

The imaginary science

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In his text *Air and Dreams*, Bachelard states that “to grasp the imagining role of language, we must patiently search out for every word its inclinations towards ambiguity, double meaning, metaphors” (p. 3). If the “essence” of the imagining role of language is actually this, then philosophy is an *imaginary science*. What? Haven’t we learned that imagination and science doesn’t go together, that they are actually opposites? Of course, this could mean, as probably most people will critically understand it, that philosophy is not concerned with reality, but with its fictional double. This is not completely false, but neither completely true. Because, if we follow Bachelard one more time, one could state that “the imaginary is immanent in the real”, therefore, there is a “*continuous* path [that] leads from the real to the imaginary” (p. 4). Philosophy is an imaginary science specifically because it works constantly trying to create this continuous path, searching the imaginary core of reality in reality itself, but also fictionalizing it in every attempt to grasp it.

Jacques Derrida is thinking something very similar when in his 1972’s text *White Mythology* he shows how metaphors are structural resources for the philosophical discourse of all times. Of course, he is talking about –and allow me to put it in a psychological way– the *conscious* use of metaphors by philosophers, but also about a certain *unconscious* use of them as well. The conscious use could be found in every trope that it is used pedagogically and aesthetically; unconscious uses will be those uses of metaphors as *speculative instruments*. The first use is probably also the most visible use of rhetorical figures in philosophy, but the second is doubtlessly the more widespread and effective use of them. This means that philosophy actually works metaphorically, that the most rational speculations are based on a specific function given to some general tropes. I have found that the speculative trope *par excellence* for philosophy is analogy, since it has a long history of uses, starting with the metaphysical and theological tradition. I can’t explain how analogy works historically for philosophy here, but I will try to summarize it through some general ideas: the main function of analogy in philosophy is to allow the philosopher to talk about what she *can’t actually talk about*. Analogical knowledge as, for example, Kant puts it, is that kind of knowledge that gives us insight into that we cannot see. Or, more technically, some kind of –*unproper* – ‘knowledge’ that allows us to speak properly about the thing in itself, the *noumenon*, while knowledge in the *strict sense* only gives us access to the realm of *phenomenon*, things for us. Analogy is used in this way by philosophers of all times, as I said, even when they are not fully aware of it, since it is the only speculative tool that can give us access to reality itself. So, if philosophy talks about reality, if it can say something true about it, it can only say it *analogically*.

In a post-humanist world, and in a post-humanist academy, philosophy has of course turned its back on analogy as a speculative tool. And this is because analogy, as the word says it, is some kind of comparative judgment between what is unknown and what is known. Attribution analogies were defined by theologians as modes of predicament that, establishing two terms, work attributing properties from the known term (first *analogon*) to the unknown term (second

analogon). Since philosophers also have historically thought that the most well-known for us are we ourselves (the soul, the mind, the cogito, self-existence, etc.), they have attributed human properties to the whole non-human sphere: this is why nature has ‘laws’, or is some kind of ‘work of art’, etc. Anthropologization of nature is one of the historical consequences of analogy used as a speculative method in philosophy. This is probably the biggest symptom of how the *anthropos* has epistemically ruled the world for so many centuries, and it is also probably one of the main targets for post-humanist critical theories.

To understand this speculative ‘logic’ – or rhetoric – of philosophy could be a necessary step to fully understand what Donella Meadows called in 1994 to “have a vision” on how a sustainable world would be. Could this be taken as a challenge of visioning how a world without humans will be? Or more precisely, how a world that is not *humanly described* would be? The main proof of how difficult this could be is that almost 30 years have passed since Meadows’ speech took place, and we are still not fully able to envision or imagine a truly sustainable world. How can we imagine a world that is not humanly described, specifically if we are aware that we almost “naturally” use analogies to describe it, all the time – because as Bachelard’s quote of W. Blake says, imagination in “Human Existence itself” (p. 1). We need to pay attention to the fact that to ‘describe’ a world, meaning to *rationaly talk about it*, has never been an exercise completely different from imagining it through analogies – and this is the deep sense of philosophy being an imaginary science, as we have stated in the first place. Could this mean that we *need* philosophy to have this vision, or at least that it is *not without* philosophy that this ‘vision’ – that Meadows also states is *not* a rational exercise – is possible?

My answer is yes, but with a ‘but’. Yes, since there has never been an imaginary attempt to describe the world as important as the analogical attempt of philosophy, and this is something we should not underestimate at all. And no, because to fully have this sustainable vision, we need to start thinking analogically different from how tradition has it. For example, we need to stop attributing properties in a one-way direction, from humans to nature, but also bidirectionally. Furthermore, we need to complicate this bidirectionality as well. What if we take no reference and no order to start this analogical process? For example, what if we understand that humans are some kind of semantic *parasites* of nature, but also that nature is a semantic *parasite* to us? The parasite is an intriguing figure, first because it is a metaphor or an analogy itself: etymologically it takes us back to the Greek words ‘*para*’ and ‘*sitos*’, the latter meaning exactly ‘food’, and the former being a clause that could mean ‘with’ as well as ‘near to’ or even ‘against’. So, a parasite is something or someone I eat-with or that I eat, or even that eats-me. If humans are semantic parasites of nature, this means that we take our own sense, the sense of what we are, from ‘eating’ nature, from incorporating it inside our ‘body’ of meanings. The same will be true conversely, because it is like nature could ‘eat us’ in order to get its own meaning, because nature actually takes from us a set of meanings that are ‘metabolized’ by it, destroying a good part of its pure anthropological traits. What this ultimately means is that the analogical tool of philosophy cannot be tamed by establishing for it a regular order of operation: attribution of properties from one term to another or vice versa. It is really a complex relation that is similar, analogue – maybe –, to that of the parasitic relation.

In a moment when speculation about reality in itself has become the subject of contemporary philosophy, and mathematics arose as the most adequate form of language to talk about it, I invite you to go back to philosophy and its analogical method, to criticize its limits and to widen its horizon. Otherwise, imagination is at risk of being lost in a rational, numeric formula.