

order to deal a penetrating thrust. When the device is a hostile metaphor or a cruel joke requiring much background and effort to understand, it is all the more painful because the victim has been made a complicitor in his own demise. Do not, therefore, suppose that jokes are always for shared amusement, or metaphors always for communal insight. Some of the most instructive examples will be ones in which intimacy is sought as a means to a lethal and one-sided effect. I leave the construction of examples to you.

I have just begun to open this topic for myself and hope to participate in elaborating two of its themes. As precisely and delicately as we can describe it, what is the character of this linguistic intimacy, and how, in general and in detail, is it attained? And then what good is it—what is it for? Perhaps you will find these questions useful when mulling over the rich variety of example metaphors used in the papers to come.

Critical Inquiry Autumn 1978 (Vol. 9, No. 1)
Special Issue on Metaphor

The Epistemology of Metaphor

Paul de Man

Metaphors, tropes, and figural language in general have been a perennial problem and, at times, a recognized source of embarrassment for philosophical discourse and, by extension, for all discursive uses of language including historiography and literary analysis. It appears that philosophy either has to give up its own constitutive claim to rigor in order to come to terms with the figurality of its language or that it has to free itself from figuration altogether. And if the latter is considered impossible, philosophy could at least learn to control figuration by keeping it, so to speak, in its place, by delimiting the boundaries of its influence and thus restricting the epistemological damage that it may cause. This attempt stands behind recurrent efforts to map out the distinctions between philosophical, scientific, theological, and poetic discourse and informs such institutional questions as the departmental structure of schools and universities. It also pertains to the received ideas about differences between various schools of philosophical thought, about philosophical periods and traditions, as well as about the possibility of writing a history of philosophy or of literature. Thus, it is customary to assume that the common sense of empirical British philosophy owes much of its superiority over certain continental metaphysical excesses to its ability to circumscribe, as its own style and decorum demonstrate, the potentially disruptive power of rhetoric. "The Skywriters," says a contemporary literary critic (with tongue in cheek) in a recent polemical article, "march under the banner of Hegel and Continental Philosophy, while the Common Sense school [of literary criticism] is

content with no philosophy, unless it be that of Locke and a homespun organicism."¹

The mention of Locke in this context certainly does not come unexpected since Locke's attitude toward language, and especially toward the rhetorical dimensions of language, can be considered as exemplary or, at any rate, typical of an enlightened rhetorical self-discipline. At times it seems as if Locke would have liked nothing better than to be allowed to forget about language altogether, difficult as this may be in an essay having to do with understanding. Why would one have to concern oneself with language since the priority of experience over language is so obvious? "I must confess then," writes Locke in the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, "that, when I first began this discourse of the understanding, and a good while after, I had not the least thought that any consideration of words was at all necessary to it."² But, scrupulous and superb writer that he is, by the time he reaches book 3 of his treatise, he can no longer ignore the question:

But when, having passed over the original and composition of our *ideas*, I began to examine the extent and certainty of our knowledge, I found it had so near a connexion with words that, unless their force and manner of signification were first well observed, there could be very little said clearly and pertinently concerning knowledge, which, being conversant about truth, had constantly to do with propositions. And though it terminated in things, yet it was, for the most part, so much by the intervention of words that they seemed scarce separable from our general knowledge. At least they interpose themselves so much between our understandings and the truth which it would contemplate and apprehend that, like the *medium* through which visible objects pass, their obscurity and disorder does not seldom cast a mist before our eyes and impose upon our understandings. [Bk. 3, chap. 9, pp. 87-88]

1. Geoffrey Hartman, "The Recognition Scene of Criticism," *Critical Inquiry* 4 (Winter 1977): 409.

2. Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. John W. Yolton, 2 vols. (London and New York, 1961), 2:bk. 2, chap. 9, p. 87. All further references will appear in the text.

Paul de Man, Tripp Professor in the humanities and chairman of the comparative literature department of Yale University, is the author of *Blindness and Insight: Essays in the Rhetoric of Contemporary Criticism*. His previous contribution to *Critical Inquiry*, "Political Allegory in Rousseau," appeared in the Summer 1976 issue and will appear as a chapter in his forthcoming book *Allegories in Reading*.

Neither is there any question about what it is in language that thus renders it nebulous and obfuscating: it is, in a very general sense, the figurative power of language. This power includes the possibility of using language seductively and misleadingly in discourses of persuasion as well as in such intertextual tropes as allusion, in which a complex play of substitutions and repetitions takes place between texts. The following passage is famous but always deserves extensive quotation:

Since wit and fancy finds easier entertainment in the world than dry truth and real knowledge, *figurative speeches* and allusions in language will hardly be admitted as an imperfection or abuse of it. I confess, in discourses where we seek rather pleasure and delight than information and improvement, such ornaments as are borrowed from them can scarce pass for faults. But yet, if we would speak of things as they are, we must allow that all the art of rhetoric, besides order and clearness, all the artificial and figurative application of words eloquence hath invented, are for nothing else but to insinuate wrong *ideas*, move the passions, and thereby mislead the judgment, and so indeed are perfect cheat; and therefore however laudable or allowable oratory may render them in harangues and popular addresses, they are certainly, in all discourses that pretend to inform or instruct, wholly to be avoided and, where truth and knowledge are concerned, cannot but be thought a great fault either of the language or person that makes use of them. What and how various they are will be superfluous here to take notice, the books of rhetoric which abound in the world will instruct those who want to be informed; only I cannot but observe how little the preservation and improvement of truth and knowledge is the care and concern of mankind, since the arts of fallacy are endowed and preferred. It is evident how much men love to deceive and be deceived, since rhetoric, that powerful instrument of error and deceit, has its established professors, is publicly taught, and has always been had in great reputation; and I doubt not but it will be thought great boldness, if not brutality, in me to have said thus much against it. *Eloquence*, like the fair sex, has too prevailing beauties in it to suffer itself ever to be spoken against. And it is in vain to find fault with those arts of deceiving wherein men find pleasure to be deceived. [Bk. 3, chap. 10, pp. 105-6]

Nothing could be more eloquent than this denunciation of eloquence. It is clear that rhetoric is something one can decorously indulge in as long as one knows where it belongs. Like a woman, which it resembles ("like the fair sex"), it is a fine thing as long as it is kept in its proper place. Out of place, among the serious affairs of men ("if we would speak of things as they are"), it is a disruptive scandal—like the appearance of a real woman in a gentlemen's club where it would only be

tolerated as a picture, preferably naked (like the image of Truth), framed and hung on the wall. There is little epistemological risk in a flowery, witty passage about wit like this one, except perhaps that it may be taken too seriously by dull-witted subsequent readers. But when, on the next page, Locke speaks of language as a "conduit" that may "corrupt the fountains of knowledge which are in things themselves" and, even worse, "break or stop the pipes whereby it is distributed to public use," then this language, not of poetic "pipes and timbrels" but of a plumber's handyman, raises, by its all too graphic concreteness, questions of propriety. Such far-reaching assumptions are then made about the structure of the mind that one may wonder whether the metaphors illustrate a cognition or if the cognition is not perhaps shaped by the metaphors. And indeed, when Locke then develops his own theory of words and language, what he constructs turns out to be in fact a theory of tropes. Of course, he would be the last man in the world to realize and to acknowledge this. One has to read him, to some extent, against or regardless of his own explicit statements; one especially has to disregard the commonplaces about his philosophy that circulate as reliable currency in the intellectual histories of the Enlightenment. One has to pretend to read him ahistorically, the first and necessary condition if there is to be any expectation of ever arriving at a somewhat reliable history. That is to say, he has to be read not in terms of explicit statements (especially explicit statements about statements) but in terms of the rhetorical motions of his own text, which cannot be simply reduced to intentions or to identifiable facts.

Unlike such later instances as Warburton, Vico, or, of course, Herder, Locke's theory of language is remarkably free of what is now referred to as "cratyllic" delusions. The arbitrariness of the sign as signifier is clearly established by him, and his notion of language is frankly semantic rather than semiotic, a theory of signification as a substitution of words for "ideas" (in a specific and pragmatic sense of the term) and not of the linguistic sign as an autonomous structure. "Sounds have no natural connexion with our *ideas*, but have all their signification from the arbitrary imposition of men. . . ." Consequently, Locke's reflection on the use and abuse of words will not start from the words themselves, be it as material or as grammatical entities, but from their meaning. His taxonomy of words will therefore not occur, for example, in terms of parts of speech but will espouse his own previously formulated theory of ideas as subdivided in simple ideas, substances, and mixed modes,³ best paraphrased in this order since the first two, unlike the third, pertain to entities that exist in nature.

On the level of simple ideas, there seem to be no semantic or

3. An apparent exception to this principle would be bk. 3, chap. 7, where Locke pleads for the necessity of studying particles of speech as well as nouns. But the assimilation of particles to "some action or insinuation of the mind" of which they are "tracks" reintegrates them at once into the theory of ideas (p. 73).

epistemological problems since the nominal and the real essence of the species designated by the word coincide; since the idea is simple and undivided, there can in principle be no room for play or ambivalence between the word and the entity, or between property and essence. Yet this lack of differential play immediately leads to a far-reaching consequence: "The *names of simple ideas are not capable of any definitions . . .*" (bk. 3, chap. 4, p. 26). Indeed not, since definition involves distinction and is therefore no longer simple. Simple ideas are, therefore, in Locke's system, simpleminded; they are not the objects of understanding. The implication is clear but comes as something of a shock, for what would be more important to understand than single ideas, the cornerstones of our experience?

In fact, we discourse a great deal about simple ideas. Locke's first example is the term "motion," and he is well aware of the extent to which metaphysical speculation, in the scholastic as well as in the more strictly Cartesian tradition, centers on the problem of the definition of motion. But nothing in this abundant literature could be elevated to the level of a definition that would answer the question: What is motion? "Nor have the modern philosophers, who have endeavored to throw off the *jargon* of the Schools and speak intelligibly, much better succeeded in defining simple *ideas*, whether by explaining their causes or any otherwise. The *atomists*, who define motion to be a *passage from one place to another*, what do they more than put one synonymous word for another? For what is *passage* other than *motion*? And if they were asked what passage was, how would they better define it than by *motion*? For is it not at least as proper and significant to say *passage is a motion from one place to another* as to say *motion is a passage*, etc. This is to translate and not to define . . ." (bk. 3, chap. 4, p. 28). Locke's own "passage" is bound to continue this perpetual motion that never moves beyond tautology: motion is a passage and passage is a translation; translation, once again, means motion, piles motion upon motion. It is no mere play of words that "translate" is translated in German as "*übersetzen*," which itself translates the Greek "*meta pherein*" or metaphor. Metaphor gives itself the totality which it then claims to define, but it is in fact the tautology of its own position. The discourse of simple ideas is figural discourse or translation and, as such, creates the fallacious illusion of definition.

Locke's second example of a word for a simple idea is "light." He takes pains to explain that the word "light" does not refer to the perception of light and that to understand the causal process by which light is produced and perceived is not at all the same as to understand light. In fact, to understand light is to be able to make this very distinction between the actual cause and the idea (or experience) of a perception, between a perception and perception. When we can do this, says Locke, then the *idea* is that which is *properly* light, and we come as close as we can come to the proper meaning of "light." To understand light as idea is to

understand light properly. But the word "idea" (*eide*), of course, itself means light, and to say that to understand light is to perceive the idea of light is to say that understanding is to see the light of light and is therefore itself light. The sentence: to understand the idea of light would then have to be translated as to light the light of light (*das Licht des Lichtes lichten*), and if this begins to sound like Heidegger's translations from the Pre-Socratics, it is not by chance. Etymons have a tendency to turn into the repetitive stutter of tautology. Just as the word "passage" translates but fails to define motion, "idea" translates but does not define light and, what is worse, "understand" translates but does not define understanding. The first idea, the simple idea, is that of light in motion or figure, but the figure is not a *simple* idea but a delusion of light, of understanding, or of definition. This complication of the simple will run through the entire argument which is itself the motion of this complication (of motion).

Things indeed get more complex as one moves from simple ideas to substances. They can be considered in two perspectives: either as a collection of properties or as an essence which supports these properties as their ground. The example for the first model of a substance is "gold," not unrelated, in some of its properties, to the solar light in motion. The structure of substances considered as a collection of properties upsets the convergence of nominal and real essences that made the utterer of simple ideas into something of a stuttering idiot but, at least from an epistemological point of view, a happy one. For one thing, properties are not just the idea of motion, they actually move and travel. One will find gold in the most unexpected places, for instance in the tail of peacock. "I think all agree to make [gold] stand for a body of a certain yellow shining colour; which being the *idea* to which children have annexed that name, the shining yellow part of a peacock's tail is properly to them gold" (bk. 3, chap. 9, p. 85). The closer the description comes to that of metaphor, the more dependent Locke becomes on the use of the word "properly." Like the blind man who cannot understand the idea of light, the child who cannot tell the figural from the proper keeps recurring throughout eighteenth-century epistemology as barely disguised figures of our universal predicament. For not only are tropes, as their name implies, always on the move—more like quicksilver than like flowers or butterflies which one can at least hope to pin down and insert in a neat taxonomy—but they can disappear altogether, or at least appear to disappear. Gold not only has a color and a texture, but it is also soluble. "For by what right is it that fusibility comes to be a part of the essence signified by the word *gold*, and solubility but a property of it? . . . That which I mean in this: that these being all but properties, depending on its real constitution, and nothing but powers either active or passive in reference to other bodies, no one has authority to determine the signification of the word *gold* (as referred to such a body existing in nature)

. . ." (bk. 3, chap. 9, pp. 85–86). Properties, it seems, do not properly totalize, or, rather, they totalize in a haphazard and unreliable way. It is indeed not a question of ontology, of things as they are, but of authority, of things as they are decreed to be. And this authority cannot be vested in any authoritative body, for the free usage of ordinary language is carried, like the child, by wild figuration which will make a mockery of the most authoritarian academy. We have no way of defining, of policing, the boundaries that separate the name of one entity from the name of another; tropes are not just travellers, they tend to be smugglers and probably smugglers of stolen goods at that. What makes matters even worse is that there is no way of finding out whether they do so with criminal intent or not.

Perhaps the difficulty stems from a misconceived notion of the paradigm "substance." Instead of being considered as a collection, as a summation of properties, the accent should perhaps fall on the link that binds the properties together. Substances can be considered as the support, the ground of the properties (*hypokeimenon*). Here Locke's example will be "man"; the question to be accounted for then becomes: What essence is the proper of man? The question in fact amounts to whether the proper, which is a linguistic notion, and the essence, which exists independently of linguistic mediation, can coincide. As the creature endowed with conceptual language, "man" is indeed the entity, the place where this convergence is said to take place. The epistemological stakes are therefore higher in the case of the example "man" than in the case of "gold." But so are the difficulties, for, in answer to the question "What essence is the proper of man," the tradition confronts us with two perhaps incompatible answers. Man can be defined in terms of his outward appearance (as in Plato: *animal implume bipes latis unguibus*) but also in terms of his inner soul or being. "For though the sound *man*, in its own nature, be as apt to signify a complex *idea* made up of animality and rationality, united in the same subject, as to signify any other combination: yet, used as a mark to stand for a sort of creatures we count of our own kind, perhaps the outward shape is as necessary to be taken into our complex *idea*, signified by the word *man*, as any other we find in it . . . for it is the shape, as the leading quality, that seems more to determine that species than a faculty of reasoning, which appears not at first and in some never" (bk. 3, chap. 11, p. 115). The problem is that of a necessary link between the two elements in a binary polarity, between "inside" and "outside," that is to say, by all accounts, that of metaphor as the figure of complementarity and correspondence. One now sees that this figure is not only ornamental and aesthetic but powerfully coercive since it generates, for example, the ethical pressure of such questions as "to kill or not to kill." "And if this be not allowed to be so," says Locke, "I do not know how they can be excused from murder who kill monstrous births (as we call them) because of an un-

ordinary shape, without knowing whether they have a rational soul or no, which can be no more discerned in a well-formed than ill-shaped infant as soon as born" (bk. 3, chap. 11, p. 115). The passage is, of course, primarily a mock argument, a hyperbolic example to unsettle the unquestioned assumption of definitional thought. Yet it has its own logic which will have to run its course. For how could anyone "allow" something to be if it is not necessarily the case that it is? For it is not necessarily the case that the inner and the outer man are the same man, that is to say, are "man" at all. The predicament (to kill or not to kill the monstrous birth) appears here in the guise of a purely logical argument. But not much further along in the *Essay*, what is "only" an argument in book 3 becomes an ethically charged issue in book 4, chapter 4, which is entitled "Of the Reality of Knowledge."⁴ The problem there under discussion is what to do with the "changeling": the simpleminded child so called because it would be natural for anyone to assume that this child has been substituted by mistake for his real offspring. The substitutive text of tropes now has extended to reality.

The well-shaped *changeling* is a man, has a rational soul, though it appear not: this is past doubt, say you. Make the ears a little longer and more pointed, and the nose a little flatter than ordinary, and then you begin to boggle; make the face yet narrower, flatter, and longer, and then you are at a stand; add still more and more of the likeness of a brute to it, and let the head be perfectly that of some other animal, then presently it is a *monster*, and it is demonstration with you that it hath no rational soul and must be destroyed. Where now (I ask) shall be the just measure, which the utmost bounds of that shape that carries with it a rational soul? For since there have been human *foetuses* produced, half-beast and half-man, and others three parts one and one part the other, and so it is possible they may be in all the variety of approaches to the one or the other shape and may have several degrees of mixture of the likeness of a man or a brute, I would gladly know what are those precise lineaments which, according to this hypothesis, are or are not capable of a rational soul to be joined to them. What sort of outside is the certain sign that there is or is not such an inhabitant within? [Bk. 4, chap. 4, p. 175]

If we then are invited by Locke, in conclusion, to "quit the common notion of species and essences," this would reduce us to the mindless stamens of simple ideas and make us into a philosophical "changeling," with the unpleasant consequences that have just been conjectured. As we

4. Examples used in logical arguments have a distressing way of lingering on with a life of their own. I suppose no reader of J. L. Austin's paper, "On Excuses," has ever been quite able to forget the "case" of the inmate in an insane asylum parboiled to death by a careless guard.

move from the mere contiguity between words and things in the case of simple ideas to the metaphorical correspondence of properties and essences in substances, the ethical tension has considerably increased.

Only this tension could account for the curious choice of examples selected by Locke when he moves on to the uses and possible abuses of language in mixed modes. His main examples are manslaughter, incest, parricide, and adultery—when any nonreferential entity such as mermaid or unicorn would have done just as well.⁵ The full list of examples—"motion," "light," "gold," "man," "manslaughter," "parricide," "adultery," "incest"—sounds more like a Greek tragedy than the enlightened moderation one tends to associate with the author of *On Government*. Once the reflection on the figurality of language is started, there is no telling where it may lead. Yet there is no way *not* to raise the question if there is to be any understanding. The use and the abuse of language cannot be separated from each other.

"Abuse" of language is, of course, itself the name of a trope: catachresis. This is indeed how Locke describes mixed modes. They are capable of inventing the most fantastic entities by dint of the positional power inherent in language. They can dismember the texture of reality and reassemble it in the most capricious of ways, pairing man with woman or human being with beast in the most unnatural shapes. Something monstrous lurks in the most innocent of catachreses: when one speaks of the legs of the table or the face of the mountain, catachresis is already turning into prosopopeia, and one begins to perceive a world of potential ghosts and monsters. By elaborating his theory of language as a motion from simple ideas to mixed modes, Locke has deployed the entire fan-shape or (to remain within light imagery) the entire spectrum or rainbow of tropological totalization, the anamorphosis of tropes which has to run its full course whenever one engages, however reluctantly or tentatively, the question of language as figure. In Locke, it began in the arbitrary, metonymic contiguity of word-sounds to their meanings, in which the word is a mere token in the service of the natural entity, and it concludes with the catachresis of mixed modes in which the word can be said to produce of and by itself the entity it signifies and that has no equivalence in nature. Locke condemns catachresis severely: "he that hath *ideas* of substances disagreeing with the real existence of things, so far wants the materials of true knowledge in his understanding, and hath instead thereof *chimeras*. . . . He that thinks the name *centaur* stands for some real being, imposes on himself and mistakes words for things" (bk. 3, chap. 10, p. 104). But the condemnation, by Locke's own argu-

5. In the general treatment of mixed modes, Locke lists "adultery" and "incest" (p. 34). In the subsequent discussion of the abuses of language, he returns to the problem of mixed modes and gives as examples manslaughter, murder, and parricide, as well as the legal term often associated with manslaughter, "chance medley." Mermaids and unicorns are mentioned in another context in bk. 3, chap. 3, p. 25.

ment, now takes all language for its target, for at no point in the course of the demonstration can the empirical entity be sheltered from tropological defiguration. The ensuing situation is intolerable and makes the soothing conclusion of book 3, entitled "Of the Remedies of the Foregoing Imperfections and Abuses [of Language]," into one of the least convincing sections of the *Essay*. One turns to the tradition engendered by Locke's work in the hope of finding some assistance out of the predicament.

* * *

Condillac's *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* constantly advertises, perhaps even exaggerates, its dependence on Locke's *Essay*. It contains at least two sections that explicitly deal with the question of language; in fact, its systematic commitment to a theory of mind that is in fact a theory of the sign makes it difficult to isolate any part of the treatise that is not modeled on a linguistic structure. Two sections, however, openly and explicitly deal with language: the chapter on the origins of language, "Du langage et de la méthode," which makes up the second part of the *Essai*, and another section, "Des abstractions" (pt. 1, section 5). From Rousseau to Michel Foucault, the former section (which elaborates the notion of "*langage d'action*") has received much attention. But the chapter on abstract terms also deals with language in a more inclusive way than its title would seem to indicate. It can be shown, though this is not my present purpose, that the subsequent chapters on "*langage d'action*" are a special case of the more inclusive model and history set up in this section. Read in conjunction with Locke's "On Words," it allows for a wider perspective on the tropological structure of discourse.

At first sight, the brief chapter seems to deal with only one rather specialized use of language, that of conceptual abstractions. But "abstractions" are defined from the start in a way that considerably expands the semantic field covered by the term. They come into being, says Condillac, "by ceasing to think [*en cessant de penser*] of the properties by which things are distinguished in order to think only of those in which they agree [or correspond; the French word is '*conviennent*'] with each other."⁶ The structure of the process is once more precisely that of metaphor in its classical definition. Some hundred and thirty years later, Nietzsche will make the very same argument to show that a word such as "leaf" (*Blatt*) is formed by "making what is different equal [*Gleichsetzen des Nichtgleichen*]" and by "arbitrarily dropping individual differences

6. Condillac, *Essai sur l'origine des connaissances humaines* (1746), ed. Charles Porset (Paris, 1973), bk. 1, sec. 2, p. 194. All further references will be from bk. 1, chap. 5 and will appear in the text; here and elsewhere, my translation.

[*beliebiges Fallenlassen der individuellen Verschiedenheiten*]."⁷ And a few years after Condillac, Rousseau will make the same argument in his analysis of denomination in the second *Discourse*.⁸ It is entirely legitimate to conclude that when Condillac uses the term "abstraction," it can be "translated" as metaphor or, if one agrees with the point that was made with reference to Locke about the self-totalizing transformation of all tropes, as trope. As soon as one is willing to be made aware of their epistemological implications, concepts are tropes and tropes concepts.

Condillac spells out these implications in what reads like the plot of a somewhat odd story. He implicitly acknowledges the generalized meaning of the term "abstraction" by insisting that no discourse would be conceivable that does not make use of abstractions: "[abstractions] are certainly absolutely necessary [*elles sont sans doute absolument nécessaires*]" (sec. 2, p. 174). On the other hand, he cautions at once against the threat their seductive power constitutes for rational discourse: just as certainly as they are indispensable, they are necessarily defective or even corruptive—"however corruptive [*vicieux*] this contradiction may be, it is nevertheless necessary" (sec. 6, p. 176). Worse still, abstractions are capable of infinite proliferation. They are like weeds, or like a cancer; once you have begun using a single one, they will crop up everywhere. They are said to be "marvelously fecund" (sec. 7, p. 177), but there is something of Rappaccini's garden about them, something sinister about those vigorous plants that no gardener can do without nor keep in check. Even after their ambivalent nature has been analyzed on an advanced level of critical understanding, there is very little hope they can be mastered: "I don't know if, after all that I have said, it will at last be possible to forego all these 'realized' abstractions: many reasons make me fear the opposite is true" (sec. 12, p. 179).⁹ The story is like the plot of a Gothic novel in which someone compulsively manufactures a monster on which he then becomes totally dependent and does not have the power to kill. Condillac (who after all went down in the anecdotal history of philosophy as the inventor of a mechanical statue able to smell roses) bears a close resemblance to Ann Radcliffe or Mary Shelley.

From the recognition of language as trope, one is led to the telling of a tale, to the narrative sequence I have just described. The temporal deployment of an initial complication, of a structural knot, indicates the close, though not necessarily complementary, relationship between trope

7. Nietzsche, *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn*, ed. Karl Schleiermacher, 3 vols. (München, 1969), 3:313.

8. Rousseau, *Deuxième Discours (Sur l'origine et les fondements de l'inégalité)*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jean Starobinski, 5 vols. (Paris, 1964), 3:148.

9. The French word "*réaliser*" is used in a precise technical sense. The abstractions are mistaken for "real" objects in the same way Locke speaks of the danger of mistaking words for things. The reason for this error becomes clear later in the text.

and narrative, between knot and plot. If the referent of a narrative is indeed the tropological structure of its discourse, then the narrative will be the attempt to account for this fact. This is what happens in the most difficult, but also the most rewarding, section of Condillac's text.

Paragraph 6 starts out with a description of first or simple ideas in a manner reminiscent of Locke; the main stress is on *ideas* rather than on *first*, for Condillac stresses the conceptual aspect of all ideas, regardless of order. He contrasts a reality, which is presumably that of things in themselves, with what he calls, somewhat tautologically, "a true reality [*une vraie réalité*]." This true reality is not located in things but in the subject, which is also the mind as *our* mind (*notre esprit*). It is the result of an operation the mind performs upon entities, an *apercevoir en nous* and not a perception. The language which describes this operation in Condillac's text is consistently, and more so than in Locke's, a language of mastery of the subject over entities: things become "truly real" only by being appropriated and seized upon with all the etymological strength implied in *Begriff*, the German word for concept. To understand is to seize (*begreifen*) and not to let go of what one has thus taken hold of. Condillac says that impressions will be considered by the mind only if they are "locked up [*renfermées*]" in it. And as one moves from the personal subject "*nous*" to the grammatical subject of all the sentences ("*notre esprit*"), it becomes clear that this action of the mind is also the action of the subject.

Why does the subject have to behave in such a potentially violent and authoritarian way? The answer is clear: this is the only way in which it can constitute its own existence, its own ground. Entities, in themselves, are neither distinct nor defined; no one could say where one entity ends and where another begins. They are mere flux, "modifications." By considering itself as the place where this flux occurs, the mind stabilizes itself as the ground of the flux, the *lieu de passage* through which all reality has to pass: "... these 'modifications' change and follow each other incessantly in [our mind's] being, which then appears to itself as a ground [*un certain fond*] that remains forever the same" (sec. 6, p. 176). The terminology is a mixture of Locke and Descartes (or Malebranche). The subject seen as a compulsive stabilization that cannot be separated from an unsettling action upon reality performed by this very subject is a version of a Cartesian *cogito*—except that the function performed in Descartes' second and third "Meditation" by hyperbolic doubt becomes here, in the tradition of Locke, a function of empirical perception. Hyperbolic doubt, a mental act in Descartes, now extends to the entire field of empirical experience.

The self-constitutive act of the subject has, in Condillac (as in Descartes), a much more openly reflexive status than in Locke. The verb most frequently associated with the subject "mind" is "to reflect [*réfléchir*]: "since our mind is too limited to *reflect* . . ."; "the mind cannot

reflect on nothing. . . ." To reflect is an analytical act that distinguishes differences and articulates reality; these articulations are called abstractions, and they would have to include any conceivable act of denomination or predication. This is also the point at which an act of ontological legerdemain enters the system: the subject (or mind) depends on something which is not itself, here called "modifications" ("certain sensations of light, color, etc., or certain operations of the soul . . ."), in order to be at all, but these modifications are themselves as devoid of being as the mind—cut off from its differentiating action, they are nothing. As the other of the mind, they are devoid of being, but by recognizing them as similar to itself in this negative attribute, the mind sees them, as in a specular reflection, as being both itself and not itself at the same time. The mind "is" to the extent that it "is like" its other in its inability to be. The attribute of being is dependent on the assertion of a similarity which is illusory, since it operates at a stage that precedes the constitution of entities. "How will these experiences, taken abstractly, or separately, from the entity [the mind] to which they belong and to which they correspond only to the extent that they are locked up in it, how will these experiences become the object of the mind? Because the mind persists in considering them as if they were entities in themselves. . . . The mind contradicts itself. On the one hand, it considers these experiences without any relation to its own being, and then they are nothing at all; on the other hand, because nothingness cannot be comprehended, it considers them as if they were something, and persists in giving them the same reality with which it at first perceived them, although this reality can no longer correspond to them." Being and identity are the result of a resemblance which is not in things but posited by an act of the mind which, as such, can only be verbal. And since to be verbal, in this context, means to allow substitutions based on illusory resemblances (the determining illusion being that of a shared negativity) then mind, or subject, is the central metaphor, the metaphor of metaphors. The power of the tropes, which Locke sensed in a diffuse way, is here condensed in the key metaphor of the subject as mind. What was a general and implicit theory of tropes in Locke becomes in Condillac a more specific theory of metaphor. Locke's third personal narrative about things in the world becomes here the autobiographical discourse of the subject. Different as the two narratives may be, they are still the allegory of the same tropological aporia. It now also becomes more directly threatening since we, as subjects, are explicitly inscribed within the narrative. One feels more than ever compelled to turn elsewhere for assistance and, staying in the same philosophical tradition, Kant would seem to be the obvious place.

Kant rarely discusses the question of tropes and rhetoric directly but comes closest in a passage from the *Critique of Judgment* that deals with the distinction between schemata and symbolic language. He starts out from the term "hypotyposis" which, used, as he does, in a very inclusive way, designates what, after Peirce, one might call the iconic element in a representation. Hypotyposis makes present to the senses something which is not within their reach, not just because it does not happen to be there but because it consists, in whole or in part, of elements too abstract for sensory representation. The figure most closely akin to hypotyposis is that of prosopopeia; in its most restricted sense, prosopopeia makes accessible to the senses, in this case the ear, a voice which is out of earshot because it is no longer alive. In its most inclusive and also its etymological sense, it designates the very process of figuration as giving face to what is devoid of it.

In section 59 of the *Critique of Judgment* ("Of the Beautiful as a Symbol of Public Morality"), Kant is primarily concerned with the distinction between schematic and symbolic hypotyposes. He begins by objecting to the improper use of the term "symbolic" for what we still call today *symbolic* logic. Mathematical symbols used in algorithms are in fact semiotic indices. They should not be called symbols because "they contain nothing that belongs to the representation [*Anschauung*] of the object." There is no relationship whatever between their iconic properties and those of the object, if it has any. Things are different in the case of a genuine hypotyposis. A relationship exists but it can differ in kind. In the case of schemata, which are objects of the mind (*Verstand*), the corresponding perception is a priori, as would be the case, presumably, for a triangle or any other geometrical shape. In the case of symbols, which are objects of reason (*Vernunft*) comparable to Condillac's abstractions, no sensory representation would be appropriate ("*angemessen*," i.e., sharing a common ratio), but such a similarity is "understood" to exist by analogy ("*unterlegt*," which could be translated by saying that an "underlying" similarity is created between the symbol and the thing symbolized). Kant then illustrates at some length the distinction between an actual and an analogical resemblance. In an analogy, the sensory properties of the *analogon* are not the same as those of the original, but they function according to a similar formal principle. For example, an enlightened state will be symbolized by an organic body in which part and whole relate in a free and harmonious way, whereas a tyranny will be properly symbolized by a machine such as a treadmill. Everyone understands that the state is not a body or a machine but that it functions like one, and that this function is conveyed more economically by the symbol than by lengthy abstract explanations. We seem at last to have come closer to controlling the tropes. This has become possible because there seem to be, for Kant, tropes that are epistemologically reliable. The denominative noun "triangle," in geometry, is a trope, a hypotyposis

which allows for the representation of an abstraction by a substitutive figure, yet the representation is fully rational and "*angemessen*." By showing that one can move from the symbolic order, which is indeed imprecise and therefore exists in the restrictive mode of the *only* (the word "*blosz*" recurs four times in the passage), to the rational precision of the schemata, while remaining within the general tropological field defined by the hypotyposis, the epistemological threat that disturbed Locke and Condillac seems to have been laid to rest. The solution is dependent, however, on a decisive either/or distinction between symbolic and schematic language. Representation is either schematic or symbolic ("*entweder Schemata oder Symbole*"), and the critical mind can decisively distinguish between both.

At this point in the argument, Kant interrupts his exposition for a digression on the all-too-often-overlooked prevalence of figures in philosophical discourse, an important question which "would deserve a more exhaustive examination." But this is not the time nor place for such an examination—which he, in fact, never undertook in a systematic way. The terminology of philosophers is full of metaphors. Kant cites several examples, all of them having to do with grounding and standing: "ground [*Grund*]," "to depend [*abhängen*]," "to follow from [*fließen*]" and, with a reference to Locke, "substance." All these hypotyposes are symbolic and not schematic, which means that they are not reliable from an epistemological point of view. They are "a mere translation [*Übertragung*] from a reflexion upon a represented object into an entirely different concept, to which *perhaps* no representation could ever correspond [*dem vielleicht nie eine Anschauung direkt korrespondieren kann*]" (emphasis mine). The appearance of the word "perhaps" in this sentence, even though it sounds like a casual side remark, is most surprising. It has been the point of the entire argument that we know for certain whether a representation directly corresponds to a given concept or not. But the "perhaps" raises the question of how such a decision can be made, whether it is in the nature of things or whether it is merely assumed (*unterlegt*). Is the distinction between schemata and symbol itself a priori or is it merely "understood" in the hope of having it perform the definitional work that cannot be performed directly? From the moment this decision can be said, even in passing, to be "perhaps" possible, the theory of a schematic hypotyposis loses much of its power of conviction. Things happen, in the text, as if Kant had not at first been aware of the metaphorical status of his own term "*unterlegen*" when he used it in support of a crucial distinction between two modes of support. The considerations about the possible danger of uncontrolled metaphors, focused on the cognate figures of support, ground, and so forth, reawaken the hidden uncertainty about the rigor of a distinction that does not hold if the language in which it is stated reintroduces the elements of indetermination it sets out to eliminate. For it is not obvious

that the iconic representation that can be used to illustrate a rational concept is indeed a figure. In the second *Discourse*, Rousseau confronts a similar question¹⁰ but concludes that the particular representation that any general concept necessarily engenders is a psychological epiphenomenon related to memory and to the imagination and not a conceptual trope that belongs to the realm of language and knowledge. What Kant calls a schematic hypotyposis would then not be a cognition at all but a mere mnemotechnic device, the equivalent of the mathematical sign in the area of the psychology of perception rather than of language. In that case, the sentence, which emphasizes that the decision as to whether a representation can be adequate to its object is of the order of the "perhaps," is more rigorous than the either/or distinction, despite or rather because of its vagueness. If the distinction between a priori and symbolic judgments can only be stated by means of metaphors that are themselves symbolic, then Locke's and Condillac's difficulties have not been overcome. Not only our knowledge of God, to which the passage under examination returns at the end, but the knowledge of knowledge is then bound to remain symbolic. He who takes it for schematic and gives it the attributes of predictability and transcendental authority that pertain to the objective reality of entities unmediated by language is guilty of reification (the opposite figure of prosopopeia); and he who thinks that the symbolic can be considered a stable property of language, that language, in other words, is purely symbolic and nothing else, is guilty of aestheticism—"whereby nothing is seen as it is, not in practice either."

In all three instances, we started out from a relatively self-assured attempt to control tropes by merely acknowledging their existence and circumscribing their impact. Locke thought that all we needed to banish rhetoric from the councils of the philosophers was an ethical determination of high seriousness coupled with an alert eye for interlopers. Condillac limits the discussion to the sphere of abstractions, a part of language that appeals neither to poets nor to empirical philosophers; he seems to claim that all will be well if we abstain from taking these cumbersome terms for realities. Kant seems to think that the entire question lacks urgency and that tidy critical housekeeping can rehabilitate rhetoric and make it epistemologically respectable. But, in each case, it turns out to be impossible to maintain a clear line of distinction between rhetoric, abstraction, symbol, and all other forms of language. In each case, the resulting undecidability is due to the asymmetry of the binary model that opposes the figural to the proper meaning of the figure. The ensuing anxiety surfaces obliquely in the case of Locke and Condillac; it would take a much longer demonstration to indicate that Kant's critical philosophy is disturbed by similar hesitations, but the somewhat surpris-

10. Rousseau, p. 150.

ing theological allusion at the end of our passage may be a symptom. The manifest effacement of such anxiety-traces in the texts is much less important, however, than the contradictory structures of the texts themselves, as it is brought out by a reading willing to take their own rhetoric into consideration.

* * *

As Kant just taught us, when things run the risk of becoming too difficult, it is better to postpone the far-reaching consequences of an observation for a later occasion. My main point stresses the futility of trying to repress the rhetorical structure of texts in the name of uncritically preconceived text models such as transcendental teleologies or, at the other end of the spectrum, mere codes. The existence of literary codes is not in question, only their claim to represent a general and exhaustive textual model. Literary codes are subcodes of a system, rhetoric, that is not itself a code. For rhetoric cannot be isolated from its epistemological function however negative this function may be. It is absurd to ask whether a code is true or false but impossible to bracket this question when tropes are involved—and this always seems to be the case. Whenever the question is repressed, tropological patterns reenter the system in the guise of such formal categories as polarity, recurrence, normative economy, or in such grammatical tropes as negation and interrogation. They are always again totalizing systems that try to ignore the disfiguring power of figuration. It does not take a good semiotician long to discover that he is in fact a rhetorician in disguise.

The implications of these parallel arguments for literary history and for literary aesthetics are equally controversial. An historian caught in received models of periodization may find it absurd to read texts that belong to the Enlightenment as if one were reading Nietzsche's *Über Wahrheit und Lüge im aussermoralischen Sinn* or Jacques Derrida's *La Mythologie blanche*. But if we assume, just for the sake of argument, that these same historians would concede that Locke, Condillac, and Kant can be read as we have here read them, then they would have to conclude that our own literary modernity has reestablished contact with a "true" Enlightenment that remained hidden from us by a nineteenth-century Romantic and realist epistemology that asserted a reliable rhetoric of the subject or of representation. A continuous line could then be said to extend from Locke to Rousseau to Kant and to Nietzsche, a line from which Fichte and Hegel, among others, would very definitely be excluded. But are we so certain that we know how to read Fichte and Hegel in the properly rhetorical manner? Since we assume that it is possible to coordinate Locke and Nietzsche by claiming that their similarly ambivalent attitudes toward rhetoric have been systematically over-

looked, there is no reason to assume a priori that a similar argument could not be made with regard to Fichte or Hegel. It would have to be a very different argument, of course, especially in the case of Hegel, but it is not inconceivable that it can be made. And if one accepts, again merely for the sake of argument, that syntagmatic narratives are part of the same system as paradigmatic tropes (though not necessarily complementary), then the possibility arises that temporal articulations, such as narratives or histories, are a correlative of rhetoric and not the reverse. One would then have to conceive of a rhetoric of history prior to attempting a history of rhetoric or of literature or of literary criticism. Rhetoric, however, is not in itself an historical but an epistemological discipline. This may well account for the fact that patterns of historical periodization are at the same time so productive as heuristic devices yet so demonstratively aberrant. They are one way of access, among others, to the tropological structure of literary texts and, as such, they necessarily undermine their own authority.

Finally, our argument suggests that the relationship and the distinction between literature and philosophy cannot be made in terms of a distinction between aesthetic and epistemological categories. All philosophy is condemned, to the extent that it is dependent upon figuration, to be literary and, as the depository of this very problem, all literature is to some extent philosophical. The apparent symmetry of these statements is not as reassuring as it sounds since what seems to bring literature and philosophy together is, as in Coñdillac's argument about mind and object, a shared lack of identity or specificity.

Contrary to common belief, literature is not the place where the unstable epistemology of metaphor is suspended by aesthetic pleasure, although this attempt is a constitutive moment of its system. It is rather the place where the possible convergence of rigor and pleasure is shown to be a delusion. The consequences of this lead to the difficult question whether the entire semantic, semiological, and performative field of language can be said to be covered by tropological models, a question which can only be raised after the proliferating and disruptive power of figural language has been fully recognized.

What Metaphors Mean

Donald Davidson

Metaphor is the dreamwork of language and, like all dreamwork, its interpretation reflects as much on the interpreter as on the originator. The interpretation of dreams requires collaboration between a dreamer and a waker, even if they be the same person; and the act of interpretation is itself a work of the imagination. So too understanding a metaphor is as much a creative endeavor as making a metaphor, and as little guided by rules.

These remarks do not, except in matters of degree, distinguish metaphor from more routine linguistic transactions: all communication by speech assumes the interplay of inventive construction and inventive construal. What metaphor adds to the ordinary is an achievement that uses no semantic resources beyond the resources on which the ordinary depends. There are no instructions for devising metaphors; there is no manual for determining what a metaphor "means" or "says"; there is no test for metaphor that does not call for taste.¹ A metaphor implies a kind and degree of artistic success; there are no unsuccessful metaphors, just as there are no unfunny jokes. There are tasteless metaphors, but these are turns that nevertheless have brought something off, even if it were not worth bringing off or could have been brought off better.

This paper is concerned with what metaphors mean, and its thesis is

1. I think Max Black is wrong when he says, "The rules of our language determine that some expressions must count as metaphors." He allows, however, that what a metaphor "means" depends on much more: the speaker's intention, tone of voice, verbal setting, etc. "Metaphor," in his *Models and Metaphors* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1962), p. 29.