

## On Metaphor, Story, and Idolatry

### From Lakoff/Johnson “Metaphors We Live By”

Metaphor is principally a **way of conceiving of one thing in terms of another**, and its primary function is understanding. Metonymy, on the other hand, has primarily a referential function, that is, it allows us to use one entity to stand for another.... Which part we pick out determines which aspect of the whole we are focusing on. (36)

There is directionality in metaphor, that is, that we understand one concept in terms of another. Specifically, **we tend to structure the less concrete and inherently vaguer concepts** (like those for the emotions) **in terms of more concrete concepts**, which are more clearly delineated in our experience. (112)

**Metaphor is primarily a matter of thought and action** and only derivatively a matter of language. (152)  
(Example: *amor conquista todo* – “*love conquers all*” *links violence with love*)

**Metaphors may create realities for us, especially social realities.** A metaphor may thus be a **guide for future action**. Such actions will, of course, fit the metaphor. This will, in turn, reinforce the power of the metaphor to make experience coherent. In this sense **metaphors can be self-fulfilling prophecies**. (156)

Though questions of truth do arise for new metaphors, **the more important questions are those of appropriate action**. In most cases, what is at issue is not the truth or falsity of a metaphor but the perceptions and inferences that follow from it and **the actions that are sanctioned by it**. In all aspects of life, not just in politics or in love, we define our reality in terms of metaphors and **then proceed to act on the basis of the metaphors**. We draw inferences, set goals, make commitments, and execute plans, all on the basis of how we in part structure our experience, consciously and unconsciously, by means of metaphor. (158)

There is a good reason why our conceptual systems have **inconsistent metaphors for a single concept**. The reason is that there is **no one metaphor that will do**. Each one gives a certain comprehension of one aspect of the concept and **hides others**. To operate only in terms of a consistent set of metaphors is to hide many aspects of reality. Successful functioning in our daily lives seems to require a **constant shifting of metaphors**. (221)

<sup>1</sup> Then God spoke all these words:

<sup>2</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery; <sup>3</sup> **you shall have no other gods before me.**

<sup>4</sup> **You shall not make for yourself an idol**, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth. <sup>5</sup> You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for **I the LORD your God am a jealous God**, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, <sup>6</sup> but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments.

**From Will Storr, The Science of Storytelling: Why Stories Make Us Human and How to Tell Them Better**

“The world we experience as ‘out there’ is actually a reconstruction of reality that is built inside our heads. It’s an act of creation by the storytelling brain. This is how it works. You walk into a room. Your brain predicts what the scene should look and sound and feel like, then it generates a hallucination based on these predictions. It’s this hallucination that you experience as the world around you. It’s this hallucination you exist at the centre of, every minute of every day. You’ll never experience actual reality because you have no direct access to it.”

“We experience our day-to-day lives in story mode. The brain creates a world for us to live in and populates it with allies and villains. It turns the chaos and bleakness of reality into a simple, hopeful tale, and at the centre it places its star – wonderful, precious me – who it sets on a series of goals that become the plots of our lives. Story is what brain does. It is a ‘story processor’, writes the psychologist Professor Jonathan Haidt, ‘not a logic processor’. Story emerges from human minds as naturally as breath emerges from between human lips.”

“If tribal thinking is original sin, then story is prayer. At its best, it reminds us that, beneath our many differences, we remain beasts of one species.”

“As the psychologist Professor Brian Little writes, ‘All individuals are essentially scientists erecting and testing their hypotheses about the world and revising them in the light of their experience.’”

“The narrator can't be trusted because it has no direct access to the truth of who we really are. It feels as if that voice is the thing that is in control of us; it feels as if that voice is us but it's not.

We are our neural models. Our narrator is just observing what's happening in the controlled hallucination in our skulls, including our own behavior and explaining it. It's tying all the events together into a coherent tale that tells us who we are; why we're doing what we're doing and feeling what we're feeling. It's helping us feel in control of our thrilling neural show and it's not lying, exactly.

It's confabulating. When we confabulate, we tell a story that is fictional while believing that it is a true story and we're confabulating all the time.”

“Unpredictable humans. This is the stuff of story.”

“Identifying and accepting our flaws, and then changing who we are, means breaking down the very structure of our reality before rebuilding it in a new and improved form. This is not easy. It’s painful and disturbing. We’ll often fight with all we have to resist this kind of profound change. This is why we call those who manage it ‘heroes’.”

“A good [person] draws a circle around [themselves] and cares for those within – [their partner, their] children. Other[s] draw a larger circle and bring within their brothers and sisters. But some... have a great destiny. They must draw around themselves a circle that includes many, many more. Your [parent] was one of those.... You must decide for yourself whether you are as well.”

From the movie 10,000 B.C.