

Philosophy in the Flesh: the Embodied Mind & its Challenge to Western Thought

By George Lakoff, Mark Johnson

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What are human beings like? How is knowledge possible? What is truth? Where do moral values come from? Questions like these have stood at the center of Western philosophy for centuries. In addressing them, philosophers have made certain fundamental assumptions—that we can know our own minds by introspection, that most of our thinking about the world is literal, and that reason is disembodied and universal—that are now called into question by well-established results of cognitive science. It has been shown empirically that:Most thought is unconscious. We have no direct conscious access to the mechanisms of thought and language. Our ideas go by too quickly and at too deep a level for us to observe them in any simple way.Abstract concepts are mostly metaphorical. Much of the subject matter of philosopy, such as the nature of time, morality, causation, the mind, and the self, relies heavily on basic metaphors derived from bodily experience. What is literal in our reasoning about such concepts is minimal and conceptually impoverished. All the richness comes from metaphor. For instance, we have two mutually incompatible metaphors for time, both of which represent it as movement through space: in one it is a flow past us and in the other a spatial dimension we move along.Mind is embodied. Thought requires a body—not in the trivial sense that you need a physical brain to think with, but in the profound sense that the very structure of our thoughts comes from the nature of the body. Nearly all of our unconscious metaphors are based on common bodily experiences.Most of the central themes of the Western philosophical tradition are called into question by these findings. The Cartesian person, with a mind wholly separate from the body, does not exist. The Kantian person, capable of moral action according to the dictates of a universal reason, does not exist. The phenomenological person, capable of knowing his or her mind entirely through introspection alone, does not exist. The utilitarian person, the Chomskian person, the poststructuralist person, the computational person, and the person defined by analytic philosopy all do not exist.Then what does?Lakoff and Johnson show that a philosopy responsible to the science of mind offers radically new and detailed understandings of what a person is. After first describing the philosophical stance that must follow from taking cognitive science seriously, they re-examine the basic concepts of the mind, time, causation, morality, and the self: then they rethink a host of philosophical traditions, from the classical Greeks through Kantian morality through modern analytic philosopy. They reveal the metaphorical structure underlying each mode

of thought and show how the metaphysics of each theory flows from its metaphors. Finally, they take on two major issues of twentieth-century philosophy: how we conceive rationality, and how we conceive language.*Philosophy in the Flesh* reveals a radically new understanding of what it means to be human and calls for a thorough rethinking of the Western philosophical tradition. This is philosophy as it has never been seen before.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson take on the daunting task of rebuilding Western philosophy in alignment with three fundamental lessons from cognitive science: The mind is inherently embodied, thought is mostly unconscious, and abstract concepts are largely metaphorical. Why so daunting? "Cognitive science--the empirical study of the mind--calls upon us to create a new, empirically responsible philosophy, a philosophy consistent with empirical discoveries about the nature of mind," they write. "A serious appreciation of cognitive science requires us to rethink philosophy from the beginning, in a way that would put it more in touch with the reality of how we think." In other words, no Platonic forms, no Cartesian mind-body duality, no Kantian pure logic. Even Noam Chomsky's generative linguistics is revealed under scrutiny to have substantial problems.

Parts of *Philosophy in the Flesh* retrace the ground covered in the authors' earlier *Metaphors We Live By*, which revealed how we deal with abstract concepts through metaphor. (The previous sentence, for example, relies on the metaphors "Knowledge is a place" and "Knowing is seeing" to make its point.) Here they reveal the metaphorical underpinnings of basic philosophical concepts like time, causality--even morality--demonstrating how these metaphors are rooted in our embodied experiences. They repropose philosophy as an attempt to perfect such conceptual metaphors so that we can understand how our thought processes shape our experience; they even make a tentative effort toward rescuing spirituality from the heavy blows dealt by the disproving of the disembodied mind or "soul" by reimagining "transcendence" as "imaginative empathetic projection." Their source list is helpfully arranged by subject matter, making it easier to follow up on their citations. If you enjoyed the mental workout from Steven Pinker's *How the Mind Works*, Lakoff and Johnson will, to pursue the "Learning is exercise" metaphor, take you to the next level of training. *--Ron Hogan*

From Library Journal
Written by distinguished Berkeley linguist Lakoff and his coauthor on Metaphors We Live By (1983), this book explores three propositions claimed as "major findings" of cognitive science: "The mind is inherently embodied. Thought is mostly unconscious. Abstract concepts are largely metaphorical." Cognitive science, with its basic materialist bent, applies computer-based concepts, a little neurophysiology, and linguistic theory to human mental life. It will, the authors say, drastically change philosophy. They seem to think that we are really run by our deep wiring and the cultural concepts that become embodied metaphors. While seeking clarity by drawing out the implications of their basic notions, they add new puzzles. What does it mean to say "reason is not disembodied"? Read this book to see how (some?) cognitive scientists think. But read it with Charles P. Siewert's recent The Significance of Consciousness (Princeton Univ., 1998) for the traditional notions of consciousness. Readers will find there's still room for their own judgments.?Leslie Armour, Univ. of Ottawa, Canada
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About the Author

George Lakoff is professor of linguistics at the University of California at Berkeley, and the coauthor, with Mark Johnson, of *Metaphors We Live By*. He was one of the founders of the generative semantics movements in linguistics in the 1960s, a founder of the field of cognitive linguistics in the 1970s, and one of the developers of the neural theory of language in the 1980s and '90s. His other books include *More Than*

Cool Reason (with Mark Turner), *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things,* and *Moral Politics.***Mark Johnson** is professor and head of the Philosophy Department at the University of Oregon and is on the executive committee of the Institute of Cognitive and Decision Sciences there. In addition to his books with George Lakoff, he is the editor of an anthology, *Philosophical Perspectives on Metaphor.*

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