The Virtues of Breaking One's Word: Derrida, Metaphor, and The Philosophy of Language

Terry L. Boyd

Dissertation under the Direction of Professor Charles Scott

In "White Mythology," Jacques Derrida claims that the structure of metaphor reveals the impossibility of constructing complete theories of meaning. He targets two metaphors—the metaphor *of metaphor*, and the metaphor *of theory*—as illustrative of this problem. These metaphors organize what he calls "the classical model of communication." As long thinkers rely on this model, the meaning of metaphor will always present an insoluble problem for philosophy. Using these claims as hypotheses, I investigate the work of several of Derrida's contemporaries: Max Black, Donald Davidson, Paul Ricoeur, and John Searle.

Derrida's assessment appears to be correct. I explore evidence for this by identifying the effects that Derrida's chosen metaphors have in these thinkers' work. This inquiry reveals the persistent role that the metaphor of *dead metaphor* plays in these theories. This metaphor conveniently functions to mask the uncertainty of the literal/metaphorical distinction. I argue that no theory of meaning which relies on this distinction can be taken seriously with such a fractured foundation.

Speech-act theory can provide solutions to these problems. I demonstrate this while clarifying the debate between John Searle and Jacques Derrida concerning J.L. Austin's work. I contend that both thinkers misjudge the importance of Austin's concept of perlocution. They therefore mischaracterize the role and function of locutionary force for Austin. This is

noteworthy because the connection between perlocution and force is central to understanding both metaphor and another persistent absence in the philosophy of language: the speaking body.

Finally, I forward a theory of metaphor that is attentive to perlocution, embodiment, and the social origins of locutionary force. This theory enables me to address some persistent background concerns of the overall project: 1) the motivation for a complete theory of meaning, 2) the rhetoric of *regulation* and *mastery* that pervades such theories, and 3) the odd centrality of the metaphor of death. Using my theory of metaphor, I interpret these background concerns, showing that the metaphorical structure of the classical model of communication shares and reiterates the metaphorical structure of *masters and slaves*.

Approved  *Charles E Scott*                      Date 5/15/2020

Charles Scott