematic terrain on which philosophy systematically has been asked for the metaphorical grounds [*titres*] of its concepts."¹⁷ Rather than demanding that philosophy reveal the metaphorical origins of its concepts, what interests Derrida are the metaphysical and rhetorical schemata at work in this very request, not, however, simply to reject and discard them, but, rather, "to reinscribe them otherwise,"¹⁸ that is, in such a way that through the "implicit logic of this reverie one begins to see the outlines [*voir se dessiner*]" of what has been called "the wider space of a discourse on figuration."¹⁹ Once we get a glimpse of what such a discourse consists, we will also be able to glean how "reinscription" is to be understood here.

Some of the questions that guide Derrida's reasoning in the chapters following the opening "Exergue" thus begin to come into view: If a symbolist understanding of language underlies the argument that concepts are worn down metaphors and thus privileges diachrony, the question arises as to the synchronic interrelation of metaphors and their syntax in a philosopher's work, or in the text of philosophy as such; if a continuist conception undergirds the assumption that concepts arise through the usure of metaphors, how then to account for the displacement that metaphor, as an operation of

¹⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215.

¹⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215.

¹⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215 (translation modified by the author, R. G.).

¹⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215.

¹⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 210 (translation modified by the author, R. G.).

transfer, effects, that is, for the possibility that the displacement of a noun to another object may become unrecoverable; finally, if, in the philosophical (or rhetorical) account of the metaphorical process, economic terms, such as “coins,” have imposed themselves, what is the status of the “more general analogy” between the linguistic and the economic fields that underlies a determination of metaphor based on a comparison of it to a coin whose effigy has been effaced?

In “White Mythology,” Derrida is interested in metaphor *within* the text of philosophy. If to inquire into metaphor in the text of philosophy means to assess philosophy’s conception of metaphor, then the four questions raised by Derrida in answer to Polyphilos’ claim clearly suggest that metaphor, as a philosophical concept, is something like a diminished, or disempowered, “metaphor.” Following his lengthy discussion of Aristotle’s definition of metaphor in *Poetics* and *Rhetoric*, one which has shaped philosophy’s understanding of metaphor until today, Derrida concludes that “all the onomatism which dominates the theory of metaphor, and the entire Aristotelian doctrine of simple names (*Poetics*, 1457a) is elaborated in order to assure harbors of truth and propriety.”²⁰ In other words, the assignment of a cognitive function to metaphor by discovering within it “a hidden syllogism [...], the theoretical perception of resemblance,”²¹ which anchors it in a referent and a proper noun, is philosophy’s way of acknowledging that metaphor “risks disrupting the semantic plenitude to which it should belong.”²² What is called “metaphor” in philosophy’s cognitive and semantic account of it is essentially a protective shield against something that can also cause metaphor to miss the truth, and to “venture forth alone, unloosed from the very thing it aims at.” Philosophy’s definition of metaphor (and, by extension, of rhetoric) is based on “an axiology supported by a theory of truth” that serves to ward off, and keep in check, what can always derail the making of good metaphors. “Metaphor” is the philosophical name that implicitly acknowledges, and, at the same time, blinds itself to, the very nature of “the moment of the turn or the detour (*du tour ou du détour*)” that characterizes metaphor, in short, what has been termed “‘tropic’ movements.”²³ Rather than following Derrida through the different steps in which these movements, which are a “tropic and prephilosophical resource” for which no “properly philosophical category is available,”²⁴ and that hence are no longer of the order of rhetoric as a philosophical discipline, are brought

²⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 244.

²¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 239.

²² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241.

²³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241.

²⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

to light, let me describe them as succinctly as possible. During the turns or detours of metaphor, meaning can “venture forth alone, unloosed from the very thing it aims at,” thus opening “the wandering of the semantic.”²⁵ Because of these movements, truth can always be lost. They refer to the “displacement with breaks” that thwarts all continuity and progress in metaphor’s transfer or transport and the “reinscriptions in a heterogeneous system, mutations, separations without origin”²⁶ to which it is always prone.

To return, then, to the four questions raised with respect to Polyphilos’ discourse, it is clear that they suggest that metaphors in the text of philosophy refer to something that cannot any longer be named by the word “metaphor,” namely, “the ‘tropic’ movements” whose operation of displacements and the separations that they do not fail to produce have been stripped of their full impact by the concept of metaphor, thus reducing to a minimum the dissemination and the irremediable loss of meaning to which unbridled metaphoricity can give rise and demoting in the same process metaphor’s syntactic, or systematic, interrelation with its own kind, which deprives it of any intelligibility in and for itself. In metaphor as a philosophical concept, displacement and syntactic relation are certainly acknowledged, but in a domesticated form so as not to threaten its semantic sublation and identification.

At this point, I believe it is appropriate to frame what we have seen so far of metaphor through the conclusion reached at the end of “White Mythology.” After what I have said so far about metaphor in the philosophical text as a disempowered figure for certain “tropic” movements and syntactic resistance, it should come as no surprise that at the end of “White Mythology” Derrida evokes the self-destruction of metaphor as a philosophical concept, or, following Aristotelian terminology, what he refers to as a “philosopheme” (*philosophema*).²⁷ That metaphor is “indefinitely constructing its own destruction”²⁸ in the text of philosophy is a problematic raised at the precise moment at which Derrida broaches the question of whether the program of a Bachelardian metapoetics can be transposed to philosophy to account exhaustively in a meta-philosophical way for its constituting primary metaphors. Here the question of the inevitable plurality of metaphors is brought up, and it is in the context of their syntactic relations, which, ultimately, are incompatible with the semantic definition of metaphor, that the topic of the self-destruction of metaphor is examined.

²⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241.

²⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 215.

²⁷ See, for example, ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, in: ARISTOTLE, *The Complete Works*, edited by Jonathan Barnes, Princeton 1984, Volume I, p. 273.

²⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 268.

How, then, is the syntax of metaphors linked to their self-destruction in philosophy? Although Bachelard, as Derrida remarks, pays careful attention to the syntax, or systematic production, of metaphors, he “interprets syntactic coordination as a semantic or thematic sheaf,”²⁹ thus sanctioning “the subordination of the syntactic [as one of] the most invariable characteristics of the concept of metaphor” in philosophy and rhetoric.³⁰ For Derrida, by contrast, the essential plurality of metaphor makes it structurally impossible for metaphor to escape syntax. Rather than having metaphor override syntax, or what he calls the “more general syntax”³¹ linked to metaphor’s irreducible plurality, syntax is understood as presenting “a supplement of [...] resistance”³² to metaphor’s semantic unification. In addition to the “tropic” movements characteristic of the metaphoric that can no longer be named by the philosophical term of metaphor, their syntax, or what is also called their “differential syntax [*différentielle syntaxique*],” is also a “properly *unnamable* articulation that is irreducible to the semantic *relève* or to dialectical interiorization.”³³ Thus understood, syntax causes the metaphoric to “organize its divisions within syntax,” with the result “that it gets carried away with itself [*s’emporte lui-même*], cannot be what it is except in erasing itself, indefinitely constructing its destruction.”³⁴

But, as Derrida notes, there are two trajectories that the self-destruction of metaphor in philosophy will always have been able to take. As he remarks, these “two courses [...] are almost tangent, and yet different, repeating, miming, and separating from each other according to certain laws.”³⁵ One of them is of the making of philosophy itself. By experiencing “metaphor” as a threat to itself, philosophy destroys it by its very determination of metaphor “as a provisional loss of meaning, an economy of the proper without irreparable damage, a certainly inevitable detour, but also a history with its sights set on, and within the horizon of, the circular reappropriation of literal, proper meaning.”³⁶ “Under the law of the same,” the de-tour of metaphoricization is interpreted as “a re-turn guided by the function of resemblance (*mimesis* or *homoiosis*).”³⁷ This de-tour is thus suspended from a concept of truth, and as a result, the generalization, or should one say, homogenization, of metaphor by way of its philosophical determination can

²⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 265.

³⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 266.

³¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 267.

³² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

³³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

³⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 268.

³⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 268.

³⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

³⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

be seen as securing its parousia in the proper meaning of Being. If this treatment of metaphor at the hands of philosophy amounts to a self-destruction of metaphor, it is because the philosophical concept deprives it of what within it does not let itself be sublated. But metaphor can also self-destruct according to another trajectory, and another generalization, this time at its own hands, if one still can say it in this manner. This other self-destruction of metaphor also implies a generalization of metaphoricity, one, however, that avoids the risk of continuity between metaphor and concept by substituting, as we will see, “another articulation for the (maintained or erased) classical opposition of metaphor and concept.”³⁸ Derrida writes:

The other self-destruction of metaphor [...] *resembles* the philosophical one to the point of being taken for it. This time, [...] in traversing and doubling the first self-destruction, it passes through a supplement of syntactic resistance, through everything [...] that disrupts the opposition of the semantic and the syntactic, and especially the philosophical hierarchy that submits the latter to the former. This self-destruction still has the form of a generalization, but this time it is no longer a question of extending and confirming a philosopheme, but rather, of unfolding it without limit, and wresting its borders of propriety from it. And consequently to explode the reassuring opposition of the metaphoric and the proper, the opposition in which the one and the other have never done anything but reflect and refer to each other in their radiance.³⁹

This second self-destruction of metaphor is, one could hold, the result of metaphor’s own logic if taken to its radical conclusion, or, more precisely, of the movements of the possibly irremediable separation and displacement that characterize it and, in the end, deprive it of any identifying property. Throughout “White Mythology,” the concern with this twofold generalization and self-destruction of metaphor in philosophy structures all the arguments whether they refer to Aristotle’s definition of metaphor, the notion of an exhaustive metaphorology, or the project of a metaphilosophy modeled after Bachelardian metapoetics. It is in light of this self-destruction and generalization that, in the following, I will discuss the preparatory reflections in the essay, especially in the chapters “Exergue” and “Plus de métaphore.” By having characterized metaphor in the discourse of philosophy as a diminished, or impoverished metaphor – Derrida, in fact, refers to it as the “philosophical phantom” of metaphor⁴⁰ – I have already alluded to the

³⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 263. Nietzsche’s (or, for that matter, Polyphilos’) seemingly subversive definition of concepts as worn out metaphors is only a complementary form of this generalization of metaphor in philosophy. His procedure, that is, his “generalization of metaphoricity by putting into *abyme* one determined metaphor” – the animal metaphor of the hive – establishes “a continuity between the metaphor and the concept, as between animal and man, instinct and knowledge.” (DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 262.)

³⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

⁴⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 258.

first type of self-destruction. In the following, however, I will pay particular attention to how the notion of “metaphor,” or “metaphoricity,” of which the philosophical concept of metaphor is the phantom proxy, is marked by the other kind of self-destruction, which makes its nominal (conceptual or metaphoric) appropriation by philosophy and rhetoric thoroughly impossible.

As I have already said, Derrida in no way endorses the position that all philosophical concepts originate in metaphors whose sensible effigies have become effaced. But that does not mean that he therefore makes a case for the opposite position: that all philosophical concepts have successfully expelled all metaphoricity. It is never a question of choosing between these equally philosophical theories of metaphor. Yet, as is manifest from the chapter “Plus de métaphore,” Derrida takes the first philosophical position as the starting point for his own inquiry. The reason for privileging it is that, however problematic, this theory about metaphor in philosophy is a first attempt, although entirely complicit with philosophy, to interrogate the classical position according to which full conceptual transparency is the *telos* of philosophical discourse. But, if, in a first move, Derrida, therefore, seems to privilege Polyphilos’ take on metaphor in philosophy, it is only, as we have also already seen, with the explicit aim to reinscribe it otherwise.⁴¹ Indeed, however much this position remains within the boundaries of philosophy in that it merely inverts the relation between concept and metaphor, or philosophy and rhetoric, it also provides a hint of an another, “new articulation” of “the (maintained or erased) classical opposition of metaphor and concept.”⁴² It is within such a generalized “new articulation” that Derrida will seek to inscribe Polyphilos’ argument. Undoubtedly, the question concerning the possibility of a general metaphorology of philosophy that is raised in the chapter “Plus de métaphore” (and which will continue to concern Derrida in later parts of the essay) derives directly from Polyphilos’, but also Nietzsche’s or Renan’s, assertion about the hidden metaphoricity of philosophical conceptuality. Indeed, did not Polyphilos claim that however much effaced all the metaphors underneath philosophical conceptuality have become, they can be successfully reanimated, or reactualized?⁴³ If I linger on Derrida’s critical discussion of the project,

⁴¹ Although the title “Plus de métaphore” must be read as “More metaphor” and, at the same time, “No more metaphor,” it also seems to reflect the two positions of Polyphilos and Aristos according to which there are always more metaphors hidden in philosophy, or that there are no metaphors anymore in philosophy, respectively.

⁴² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 263.

⁴³ Yet, as Derrida puts it in an aside, such a project never systematically inquires into how metaphors, or any other figures of speech, can be deciphered in concepts once

if not dream, of a general philosophical metaphorology, it is because in this context the new articulation of the opposition of metaphor and concept alluded to, takes shape. In any event, the point that Derrida makes throughout this chapter, which starts off with a discussion of Pierre Louis' attempt to provide an exhaustive classification of all metaphors in Plato's work, is that the project of such a general metaphorology of philosophy is, strictly speaking, impossible. Now, this verdict is not to be understood to mean that such projects even though impossible would simply be futile, or vain. In fact, it is, I think, safe to say that Derrida considers them necessary, if not inevitable, intraphilosophical undertakings. It is, therefore, important to be clear about the kind of impossibility he is referring to. Needless to say, it is not a question of empirical impossibility. Rather, the reasons given for the impossibility of a general metaphorology of philosophy are structural in nature. Yet, before further elucidation of these structural reasons, it needs to be pointed out that it is precisely these reasons' structural nature that sets the stage in "White Mythology" for the introduction of another major issue, that of the prephilosophical, or what Derrida alludes to as the "*vigil [la veille]* of philosophy."⁴⁴ As will become increasingly clear, the eve in question is, in Derrida's understanding, linked to the structural resources of the "tropic" movements and the syntactic differential discussed earlier. Anyway, the constitutive limit of a project such as a philosophical metaphorology is, basically, that metaphor is a metaphysical concept, a classical philosopheme, and that, as such, it "is enveloped in the field that a general metaphorology of philosophy would seek to dominate."⁴⁵ In short, this means that at least one concept always escapes an exhaustive demonstration that all concepts are metaphors, and that one concept is the concept of metaphor itself. With this assertion, we touch on what Derrida calls "tropic supplementarity,"⁴⁶ a formal, or structural, law that will be further refined throughout the essay.

In the process of arguing that, in all its essential characteristics, metaphor is a classical philosopheme (and that there is no other concept of metaphor than the philosophical one), Derrida already makes some statements that hint at a reinscription (otherwise) of the impossible project of establishing without fail the metaphorical credentials of all philosophical concepts. "Reinscription" means that the project of a metaphorology is to be "comprehended" within, or be "grounded" in, what has just been called the eve of philosophy, in other words, within something "older" than philosophy,

their sensible effigies have effectively become effaced. (See DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 219.)

⁴⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁴⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 219.

⁴⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 220.

from which philosophy turns away, seeking to dominate it, but which, as its blind spot, nevertheless continues to haunt it. Derrida writes:

Metaphor has been issued [*Elle est issue*, it has arisen] from a network of philosophemes which themselves correspond to tropes or to figures, and these philosophemes are contemporaneous to or in systematic solidarity with these tropes or figures. The stratum of 'tutelary' tropes, the layer of 'primary' philosophemes (assuming that the quotation marks will serve as a sufficient precaution here), cannot be dominated. It cannot dominate itself, cannot be dominated by what it itself has engendered, has made to grow on its own soil, supported on its own base. Therefore, it gets 'carried away' [*s'emporte*] each time that one of its products – here the concept of metaphor – attempts in vain to include under its own law the totality of the field to which the product belongs.⁴⁷

Before I comment in some detail on this passage let us remind ourselves again that the starting point of "White Mythology" is a thesis about philosophical conceptuality that is just as philosophical as the thesis that it seeks to undermine. Both theses operate from the start with classical distinctions such as concept/metaphor, proper/figurative, intelligible/sensible, or *techne*/nature, though one of these theories asserts the domination of the concept over sensible figuration, while the other claims that concepts can be reduced to hidden metaphors. It is important to stress here the fact that, by taking the latter thesis as his starting point, the reinscription that Derrida aims at of this thesis' critique of the more classical thesis concerning philosophy's purely conceptual and transparent language, is, to begin with, entirely predicated on sustaining the *difference* between concept and metaphor. This difference is one that the thesis which claims that all concepts are metaphors necessarily presupposes for structural reasons, and without which it could not possibly make the claim that there are only metaphors (rather than concepts). Simply put, the argument that all concepts can be reduced to metaphors does not make sense without the presupposition that there is a distinction between concept and metaphor, the proper and the figurative, philosophy and rhetoric. The reinscription that Derrida seeks to perform is based on thinking through this structural priority and irreducibility of the difference that both, but especially Polyphilos' position on philosophical conceptuality, presuppose. But before further developing this, let me return, first, to the passage quoted.

As a philosopheme, or a concept, metaphor has no particular privilege compared to other philosophemes, or concepts. It arose from a network of philosophemes with which it is systematically interlinked.⁴⁸ Now, of these "primary" philosophemes Derrida asserts that they *correspond* to tropes or

⁴⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology: Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 219.

⁴⁸ The emphasis here is clearly on the systematic interrelation of metaphor with other philosophemes and the value it thus represents within the system in question.

figures that are contemporaneous with these philosophemes and stand in a systematic solidarity to them. The extent to which Derrida's argument rests on the irreducible difference between concepts and figures becomes clear here. This difference goes back as far as the complex of "primary" philosophemes and "tutelary" tropes, that is, to the matrix itself for the distinction between philosophy and rhetoric. This difference cannot be overcome by a philosophical metaphorology since it itself presupposes it, which, ultimately, makes such an undertaking impossible. What Derrida here calls the stratum of "tutelary" tropes and the layer of "primary" philosophemes is marked in a most elementary fashion by this difference that keeps tropes and concepts both separate and systematically interrelated and which, therefore, precludes the possibility that one could come completely to dominate the other. At this juncture, let me emphasize that in this stratum the "primary" philosophemes are said to *correspond* to the "tutelary" tropes that are clearly distinct from them. Even though metaphors and concepts in a philosophical sense arise from this stratum – Derrida speaks occasionally of their production – within the stratum itself the "primary" philosophemes and "tutelary" tropes are always already in place. Their difference is staked out from the start, and it is from this difference that philosophemes and metaphor in the common or philosophical sense originate. This network of interrelated "tutelary" tropes and "primary" philosophemes will be further explored throughout "White Mythology." But even if, from the start, it is clear that Derrida resists not only the philosophical theory according to which concepts are totally free of metaphors, but also the theory that all concepts can be unmasked as rooted in metaphors, this does not mean that the relation of concepts to metaphors is not an issue for Derrida. On the contrary, by emphasizing the very difference between concept and metaphor, Derrida also forcefully stresses their relation, but not in the sense that concepts could be debunked as mere metaphors, or that the ideal of the purity of concepts, their freedom from metaphors, would simply be an illusion.

The stratum of primary philosophemes and their corresponding tutelary tropes cannot be dominated by a concept and/or figure, such as a metaphor, that derives from it. Each time a concept or a figure that has grown within this matrix tries to dominate the whole field to which it belongs, the stratum withdraws. The law that governs this withdrawal of the stratum in question from any attempt by any of its products that have arisen from it to master it by homogenizing it through metaphors (or through concepts) is the law that Derrida calls, "for economical reasons, tropic supplementarity."⁴⁹ As already seen, there is always one metaphor too many to master the totality

⁴⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 220.

of all the philosophical concepts, namely, the metaphor of the philosophical concept of metaphor, which thus subtracts itself from the field to be mastered. Tropic supplementarity means that in the wake of a systematically exhaustive classification of all the metaphorical possibilities in a corpus of philosophy, such as Plato's philosophy, for example, there will always remain at least one trope or metaphor excluded or unaccounted for, namely, the one that has engendered the concept of the metaphor, or, differently put, the metaphor of the metaphor. As Derrida notes, the supplementary tropic movement, or "extra turn of speech [which] becomes the missing turn of speech,"⁵⁰ prevents this turn from becoming the missing complementary piece for the taxonomy of the philosophical metaphors to be complete. In other words, the trope or metaphor that such an undertaking excepts is the one without which such a thing as an exhaustive metaphorology of philosophy could not be envisaged, but which, at the same time, refuses all completion to it: "The field is never saturated."⁵¹

I return now to the notion of a stratum of "primary" philosophemes and corresponding "tutelary" tropes. When no longer speaking of the exhaustive metaphorology of one single philosopher, such as Plato or Descartes, but of philosophical language as a whole, Derrida refers to these tropes as "'archaic' tropes" and to the philosophemes in question as "'founding' concepts," to name only the concepts of *theoria*, *eidos*, and *logos*.⁵² Later in "White Mythology," these founding tropes are alluded to as "metaphors of the 'first degree'."⁵³ In the same way that Derrida characterizes Polyphilos' belief that all concepts can be retraced to metaphors, or that a metaphorology could produce a consummate account of the totality of philosophical metaphors as reveries, a "metaphilosophy, a more general but still philosophical kind of discourse on the metaphors of the 'first degree,' [or] the nontrue metaphors that opened philosophy," is portrayed as something that can only "be dreamed of."⁵⁴ But the difficulties involved in comprehending the entirety of these tropes of the philosophical text in general are even more formidable than those we encountered regarding the attempt to master the metaphoricality of one particular philosopher, where the criteria for the classification of the metaphors are generally borrowed from the philosopher himself. In the attempt to master the *archaic* tropes and *founding* concepts of the philosophical text as such, everything we have developed so far about "tropic" movement and syntactic resistance makes itself felt in

⁵⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 220.

⁵¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 220.

⁵² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 224.

⁵³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 259.

⁵⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 259.

all its structural force. An even more formidable tropical charge frustrates the final classification of these tropes and concepts.⁵⁵ Take, for example, Aristotle's definition of metaphor in the *Poetics*, according to which metaphor consists in giving a 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 the grounds of analogy. As Derrida points out, all the concepts (*epiphora*, *eidōs*, *genos*) that operate in this definition "have an origin and an efficacy that are themselves 'metaphorical,' to use a word that this time, rigorously is no longer suitable to designate tropes that are as much defining as defined."⁵⁶ In other words, these "archaic" tropes (that correspond to the "primary" philosophemes) implicate "the defined in the definition."⁵⁷ These "defining tropes that are prior to all philosophical rhetoric and that produce philosophemes" not only can no longer be called metaphors because of the abyssal stratification of the defined in their definition, they also escape all possible nominalization, and hence conceptual mastery.⁵⁸ "Metaphorical," in this case, refers thus to tropes correlated to concepts (that are, among other things, to define metaphor) that implicate "the defined in the definition" without an end in sight of the process of implication⁵⁹ and cannot any more be called metaphors, precisely because the tropic movements by which they are constituted disallow them from coalescing into any figural shape. It is here, then, that one also touches on the new articulation of the difference and relation between concept and metaphor (or philosophy and rhetoric) announced earlier, one that the philosophical concept of metaphor can no longer serve to name. To call the "metaphor" within which the philosophical text is situated still by that name is possible only "by a catachresis, if you will, that would retrace metaphor through its philosophical phantom: as 'non-true metaphor'."⁶⁰

Apart from these structural difficulties that a metaphilosophy of the founding tropes of philosophy inevitably encounters, there are additional difficulties. Whereas, in the case of the philosophical metaphoricity of one philosophical oeuvre, the criteria for classification are usually borrowed

⁵⁵ Invoking Kant, Hegel, and Heidegger, Derrida writes: "The values of concepts, foundation, and theory are metaphorical, resisting every meta-metaphoric." (DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 224; translation modified by the author, R. G.)

⁵⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 252.

⁵⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 252.

⁵⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 255.

⁵⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 253.

⁶⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 258. Derrida's qualification, "as you will," clearly indicates that the rhetorical figure of catachresis is not referred to without a caveat.

from it, that is, derived from the prime ideas of the philosopher, in the case of the attempt to classify the “tutelary” tropes (and the corresponding “founding” philosophemes), fundamental philosophical questions would be in need of clarification. To bring the scope of the latter into view, let me first point out that the “tutelary” tropes in the stratum that subtends philosophical conceptuality, which are the objects of such a metaphilosophical classification, are tropes that make the “primary” concepts that correspond to them into a “natural” language of sorts within which, and with respect to which, the thought of individual philosophers takes place.⁶¹ In order to classify these “(natural) original metaphors” that correspond to the “natural” founding concepts of philosophy – which would amount to a rhetorical analysis of what Derrida terms “the philosophical text, supposing that assured criteria were available for identifying this text as such” – one would not only have to resort to “the mythology of the four elements,” that is, to “the elementary regions of phenomena,” but also to the distinctions regarding the zones of sensibility, assuming not only that all the philosophical questions regarding not solely empirical aesthetics, but, ultimately, transcendental aesthetics (and the metaphoricity that it itself involves) would have been successfully resolved.⁶² In short, a general taxonomy of “the so-called philosophical metaphors” at the founding core of the philosophical text “would presuppose the solution of important problems, and primarily of problems which constitute the entirety of philosophy in its history. Thus a metaphorology would be derivative as concerns the discourse it allegedly would dominate.”⁶³ Put simply, formidable technical problems within philosophy would thus have to be resolved prior to any attempt to develop a philosophical rhetoric. But even in this case, such a rhetoric would still remain a philosophical rhetoric because “the concept of metaphor, along with all the predicates that permit its ordered extension and comprehension, is a philosopheme”⁶⁴ and would thus, because of the law of ‘tropic’ supplementarity, fall short of what ultimately it seeks to accomplish.

As Derrida holds, the consequences of all this are double and contradictory: “On the one hand it is impossible to dominate philosophical metaphors as such, *from the exterior*, by using a concept of metaphor which remains a philosophical product. Only philosophy would seem to wield any authority over its own metaphorical productions. But, on the other hand, for the same reason philosophy is deprived of what it provides itself. Its instruments belonging to its field, philosophy is incapable of dominating its

⁶¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 224.

⁶² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, pp. 226–227.

⁶³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 228.

⁶⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 228.

general tropology and metaphoric.”⁶⁵ In short, any effort by philosophy to account exhaustively for its metaphors and to retrace its concepts to ordinary metaphors is bound to fail. Philosophy’s general metaphoric inevitably remains philosophy’s blind spot. Even though the philosopheme “metaphor” may outline the contours of this blind spot, it remains without any assurance that “an organizing center” has thus in fact been circumscribed.⁶⁶ Because of this “formal law [that] holds for every philosopheme,”⁶⁷ whatever glimpse the concept of metaphor allows of philosophy’s tropological nature, is completely pre-determined by this concept to the extent that it is a philosophical concept. In addition, it must be noted that

the constitution of the fundamental oppositions of the metaphorology (*physis / techne*, *physis / nomos*, sensible/intelligible, space/time, signifier/signified, etc.) has occurred by means of the history of a metaphorical language, or rather by means of ‘tropic’ movements which, no longer capable of being called by a philosophical name – i. e. metaphors – nevertheless, and for the same reason, do not make up a ‘proper’ language,⁶⁸

that is, a language more natural, more originary than that of the seemingly “natural” language of the foundational concepts of philosophy. Before any further commentary on these lines, I linger for a moment on this notion of a cluster of “‘tropic’ movements” that Derrida substitutes for the classical opposition and articulation of concept and metaphor. If, as I said before, the classical concept of metaphor is a “philosophical phantom of metaphor,” it is because it serves to control the inevitable effects of “the power of metaphoric displacement” characteristic of the process of metaphorical transfer, “the becoming unloosed from the very thing it aims at,” the disruption of “the semantic plenitude to which it should belong,” and “the wandering of the semantic,”⁶⁹ all of which are possibilities that the classical semantic definition of metaphor seeks to suppress. As Derrida’s analyses of Aristotle in particular demonstrate, Aristotle himself recognizes that even though metaphor should be grounded in a referent, ultimately that of the sun, this referent lends itself to an unlimited process of metaphorization which cannot be brought to a stop. Although Aristotle does not follow up on the consequences that derive from these movements that cannot be appropriated any longer by the concept of metaphor as he defines it, it becomes clear here that, in fact, there are no good metaphors, that is, metaphors that give something to know, not only because concepts always accomplish this better than metaphor, but also nothing ultimately can pre-

⁶⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 228.

⁶⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 228.

⁶⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 228.

⁶⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, pp. 228–229.

⁶⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241.

vent metaphor from further metaphorization. What Derrida refers to as the “‘tropic’ movements” can “no longer be called by a philosophical name” such as metaphor if metaphor is to keep a lid on the infinite proliferation of these movements, or, if one does still call them by that name, it must be, as we have already seen, in a way such that the metaphor “no longer receive[s] its name from metaphysics, except by a catachresis, if you will, that would retrace metaphor through its philosophical phantom: as ‘nontrue metaphor’.”⁷⁰ The same is valid, I would add, for the concept of metaphoricity. What the “‘tropic’ movements” in question refer to is “a properly *unnamable* articulation that is irreducible to the semantic *relève* or to dialectical interiorization,”⁷¹ insofar as the noun, or more precisely, the *nominalizable*, as the first semantic unity, is, in the classical definition, the very element of metaphor.⁷² Now, it is also important to point out that what Derrida explicitly says about this unnamable cluster of “‘tropic’ movements” that emerges as the focal point of “White Mythology” derives entirely from the consequences that follow from the fact, to put it in the broadest way, that “there can be bad metaphors.”⁷³ If, as Aristotle acknowledges, metaphors can be metaphorized, that is, uncoupled from their relations to the noun, the referent, the proper, engendering in the process not only an infinite wandering of sense impossible to appropriate from the semantic perspective of the theory of metaphor, but also a putting of signification into a scandalously promiscuous “kind of state of availability” for both sense and nonsense,⁷⁴ then the “‘tropic’ movements” articulate nothing less, but also nothing more, than, say, the underside of philosophy’s account (and appropriation) of metaphor. If one follows philosophy’s conceptualization of metaphor, one is driven to recognize that philosophy and rhetoric are carved out from an articulation of “‘tropic’ movements” that they presuppose without, however, being in a position to appropriate them by naming this articulation. As Derrida recalls at the end of the essay, it is in the guise of the figure of the sophist (as opposed to that of the rhetorician), that is, of “the very figure of that which doubles and endangers philosophy,”⁷⁵ that Aristotle acknowledges the pre-philosophical dimension of philosophy, in

⁷⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 258.

⁷¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 270.

⁷² See DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 233 and 236.

⁷³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241; see also p. 251.

⁷⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 241.

⁷⁵ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 271.

other words, what has been referred to as “the eve of philosophy” that philosophy cannot but seek to master in order to be able to come into its own.

Let us recall that, after having stated that the fundamental oppositions of metaphorology are constituted by “‘tropic’ movements” that cannot be designated by the philosophical name of metaphor, Derrida holds that this stratum of movements is not, therefore, a language more natural than the seemingly “natural” language of the foundational concepts of philosophy. To account for these non-metaphoric tropic movements, it is necessary to reach beyond the opposition of the proper and nonproper. More generally, as Derrida writes, “by definition, thus, there is no properly philosophical category to qualify a certain number of tropes that have conditioned the so-called ‘fundamental,’ ‘structuring,’ ‘original,’ philosophical oppositions: they are so many ‘metaphors’ that would constitute the rubrics [*le titre*] of such a tropology, the words ‘turn’ or ‘trope’ or ‘metaphor’ being no exception to the rule.”⁷⁶ The concern with these philosophically non-categorizable “‘tropic’ movements,” that is, movements that none of the philosophical concepts, including the one of metaphor as transport of one proper meaning to a figurative one, or metaphorization as idealization, and so forth, can comprehend because these concepts have been forged precisely to dominate the movements in question; in other words, the irremediable displacement, separation, and ultimately errance that they suggest, makes it necessary to return to the question of the “eve of philosophy” evoked earlier. Indeed, at this very juncture of his argument, Derrida refers to it as the “*vigil [la veille]* of philosophy.”⁷⁷ What makes up this eve of philosophy, that is, the preceding day, the evening before philosophy, properly speaking, is, in a way, the concern of all the chapters of “White Mythology” that follow the introductory chapter, “Exergue”; and it is in light of this concern that Derrida’s analyses of Aristotle’s definition of metaphor, his discussion of the difference between *prepon*, *kurion*, and *idion*, (that is, those terms that in Aristotle’s theory of metaphor are usually translated as referring to the proper, as opposed to figural, sense), the inevitable question of the plurality of metaphors, the subordination of syntax by the thematism of metaphor, and so forth, take place. Without being able to give these developments here a detailed account for reasons of time and space, let me first say that this eve is neither of the order of a more fundamental form of philosophy that the metaphysical tradition would have ignored or forgotten, such as, for instance, Pre-Socratic philosophy. Nor does it refer to the alleged origin of philosophy in myth, or in some sort of preconceptual intuiting. Finally,

⁷⁶ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁷⁷ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

philosophy's eve is not poetry or literature either. All these are others of philosophy within philosophy. Derrida writes: "Supposing that we might reach it (touch it, see it, comprehend it?), this tropic and prephilosophical resource could not have the archeological simplicity of a proper origin, the virginity of a history of beginnings."⁷⁸ Rather, the vigil, or eve, to which Derrida points is entirely a function of his analyses of metaphor "in the text of philosophy," which show that a thesis – "philosophy's *unique thesis*" – namely, the thesis that posits "that the sense aimed at through these figures [especially the figure of metaphor] is an essence rigorously independent of that which transports it."⁷⁹ Within philosophy, this thesis "constitutes the concept of metaphor. The opposition of the proper and the nonproper, of essence and accident, of intuition and discourse, of thought and language, of the intelligible and the sensible."⁸⁰ But what Derrida's analyses of metaphor in the text of philosophy also show is that while philosophy posits this thesis, it cannot but also, however reluctantly, or rather unwittingly, "acknowledge" that this thesis cannot contain in the philosophical text certain movements, those of displacement, separation, and, ultimately, errancy, that the concept of metaphor was supposed to master.⁸¹ As the analyses of "White Mythology" demonstrate, these "'tropic' movements" over which the concept of metaphor seeks to prevail, but which it also fails to designate, are structural in nature. The whole of these movements and their syntax, a whole that cannot make up a whole, this is the vigil, or eve, in question.

The philosophical concept of metaphor serves to keep a lid on the "'tropic' movements" that are "no longer capable of being called by a philosophical name – i. e. metaphors."⁸² As Derrida's discussion of metaphor from Aristotle to the classical rhetoric of Du Marsais and Fontanier demonstrates, whatever the transformations of this concept have been, there is a definite "limit of its plasticity."⁸³ Its naming capacity, hence its role in the service of cognition, has limits not only because the concept is better than it at accomplishing knowledge, but also because it cannot serve (as little as the concept) to name in any meaningful manner the "tropic and prephilosophical resource" of philosophy. For this reason too, this resource cannot ever be the object of "a *rhetoric* of philosophy." And, if Derrida adds, "we know this already, on the basis of the law of supplementarity (between the

⁷⁸ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁷⁹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁸⁰ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁸¹ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁸² DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

⁸³ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.

concept and the field) viewed in its formal necessity,”⁸⁴ it is to emphasize the structural and formal nature of this resource from which philosophy *and* rhetoric both emerge always again in new shapes whose irreducible multitude is indicative itself of their intrinsic limit as attempts to dominate a resource that inevitably escapes them and with respect to which both the concept and metaphor as means of knowledge encounter their boundaries.

Summary

Notwithstanding the fact that in “White Mythology” Jacques Derrida broaches the problematic of philosophy and rhetoric only through one of rhetoric’s figures, namely, metaphor, the essay in question is generally considered to be his most significant contribution to the relation between both domains. However, in order gauge what this contribution amounts to, it is necessary, first, to construe Derrida’s overall agenda in this text. Derrida, I hold, seeks a third way to account for the relation between philosophy and literature, that is, beyond the assumptions that all concepts can be reduced to metaphors, respectively, that the *telos* of philosophy aims at conceptual transparency, free all metaphoricity. Indeed, Derrida considers the philosophical concept of metaphor as a phantom proxy for “tropical” movements and a syntactic resistance that cannot any longer be called “metaphor,” and which make up a wider space of figuration from which concept and metaphor, or philosophy and literature, emerge at the eve of philosophy.

Zusammenfassung

Ogleich Jacques Derrida den Zusammenhang von Philosophie und Rhetorik in „Die weiße Mythologie“ nur mittels einer einzelnen rhetorischen Figur, der Metapher, problematisiert, wird dieser Essay gemeinhin als sein bedeutendster Beitrag zum Verhältnis von Philosophie und Rhetorik betrachtet. Doch um die präzise Natur von Derridas Theorieangebot abschätzen zu können, ist es nötig, zuvor ein klares Verständnis von Derridas Vorhaben, das „Die weiße Mythologie“ artikuliert, gewonnen zu haben. Derrida, so zeige ich, sucht einen dritten Weg im Hinblick auf das Verhältnis von Philosophie und Rhetorik, genauer, in Bezug auf die beiden philosophischen Thesen, dass sich einerseits alle Begriffe auf Metaphern reduzieren ließen, und andererseits, dass das *Telos* der Philosophie darin bestünde, begriffliche Transparenz und Freiheit von aller Metaphorizität zu erreichen. Derrida versteht dagegen den philosophischen Begriff der Metapher als ein begriffliches Phantom, das im philosophischen Diskurs für tropische Bewegungen und einen syntaktischen Widerstand einsteht, was insgesamt nicht mehr mit dem Begriff der „Metapher“ bezeichnet werden kann und worin sich der erweiterte Raum eines figurativen Geschehens darstellt, aus dem Begriff und Metapher, Philosophie und Rhetorik am Vorabend der Philosophie hervorgehen.

⁸⁴ DERRIDA, *White Mythology. Metaphor in the Text of Philosophy*, p. 229.