

Workshop on

Metaphor in Ancient Greek Philosophy with a special focus on Emotions

Ruhr University Bochum, December 2nd, 2026

Keynote lecture by Douglas Cairns (University of Edinburgh)

Organizers: Chiara Ferella, Barbara Sattler

Call for Abstracts

Metaphor is pervasive in ancient philosophical texts, shaping the language through which thinkers articulate questions concerning knowledge, being, the soul, the cosmos, and human experience. One domain in which metaphor is particularly prominent is that of emotions, often conceptualized as forces that move, heat, weigh down, overpower, or otherwise affect those who experience them.

The presence of figurative language in philosophy raises the question of the role played by metaphors in the formation and articulation of philosophical thought. To what extent does it provide a way of representing phenomena not immediately accessible to direct experience—a means, as it were, of seeing the unseen—or phenomena that are otherwise hard to grasp or cope with, such as emotions. And to what extent does it participate in shaping the concepts and explanatory models through which ancient philosophers make sense of the world?

This workshop brings together scholars working on metaphor in ancient philosophy to explore the relationship between figurative language and philosophical conceptualization. Particular attention will be paid to how established metaphorical patterns are adapted, transformed, or challenged in response to philosophical problems. Contributions may address different areas of ancient philosophy, but the field of emotions will be especially welcome.

Questions to be explored include: How do metaphors structure philosophical concepts and explanatory models? How do such patterns develop across authors, genres, periods, and traditions? What happens when metaphors inherited from ordinary language or literature, or from neighbouring domains such as medicine, religion, politics, or the crafts, enter philosophical discourse?

By bringing together different philosophical domains and methodological approaches, the workshop aims to investigate metaphor not as an ornamental feature of philosophical language, but as a potentially constitutive instrument of ancient philosophical thought. The conceptualization of emotions provides an especially revealing test case, while comparison with other areas of inquiry will allow us to examine whether—and how—the cognitive and explanatory functions of metaphor vary according to their objects and contexts.

Call for Abstracts: We are looking for abstracts from scholars working on the theme of this workshop. The papers should be appropriate for roughly 40 minutes of presentation. We will be able to cover accommodation and travel costs within Europe.

Important details:

- Abstracts should be between 300 and 1000 words.
- Papers can be submitted in English or German.
- Applicants should remove any identifying information on the abstract and include a separate document with their name, email, and affiliation.
- Abstracts should be sent to Valarie Zarges (Valerie.Zarges@rub.de)
- The submission deadline is September 15th, 2026.