Asked what his first decree would be, were he to become emperor, Confucius allegedly replied that he would fix the meaning of words. It is easy to appreciate the good intentions of the eastern sage; Aristotle may have had something similar in mind when he stated that a word which does not have a single meaning has *no* meaning. This expresses a central truth about the nature of language, thought and reality; not, however, the full truth, since language does not lend itself to such Procrustean fixity; Aristotle recognised this better than most. Only a tyrannical philosopher king could legislate as suggested by the anecdote concerning Confucius. Perhaps the clearest challenge to such a decree is analogy; this occurs most commonly as metaphor, which is surely one of the most marvellous feats of language. Bereft of metaphor, everyday language would remain flat and univocal, each word atomically attached to a single object. Indispensable to our way of understanding and articulating the world, metaphor is richly revealing of the relationship between knowledge and reality. It deeply penetrates our way of perceiving and expressing the world. John Middleton Murry did not exaggerate when he remarked: “To attempt a fundamental examination of metaphor would be nothing less than an investigation of the genesis of thought itself.”

“Metaphor” means literally “transfer” or “transport.” The word is used as such by Herodotus, who relates that the Athenian tyrant Pisistratus “removed all the dead that were buried within sight of the temple and carried them to another part of Delos.” He also uses the word to describe the use of levers for the lifting of stone in the construction of pyramids. These are both strongly physical and visible uses of the term. The first, as it were, “metaphorical” use of the word—as a noun—is found in the orator Isocrates, who describes the wealth of stylistic means enjoyed by poets, compared to the dearth of literary devices available to prose writers: “The poets are granted many methods of adorning their language, for besides

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1 *Metaph.* Γ, 4, 1006b8: τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἐν σημαίνειν ύστερ σημαίνειν ἐστίν.
2 J. M. Murry, 1931, p. 2.
3 Ι, 64.2-3: τούς νεκροὺς μετεφόρεε ἐς ἄλλον χώρον τῆς Δήλου.
4 II, 125, 4.
the use of normal words they can also employ foreign words, neologisms, and metaphors while prose writers are allowed none of these last three, but must severely restrict themselves to such terms alone as citizens use and such arguments as are precisely relevant to the subject matter.”

Metaphor was primarily understood by Isocrates, therefore, as a means of poetic adornment.

While he was himself a master of metaphor, Plato does not name it as such. He uses “μεταφέρων,” meaning to “transfer” an object from one place to another. Interestingly he employs the expression “μεταφέρων ὄνόματα,” meaning to “translate” from one language into another. Aristotle was the first to offer a systematic study of the essential nature and structure of metaphor. Umberto Eco has suggested that “of the thousands and thousands of pages written about the metaphor, few add anything of substance to the first two or three fundamental concepts stated by Aristotle”; such a claim may seem exaggerated in view of the voluminous literature that has since appeared, especially in recent decades. Another author refers to “the Stagirite’s astonishingly modern description of metaphorical processes.” While Aristotle could not have anticipated the variety of theories now current, many interpretations will find support in his stated views; his perspective, however, may not be reduced to any one in particular. In the following reflections I wish to consider some of the presuppositions of Aristotle’s theory of metaphor, and relate them to other aspects of his philosophy, especially his metaphysics, epistemology and psychology. My focus is metaphor as a token for the analogous unity pervading the diversity of the world, and as an index of man’s psychosomatic unity. The key to Aristotle’s approach is his understanding of metaphor as analogy; much discussion of metaphor as a linguistic or literary device has unfortunately neglected this. Analogy is of the essence of metaphor. It relies on the diversity and unity both of human knowledge and human nature, and on the diversity and interconnection of beings within the cosmos.

Aristotle famously defines metaphor in the Poetics as the transfer to one thing of a term belonging properly to another, i.e., an alien or strange name (ὅνόματος ἄλλοτρον ἐπιφορά). This may occur, he explains, in one of four ways: from genus to species, from species to genus, from species

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5 Evagoras 190 D. Translation W. B. Stanford, 1936, p. 3.
6 See Stanford, pp. 3-4. An excellent account of Plato’s use of metaphor may be found in E. E. Pender, 2002.
9 Poet. 21, 1457b7.