

Moral metaphors, or Kant after Blumenberg: Towards an analysis of the aesthetic settings of morality

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Abstract
This paper examines the role of formal, aesthetic elements in motivating moral action. It proposes that Blumenberg's analysis of the existential settings of myth and metaphor provide a useful framework to consider the conception and function of the aesthetic symbol in Kantian moral philosophy. In particular, it explores the hypothesis that Blumenberg's analysis of 'pregnance' and 'rhetoric' are useful for identifying and evaluating the processes involved in self-persuasion to the moral perspective.

Keywords
aesthetics, Blumenberg, Kant, morality, self-persuasion

Comprehensive images and conceptions of the whole underpin various forms and rules of human activity.¹ By the term 'comprehensive image' we can understand the orientation that certain myths, or religious-cosmogenic stories, or philosophical ideas such as Heidegger's 'being-in-the-world', provide for those who inhabit them. These myths, stories and ideas project a conception of the whole that could not otherwise be had. Such comprehensive images are primarily shaped and communicated aesthetically. Put more precisely, the effective dimension of such orientating images is aesthetic in the sense that these images work on and through sensible forms. I would like to set aside the question of the 'origin' of such images, as if, in any case, these could be adequately indicated and elucidated.² Instead, I will examine in what respects these aesthetic settings may be said

to incline us to be and act in one way rather than another. What role does the aesthetic setting of meaning play in the processes of reasoning that constitute moral reflection? Since Kant, moral reflection has been understood to involve reflection on situations that involve others and that are not resolvable by technical rules. The term 'aesthetic' is used here partly to emphasize that the settings that incline one to certain kinds of moral reflection and action are structured by the formal organization of sensible data. Whether these conceptions of the whole have overt moral messages or purposes does not concern us here.³ The term 'aesthetic' will thus be understood in this paper to refer specifically to the disciplining of sensibility.

My hypothesis is that prior to the evaluative, ethical relation to a context there is the formal organization of a situation that disciplines the senses. The formal organization of the sensible field takes various communicative modes, has multiple sources, and involves the self in the formative process with more or less self-awareness. It does not matter, again, that these forms may have 'moral messages' – the point is that their disciplining of sense positively and negatively marks the situation, and this marking inclines one to act in one way rather than another. The disciplining of sensibility is the context for moral activity: this disciplining underlines the ethical attitude against which situations are understood in terms of the moral criteria of the 'good' and the 'bad'. This disciplining also, to some extent, determines the moral relevance of the situation.

This conception of moral action that is engaged through the formal features of material elements can be given an historical background in Kant. Kant is not only the first to articulate this idea in its full scope but he also articulates it in terms that are systematic and detailed enough to be analysed. In §59 of the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant develops a particular use for the symbol: he uses it as a way of orientating moral action for a creature dependent on discursive modes of knowing. His category of the symbol describes how the disciplining of the mind occurs through the satisfactions that comprehensive images provide in the reflection on sensible form. This satisfaction extends to a conception of the whole where the moral disposition has a 'place' in the natural world. One of the key points in this analysis is the transfer of the elements of the meaning that can be had in the formal arrangement of material forms of beauty to the moral idea that would, without this transfer, be empty. It is a corollary of Kant's position that the organized form of beauty is effective as the symbol of morality because it gives support and corroboration to the moral perspective.

Hans Blumenberg draws on Kant's account of the symbol to elaborate his theory of the transfer of elements of aesthetic meaning to ideas. In his *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* he cites Kant's comment that further attention to the mechanisms of the transfer of aesthetic meaning from material elements to ideas is needed as the prompt and framework for his own metaphorology (1998: 11–12). Further, like Kant, Blumenberg is interested in the mechanics and effects of this transfer because he is interested in clarifying the factors involved in such a transfer.⁴ Whereas Kant's treatment of the moral symbol regulates the transfer of elements of meaning from aesthetic to moral contexts by the requirement that this transfer be understood as merely analogical, Blumenberg's analysis is trained on the way aesthetic elements are constitutive of the coherence of practical dispositions. It is worthwhile to reconsider Kant's moral-aesthetic theory in the light of Blumenberg's approach to the topic of the existential hold that meaning-

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constellations exert on concrete understanding and behaviour. My discussion will be framed by critical consideration of the role played by aesthetic settings to furnish grounds for motivation to moral action. In particular, I would like to use Blumenberg's work to examine how sensible elements are structured so that a certain view of morality becomes visible and attractive.

The perspective I will develop here is set against the idea that it is situations themselves which (in the 'raw' so to speak) elicit an evaluative, ethical relation: that the normative criteria used in such evaluation have the reflective or procedural content of non-situation-specific 'rules'. The project I have in mind here is not a rejection of the idea that moral evaluation is distinguished from other types of evaluation by its reference to autonomous laws, but an identification of the involvement of 'non-moral' forces that gives such laws or rules their force and hold. Equally, because this is a perspective on rule-following behaviour that is reflective in relation to rules, it does not endorse the position of Humean-styled critiques of morality in which the relation to situations is driven by a non-reflective, affect-bound relation to their settings. If we understand by the term 'aesthetic' the active construction of settings through formal organization of sensibility, then this filter that precedes moral evaluation is pertinent for the identification and analysis of the non-moral factors that motivate and incline 'moral' action, but that do so reflectively.

Put in more positive terms, this project takes its bearings from the question of the satisfaction that is felt in the self-involving reflection on formal properties, and which encourages and reinforces certain behaviours. This satisfaction is present not just in the disciplining toward moral evaluation and action, but also, as Kant's Introduction to the *Critique of Judgment* remarks, in the positive feeling experienced in the process of understanding something, i.e. in the cognitive disposition.⁵ Such 'satisfaction' poses problems of [interpretative] conceptualization in the case of the ascetic moral attitude: what explains the satisfaction in the self-renunciations involved in Kantian morality? In his *Genealogy of Morality*, Nietzsche explains the paradoxical type of satisfaction that is

looked for and found in failure, decay, pain, misfortune, ugliness, voluntary deprivation, destruction of selfhood, self-flagellation and self-sacrifice. This is all paradoxical in the extreme: we are faced with a dissidence [Zwiespaltigkeit] which wills itself to be dissident, which *relishes* itself in this affliction and becomes more self-assured and triumphant to the same degree as its own condition, the physiological capacity to live, *decreases*. (1994: 91)⁶

Nietzsche's account of the paradoxical constitution of satisfaction in the (Kantian) ascetic world-view can be reformulated in the light of our question here: how does the feeling of satisfaction had from the reflection on sensible form charge and direct moral reasoning? What aspects of form render moral evaluation meaningful as a setting of context for action? In particular, to what extent is the moral attitude disciplined or educated by the formal elements, the elements that I referred to in my opening remarks as 'aesthetic', and which can be defined as having to do with sensible form or the organization of sensible material, or organized presentation of sensible elements? Kant's explicit exclusion of 'satisfaction' as grounds for resolving the moral will to act only sharpens the paradox that Nietzsche identifies. It is reasonable to ask whether this ascetic relation

to the will is also explicable in terms of the expectations of aesthetic meaning that ground and incline moral action in certain directions. What is morally relevant in a situation is not morally determinable, or at least is morally undetermined; it is the aesthetic form that first marks what is morally relevant as 'moral'.

My discussion falls into three parts. In the first part I examine whether Blumenberg's perspective on myth and metaphor is useful for understanding how it is that Kant's austere conception of the moral standpoint could be made existentially meaningful, attractive and satisfying. After all, the austerity of the Kantian moral view explicitly prohibits the involvement of non-moral elements in moral judgment. For just this reason, the identification of the aesthetic elements that make this judgment habitable is significant not just because it compromises the picture Kant gives of his moral philosophy, but because it does so in terms which are paradoxically compatible with his own account of the moral symbol as the meaning-context that provides necessary support for moral action.

The second part considers how Blumenberg's conceptions of pregnancy and rhetoric may be used to elucidate the features of Kantian moral evaluation that compel or motivate action. In different ways these two terms articulate the processes involved in the marking of situations for certain kinds of evaluation and action. Blumenberg's treatment of myth and metaphor draws attention to the existential dimension of materially formed constellations of meaning. In the cases of pregnancy and rhetoric his reflections can be used to identify the way such constellations of meaning shape and incline specifically moral kinds of reflection and acts.

Finally, I analyse the implications of this Blumenberg-styled reading of Kant's moral philosophy for future study of the settings involved in rule-following behaviour, of which morality is one type. Blumenberg thinks that rhetoric shapes the situation in the sense of imprinting a form on it. Thus understood it is rhetoric that makes it possible for humans to find paths of action meaningful because the human situation is defined by the absence of sufficient knowledge on which to act. In this sense Blumenberg's position on rhetoric contends that human action is much more meaning-driven than it is rule driven.⁷

Blumenberg's postulate of human weakness or infirmity in relation to the whole has as its correlate the thesis of anthropological susceptibility to rhetoric, understood specifically as the expectation of satisfying, fundamental meanings that can ground a conception of the whole. The shaping of such expectations occurs through the motor of self-persuasion. What consequences, I would like to ask, follow from locating moral behaviour in the sphere of self-persuasion in which, in Blumenberg's words, 'rhetoric is form as means'? (Baynes et al. 1987: 431).⁸ Does this perspective have general explanatory scope beyond its capacity to explain Kant's ascetic, formal moral position as grounds for motivation to action? What does this perspective say about the role and mechanics of fundamental meanings in persuading us to act?

1. Kant after Blumenberg: Kantian morality in the perspective of Blumenberg's theory of myth and metaphor

Hans Blumenberg's *Work on Myth* sees in the reduction of 'the absolutism of reality' the 'functional origin' of myth, what he also calls the 'work of myth'. Myth compensates for

human helplessness in the face of an alien world. In other texts Blumenberg assigns this anthropological determination to a biological condition: human helplessness follows from the instinct deficiency that deprives humans of their ecological niche (1983: 209–56).⁹ Myth is how humans make the world habitable for themselves, a world which was not created for them; in other words, myth does not serve so much a cognitive as a practical need, the practical need to make absolutely strange (and hence hostile) powers only humanly strange.

Blumenberg's highly specific conception of metaphor is related to his understanding on myth; in the case of metaphor, it seems, the emphasis falls equally on both intellectual and moral perspectives of how certain positions are made meaningful. This concern with habitability is especially marked with the reversal in perspective that characterizes his shift from the early analysis of metaphor which looks upstream 'toward the constitution of conceptuality' to the later question of how the connections with the life-world are 'the constant motivating support (though one that cannot be constantly kept in view) of all theory'. Instead of looking for metaphors in the make-up of concepts, this analysis is trained on the functional grounding of metaphors in the vital needs of life. Conceptual metaphors would identify the 'stimulations and expectations of truth' that motivate and support theoretical curiosity and that make its positions meaningful and habitable (1997: 81).

Are the contributions Blumenberg makes to our understanding of myth and metaphor helpful for analysing Kant's moral philosophy? In particular, is Blumenberg's perspective on myth and metaphor useful for identifying how it is that Kant's austere conception of the moral standpoint becomes attractive? Kant's moral philosophy concedes, I think, that the rigour of its attention to the lawful motive raises the problem of 'habitability', or the meaningfulness of the moral standpoint for finite, sensuous beings. Kant would not admit, however, that the factors that render the moral standpoint adoptable are non-moral nor that their mechanism is one of self-persuasion to action (or 'rhetorics' in the sense given above and further elaborated below). In what follows I would like to use Blumenberg to set out the grounds for such an interpretation of Kant's moral philosophy.

It needs to be acknowledged at the outset that the perspective of such an interpretation runs counter to the reception and, especially, the intentions of the Kantian moral theory. In modern philosophy the moral standpoint is generally defined in terms of specifications of motive and action. Kant's moral philosophy provides the most influential and essentially austere formulation of such specifications. For Kant, the status of moral action as such depends on two conditions which together preserve its integrity: one in respect of motivation and one in respect of its reality.

On the side of motive, Kant maintains that only those actions that are motivated by respect for the moral law can be admitted as moral. This condition preserves the moral law against perversion by sensuous attachments. At the same time, Kant sees that moral intention is inherently orientated to action, and should the reality of moral action *qua* action prove illusory, moral consciousness itself would turn out to be an illusion. In other words, an arrangement of the world that does not thwart moral conduct has to be assumed along with the validity of the moral law. Hence Kant's postulates of God and immortality supply the necessary supposition of moral consciousness but, as Kant concedes, like the

postulate of freedom these postulates are not theoretically determinable. Rather, the postulates form part of the necessary framework for consistency in practical reflection.¹⁰

The important features of this moral perspective are that: 1) the practical effectiveness of respect for moral law is distinct from the other types of practical action, such as technical know-how, primarily because it crucially entails self-involving reflection; and 2) moral action is law-governed and formal, which means that instead of calculating the outcomes, the type of reflection involved in moral consideration is one that is concerned with the moral purity of law-oriented motive.

Nonetheless, there is considerable evidence that Kant uses non-moral constellations of meaning not only to render the precepts of his moral theory understandable and convincing, but also to build up a 'moral image' of the world.¹¹ This moral image elaborates a conception of a moral whole, which defends morality against the charge of illusion. Kant's elaboration of a moral image of the world establishes, by way of the concrete examples used in moral education and the evidence of history, that the moral standpoint is possible, and further, that it has real effects in the world. Kant's use of historical examples to defend his moral theory and his recourse to examples in moral education thus have a distinct advantage over the consistency in moral argumentation that the postulates provide: these examples actually show that neither the possibility nor the effectiveness of morality is out of place in the world.

Traditionally, the discussion of such examples from history and education are looked at in cultural-historical terms, but I would like to examine them here in terms of the internal mechanisms of their interaction. In particular, I would like to emphasize that the presence and function of these non-moral constellations of meaning for the moral theory show, against Kant's intentions, that respect for law is not purely rational.

Kant draws on two sources of evidence to elucidate the reality of the moral standpoint. First, in his history of moral formulas such as the categorical imperative Kant appeals to the hidden stories in cultural traditions that make these formulas apprehensible. It is clear that these stories also provide evidentiary support and motivation for the moral standpoint. For example, he points to the nascent virtue ethics to be drawn from different stories in the Gospels, or he invokes the legend of the tyrant Phalaris' Ox in order to set out the extreme case in which fidelity to moral duty would prevail over threats to one's person, and in this vein he refers as well to the paths of noble but doomed causes, such as the defenders of Anne Boleyn against the calumny of Henry VIII (1993: 87, 165, 161).¹²

In a similar way, Kant calls on different moments of intellectual history as if these moments too provided a corroborating history as well as a vehicle for apprehending his moral formulas. Thus the Stoics are criticized for inconsistency in relation to the standard of Kant's moral theory and the postulates of God and immortality, which secure freedom against suspicion of illusion. In particular, Kant indicts the Stoics for defending 'moral heroism' at the price of the moral test of universalization (1993: 89–90). The Gospels, on the other hand, are cited with approval: they provide incipient formulations of the categorical imperative's test of universalizability as applied to maxims for action (1993: 88, 90).

These examples provide Kant with corroboration for the moral perspective. Clearly, Kant's assessment of these examples in his 'history of morality' is inconsistent: whereas

his selection of moral exemplars features heroic acts such as braving the terror of being burnt alive in Phalaris' brass ox, the feature of Stoic ethics that he singles out for censure is heroism.¹³ Of course, it is possible to smooth over this contradictory attitude to moral heroism if we recall that Kant wishes to regulate the pedagogical role of exemplars in inculcating the moral disposition; he emphasizes that proper attention to the idea of moral law must exclude the fanciful and romantic dangers of mere storytelling and that the mature moral perspective is one that eschews the scaffolding of models or the calculation of outcomes. But are Kant's aims in the use of his examples of moral history so easily managed? Is it possible that these examples, whether or not they are at odds with one another from the perspective of their logical consequences, nonetheless work in concert to secure the strategic goal of making the moral formulas habitable? This question, I think, is raised even more insistently in Kant's comments on the topic of moral pedagogy.

Second, in his treatment of the topic of the pedagogical formation of the moral disposition Kant highlights the way that the vital nature of moral tales recommends the story-form as an effective moral-pedagogical tool. The passages in *The Groundwork* (1785), *The Critique of Practical Reason* (1788) and *The Metaphysics of Morals* (1797) that deal with the formation of moral capacity all focus on moral exemplars. Kant accepts that the way to the moral vocation proceeds by non-moral inducements: 'Certainly, it cannot be denied that in order to bring an as yet uneducated or degraded mind onto the path of the morally good, some preparatory guidance is needed to attract it by a view to its own advantage or to frighten it by fear of harm' (1993: 158). Kant encourages the 'educators of youth' to have 'examples at hand' from 'biographies of ancient and modern times of moral duty' (1983: 160). Such examples, introduced as a supplement to the instruction of moral catechism, are to 'first show the distinctive mark of pure virtue' and, unlike the heteronomy encouraged by the accessories used in 'fawning religion', can be 'put ... before, say, a ten-year old boy for his judgment [fo] see whether he must necessarily judge so by himself without being guided by the teacher' (1983: 161).

What is significant here is not so much that the moral disposition is formed and shaped through stories, nor that this pedagogical exercise proceeds by the non-moral calculus of rewards and punishments, but that these stories give orientation, motivation and direction for moral action. Indeed the story-form already marks a situation positively and negatively in respect to moral agency and as such it does more than render the moral standpoint and the way it eschews self-interest in favour of fidelity to law credible; it also sets up the expectation that moral reflection will have satisfying outcomes because it is not out of place in the world.

In the context of these features of Kant's moral theory, it is reasonable to ask, I think how it is that the moral perspective, orientated as it is to the formulas of the categorical imperative, is experienced as a meaningful framework for moral reflection and action. To my mind, this question is one of the central problems of Kant's moral theory; it is brought forward not only by the formal aspirations of the theory, but also by the decisive ways Kant relies on non-moral elements to render his moral doctrine understandable and effective.

Kant's discussion of moral pedagogy concedes that the use of stories and noble biographies enliven and communicate moral ideas. But devices such as these cannot

I think, be restricted, as Kant would like, to their decorative and pedagogical functions. They also need to be considered in terms of the function of orientation that they lend to the moral standpoint. The use of these devices as corroborating 'sources' for Kant's 'history' of morality only emphasizes the point. The discussion of historical exemplars, like education, is not adventitious for the moral standpoint because in each case moral action derives support through time: the moral stance can expect to have real effects and Kant accordingly uses these contexts to make the point that the moral perspective is not illusory. Similarly, the examples that Kant uses for his moral pedagogy play a function of habitation – they show that morality is possible, that it belongs to the world.

It seems to me that Blumenberg's work provides a useful framework to consider this question of the meaning-orientation needed for moral formulas to work. Firstly, this is because Blumenberg foregrounds and analyses the image that *makes the adoption of certain positions possible*: for this reason, the support that the different kinds of aesthetic experiences such as stories of exemplars provide for the moral standpoint in Kant can be usefully considered in terms of the existential settings that Blumenberg gives to myth and metaphor.

Understood in these terms, the adoption of or 'conversion' to moral perspective marks the shift in function that rescues a situation as morally tractable. Moral conversion names the process that makes a situation habitable for the moral will. Such conversion heightens and satisfies the expectation that morality is not out of place in the world. Blumenberg's work on metaphor is explicitly concerned with the question of the transfer of the image that occurs between different idioms, such as the story-form and the moral formula, a question that, significantly for our topic, is itself adopted by him from Kant's defence of the thesis that beauty is the 'symbol' of morality in the *Critique of Judgment*.¹⁴

Finally, it is instructive, I think, to pose the question of the relevance of Blumenberg's work to the topic of morality in more general terms: in this regard, we might ask after the import of his approach to aesthetic form for understanding the dynamics involved in the rule-following behaviour. For example, it seems to me that Blumenberg's view that 'rhetoric is form as means'¹⁵ has specific implications for the processes of self-persuasion to action that, I would argue, is one of the critical features of any moral discourse, including formal doctrines like Kant's.

II. Moral persuasion: Blumenberg on pregnancy and rhetoric

There are some general points that can be made regarding the applicability of certain well-known Blumenbergian categories of analysis to Kant's moral theory. It is clear that on Blumenberg's view Kant's postulates of God and immortality are myths of a special type, the type that aims to bring myth to an end, to provide a supportive environment for 'man's' definitive self-assertion on his own behalf, and for the attendant responsibility. On the side of myth it seems that the service 'final myths' provide is not primarily directed to taming hostile reality but is meant to render bearable the 'oppressiveness of contingency' (1990: 293). The oppressiveness in question is the same as the one the Kantian goodwill would experience in the world without the solace of God and immortality.¹⁶ Similarly, because Blumenberg's very specific understanding of metaphor is

concerned with how certain positions become existentially meaningful and attractive, it can help to identify the amoral commitments that, paradoxically, drive the Kantian moral position to its austere perspective.¹⁷

Finally, Blumenberg's discussion of the passage from myth and mythology into aestheticism in *Work on Myth* is a relevant perspective for a critical consideration of the different ways the aesthetic presentation of moral law comes to the aid of ethical conduct in Kant's practical philosophy.¹⁸ These points of general applicability are not surprising given that Blumenberg's interest in the support aesthetic devices of meaning provide for moral and intellectual positions explicitly follows Kant's own use of aesthetic judgment as a mediating category for morality in the third *Critique*.¹⁹

For the sake of brevity, I want to leave to one side the commentary it would be possible to make on these latter themes and the significance that could be made of their derivation from Kant in order to focus instead on just two places where Blumenberg's approach to the topic of meaning is relevant for the analysis of the techniques of meaning-orientation in respect to the technical specifications of motive and action in moral philosophy. In particular, I would like to focus on the different ways Blumenberg addresses in his comments on 'pregnance' and 'rhetoric' the relation between reflection on aesthetic form and motivation to act.

1) *Pregnance and moral reflection*. In the section entitled 'Significance' in the first part of *Work on Myth*, Blumenberg uses the term 'pregnance' to describe the stamping or imprinting of a situation (1990 [1985]: 68 ff).²⁰ This stamp or imprint is a pared down, transposable meaning. It conveys meaning in an abbreviated formula; but this abbreviation is effective in orientating action because it takes up a history and narrative able to dispose the will to evaluate a situation in certain ways and to incline it towards particular paths of action. In particular, pregnancy is, he says, like the aesthetic object, a way of marking out a situation from 'the diffuse surrounding field of probabilities' (p. 69). As such it identifies and deals with what is significant by promoting 'resistance to the factors that efface, that promote diffusion' (p. 69).

The first step in the moral treatment of a situation is to mark out a topic, that is, to counter dispersion of an 'event' in time and space, to stop its dissolution. Thus, giving form to or making a story of dispersed or passing elements of an environment is a way of marking out a topic for moral treatment. It is a corollary of this analysis of 'pregnance' that the cultivation of a moral disposition toward a situation may be analysed in terms of the presence of such shaping constellations of meaning in culturally authorized traditions, such as references to the Gospels may provide. The presence of such transposable units of meaning already inclines evaluative intelligence or the will in specific ways and offers a way to understand the factors involved in the type of evaluative behaviour, such as moral behaviour, that is reflective in relation to formal rules.

Like any other moral doctrine, Kant's is lined with forms of pregnancy that motivate and persuade in a certain direction the moral will. The task of the type of analysis I propose consists in identifying the specific forms that pregnancy takes in Kant's moral theory. In general, these forms mark situations as appropriate to moral reflection and action,²¹ but they also cast the situation positively and negatively in respect to the outcomes of such reflection and action. As Paul Veyne remarks, mythical stories can also provide alibis not to act.²²

Let me be clear: the point is not that Kant uses stories as ways of cajoling the novice to the moral standpoint, nor that he depends on moral tales as the only way of depicting the otherwise ungraspable moral formula. My point is not that 'examples' allow abstract 'ideas' to be understood (this point Kant concedes in his explicit rationale for using moral pedagogy to make moral ideas apprehendable). Rather, the formal perspective of Kantian moral doctrine requires formally disciplining elements able to present situations as morally relevant and frame answers to moral dilemmas.

The 'test' of the universalization of maxims in Kant's categorical imperative is not able to generate the answer for what constitutes moral paths of action. It is not a machine that automatically returns an answer. Instead, what one finds is a situation stamped with an image, pregnant with a meaning, that disciplines one's inclinations and marks out the ethical field. At every level, the morally relevant situation is constituted in good part by metaphors, that is, images that imprint passing events and moments with articulable and actionable meaning.

In part these metaphors are derived from cultural stories that mobilize sentiments in particular directions. For instance, the positive sentiment towards the French Revolution can be used to show us that moral action is not out of place in the world. What underlines the sentiment is nothing other than an image (of revolution) which turns the chaos of events into a topic for moral reflection and evaluation. The fact of finding certain actions commendable is also a resource from which we derive righteous confidence to act for a cause. It is these kinds of story elements that support Kant's moral doctrine and that allow its perspective to be lived and 'worked on'.²³

A range of themes and topics in Kant's work can be called on in support of this thesis. Kant's philosophy of history, for instance, identifies the regulative force of the idea of progress in its attractiveness: life would become unbearable were we to think that human existence would never escape the rule of the capricious webs of childish vanity.²⁴ As Blumenberg points out, myths need a reality clause,²⁵ and Kant arguably finds his in his *Critique of Teleological Judgment*.

The idea of the existence of a moral order favourable to moral action is homologous to the teleological idea of a 'technic of nature' that responds to our reason's need for comprehensive knowledge. As we know, this is itself a projection of the aesthetic idea of the 'subjective purposiveness' of natural beauty, that is, the self-assurance that nature does not disappoint our demand for a realm of satisfying worldly experiences, a realm of sense-fulfilment. Natural beauty, like the idea of a 'technic of nature', is perceived as meaningful, not because things of nature are in themselves beautiful or ordered but because they are perceived this way. This very idea that every event is under description and never accessible merely as a raw event is also an integration of the malleability that moral evaluation requires.

2) *Rhetoric and moral action*. If the meaningfulness of the moral standpoint can be grasped from the perspective of 'pregnance', Blumenberg's analysis of rhetorical functions can address how the means used to mark the attractiveness of the moral position manages to compel action. The abstract principles of moral conduct become serviceable in part because they mobilize an attractive self-conception. When Kant tells a story about the progress and maturity of the moral idea or attaches it to the positive

image of a paragon, the value of 'pure principles' is enhanced because one wishes to be associated with maturity and nobility.

Blumenberg's anthropological approach highlights the needs met and functions executed in rhetorical forms of evaluation. In his 1971 essay 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric', Blumenberg defines rhetoric as a 'behavioural characteristic'; 'a form of rationality ... a way of coming to terms with the provisionality of reason' (1987: 452).²⁶ Viewed as a form of reasoning that manages practical needs, rhetoric is primarily understood by Blumenberg in terms of its function of self-persuasion.

Again, it is Kant who provides the reference point for this definition: he states in this essay that he wishes to follow 'Kant's insight' that inner experience has no precedence over outer experience: 'we are appearances to ourselves, the secondary synthesis of a primary multiplicity, not the reverse' (1987: 456). Blumenberg extends this Kantian insight to defend the claim that it is not just man's 'situation that is potentially metaphorical; his constitution itself already is' (1987: 456). The mode of this constitutive metaphoricality is one of 'self-externality' in 'self-understanding'.

Blumenberg concludes that practical action depends on 'external relations that are underpinned by the exercise of self-persuasion' (1987: 456). Self-persuasion locates the terms and force with which a path of action is made convincing for an agent, and these terms also become grounds for the communication of the credibility of this path to others. Thus moral reflection may be understood as a form of self-persuasion, in which the reflection on marked and evaluated material forms is decisive for persuasion to action. I will return to the question of the preconditions of such self-persuasion in the final section of this paper.

Blumenberg raises a question of particular salience for moral philosophy: namely, what role is played by evocative constellations of meaning, such as tales and myths, in the process of motivation to action, and to the reflective relation to rules that constitutes moral action.²⁷ But he goes further still: Blumenberg's analysis of rhetoric is mindful of the fact that words alone and even silence may provide the satisfactions of 'action' and thus the terms of his analysis are precisely attuned to the existential expectations and satisfactions that particular constellations of meaning, whatever their provenance, medium and effectiveness, extend to those who inhabit them.

The topic of the practical dispositions forged by meaning constellations means that rhetoric is much more important than a functionalist account would imply. In Blumenberg rhetoric is vested with the capacity for delaying action, taking action in substitutive forms and so on. Thus 'rhetoric is form as means' because it covers the entire behavioural sphere in which the process of reflective reasoning supplies motives for 'action'; reasoning, as he says, is the activity that manages the provisionality of reason.

Similarly, the stamp or imprint that is transferable is itself a way of isolating features of a situation that is now (i.e. by this marking) seen as amenable to reasoning reflection. Symbolism, hyperbolism or other 'substitutive' tactics of rhetoric may underlie the moral treatment of a 'topic'. The moral 'topic' is formed and not 'given'. Silence or inaction is susceptible of moral understanding because they are first understood as potentially 'rhetorical'.

III. Aesthetic settings in the moral field: Action and the 'symbol' of morality

The thesis that ideas are constituted in and through material relations and processes, and that the 'self' is also formed out of such a process of external, metaphorical formation, is not unique to Blumenberg. This type of thesis together with its corollary that such constitution is susceptible to identification and analysis can be found in a number of thinkers:²⁸ what is specific to Blumenberg is the way this conception of the image (i.e. the material constitution of meaning) is linked to motive. Moreover, it seems to me that the role of material elements of meaning in self-constitution and the dependence of motives for action on self-persuasion provide promising critical insights into some of the central topics of moral philosophy. In particular, they allow us to raise the question of precisely what is involved in those kinds of rule-following behaviour that, like moral conduct, entails self-involving reflection in relation to rules.

It is also interesting to consider the implications of this conception of morality. For Kant motives are inscrutable even (or especially) to the agent, and his moral theory is open to the objection that, on the terms of his own account, motives are ultimately only ever known as aesthetically stylized postures.²⁹ It seems to me that Blumenberg's work offers a way of refining this objection: motives are part of the self-external medium of our self-relation. It allows these motives to be identified and analysed because his work on this topic encourages self-lucidity. For instance, Kant's appeal to the 'fact of reason' as the ultimate ground of morality might be seen from this perspective to mask the processes involved in persuasion to the moral position.³⁰ More specifically, the ultimate appeal to this 'fact' (which Kant casts as a 'voice' that can never be rendered inaudible) obscures the role aesthetic constellations of meaning, such as the very figure of the constant moral 'voice', play in authorizing and shaping 'moral' positions.³¹

Blumenberg's analysis of rhetoric draws attention to the conditions under which rhetoric, understood as the machinery of persuasion and self-persuasion, in the moral domain produces action. There are two features of Blumenberg's approach to material constellations of meaning as they are deployed in discourses that aim to persuade and move to action that are particularly instructive: first, his attention to the rhetorical conditions according to which action is understood to be effective; and second, his account of the way the expectation of meaning works in the rhetorical situation. To put the implications of these features at their most extreme we might say that the very idea of the moral sphere of action is itself a rhetorical construction. This statement does not imply an incompatibility between morality as a sphere that is shaped and stimulated through rhetoric, and normative, institutionalized rules. Instead, it proposes a new thesis regarding the origins and functions of such rules. Let me explain this claim in further detail.

Blumenberg specifies that the project of an 'anthropological localization of rhetoric' aims to address and define the condition of man's 'constitutive dependence on rhetorical actions' rather than the topic of the 'intentions' of taking advantage of this condition (1987: 455). Instead of looking at rhetoric in the perspective of an armoury of manipulative devices, it is viewed as a constitutive part of the field of human action. 'Rhetoric is form as means' because of its provision of the satisfactions of action and the corollary of such satisfaction: the formation of the motive to act (1987: 431). Now,

this position is intimately related to Blumenberg's critique of philosophy's failure to have anything 'special to say about man, with his asserted uniqueness. For rhetoric starts from and only from, the respect in which man is unique' (1987: 432). The various attempts in the canon of philosophy to marginalize the productive field that rhetoric manages are seen by him as ways of minimizing examination of the salient conditions used to motivate action through appeals to self-conception, i.e. the mechanisms of persuasion and self-persuasion.³²

He describes the doctrine of the *summum bonum* (Kant's 'absolute good') as 'an excessive demand' because as 'ethics' it 'leaves no room for rhetoric as the theory and practice of influencing behaviour on the assumption that we do not have access to definitive evidence of the good' (1987: 431–2). It is the provisional state of human existence, the fundamental way human existence precedes 'definitive truths and ethics', that places rhetoric in the position of creating 'institutions where evident truths are lacking' (1987: 434–5).³³ Blumenberg's anthropological theses thus determine the status of rhetoric as constitutive of the moral sphere.

The moral sphere of action is a rhetorical construction in two important respects: first, ethics needs a sphere in which meaning is not finally determined. In other words, autonomous action presupposes the effectiveness of reflective evaluation of a situation: a rhetorical condition where institutional norms take the place of 'evident truths'. Second, the rhetorical devices that are used to engender the field that is receptive for human action themselves bear the hallmark of malleability, namely, they are in their origins and functions substitutive devices.

Kant's conception of beauty as the symbol of morality, for instance, provides a scaffold for a favourable conception of the whole in which morality has a place. The symbol of morality stands in place of a chasm between the indifference of the natural world and the interests of practical reason. As such, it also provides the bridge needed to support the expectation of the satisfaction of a fundamental meaning. It is through Kant's analogical use of the figure of the symbol to comprehend moral action by means of beauty that he 'delivers ... the pure possibility of putting something that is at our disposal in the place of something that is not' (1987: 439–40). This strategy necessarily shifts focus away from the calcification of 'facts' that exceed the anthropological condition towards the potency in the field of action of 'expectations'.

The substitution at the origin of this conception of nature's corroboration of our moral vocation provides the meaning-orientation able to motivate action. But the sense in which rhetoric may be defined in terms of the functions of substitution also encompasses 'action' itself, which may itself be substituted for by the satisfactions of rhetoric (1987: 440).³⁴

The idea that moral behaviour may be described in terms of the image that aims to motivate and move to action highlights the forces and factors involved in the moral sphere. Examining moral philosophy in relation to the need for orientating and inclining action foregrounds the non-moral techniques, traditionally associated with aesthetics, that are used to render the moral perspective credible and effective. How in actual fact is the moral relevance of something established? This question guides us to a consideration of the role of rhetorical techniques in the sphere of moral action. I have argued here that in the case of Kant's moral philosophy it is possible to see the distinctive asceticism

of his philosophy in this light; reflecting on the aesthetic elements of the Kantian moral story (the references to heroism and sacrifice) provides material for the self-involving reflection that motivates moral action.

Blumenberg's attempt to revive the classical vocabulary of rhetoric as a way of identifying what is 'unique' in the anthropological situation is significant because of the way it recasts persuasion as involved in, rather than at odds with, normative, institutional mechanisms. This position regarding self-persuasion may be put in the vocabulary of 'aesthetics' that I outlined at the outset: the apparatus of persuasion makes use of the aesthetic elements in Kant's moral perspective to establish the self-conception of the one who acts according to principles. It is through these non-moral elements that a reflective relation to rules is able to orientate practical dispositions and actions. After all, the 'test' of the universalization of the maxim of an action is not able to generate an answer able to tell us how to act or whether to act at all. Kant's moral symbol is the engine of practical life – it organizes a world that is receptive to action because the aesthetic domain of symbolization or rhetoric is what gathers and marks the world in the ways necessary to motivate an agent committed to moral acts.

Notes

1. I would like to thank Amir Ahmadi for his comments on this paper. Simon Sellars provided bibliographic assistance. An earlier version of this paper was presented to the Blumenberg symposium, organized by Robert Savage, at Monash University in December 2008. I would like to thank the participants at this symposium for their helpful comments and questions on that occasion. The research for this paper forms part of the Australian Research Council Discovery Project 'Persuasive Force: The Role of Aesthetic Experience in Moral Persuasion'.
2. In his *Work on Myth* Hans Blumenberg gives a functional definition of the 'origin' of myths insofar as he focuses on the function of habitability that myths extend to instinct-deficient human creatures. In contrast, Mircea Eliade says that the origins of myths have to do with human needs and more specifically the exigencies of negotiating what he terms 'limit-situations' (see Eliade 1991, esp. pp. 115–19).
3. That is, whether or not they are functionally useful, as in the way that certain rituals are understood to guarantee the integrity of social order.
4. Blumenberg discusses this regulative commitment in 'Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality' (1997: 86, 96).
5. In his Introduction (section IV) to the *Critique of Judgment* Kant refers to the 'pleasure' that was once associated with cognition, but which he claims is now so well integrated to common experience that it becomes the mark of aesthetic judgement (and its contingent accord with nature's forms) alone: 'It is true that we no longer feel any noticeable pleasure resulting from our being able to grasp nature and the unity in its division into genera and species that alone makes possible the empirical concepts by means of which we cognize nature in terms of its particular laws. But this pleasure was no doubt there at one time, and it is only because even the commonest experience would be impossible without it that we have gradually come to mix it in with mere cognition and no longer take any special notice of it. So, if we are to feel pleasure in [response to] the harmony, which we regard as merely contingent, of nature's heterogeneous laws with our cognitive power, we need something that in our judging of nature makes us pay attention to this purposiveness of nature for our understanding – namely, an

endeavor to bring, if possible, these heterogeneous laws under higher though still empirical laws, when this endeavor is met with success' (1987: 27).

6. Third Essay: 'What Do Ascetic Ideals Mean?', his emphasis.
7. It is worth noting that this is the conventional definition of the moral or ethical space. It is the starting point of Kant's definition of morality (1993: 4). The position gets an emphatic formulation in the Levinasian and Derridean conceptions of ethics in which what stands outside the field of theoretical determination, i.e. knowledge, is seen to define the space of the ethical relation. In 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric', Blumenberg gives slightly different formulations of this 'ethical' space on account of his position on rhetoric. Indeed one of the consequences of his general position is that what is determined as knowable itself fields the tractable qualities of rhetoric. In his words, rhetoric ceases to be identifiable when it is omnipresent. In posing the question of the implications of his position on existential constellations of meaning we therefore need to consider the qualification that his conception of rhetoric introduces for the distinction between knowledge and morality. In the following two passages Blumenberg comments, respectively, on Kant's postulates of practical philosophy as rhetorical support against the domain of science, and on the flattening of temporal scope that differentiates the space of rhetoric from the historical field of science. I would especially like to draw attention to Blumenberg's use of rhetoric to mark out tractable fields:

We would count the postulates . . . as part of the rhetoric of ethics: they sum up what makes up the consensus of practical axioms, through persuasion and self-persuasion – what produces assent to public and private efforts and gives meaning to improving the conditions for a life that is free of crime and conflict and to trusting in the possibility of repairing backward or misguided lives. We act 'as though' we knew that efforts and expenditures of this sort, for the benefit of man, are not in vain and are not called in question by science. In our practice we turn into an axiom, as a 'postulate', what provides a motive for taking advantage of the more favourable prospects for humanity. Here rhetoric is also the art of persuading ourselves to ignore what speaks against betting on these prospects. . . . However narrow the zone of the uncertainty of scientific statements may become, it will never disappear entirely, and we will bet on it where theory appears to be more than can be demanded of, and intolerable for, practice. Since Kant the practical postulate stands against the overwhelming determinism of the world of possible scientific objects' (1987: 450–51).

The history of science showed in detail how verification, too, represents the pattern of agreement subject to later revocation, and how the publication of every theory implies a request that other people should follow the paths by which the theorist claims that it is confirmed and should give it the sanction of objectivity – without its ever being possible to exclude, by this process, the possibility that by other paths other things may be discovered and the theory contradicted. What Thomas S. Kuhn . . . called the 'paradigm' – the dominant fundamental conception, in a scientific discipline, for a long period of time, which integrates into itself all subsequent refining and extending inquiries – this paradigm is nothing but a 'consensus', which is able to stabilize itself not, indeed, exclusively, but partly by means of the rhetoric of the academics and the textbooks. (1987: 436)

8. Let me cite the full context of this phrase: 'Keeping silent, visibly omitting some action in a context of connected behavior, can become just as rhetorical as the reading aloud of an outcry of popular wrath, and the Platonic dialogue is no less rhetorically inclined than the Sophist's instructional discourse, which it opposed by literary means. Even when it is below the threshold of the spoken or the written word, *rhetoric is form as means, obedience to rules as an instrument*' (my emphasis). I will return to the analysis of substitutive meanings, and especially the cases of silence and omission of action that organizes Blumenberg's position on rhetoric, in Section II of the paper.

9. See also in the same volume Odo Marquard, 'Happiness in Unhappiness: On the Theory of Indirect Happiness between Theodicy and Philosophy of History' (1983: 102–20).
10. See Kant (1993: 128–41) for his articulation of the role of the postulates in morality. See also his specification of the moral action in respect to motive and reality (1993: 157–8).
11. See Dieter Henrich's essay, 'The Moral Image of the World', on the topic of Kant's need to defend morality against the criticism of illusion. Henrich's essay looks at the difficulties of the Kantian moral perspective rather than its dependence on aesthetic devices of elaboration (1992: 3–29).
12. There are also 'mythical' references of this type in so-called popular essays like his 'Speculative Beginning of Human History' (1786). In this essay Kant refers to the role women play in inculcating the moral disposition by clothing their sex and teaching men restraint. For Kant, this mythical-historical role in instituting morality is a role women play by virtue of their moral incapacity (1983: 51–2). See Sarah Kofman's analysis of the work done by the figure of woman in Kant's moral thinking (Kofman 1997: 335–72).
13. A similar tension can be observed between the position that acknowledges that exceptional individuals are courageous in their opposition to undeserving authority ('What Is Enlightenment?') makes this case in reference to those who do not need the scaffolding of childish religious beliefs and do not suffer from the general affliction of 'laziness and cowardice') and the tendency of the critical philosophy to universalize conditions of knowledge and action. Among other features that are placed in contradictory relation to the praise of individual courage is the dependence on the postulate of God to render moral thinking consistent. We need to ask after the implications of such a postulate given that it secures the promise of a future reward for the moral agent. To my mind, this raises the question not just of Kant's relation to the censorship of the court, but his pessimistic expectations of the capacity of his 'audience'. See his description of man's self-imposed immaturity in the case of religion as 'the most pernicious and disgraceful of all' (1983: 45) and the reference to 'laziness and cowardice' (1983: 41).
14. As I noted earlier, he casts his project in the Introduction to his *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* as an answer to Kant's call in §59 of the *Critique of Judgment* for detailed research on the problem of the mechanisms involved in the transfer of meaning. Viewed this way, Blumenberg's 'metaphorics' is arguably the remaining and reorientation of Kant's incomplete 'theory of the symbol'.
15. Blumenberg makes this comment in 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric' (1987: 431).
16. Kant describes the practical function that postulates of morality extend to the moral perspective as making 'the unceasing striving toward exact and steadfast obedience to a command of

- reason which is stern, unindulgent, truly commanding, really and not just ideally possible' (1993: 129).
17. Here we might cite the frequent references to the Kantian idea of freedom as an 'absolute metaphor'. See, for instance, Blumenberg's comments in 'Prospect for a Theory of Nonconceptuality' (1997: 85, 101–2). The metaphor is absolute in the sense that it needs no, but neither can it call on, further grounds of support. This makes it the converse (rather than complementary) term, in its conception, guiding point and intent, to the 'absolutism' of reality. The former deals with the compact functioning of meaning at the extreme end where elucidation of meaning runs into the limit of metaphoricity; the latter, in contrast, is the omnipresent condition against which Blumenberg defines anthropology in terms of 'instinct deficiency'. It is true that the 'absolutism' of reality goes some way, after Nietzsche, to explaining the need for metaphor for human being given human deficiencies, but this need and these deficiencies do not imply the conception of an 'absolute metaphor' (see Nietzsche's 'On Truth and Lie in an Extra-moral Sense'). All this is not to say that the two concepts cannot be made to work in concert a specifically interrelated pattern of analysis: 'Absolute reality' designates what is entirely foreign, 'absolute metaphor' is the limit-end of the attempt to render what is completely strange, 'human' and thus habitable. Even this designation of reality as 'absolute' is, strictly speaking, a case of 'absolute metaphor' in which the notion of the 'foreign' provides a workable conception of the whole. It is interesting to consider Blumenberg's view that 'symbol' is the limiting case of metaphor because it puts under our disposal (or renders manageable) something that is not. I think he has in mind Kant's use of beauty to manage his thesis regarding morality somehow being at 'home' in nature when he makes this comment (1998: 11–12).
18. See Blumenberg's discussion of Kant's essay 'On an Apocalyptic Tone Recently Adopted in Philosophy' (1990 [1985]: 567–70).
19. The evidence for this claim extends beyond the positive commentary on the Kantian symbol. It includes Blumenberg's statement in *Paradigmen zu einer Metaphorologie* that the mediating function of the symbol, what it transfers in the currency of meaning, is the topic of his metaphorology (1998: 11–12).
20. The German *Prägnanz* connects with the verb *prägen* (to stamp or imprint) rather than the understanding of 'pregnancy' as in either 'being with child (or, metaphorically, "laden with meaning")' (translator's note, I, 111). Amongst the reasons Wallace cites to defend this unusual usage is that we have an 'archaic sense of pregnant, meaning "pressing," "compelling," "cogent," or "clear" (O.E.D.), which derives from Latin *præmere* rather than *prægnans*'.
21. That is, as situations without technical rules that involve others.
22. This point is taken up in Blumenberg's analysis of the different ways rhetoric becomes a substitutive formation for action. I will return to this point in more detail in the next section (see Blumenberg 1987: 440). See also Blumenberg's (1990: 5–6) treatment of substitution as a way of dealing with anxiety, and see Veyne (1988: 92).
23. As the title of Blumenberg's *Work on Myth* indicates, as a human construction that fulfils human needs the myth is a 'work' that is also 'worked on'.
24. Kant, 'Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Intent' (1983: 29).
25. See Blumenberg's discussion of the 'circumstantiality' of myth (1990: 142, 245).
26. 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric', my emphasis. Blumenberg seems to distinguish between rationality as a pragmatic disposition towards circumstances (techniques and mechanisms for identifying and dealing with human instinct deficiency) and reason, whose scope and value is understood to be provisional.
27. Blumenberg's own commitment to regulative ideals in Kant's sense may also be considered in the terms of moral philosophy. This is particularly relevant for the goal of lucidity in self-reflection. I will return to this topic in the final part (Section III) of the paper.
28. In different ways Jean-Luc Nancy, Michel Foucault and Charles Baudelaire subscribe to a version of this thesis.
29. I have developed this thesis on Kant's moral philosophy in the second chapter of *The Aesthetic Paths of Philosophy: Presentation in Kant, Heidegger, Lacoue-Labarthe and Nancy* (Ross 2007).
30. I discuss the question of how Kant conceives of the binding force of moral law given the status of the 'fact of reason' in 'What is the "Force" of Moral Law in Kant's Practical Philosophy?' (Ross 2009: 27–40).
31. Blumenberg discusses the metaphorical functions of different typologies of the senses in 'Light as a Metaphor for Truth: At the Preliminary Stage of Concept Formation' (1993: 30–62). In this essay he notes the organization of the senses in terms of activity and passivity: 'sight places' whereas 'hearing is placed' (1993: 48). This comment meshes well with the typologies of the senses that Kant gives in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* (1798) in which he describes sight as a 'nobler' sense than hearing (2007: 267). The moral overtone of this comment is elaborated in Kant's division of the fine arts in his *Critique of Judgment*. In this section of the third *Critique*, sight is aligned to autonomy and hearing to heteronomy on account of their respective relations to painting and music: music is underpainted because, he says, one can turn away from painting but cannot but hear what is audible: 'music has a certain lack of urbanity about it. For, depending mainly on the character of its instruments, it extends its influence [on the neighbourhood] farther than people wish, and so, as it were, imposes itself on others and hence impairs the freedom of those outside of the musical party. The arts that address themselves to the eye do not do this; for if we wish to keep out their impressions, we need merely turn our eyes away' (1987: 200). In Blumenberg's essay he comments specifically on Kant's practical philosophy in light of this use of the metaphor of hearing the fact of moral law (see p. 48). See also Kant's phrasing of the voice of the moral law (1996: 189).
32. In 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric', he especially cites Hobbes (1987: 452–3) and Kant's (1987: 455–6) simultaneous use and exclusion of rhetoric. Again, the quote in Kant's case comes from the *Critique of Judgment*, §53 (Blumenberg 1987: 455).
33. Consider the following quote in 'An Anthropological Approach to the Contemporary Significance of Rhetoric', in which Blumenberg marks the constitutive feature of morals as the sphere of action that is premised on the renunciation of force: 'To see oneself in the perspective of rhetoric means to be conscious both of being compelled to act and of the lack of norms in a finite situation. Everything that is not force here goes over to the side of rhetoric, and rhetoric implies the renunciation of force' (1987: 437).
34. Blumenberg comments on the differences between classical and modern rhetoric *vis-à-vis* action in this regard. The former provides a mandate for action, whereas the latter promotes 'the delaying of action, or at least the understanding of such delay – and it does this especially when it wants to demonstrate its capacity to act, once again by displaying symbolic substitutions' (1987: 447).

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Blumen Berg: Topoi in Blumenberg's philosophy

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Abstract

The text consists of two parts. Part one puts the works of Hans Blumenberg, as far as they tackle the problem of rhetoric, into their historical context. Relevant here in particular is the tradition of topological philosophies of the Renaissance and their different types of revival in the 20th century. Part two analyses three main 'absolute metaphors' or 'topoi' Hans Blumenberg has investigated, the metaphors of 'light', 'shipwreck', and 'book of nature', in order to add to the philosophical perspective taken by Blumenberg a hidden philological perspective, which shows the shortcomings of conceptualizing rhetorical *techne* (how does a metaphor work), which does not always account for philological *techne* (how do we write texts).

Keywords

metaphor, philology, Renaissance, rhetoric, topoi

From Agricola to Blumenberg

Premises:

- (1) The only animals in the house are cats;
- (2) Every animal is suitable for a pet, that loves to gaze at the moon;
- (3) When I detest an animal, I avoid it;
- (4) No animals are carnivorous, unless they prowl at night;
- (5) No cat fails to kill mice;
- (6) No animals ever take to me, except what are in this house;
- (7) Kangaroos are not suitable for pets;
- (8) None but carnivora kill mice;
- (9) I detest animals that do not take to me;

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