

Verena Haser (2005) *Metaphor, Metonymy, and Experientialist Philosophy: Challenging Cognitive Semantics*. Berlin/New York: Mouton de Gruyter. Pp. 286.

Reviewed by Jeannine Fontaine

1. Introduction

Verena Haser (2005) brings formidable precision and an impressive background to her critique of Lakoff and Johnson's theory of conceptual metaphor. She raises tough questions about their claim that conceptual metaphors underlie sets of linguistic expressions. She also notes that Lakoff and Johnson's theory "eludes falsification, and for that matter verification" (p. 205). These claims are clearly the stuff of theoretical debate, and we should applaud any scholar who raises them cogently. However, Haser's polemical tone is at best distracting. Moreover, while it raises crucially important points, her discussion also strays at times into directions that must be seen as tangential to Lakoff and Johnson's central claims.

2. Issues of tone

2.1 Language

Acknowledging that the impact of Lakoff, Johnson, and their colleagues has been overwhelmingly positive, Haser notes that she is "treading on holy ground" in offering a "critical exposition of [their] approach" (p. 239). In fact, belying this late disclaimer, Haser has by this time trudged into the Lakoff and Johnson sanctuary with heavy combat boots and a very firm step. One needs to read with a critical eye, if only to separate her substantive claims from her often strident tone. Throughout, her phrasing tends to suggest that any support of Lakoff and Johnson is delusional or misguided. She opens by referring to the "experientialist" movement (p. 1) using scare quotes, branding cognitivists as "theorists of this stripe" (p. 1) and implying that more reasonable approaches can be found. To underscore her position, Haser later suggests that the popularity of this book, particularly among scholars who should know better, must be some kind of bizarre mistake. She purports to be "perplexed" that "hardly any philosopher of international reputation has taken up the gauntlet" (p. 7) to oppose Lakoff and Johnson. In a single passage, we are told that their

arguments “[fail] to carry conviction,” that their categorizations are “almost invariably disputable,” and that this poses “insurmountable difficulties” for them (p. 11). Haser’s lexical choice borders on the emotional when she resorts to terms like “irritating” (p. 54).

Ironically, while deftly hefting her own verbal arsenal, Haser attacks Lakoff and his associates for their rhetorical practices, especially their use of repetition (p. 62), which she qualifies as an “irritating” feature of Lakoff (1987: 249). She implies that the very use of this strategy is tantamount to obfuscation, to “[using] rhetoric to make a point that cannot be established by argument” (p. 147). The claim that rhetorical skill in itself constitutes a flaw to be condemned must be seen as at best controversial.

2.2 Use of sources

As with her language, Haser’s citations need to be read with caution. Her opening passage, for instance, contains a subtly misleading reference. After claiming that Lakoff and Johnson’s work can only be judged in light of their statements about experientialist philosophy (pp. 1–2), she appends a parenthetical note: *cf. also Murphy 1996: 174*. The implication is that Murphy agrees that philosophy is the crucial meeting ground for any proper discussion of Lakoff and Johnson’s ideas. In fact, surprisingly, Murphy’s article suggests just the opposite: namely, that philosophical criticism “may have drawn attention away from” the authors’ work on metaphorical representation, which he lauds as “an interesting and radical idea which deserves attention in its own right” (Murphy 1996: 174). Far from endorsing Haser’s claim about the centrality of philosophical notions, Murphy is defending his own choice *not* to address these, as he feels that they may distract from fruitful discussion on conceptual metaphor.

The occasional quote by Lakoff and Johnson’s own text is taken out of context in Haser’s treatment, as happens on p. 85, where the statement “The physical world is what it is,” is made to look quite ridiculous without its supporting text.

2.3 Terms and definitions

Haser focuses closely on certain terms; she berates Lakoff (1987) for using “misleading and ill-defined terminology” (p. 249). She accuses Lakoff and Johnson of “inflating terminological issues and exploiting ambiguities” (p.

57), and of a “refusal to offer necessary definitions and arguments,” as well as a “persistent strategy of evading the issue” (94). Among the offending terms are *objective* (p. 103) and *structure* (p. 166). The hapless term *meaningfulness* draws particular attention: Haser devotes about nine pages of her text largely to attacks on Lakoff and Johnson for their use of this word. Referring to a passage from Lakoff (1987) in regard to the relevant root word, she balefully claims that, “[r]ather than elucidating the question what meaning *is*, Lakoff states what meaning *is not*, and what it ‘involves’” (p. 137).

In an ironic twist, Haser herself avoids defining the terms *concept/category* and *meaning*. But she hastens to justify this lack as a conscious decision on her part: “Precise definitions of these terms are notoriously difficult to come up with, but fortunately dispensable in the present context” (p. 125). Presumably, she feels that this same tolerance cannot be extended to Lakoff and Johnson.

2.4 The place of philosophy

Devoting much attention to work in philosophy, Haser emphasizes sources that Lakoff and Johnson (1980) fail to note. Admittedly, references are slim in this thin volume intended for a general audience. Haser rightly points out that the authors ignore commonalities with Goodman, Putnam, Black and Beardsley (p. 75), while omitting opposing viewpoints. She criticizes Lakoff and Johnson for putting analytical philosophers in a monolithic ‘objectivist’ category in which some, particularly Putnam and Wittgenstein, do not belong (p. 89). Jackendoff and Aaron (1991) make similar points in a review of a related text. However, Johnson (1981) shows awareness of Goodman’s ideas; moreover, Johnson’s philosophical training cannot have left him unaware of Putnam and Wittgenstein. In fact, it is fair to assume, with Lukeš (in press), that Lakoff and Johnson may have deliberately simplified their picture of other views for the sake of clarity presenting their own distinctive ideas.

Haser’s in-depth discussion of philosophers, notably Davidson, is to be welcomed. In fact, her descriptions of scholarly positions are so compelling that one regrets the occasional listing which is missing from her own reference section (such as Blackburn 1984, cited on p. 82). Still, Haser’s own claims sometimes lack the precision she wishes to champion. For instance, she criticizes Lakoff and Johnson for associating a bevy of philosophers’ names with a correspondence theory of truth (p. 109); in fact,

the relevant passage, from Lakoff and Johnson (1999: 444), links these names with claims not about truth, but about formal mathematical notation, a very different matter. On another front, Haser objects to Lakoff and Johnson's treatment of Kant (e.g. p. 87); but again, she seems to be focusing more on Kant's realism (e.g. p. 87), while Lakoff and Johnson (1999) are concerned with morality, a quite different Kantian domain.

2.5 Metaphor wars

A somewhat distracting digression in Haser involves the focus of chapter 3, on Lakoff and Johnson's ARGUMENT IS WAR metaphor. In elaborating on this proposed conceptual metaphor, Lakoff and Johnson claim that, even in formal contexts such as legal or academic settings, argument tends to take on some of the aspect of war. Their single use of the word *unfair* occurs only once, in scare quotes, and is meant to portray a (presumably mistaken) position taken by professionals, not a judgment by Lakoff and Johnson themselves.

But Haser reads this as an admonition by the authors themselves against "shady practices" (p. 54), a term that Lakoff and Johnson actually do not use. Building on this, she attributes the term *unfair*, now shorn of its scare quotes (and later expanded to *unfair gimmicks* (p. 59)), to the writers themselves. This allows her later to toss the alleged charge back at the pair. More meaningfully, it gives her an opportunity for a disdainful reference to Lakoff's well-known later work on metaphor in political discourse (p. 55). Her weary claim that "[l]ittle has changed" for these cognitivists is upheld by three dates attributed to Johnson (1993, 1996 and 1998). The fact that her bibliography contains no titles by Johnson in any of these years suggests that they may have been added as an afterthought. The set may have been meant to ensnare Johnson along with his co-author in the accusation of moralizing. However, though both show a concern for moral and ethical issues elsewhere, an objective reader would find little in the language of their early work to suggest an intention to proselytize or prescribe.

Admittedly, Lakoff and Johnson's list of 'warlike' behaviors by scholars may have been somewhat unfortunate. Haser is right to note that their example of 'intimidation,' is implausible (p. 55), especially given their illustrative phrase, *[i]t is plausible to assume that* (Lakoff & Johnson 1980: 64). Her point is well taken that other areas, such as 'appeal to authority,' 'flattery,' 'bargaining,' and 'evading the issue,' are far from

exclusive to the the 'war' domain (p. 55). In short, the point (that academics and professionals also use tactics that can be linked to an underlying WAR domain) is not fully supported in Lakoff and Johnson's (1980) brief exposition. Still, I cannot help but think that many professionals will see more than a grain of insight in the claim itself. In fact, Haser's own style exuberantly exemplifies the two most valid 'warlike' examples on the Lakoff and Johnson list: 'insult' and 'belittling.'

3. Theoretical issues

3.1 Metaphor and metonymy

Haser's Chapter 2 provides a valuable comprehensive overview of theories that have attempted to distinguish metaphor from metonymy. She notes that varying definitions and approaches may single out quite different lists of expressions in either category. Still, here, too, a cautious reading is advised.

To note only one example, Haser covers in some detail the cognitive linguistic claim that metaphors involve two domains, while metonymy involves a single domain (pp. 26–8). She incisively notes problems involving domain definition. However, she then goes on to claim that the "prototypical" metaphor *Achilles is a lion* would fail to achieve metaphor status under the proposed distinction. Since "humans are higher animals" (p. 29), Haser maintains that *Achilles* and *the lion* represent members of a single domain, not separate domains. But Haser's claim here stands on a thin proviso cited from Barcelona, specifying that one domain may not be "included in the same superordinate domain" as the other (p. 29). In fact, Lakoff and Johnson's own work emphasizes the importance of "our ordinary conceptual system," (1980: 99), in which Haser's problem would not arise, as animals and humans are popularly thought of as distinct. Lakoff and Turner (1989: 66) explicitly note that science and popular conceptions are often at odds in this way:

Cultural models (...) are often at variance with our scientific knowledge. For example, experts on wolves maintain that wolves avoid humans whenever they can; nevertheless, our cultural model of wolves sees them as vicious beasts that attack humans without provocation, often cruelly.

Lakoff and Johnson (1999) also offer a discussion of color as perceived in three different modes, ranging from the scientific to the popular. Haser

herself, elsewhere, presents Putnam as a precursor to Lakoff and Johnson for his claim that terms like *gold* and *tiger* are understood by ordinary speakers who may know nothing of the scientific definitions (p. 91). There are clearly intriguing commonalities here on which to build, an opportunity that Haser does not take up.

Haser's treatment is far too detailed to begin to summarize here; a reader could find new content on each of a dozen readings of the relevant passages, and I can only recommend her Chapter 2 as an excellent overview on this sticky distinction. It is worth noting, however, that Haser's own approach to the metaphor/metonymy distinction may be the least convincing part of her chapter on the topic. Basically, she asserts that, in metaphor, "knowledge of the target concept does not imply knowledge of the source concept." So, for instance, in the utterance *my job is a jail*, sense of the word *jail* is somehow deemed to be not relevant. Inversely, commenting on the often cited example of metonymy, the *ham sandwich* standing in for the customer, Haser claims that "one has to know the meaning of *ham sandwich*" (p. 47) in order to understand the metonymy. This claim leaves considerable question as to what the 'meaning' of *ham sandwich* might be—surely, a naïve waiter who had no sense at all of the Japanese vegetable dish *furofuki* could still use this term to stand in for the person who ordered it.

3.2 Measuring theories

For anyone thinking about the requirements of a valid theory of metaphor, Haser's book contains a rich source of ideas. In chapter 7, the author provides a thought-provoking overview of the way in which metaphorical expressions may be classified in multiple ways (for instance, *win* could belong to the domain of 'games' as well as 'war', e.g. 179–180); she also discusses the level of generality for source domains (e.g. FIGHT or FORCE, as compared with WAR, pp. 177–179). She vigorously proclaims that these ideas are "not put forward as a positive contribution to the conceptual-metaphor approach. Quite to the contrary (...) They are hoped to foster our suspicion of the very idea of metaphorical concepts" (p. 176). However, a reader sympathetic to cognitive theories could easily ignore Haser's disclaimer and find much that is enlightening in her discussion. Chapter 8 also focuses on issues such as the status of primary metaphors, and later cognitivist work by Christopher Johnson and Grady.

For any reader able to read beyond the polemical tone, in fact, the book brings up a number of very valid issues throughout—for instance, the partiality of metaphorical transfer (e.g. why we have *half-baked ideas*, but not *sauted* or *poached ideas* (p. 61–62)). She offers the valid observation that people typically experience arguments before war, which should be kept in mind in looking at the metaphorical link between the two domains (149). And many would agree that the idea of ‘mapping’ is interestingly problematic (if not “incoherent” as Haser phrases it), in cases where interiors are mapped onto entities where they do not exist before the mapping (p. 150); the frequently cited phrase *in the garden* comes to mind here.

To cite one further point, Haser raises the valid question of how a ‘core’ concept like MORE can be understood independently, and how this independent notion relates to the experientially mediated idea of seeing levels rise when objects are piled up or liquids increased in a container (pp. 155–156). But if such problems are tricky, one does not have to view them as damning for Lakoff and Johnson’s overall theory. In fact, Jackendoff and Aaron (1991: 326) offer an insightful suggestion for revising cognitivist theory in a way that would treat links like MORE IS UP as distinct from what they call “I-metaphors” such as MACHINES ARE PEOPLE, which preserve the “sense of incongruity” that they see as essential to prototypical metaphors.

3.3 Missing entities: Thoughts on body, brain, and experimental evidence

Unfortunately, in heated debates where strong opinions prevail, it is sometimes easy to lose sight of the central issues; in fact, it can be hard to be sure these have been identified. In this case, as complete as Haser’s treatment is on issues of truth in philosophy, there are important topics that she either ignores or mentions only in passing. Nowhere in Haser’s book are the three central claims of Lakoff and Johnson (1999) put forth clearly: namely, that thought is embodied, unconscious, and to a large extent metaphorical.

In particular, the notion of embodiment is central to Lakoff and Johnson’s theory—and it is a concept that grew considerably, both in its formulation and in its claims to empirical support, between 1980 and 1999. In Lakoff and Johnson’s 1980 exposition, embodiment seems like a matter of sense experience (visual and motor programs, for instance). But by 1999,

it has acquired a considerable neurological component, which seems to have continued to evolve and to grow in importance since that time. This is, in fact, a theme that reaches far beyond Lakoff and Johnson's work, into central areas of recent cognitive science research; yet Haser virtually ignores it. On page 6, she refers back to an "explanation" she has reputedly given for the term 'embodiment.' But turning back in her text to see if I have missed something, I find only a brief paragraph on p. 4, followed by the dismissively phrased claim that cognitive linguists are "setting great store by embodiment and imagination..." (p. 5). Far from being a term so easily cast off, this concept requires careful in-depth examination in any focused assessment of Lakoff and Johnson's work.

On a closely related theme, Haser makes very little mention of the many empirical studies cited in Lakoff and Johnson (1999). Given this blind spot in her approach, Haser misses the important early signs of a critically important research trend. In 1990, when Mark Johnson wrote his *Body in the Mind*, his effort stood virtually alone in its field. But even a cursory search at *amazon.com* today will yield a half dozen related titles on the subject, including Jerome Feldman's (2007) book; in fact, Feldman is a founding contributor to the Neural Theory of Language group, formed at Lakoff's home institution of Berkeley. In dismissing a straw-man version of the neurological view ("Neural connections by themselves are not metaphors.," p. 209), Haser misses the chance to acknowledge what is rapidly turning out to be an accepted viewpoint among cognitive scientists.

Similarly, while Haser mentions the notion of 'image schema,' she seems to translate the phrase to 'mental images,' which leads her to note Wittgenstein's opposition to the use of mental images in constructing meaning (140). In fact, the discussion in Lakoff and Johnson (1999) suggests that the two notions are quite distinct; and further elaborations in Johnson and Roher (in press) have upheld this view. All of this has an impact on Haser's critique. For instance, Haser bases one particular criticism on her assumption that speakers would have the same 'mental image' for the words *cat* and *feline* (p. 131). In fact, a more nuanced view would reject this simplistic assumption, based on speakers' experiences with the two terms.

3.4 An evolving scholarly climate

Haser repeatedly portrays Lakoff and Johnson as scholars who have basically not grown in the quarter century since their theory first appeared.

She claims that “Lakoff /Johnson’s position has not been essentially altered in subsequent works (...)” [i.e. since 1980] (p. 3), emphasizing later that they fail to “explicitly withdraw any of their earlier claims” (p. 161) as time progresses. Haser presumably did not have access to the short postscript in the 2003 edition of *Metaphors We Live By*, in which the authors note both modifications and deletions in their earlier thinking. But even judging from the material at Haser’s disposal, her assumption that basically nothing has changed is striking; it is hard to see how a 624-page book with 17 pages of references could possibly fail to add something to the slim girth and mere fifteen listed sources in Lakoff and Johnson (1980). It is to Haser’s credit that she acknowledges the existence of new theories by others that have elaborated on the conceptual metaphor notion—for instance, work by Grady and Narayanan on the neural theory of metaphor, and, Fauconnier and Turner’s theory of conceptual blending (later expounded in Fauconnier and Turner 2003). But she dismisses these developments as not relevant to her purposes: “To examine all of these approaches in greater detail would far exceed the scope of this book” (p. 161). While this dismissal helps to consolidate the reader’s understanding of Haser’s goals, it also serves to limit her point of view to an area that may be peripheral to evaluating the main claims of cognitive metaphor theory.

This is an important point. Lakoff and Johnson have actually moved quite substantially, in ways that were already clearly visible in Lakoff and Johnson (1999), and in a direction that sets them apart from Haser’s philosophy-rich discussion. Increasingly, one can detect a consistent move on their part toward what they call “second generation cognitive studies” (Lakoff & Johnson 1999). Brain researchers like Antonio Damasio and V.S. Ramachandran were not mentioned by Lakoff and Johnson in 1980, and were only briefly incorporated into their 1999 work; however, they have now featured more prominently in later work on embodiment (cf. Johnson, 2006, and Johnson & Roherer, in press). Interestingly, the philosophers noted in earlier works are neglected in these later expositions, again suggesting a scholarly shift from philosophy to cognitive studies.

One can only imagine that, in future, more collaboration and overlap will occur, with works by Joseph Ledoux (2002) and others entering the picture with their views of the neurological underpinnings of cognition and identity.

4. Conclusion

I have watched generations of students discover Lakoff and Johnson (1980) as a (metaphorical) door opening their minds to a whole new view of how central the figurative is in language. I have enjoyed dozens of class discussions on the ubiquity of metaphor, an area in which I believe no critic can claim that Lakoff and Johnson have failed to make a significant impact. I feel one needs to acknowledge the contribution made with any work that has inspired such rich discussion and debate. As for the many issues raised in cognitive linguistics and metaphor theory more broadly, as well as in philosophy, I believe that the ferment in these areas, as evidenced by Haser's book, also stand as a healthy sign of evolving thought in the open debate initiated by Lakoff and Johnson.

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