The Speculative Journey—or, What Does It Mean to be a Traveller?

Przemysław Starowicz

ABSTRACT   This paper explores the pervasive use of *journey* and *traveller* metaphors in everyday language, and their applications in philosophical discourse. While these metaphors offer rich insights into abstract concepts such as *love* and *philosophy*, they also introduce ambiguities that can impede effective communication. By dissecting the nuances of these metaphorical figures, the paper aims to clarify their meanings and enhance their explanatory power. Divided into three main sections, the paper first discusses different types of metaphors and their general structure, providing a foundation for understanding metaphorical language. The second section delves into the specific metaphor of *journey* and *traveller*, analyzing its various connotations and implications with insights from scholars such as Dariusz Kubok and Steven Shaviro. Through this analysis, the distinctions between a traveller and a tourist are explored to deepen our understanding of metaphorical frameworks in philosophical discourse. Finally, the paper examines a specific journey strategy, focusing on Object-Oriented Ontology as an exemplification of a philosophical journey. Building upon prior conclusions, this last section elucidates the meaning and implications of this journey strategy, seeking to shed light on the multifaceted nature of philosophical discourse.

KEYWORDS   correlationism; journey; metaphor; object-oriented ontology; speculative realism; traveller; tourist

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Introduction

The figure of a *journey* and a *traveller* is in common use in everyday language. We often turn to these figures and their metaphorical meanings to communicate and comprehend the world around us. For example, we can view love as a journey and, consequently, lovers as travellers. Metaphors are employed not solely for their aesthetic appeal, but also for their ability to facilitate a deeper comprehension of a given subject. Their use is particularly beneficial when attempting to elucidate complex concepts that are difficult to define or explain explicitly. They provide a valuable tool for comprehending abstract or elusive ideas. Similarly, we use the metaphor of a journey to shed light on abstract concepts such as love or philosophy.

However, these metaphorical figures are not without ambiguity. The explanatory power of a metaphor (in our case, of a *journey* and a *traveller*) requires their further (or prior) clarification. It is essential to specify the nature of the journey being referred to, and the type of metaphor being employed, in this context. Without this specificity, the metaphor may lack clarity and fail to effectively convey the intended meaning. As I argue below, addressing this ambiguity is crucial for enhancing the effectiveness of the metaphorical framework in philosophical discourse, especially when it comes to understanding the nature of philosophy itself.

In the ensuing sections, I aim to investigate the nuanced interpretations of the metaphorical figures of *journey* and *traveller* that emerge in philosophical discourse. The paper falls into three main sections. The first discusses different types of metaphor, and the general structure of metaphor, including its components. This will then lay the foundation for understanding the complexities of metaphorical language. The second section will focus on the specific metaphor of a *journey* and a *traveller*, exploring its various connotations and implications. This examination will be guided by insights from scholars such as Dariusz Kubok and Steven Shaviro, who offer valuable perspectives on these concepts. More specifically, by dissecting the distinction(s) between a traveller and a tourist, we can gain deeper insights into the metaphorical framework and its implications for philosophical understanding. Through such an exploration I aim to shed light on the multifaceted nature of philosophical discourse and its reliance on metaphorical language.

Finally, the third section will examine a specific journey-related strategy, focusing on Graham Harman's Object-Oriented Ontology construed as an exemplification of a philosophical journey. It will also briefly consider the Speculative Realism movement and the crucial notion of correlationism. The discussion will build upon prior conclusions to elucidate the meaning

and implications of this particular strategy, which promises to achieve (or at least does not exclude the possibility of achieving) what will itself be introduced in the second section: namely, the Great Outdoors.

ON (JOURNEY) METAPHORS

The metaphor of a journey permeates both ordinary language and philosophical discourse, offering a versatile framework for conceptualizing experience. In everyday speech, we often encounter phrases like "this relationship is going nowhere," where the notion of "going nowhere" metaphorically aligns with the stalled progress of a journey. Despite their ubiquity, such expressions are typically understood without explicit interpretation, illustrating the subtle yet potent influence of metaphor in shaping our understanding. In fact, we ascribe a certain literalness to such expressions, treating *going nowhere* as a vehicle for an instance of what are generally known as "dead" metaphors—meaning ones which

> may have been alive and vigorous at some point but have become so conventional and commonplace with constant use that by now they have lost their vigor and have ceased to be metaphors at all (Kövecses 2002, ix).

While *journey* metaphors may seamlessly integrate into colloquial discourse, their application in philosophical contexts introduces a layer of complexity. Unlike literal journeys, philosophical exploration transcends physical movement, challenging conventional notions of progress and destination. When we assert that philosophy is a journey, or akin to one, we invite inquiry into the nature of this metaphor and its implications.

Philosophers have long grappled with the concept of metaphor, tracing its roots back to Aristotle's definition as "the application of an alien name by transference" (*Poetics* 1457b). This classical understanding endures in contemporary definitions, such as the Oxford English Dictionary's description of metaphor as a

> figure of speech in which a name or descriptive word or phrase is transferred to an object or action different from, but analogous to, that to which it is literally applicable (*OED* 2023).

Despite the enduring relevance of Aristotle's definition, scholars have proposed various interpretations of metaphor, each offering unique insights into its nature and function. Max Black, in his seminal work, presents three distinct views on metaphor, laying the groundwork for deeper exploration.

Before delving into these differing perspectives, it is essential to establish a common understanding of metaphor's fundamental structure and function. By elucidating the basics, we can navigate the nuances of metaphorical language with greater clarity and precision.

Metaphor consists of two components, usually called "vehicle" and "tenor." This terminology was introduced by the critic I.A. Richards almost a hundred years ago, and is still in use (see Bilsky 1952). Nevertheless, we may encounter various other pairs of terms, such as "source" and "target," or "focus" and "frame," to name just some. "Source" and "target" refer to the conceptual or cognitive view of metaphor, founded by George Lakoff and Mark Johnson. These terms denote conceptual domains of conceptual metaphor. According to this view, metaphors "typically employ a more abstract concept as target and a more concrete or physical concept as their source" (Kövecses 2002, 6). The source allows the target to be understood; furthermore, it can be conceptualized. In other words, the source domain structures the target.

In our case, the concept of *journey*, which is more concrete, structures the more abstract concept of *philosophy* (Lakoff and Johnson 1980, 65). Hence, we can consider the similarity between the source and target domains as conditioning the very possibility of the metaphor. However, as Kövecses argues when discussing the LOVE IS A JOURNEY metaphor, "[t]he domain of love did not have these elements *before it was structured* by the domain of journey" (Kövecses 2002, 7). Therefore, the similarity between the source and target domains is not a cause but an effect of conceptual metaphor.

Let us include an example at this point to illuminate the issue in detail. Kövecses refers to the metaphor of love is a journey and considers, among other things, the sentence *We aren't going anywhere*. It is easy to distinguish three elements of the journey that this sentence contains, namely: the travellers, the journey, and the destination. If one hears this sentence on a mountain path, he or she can conclude that the trail was lost and hence the situation is serious. However, under different circumstances, the meaning of the sentence changes:

> when we hear this sentence in the appropriate context, we will interpret it to be about love, and we will know that the speaker of the sentence has in mind not real travellers but lovers, not a physical journey but the events in a love relationship, and not a physical destination at the end of the journey but the goal(s) of the love relationship (Kövecses 2002, 6).

We can now move on to another set of terms. When Black introduces the terms "focus" and "frame," he uses them to analyze the sentence

The chairman ploughed through the discussion. As he characterizes it, the focus of this metaphorical statement is the word "ploughed," while the rest of the sentence is its frame. Using this metaphorical expression, Black argues that the focus may change its meaning depending on the different frames invoked. In other words, the meaning of "plough" may be determined by the frame, and thus change if the frame changes, even to the extent of putting a stop to the metaphor altogether (Black 1955, 275-6).

Having captured these basic points, we can now consider the views regarding metaphor found in Black's article. He lists three views: 1) substitutional, 2) comparisonal, and 3) interactional. The second of these is a "special case" of the first. Knowledge about *focus* and *frame* will come in handy in the following passage.

Black explains that

> [a]ccording to a substitution view, the focus of a metaphor, the word or expression having a distinctively metaphorical use within a literal frame, is used to communicate a meaning that might have been expressed literally (Black 1955, 280).

To put it simply, the view implies that a metaphorical expression can be replaced by its literal substitute, as when replacing "lion" with "brave" in the sentence *Richard is a lion*. A similar scenario arises with the comparison view, which "holds that the metaphorical statement might be replaced by an equivalent literal *comparison*" (Black 1955, 283). On this view it may also be referred to as a *simile* or just a *comparison*—and, as Maria Gołębiewska argues,

> metaphor is more abstract than comparison and in the former case comparative character is not indicated explicitly, that is the expression 'like' is not appearing here explicitly (Gołębiewska 2017, 27).

It has been mentioned that Black considers this view to be a special case of the substitute view. Nevertheless, he provides some additional explanation, using the RICHARD IS A LION metaphor. As we already know, on the substitute view, this sentence can be paraphrased into *Richard is brave*, and thus the focus can be replaced. On the comparison view, the sentence will take a slightly different form, with one additional expression: namely, "like." *Richard is a lion* becomes *Richard is like a lion*. Both of them are closely related, and both of them seem to be perfectly clear. The "advantage" of using the word "like" is the possibility of obtaining a more "elaborate

paraphrase," in that the word "like" signals some sort of unstated clarification. We understand *Richard is like a lion* as *Richard is like a lion in being brave* (Black 1955, 283-4).

The last position discussed by Black is what he calls the *interaction view*. He introduces this particular view using the sentence *Man is a wolf* as an example. Additionally, he proposes two other terms in order to describe the elements of this metaphor. The first of these is the *primary subject*, which in the metaphor in question is *Man*, and the second is the *subsidiary subject*, which in this instance is (a) *wolf*. According to this view, the focal word obtains a new meaning, which is different from its literal meaning. In other words, the frame determines the meaning of the focus in question. To understand the meaning of this metaphor, one needs to appeal to a *system of associated commonplaces*. Black argues that both of the metaphor's subjects are in fact *systems* of things consisting of associated implications, and "[t]he metaphor works by applying to the principal subject a system of 'associated implications' characteristic of the subsidiary subject" (Black 1955, 291). As Black explains: "The effect... of (metaphorically) calling a man a 'wolf' is to evoke the wolf-system of related commonplaces. If the man is a wolf, he preys upon other animals, is fierce, hungry, engaged in constant struggle, a scavenger, and so on." Hence, "[t]he wolf-metaphor suppresses some details, emphasizes others—in short, *organizes* our view of man" (Black 1955, 288). What is profoundly meaningful in our case is that the implications in question can be "established *ad hoc*" by the user of the metaphor (Black, 291).

Concluding the above, according to the interaction view of metaphor, the metaphor's meaning is determined by the interaction between the primary and subsidiary subjects. Using the latter to describe the former is to evoke a certain system of associated implications of the latter (which can be commonplaces or established *ad hoc*) to describe the former. Moreover, the metaphor in question is determined by its frame, resulting in a suppression and an emphasizing of different aspects of the subjects involved. When it comes to the philosophy is a journey metaphor, we can rely on commonplaces and conclude that philosophy is an activity with a specific beginning, course and objective, usually regarded as truth. Using the journey metaphor it is possible to describe philosophical attitudes toward the possibility of achieving that goal. However, there must be something different and, at the same time, deeper than these basic structural similarities: after all, a journey consists in something more than its structure. Hence, some sort of short reflection on journeys would seem to be called for here.

The above notwithstanding, there is also another reason to pursue such reflections. According to philosophers such as Hans Blumenberg and Richard Rorty (to name only a couple), metaphors profoundly influence philosophical inquiries. As Rorty argues, "[i]t is pictures rather than propositions, metaphors rather than statements, which determine most of our philosophical convictions" (Rorty 2018, 12). Therefore, it is important to know what this particular metaphor signifies, as it may be one that determines how we practice philosophy.

On Journeys (and Metaphor)
As has already been stated, referring to a journey is problematic because of its equivocal meaning. Hence, it is important to clarify how we should understand it, especially in light of the metaphor being discussed. As was pointed out in the previous section, such clarification is called for. Without it, the philosophy is a journey metaphor carries such a wide range of potential meanings as to in fact be virtually meaningless. In the ensuing sections, I intend to discuss what a journey is, and thereby make my own contribution to the philosophy of journeys. As I will demonstrate, the use of the metaphor in question must be preceded by at least some degree of philosophical reflection, however brief.

What has been mentioned already is that a journey can be understood in many different ways, as it is—to use the conceptual terminology associated with the study of metaphor—more a domain of metaphor than a metaphorical expression *per se*. Unless one provides an additional explanation of the particular notion of a journey one is using, the meaning of the metaphor will be hard to determine, or else will need to be understood—and here we may hark back to Black—on the basis of some system of associated commonplaces. According to the latter, a journey is something that has a beginning, a course, and a destination, and—obviously—it has to be undertaken by someone: a traveller. Therefore, just like a journey, philosophical inquiries will be construed as having a beginning and a destination connected by a road running between them. Further, just as a traveller sets out on his or her journey, a philosopher begins philosophical reflection, and both of them eventually have to (or at least should) end. To put it differently, both are kept on with because of the possibility of achieving a goal. Imagine a traveller who embarks on a journey and, at the same time, denies the possibility of achieving his or her destination.

Dariusz Kubok, discussing Pieper's interpretation of the passage about Eros from Plato's *The Symposium*, argues that

[t]he idea of persistence in the search, combined with the assumed knowledge of the impossibility of its fulfillment, seems to be internally flawed by something reminiscent of mental decay: it simultaneously questions the essence of the search and knowledge itself, thereby rendering both these elements dramatically reduced as they become dispossessed of their original function. The search is not a true search, because it is, by definition, impossible to find the object of the quest... (Kubok 2021, 264).

To put it briefly, a journey without a destination is self-contradictory and, thus, not a journey at all. Consequently, a traveller who embarks on a journey and is convinced of "the impossibility of its fulfillment" is not truly a traveller.

The concept of traveling encompasses a variety of strategies and types of journeys. Some are familiar to us from our everyday lives, while others are quite the opposite. Our usual associations with travel are often linked to tourism, which can sometimes carry a negative connotation. As Anna Wieczorkiewicz argues, "the term tourist often simply means a mentally limited and cognitively passive intruder" (Wieczorkiewicz 2008, 13). Thus, it may not come as a surprise that some of us do not like to be called by this term. On the other hand, a lot of people are committed to acts of moral turpitude, yet we do not reject being referred to as humans. Despite these debates, it is important to differentiate between a tourist and a traveller—a distinction that will become clearer later on. Even within the realm of tourism there are numerous subcategories, making it clear that simply enumerating types of journeys will not suffice here. The crucial factor is the motivation behind travel, the desires that impel us to embark on a journey and leave the comfort of home. While some tourists seek relaxation in all-inclusive resorts, others are passionate explorers, eager to visit every museum and art gallery along their route. Sometimes, an individual may embody both roles. It is natural for our preferences to fluctuate, and that is perfectly acceptable.

Nevertheless, the two attitudes have something in common: namely, the aforementioned desire to leave home—and, consequently, (effective) change of location. For some reason, spending leisure time in a foreign country resort is considered better than relaxing on a couch in one's own house. But explorers—as we call them—are driven by the desire to possess some kind of unique knowledge or experience, which is only attainable by leaving home. Tourism of this kind may prompt individuals to gain knowledge provided by experts (with the assistance of a guide, for instance), or to collect experiences, simply registering the differences and contrasts between

the various places they visit (Wieczorkiewicz 2008, 23). However, as Steven Shaviro argues, tourists are always limited by an "unvarying point of reference," which is their home (Shaviro 2016, 48). Regardless of the journey's objective, a tourist can never truly encounter the places visited, for home is always with them, fencing them off from accessing the so-called Great Outdoors. In that sense, a tourist-explorer resembles Eros from Pieper's interpretation, as discussed by Kubok in the citation above. Success in the attempt to encounter a visited place becomes *a priori* impossible. There is, however, a significant difference: tourists do not negate the possibility of reaching the destination—rather they are not even aware of it. What they take to be the Great Outdoors is not so great, and is contaminated with the indoors. They are observing the place in question from inside their houses. And with that arises a question: how to get outside? And even more important: is it even possible?

Eugene Thacker highlights the paradoxical nature of this endeavor, stating that "[t]he world-in-itself is a paradoxical concept; the moment we think it and attempt to act on it, it ceases to be the world-in-itself and becomes the world-for-us." The only way to overcome this difficulty, as he argues, is "the subtraction of the human from the world" (Thacker 2011, 5). Translating this into our journey metaphor, we may assert that the only way to venture outside and embark on a journey towards the Great Outdoors is to cease being a tourist. To achieve this,

> we need to escape the habit of always referring things back to ourselves. Going somewhere is only the first step. We must also remove our own presuppositions about whatever it is that we encounter elsewhere (Shaviro 2016, 48).

In other words, we have to become travellers.

THE SPECULATIVE TRAVELLER—OR, A JOURNEY TOWARDS OBJECTS

According to Shaviro's portrayal of Speculative Realism as a voyage into uncharted territories, Object-Oriented Ontology can be viewed as a method for navigating the concept of the "Great Outdoors" introduced by Quentin Meillassoux, a co-founder of Speculative Realism. Meillassoux defines the Great Outdoors as "the absolute outside of precritical thinkers," an external realm that exists independently of our perceptions. He describes it as a space for exploration where thought feels entirely foreign and distant. Meillassoux contrasts this with the perspective of precritical thinkers, for whom the absolute outside was still accessible. While it may appear that Speculative Realists are engaged in a dismissal of Immanuel Kant's

Copernican Revolution, and are seeking to revert to what that thinker referred to as dogmatic philosophy, this is not the case. Although they may not align with Kant, they acknowledge the difficulties of surpassing the boundaries he identified—boundaries that have shaped philosophical discourse for over two centuries.

Speculative Realists can be compared to tourists who, upon realizing that they have been observing the world from within their own homes, acknowledge the limitations of their perspective and decide to venture outside, becoming travellers. The entire Speculative Realism movement can be viewed as a *Speculative Journey* toward the absolute outside. The starting point of this journey is the rejection of correlationism by each Speculative Realist, as emphasized by Graham Harman (Harman 2018, 4). The destination, as we already know, is the aforementioned Great Outdoors. However, the paths they have taken differ significantly, and just one of these paths, Object-Oriented Ontology, will be discussed in the paragraphs below. However, before we enter into Harman's philosophy, there is still one term that requires explanation.

Correlationism, as Meillassoux explains, "consists in disqualifying the claim that it is possible to consider the realms of subjectivity and objectivity independently of one another" (2008, 5). When discussing any object, it is already an object in relation. Furthermore, the relation precedes the object itself. A more extended excerpt is certainly worth quoting:

> Generally speaking, the modern philosopher's 'two-step' consists in this belief in the primacy of the relation over the related terms; a belief in the constitutive power of reciprocal relation. The 'co-' (of co-givenness, of co-relation, of the co-originary, of co-presence, etc.) is the grammatical particle that dominates modern philosophy, its veritable 'chemical formula.' Thus, one could say that up until Kant, one of the principal problems of philosophy was to think substance, while ever since Kant, it has consisted in trying to think the cor-relation. Prior to the advent of transcendentalism, one of the questions that divided rival philosophers most decisively was 'Who grasps the true nature of substance? He who thinks the Idea, the individual, the atom, God? Which God?' But ever since Kant, to discover what divides rival philosophers is no longer to ask who has grasped the true nature of substantiality, but rather to ask who has grasped the more originary correlation: is it the thinker of the subject-object correlation, the noetico-noematic correlation, or the language-referent correlation? The question is no longer 'which is the proper substrate?' but 'which is the proper correlate?' (Meillassoux 2008, 5-6).

The rejection of correlationism carries profound significance for the Speculative Realism movement, as it is arguably the only common thread among the philosophies within this movement. According to Harman, however, "[a]ll four philosophies are realisms... And all four are speculative" (Harman 2018, 5). Nevertheless, as Tom Sparrow argues, Speculative Realism "is not unified and does not follow a singular method. It is as diverse as its many practitioners" (Sparrow 2014, loc. 152). Hence, the aforementioned differences in the paths of Speculative Realists are also noticeable in this particular case.

Let us now pursue one of these Speculative Journeys—specifically, Object-Oriented Ontology—as mentioned earlier. This journey might also be referred to as an Object-Oriented Journey, as will become clearer in a moment: it is all about objects. It is also worth emphasizing that in this text we will only be discussing Harman's version of Object-Oriented Ontology, as there are other philosophers that can be characterized as Object-Oriented Ontologists. And just as different kinds of Speculative Realism differ from each other, so do different kinds of Object-Oriented Ontology.

It has been mentioned above that Speculative Realists share the common starting point of their speculative journeys. To some extent, this starting point determines the journey's path and its destination. However, to reject correlationism, one has to acknowledge its existence, and this cannot be done without prior philosophical education. In other words: one must travel the path that precedes the path of rejection. In the case of Harman, this path leads through phenomenology, which has profoundly influenced the shape of his philosophical project. According to Harman's ontology, an object has a fourfold structure, which consists of two objects (the Real Object and the Sensual Object) and their qualities (Real Qualities and Sensual Qualities) (Harman 2011, 95-109). It is safe to say that without having encountered Husserl and Heidegger on his philosophical path, Harman would never have developed the concept of the fourfold object. As he writes, "The major topic of object-oriented philosophy is the dual polarization that occurs in the world: one between the real and the sensual, and the other between objects and their qualities..." One involves a "vertical" gap, as found in Heidegger, for whom real objects are forever withdrawn behind their accessible, sensual presence to us. The other is a subtler "horizontal" gap, as found in Husserl, "...between the relatively durable objects of our perception and their swirling kaleidoscope of shifting properties" (Harman 2012, 4).

The Real Object, as Harman argues,

is neither a mere nickname for some set of encountered properties, nor a Christmas present that eventually gets unwrapped—but more like an

unknown Halloween visitor hidden permanently behind countless masks
and robes (Harman 2005, 64).

The Real Object is always withdrawn, and thus what we encounter are
only Sensual Qualities attached to the Sensual Object. And they do not
exist outside one's perception. One may wonder how, if the Real Object
is always withdrawn from any relation, it is possible to overcome corre-
lationism. How can one fulfill the desire of reaching the Great Outdoors?

Harman, however, does not inquire into the issue of correlation. He rather
discusses problems connected with precritical philosophy. When it comes to
correlationism, he argues that the thing-in-itself is not inaccessible because
of some epistemic limitations. It is a matter of the ontological structure of
every single object. Thus, it is not a matter of epistemology to inquire into
the subject-object relation: rather, it is a topic within ontology. Therefore,
the journey that one may pursue here can only be a speculative one, which
means one has to inquire into non-correlationist issues.

Certainly, there is more that could be written about the specifics of
Object-Oriented Ontology, but the goal of this article seems to have already
been achieved. The aim here, after all, was not to provide a comprehen-
sive explication of Harman's philosophy: rather, it was that of indicating
a direction one could consider when thinking about one's own forthcoming
philosophical journeys.

Conclusion

The journey has been part and parcel of the lives of humans (and not only
humans) since their very beginnings. However, its significance extends
beyond physical travel: it also encompasses philosophical exploration.
Although this concept may initially seem abstract, contemplating the jour-
ney from a philosophical perspective can yield a deeper understanding of
both the journey and philosophy itself.

When employing a metaphor, it should not be regarded simply as a deco-
rative element with mere aesthetic value. While appreciating its aesthetic
aspect, we should also recognize its explanatory potency and employ it
judiciously. Given the variety of metaphors, it is crucial to exercise skill
and care in selecting the type that best aligns with our intentions. This is
essential for gaining a profound understanding of abstract concepts, par-
ticularly within the realm of philosophy. As I have sought to demonstrate
in the sections above, philosophical inquiries into the metaphor's *vehicle* (in
the present case, the notions of journey and traveller) serve to enhance the
explanatory power of the metaphor itself, providing a powerful tool that

can be used to gain a better understanding of its *tenor* (thus, of philosophy and philosophers).

According to Speculative Realism, and particularly Object-Oriented Ontology as discussed by Graham Harman, the journey toward the Great Outdoors entails a rejection of correlationism. This journey is akin to a philosophical expedition into uncharted territories, where the goal is to explore the absolute outside, independent of human perception. Harman's ontology, influenced by (among other things) phenomenology, posits that objects have a fourfold structure and are always partially withdrawn from our perception. Overcoming correlationism requires a speculative journey that inquires into non-correlationist issues, emphasizing the ontological structure of objects rather than our epistemological limitations.

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