Volume 4, Issue 2, 2019

Enugu State University of Science & Technology
Journal of Social Sciences

ENUGU STATE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

TECHNOLOGY FOR SERVICE

Journal of Social Sciences

published by
Faculty of Social Sciences
Enugu State University of Science & Technology
www.esutjss.com

The Imaginative in the Service of the Rational

Jude Godwins

Department of Philosophy, Seat of Wisdom Seminary,
Imo State University, Owerri.
judegodwins8@gmail.com

Abstract

Until most recently this intellectual climate remained, as it were, sacrosanct. It was an academic and theoretical climate where there could be only one conceptual system and only one accurate way of understanding the world. In our day developments in the cognitive sciences occasion a battery of agitating questions. To what extent are reason and thought mere manipulation of abstract symbols? Are they actually only about the correspondence of words and mental representations to the external world, independently of the nature and body of the human being involved in the operation? Are the symbols used in thought actually meaningless, only getting their meaning by corresponding to things in the physical world? Are reason and concepts really transcendental, in the sense of not being liable to the natures and bodies of the thinking beings? To what extent does the human mind mirror reality as it is "out there"? Is nature really mirrored in our mathematical reasoning? Are our concepts in truth internal representations of external realities? Are thought and reason not instead a matter of the nature of the thinking being - its body, social character, environmental interactions? The foregoing questions, as it were, boil down to the problem of the kind of beings that we are, with the kind of bodies that we have. This natural given (or disposition) gives rise to our use of our imaginative faculties and processes. And these have consequences.

Keywords: human mind, intellectual climate, mathematical reasoning, natural dispositions.

Introduction

Nearly two thousand years of philosophizing, some argue, has institutionalized a certain theory of categorization where certain philosophical assumptions have virtually denied many a researcher access to such an empirical matter as how humans categorize their experiences and make sense of their world (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 210). It is a traditional theory of categorization that has given rise to a certain view of mind, reason, meaning, language, grammar, logic, and truth.

Under this colossal intellectual edifice, reason is defined as a disembodied manipulation of abstract symbols. It is held to be transcendental, in the sense of going beyond our natural thought pattern. It is also said to be inferential. Mathematics is held to be its paradigmatic instance. The mind's operations are said to be independent of the body. Conceived as an abstract machine, it is thought to manipulate symbols the way computers do. Words, mental representations, etc. (symbols) are assumed to be only meaningful when they correspond to things in the external world. When they do, they are held to be internal representations of external reality. The properties of organisms are said not to influence the correspondence between abstract symbols and the things in the world.

In this thought pattern, the mind is held to be an exact mirror of nature, since it is assumed to make use of internal representations of external reality. For the same reason too, accurate reason is said to be an exact mirror of the logic of the world. The human body is assumed not

to influence human reason and conceptualization. Immune to the limitations of the perceptual process, the nervous system, and the human body, thought is thus said to be abstract and disembodied. It is held to be mathematical. Concepts too are held to be transcendental; they are assumed to be internal representations of external reality.

In this thought trajectory, emotion is said not to have anything in common with conceptualization, since it is thought to be bereft of any conceptual content. Meaning, in the view of this traditional theory must, therefore, be compositional, transcendental, objective, disembodied, and independent of the understanding of any human being (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 200). It is, at best, simply a relating of symbols to things (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 196). in the objective world, a matter of truth and reference. Truth is defined in terms of words fitting the external world.

In the area of natural language, meaning is said to be strictly based on a certain truth condition; it is held to be independent of the context of use and of human understanding. Syntax is held to be different from meaning. Grammar, being pure form, is said not to admit of any immediate form-meaning correspondence. Sentences are regarded as "abstract objects with inherent structures." In communication, people are believed to send messages containing fixed meaning to their addressees. Certain linguistic expressions are held to be associated with certain definite meanings.

It is a view of categorization where categories are strictly defined by shared and common properties of their members. Conceptual categories are believed to be symbolic structures, acquiring their meaning by fitting objectively existing categories in an actual or possible world. They are believed to be independent of the body and nature of the beings doing the categorization. They are thought to mirror the structure of categories actually existing "out there."

Against this academic and theoretical backdrop, there could be only one conceptual system and only one accurate way of understanding the world – the God's – Eye – View about what the world really is like (Johnson, 1987, x). Johnson dismisses this "offending cluster of assumptions" as objectivism and associates it with our "blindness toward imagination" (Johnson, 1987, ix-x).

Until most recently this intellectual climate remained, as it were, sacrosanct. In our day developments in the cognitive sciences occasion a battery of agitating questions. To what extent are reason and thought mere manipulation of abstract symbols? Are they actually only about the correspondence of words and mental representations to the external world, independently of the nature and body of the human being involved in the operation? Are the symbols used in thought actually meaningless, only getting their meaning by corresponding to things in the physical world? Are reason and concepts really transcendental, in the sense of not being liable to the natures and bodies of the thinking beings? To what extent does the human mind mirror reality as it is "out there"? Is nature really mirrored in our mathematical reasoning? Are our concepts in truth internal representations of external realities? Are thought and reason not instead a matter of the nature of the thinking being - its body, social character, environmental interactions? The foregoing questions, as it were, boil down to the problem of the kind of beings that we are, with the kind of bodies that we have. This natural given (or disposition) gives rise to our use of our imaginative faculties and processes.

That notwithstanding, the history of philosophy reveals this steady watering down of the cognitive content of our imaginative faculties, which could be associated with two major historical tendencies of the modern period, namely, Cartesianism and Kantianism (Grenham Bird, 1995, 439-441).
It could serve as well to consider briefly the two philosophers whose thinking constituted a spring board from where these philosophical propensities generated Perhaps, in so doing, one could better situate historically this seeming disregard of what could be termed the imaginative half of our inference structure.

Descartes, wanting to refute skepticism, posits a general mathematical method underscoring indubitably certain and real knowledge. We are undoubtedly certain of our experience as thinking beings, he holds. The world consists of two substances: bodies and minds (res cogitans and res extensa) (Davis, 1998, 255-257). We have knowledge of our minds rather than of our bodies. Thus, men are true to type when they are engaged in rational operations. This Cartesian dualism has a two-fold upshot, namely, (a) the human body is not an essential component of human reason, and (b) the human mind simply knows its own ideas.

Then, of course, the question arises how it is possible that the two, between which neither a material-form relationship nor an interaction can take place, can be experienced as a genuine unit in human self-awareness before any analysis. Descartes does not ask this question (Haeffner, 1989, 135).

Kant, that intellectual giant, will be remembered in history for identifying the dangers of this sort of dichotomy. However, though he denies the existence of a mind-independent body, he still distinguishes between formal and informal cognitive faculties. On the one hand, the formal cognitive faculty stands for the understanding's spontaneous and organizing operations within the conceptual and intellectual realm. On the other hand, the material faculty refers to the bodily operations that deal with the perceptual and sensible data.

Kant argued that genuine empirical knowledge must be knowledge of objects that we all can experience; objects that are subject to universal laws. In order to have such an "objective" experience, there must be some material given from outside us to our senses; and this content must be organized by patterns of thought given by our mind. The bodily capacity for receiving these sense impressions, sensibility, supplies us only with particular representations (e.g., images, percepts) given to our senses by whatever objects we are experiencing. The capacity for conceptualizing these contents of sensibility, is an intellectual faculty that gives general representations (i.e., concepts) under which the particulars of sensation can be organized in a meaningful manner (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, xxvii-xxviii).

By saying that our knowledge of the external world is what we receive from it, as structured by our consciousness, Kant intends to solve the dualism of Cartesianism (Allison, 1995, 435-438). This is to guarantee that concepts correspond to objective reality.

Be it as it may, Kant still speaks in a language that separates the intellectual from the sensible. In a somewhat different context, Haeffner describes Kant's dichotomy as a "radikale Trennung des Phänomenalen vom Noumenalen" (Haeffner, 1989, 213).

Against this backdrop, one could begin to sense that there could be some merit in the contention that when well accounted for, our imaginative faculties, in their unifying functions, could well resolve this gulf.

The projected aim of this thesis then is to make an emphatic case for the experiential and embodied aspect of human reason. It seeks to investigate the claim that our 'logical inferences' and 'reasoning about abstract entities' have their roots in our embodied and concrete experiences as well as in our mundane attempts at problem solving. Consequently, it wonders whether our abstract entities configurations and our rational inference structures may, indeed, be simply about inexplicable structures of rationality or what has been termed pure reason. It asks whether these could not be, after all, the natural consequences of our metaphorically framed structures of understanding, which are in the service of the human imaginative schematic operations and capacities, by which humans have been known to make sense of their world.

The following will constitute our operative terms in this essay: categorization, image schemata, metaphorical projection, space grammar, and mental spaces.

Categorization. Categorization refers to the way humans break up their experiences into comprehensible kinds. Implied here is a theory of prototype categorization as against one based on a 'necessary condition' of shared properties. Humans, studies reveal, do actually break up their experiences, slotting them into categories in terms of prototypes and family resemblances.

Prototypes are neutral structures enabling us to perform inferential and imaginative feats in relation to categories. The result is a somewhat prototype-based reasoning. The way humans have been discovered to categorize and make sense of their existential milieu would become for us indicative of our manner of reasoning about abstract entities.

Image schemata. By image schemata is meant the recurring structures in the human experience, with their attendant ecological and gestalt senses. These image schemata, it has been discovered, have their internal structures which could well go into the definition of reason.

Metaphorical projection. Metaphorical projection is defined as a major way of projecting structure across domains and categories, establishing new connections and organizations of meaning, extending and developing image schemata (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 171). For instance in the expressions 'the foot of the mountains' and 'the foot of the list', mountain and list are structured in ways revealing a metaphorical projection of the human body onto them. The claim of our line of thought is that our conceptual system is, in the main, structured by systematic metaphorical framings. We understand more complex realms by associating a certain domain with a certain range. We comprehend more abstract/theoretical and less-structured realms (for example reason, logic, and knowledge) through mappings from more concrete and sufficiently structured domains (for instance our corporeal experience of hearing, motion, tactile sensation or object manipulation) (Johnson, 1993, 10).

Metaphorical mappings link up one experiential ambiance to another. Haeffner acknowledges this phenomenon when he defines metaphor as a transfer (Greek: metaphorà) of meaning from one level of meaning to another (Haeffner, 1989, 129). Apparently referring to what we have called the internal structures of the schemata that are transformed in this carry-over of meaning from one sphere to another, he argues that basically there must be some reason that such a

transfer could and can take place at all (Haeffner, 1989, 129). Our inquiry asks whether this meaning carry-over could not finish up in a somewhat metaphorical reasoning**.**

Space grammar. Space grammar is an upshot of our spatialization which in turn is tied to our bodily orientation (Haeffner, 1989, 128-129), according to which the body is either a trajector (the contained**:** He walked out of the enclosure), or a landmark (the container**:** he poured the wine into his mouth) (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 33). We humans make spatial inferences using spatial-relations concepts. From some landmark, we attribute farness and nearness to objects that are simply where they are (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 30). We have been known not only to use spatial-relations concepts unconsciously but also to frame them unto our surrounding world through our perceptual and conceptual systems. In this line of thought, space understood in this bodily or physical context, wields an enormous but often unnoticed influence on our rational structures.

Mental spaces. The theory of mental space is a broad domain of inquiry embracing all the areas enumerated above and more. Following Fauconnier, Lakoff defines mental spaces as a **"**medium in which thoughts occur and in which conceptual entities are located**"** (Lakoff, 1987, 542). Fauconnier's theory of cross-domain mappings in our mental space configurations would be at the back of our minds as we probe our thesis. Curious enough, one finds these human operations, as it were, converging into our imaginative capacities and structures. Thus, we shall be inquiring to ascertain whether, when all is said and done, the human imaginative structures could not be an integral part of the human meaning-constructs and reasoning patterns. It does seem the case that anything one experiences and knows as forming meaning, the way one reasons about such a thing, depends on the imaginative structures that build and give the human experience its character (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980, 172).

This project is born out of the philosophical curiosity and wonder over the sensitive area of human reason. We are curious about how humans normally understand, attain meaning, do their reasoning, and draw their inferences. Our essay makes no claim whatsoever to any philosophical novelty, despite possible suggestive tendency to this, given the nature, of our inquiry. It simply intends to probe into recent and unstained research in the field of cognitive sciences, and in particular, in the spheres of philosophy of mind, philosophy of language, and philosophical anthropology concerning the human reason. It modestly asks whether these could contribute anything to the age-old search for certainty in our rational inquiries which began as a unity. Two authors have researched extensively on this problem. In as much as they are relatively unknown, we might do well here to say a few things about them.

About Johnson and Lakoff

Mark Johnson. Johnson is a professor of philosophy, the editor of philosophical perceptive on metaphor, and the author of Moral Imagination, and The Body in the Mind. He is also co-author of Metaphors We Live By, and Philosophy in the Flesh. His magnus opus -The Body in the Mind - is an awe-inspiring confluence of philosophy, psychology, and cognitive sciences.

Johnson inquired into the modes of the emergence and constraint of meaning, understanding, and rationality by the patterns of our embodied experience. He underscores the inseparability of the body-mind, cognition-emotion, and reason-imagination operations. He postulates a

theory of imagination that links our corporeal structures to cognitive structures. Hence, our notions of scale, force, balance – having their correlations in our experience – could be metaphorically extended to reveal 'abstract meaning and rational connections'. Johnson's most recent co-authored book, philosophy in the flesh (1999), is an enviable blend of philosophy of mind and cognitive science. It posits an unconscious thought, metaphorical abstract concepts, and an embodied mind. The book denies any sustainable direct conscious accessibility to the inner workings of language and thought. It submits that our system of abstract concepts is constituted by metaphors derived from the human experience. It postulates a thought-structure occasioned by the nature of the human body.

George Lakoff. Lakoff is a professor of Linguistics, the author of Moral Politics, and Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things. He is also co-author of Metaphors We Live By, and Philosophy in the Flesh. He is a founder of the discipline of cognitive linguistics, and one of the pillars of the neural theory of language.

Lakoff's major thesis is that human beings organize their knowledge by means of structures referred to as idealized cognitive models, ICMs. The incidental by-products of this organizational paradigm are the category structures and prototype effects. Category structure is the natural human mode of organizing and ordering the world around us in terms of kinds, whose purpose is to facilitate understanding. Prototype effects refer to the lack of proportion and harmony among category members. This lack of proportion is evidenced by the fact that a particular member of a category could serve as a better example than others. These prototype effects form part of our reference-point reasoning. An example is the correlation between them and the metonymic reasoning, where a category member is meant to stand for the entire category in a reasoning process. A development in cognitive semantics, Lakoff's idealized cognitive models are grounded in four theories, namely, (1) Fillmore's frame semantics, (2)Lakoff-Johnson theory of metaphor and metonymy, (3) Langackers's cognitive grammar, and (4) Fauconnier's theory of mental spaces. Let us look briefly into these theories.

(1) **Fillmore's frame semantics.** Fillmore argues that, following from the concept of a frame, our models are simply idealized. Lakoff cites the example of our idealized model of a week. We do not have a seven-day week existing objectively anywhere in nature. It is only our creation. Week models differ from culture to culture (Lakoff, 1987, 69). Some cultures have different calendar cycles. The Igbo week, for instance, has an eight-day structure, which is divided into two halves. Each half has four days (Eke, Orie, Afor, Nkwo) with each day coming up twice in the week. The first half comprises the small days, while the second half has the big days. Hence, you talk of the small Eke day and the big Eke day.

(2) **Lakoff-Johnson theory of metaphor and metonymy.** In the process of metonymy, for some purpose, a subcategory or a member of a category is used to understand the entire category. The outcome is a metonymic understanding where a whole is understood via some part. For example, 'the white house is considering sending some relief materials to Yugoslavia'. Here the white house stands for the United States' government. It could also refer to the entire citizens of the United States of America. We use this human construct in making judgments and drawing inferences, generating what is termed reference-point or metonymic reasoning. Lakoff and Johnson show that conceptual metaphor is a cognitive framework indicating an experience-based framing from one realm/level of idealized cognitive model to another. Metaphorical models become mappings from an image-schematic model in one domain to an analogous structure in another realm. Hence, we have an abstract conceptual

structure that is, but a metaphorical projection from a concrete domain to an abstract sphere. It is a form of reasoning, were conceptual metaphors map image schemata onto abstract realms. The upshot is an image-schematic reasoning.

(3) **Langackers's cognitive grammar.** For Langacker, contrary to generative grammar, syntax is not independent of the semantics. There is, rather, a form-meaning correlation based on the concept of motivation of meaning. Cognitive grammars, thus, are given meaning through their links with experience, especially embodied experience.

Fauconnier's theory of mental space. Fauconnier sees mental spaces as specific structures proliferating as we think and talk, allowing an articulate subdivision into parts of our discourse and knowledge structure (Fauconnier, 1997, 11). A certain demarcation in the physical world, a dream, a painting, a poem – with their ability to motivate thought, all could be mental spaces. Apart from the above four theories which play influential roles in Lakoff's positing of idealized cognitive models, there is yet another factor, namely, linguistic categories, which takes up a somewhat decisive place in Lakoff's thought. A few considerations on this linguistic phenomenon could further help dispose one towards Lakoff.

Linguistic categories. Linguistic categories, like their counterparts – conceptual categories – exhibit prototype effects. The very presence of such effects indicates that linguistic categories have identical characteristics with other conceptual categories. Similarly, language has been known to use general cognitive mechanisms, at least, categorization mechanisms. (In fact, the grammar of a language is said to be a cognitive and conceptual subsystem, possessing a cognitive status.)

One other principal claim of Lakoff, then, is that since language makes use of our cognitive apparatus, what is true of other categories in our conceptual system should also be true of linguistic categories. Linguistic categories could help us understand cognitive categories. Hence, we should use linguistic evidence in the study of the cognitive apparatus employed in categorization.

Conclusion

The linguistic evidence itself, reveals that linguistic expressions get their meaning in two ways. The two ways are**:** (a) by being associated with idealized cognitive models, and (b) by having the elements of the idealized cognitive models either to be directly understood in relation to preconceptual structures in experience, or indirectly understood in terms of directly comprehended concepts plus structural relations.

All these indicate that language is grounded in cognition. The structure of language utilizes the same devices used to structure cognitive models, namely, image schemata, which are comprehend in relation to bodily functioning. Language is meaningful because it is directly linked to meaningful thought and depends on the nature of thought. Thought, for its part, attains its meaning through a two-dimensional direct connection to preconceptual bodily functioning, which is constrained, though not totally, by the nature of the world within which we operate. But most importantly, language and thought are meaningful, consequent upon their being motivated by our functioning as part of reality (Lakoff, 1987, 291-292).

The work is divided into three chapters. Chapter one discusses the transformation from image schemata to rational inferences. It considers the process as a natural movement from image - schematic structures to concept formation and then to rational inferences. Chapter two investigates the phenomenon of reason as embodied, imaginative, and metaphorical. Chapter three evaluates the entire project and attempts a modest conclusion in the light of the evaluation.

REFERENCE

1. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, Metaphors We Live by (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 210. Citation from this text will henceforth be referred to as MWLB
2. Grenham Bird, "Kantianism" in The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Ted Honderich ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 439-441
3. Martin Davis, "The Philosophy of Mind" in Philosophy 1: A Guide through the Subject, A.C. Grayling (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 255-257
4. Gerd Haeffner, Philosophiscche Anthropologie (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1989), No. 135
5. Gerd Haeffner, The Human Situation. A philosophical Anthropology, Eric Watkins trans. Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1989, no. 135.)
6. Henry E. Allison, "Kant Immanuel" in The Oxford Companion to Philosophy, Ted Honderich ed. (New York: Oxford University, 1995), 435-438
7. Gilles Fauconnier, Mappings in Thought and Language. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).