
INTERFACING METAPHORS AND POSTURES FOR UNDERSTANDING DEEP COMMUNICATIVE DIVISIONS AT A TERTIARY INSTITUTION

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ABSTRACT

While South Africans have made some significant social and political progress since the first democratic elections in 1994, there are still divisions¹ in this recovering society, and the aftermath of apartheid has not subsided as quickly as we may have hoped. This conflicted socio-political history has created a confusing web in which the people of South Africa find themselves entangled as they attempt to reconcile themselves with this history, while striving for authenticity in their lived experience. In becoming more aware of how various groups of South Africans might have come to conceptualise their position in society, it may prove useful to consider a metaphorical model of morality proposed by American cognitive linguist George Lakoff² (1990; 2002; 2008), who attempted to resolve some major difficulties in American politics by making the unconscious conscious, as the problems begin in the minds of citizens. This article interfaces a version of this metaphorical model with Johann Visagie's postural model³ of humanity in an attempt at moving beyond personal and political narratives towards opening a constructive, licensed discourse. The article was originally written in response to the 2009 and 2010 colloquia⁴ at the University of the Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein. The colloquia served to address issues of racial conflict in society and on campus. Since then, the UFS has made huge inroads in social reconciliation. However, issues such as these remain pertinent in all levels of South African society, and this article, although presented here as a case study of the UFS, could be applied to similar situations elsewhere where problems still persist.

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INTRODUCTION

It is important to state from the outset that this is not an attempt to transcribe American politics onto a particular South African model as the uniqueness of the South African political situation cannot be disregarded. It is Lakoff's methodology – employed in analysing politics and interpreting how *people* talk and how *people* think about morality – that forms this article's point of departure, rather than his own liberal agenda which he makes quite clear in his political publications. It is left entirely up to the reader to determine whether or not to pursue such ambitions and is not of chief concern here. However, it could be of possible interest that Lakoff (and those like him) would have witnessed, and perhaps taken on, the massive paradigm shift in the intellectual and social climate of the Sixties (Lakoff 2002: 318), as it is termed in American popular culture, which swung quite dramatically away from authoritarianism and establishmentarianism towards an ethic of nurturance so that people may feel less alienated in society. In would be in this context that the new models of ethical conduct in society would have split off from the mainstream and began to flourish into what Americans have today.

The objective, in this instance, is to form crossing points between complimentary perspectives of at least two different philosophical sub-theories in order for us to reach a more inclusive solution to the problem of deep communicative divisions. The article was originally written in response to the 2009 and 2010 colloquia at the University of the Free State (UFS) in Bloemfontein, South Africa. The colloquia served to address issues of racial conflict in society and on campus. Since then, the UFS has made huge inroads in social reconciliation. However, issues such as these remain pertinent in all levels of South African society, and this article, although presented here as a case study of the UFS, could be applied to similar situations elsewhere where problems still persist.

Lakoff applies what he has garnered from his work as a cognitive scientist to American politics which he believes is about the unconscious worldviews and moral systems of liberals and conservatives and which, he suggests, are deeply embedded in different models of the family. He frames the deeper question as follows: "Do models of the family and family-based moral systems allow one to explain why liberals and conservatives take the stands they do on particular issues?" (2002: 12). Lakoff comes up with two distinct family-based models which will be familiar to readers of his work: that of the Strict Father for conservatives, and that of the Nurturant Parent for liberals. He goes on to do an extensive analysis of what these models mean in American politics, citing many events and examples of language used in various contexts. He also explains how these models are not always exclusive but may be combined in different ways for various groups.

Would it be useful if, hypothetically, we pose the question in a specifically South African (and possibly a UFS) framework? Could we ask something like: "Do

models of the family and family-based moral systems allow one to explain why different groups in this country take the stand they do on particular issues?” During the apartheid era, the Nurturant Parent model might have been valid for some but, this author would suggest, only for a very small sector of the population⁵. It seems more plausible that, given our largely conservative patriarchal family systems, most South Africans would have been able to identify with, and operate within, a Strict Father model. It could even be reasoned that many more South Africans would identify with what one could call an Abusive Father model. This term may appear a little extreme to some, but it is useful for the sake of the thought experiment of the university. It is important to note that the issue is not that students literally see university authorities as abusers, but we need to determine if they are thinking in this way because of unconsciously formed models. If so, what should all members of the university do about that? Interfacing Lakoff’s and Visagie’s models might prove useful in an endeavour to construct critique and pave the way for fruitful research possibilities that inform what would be acceptable or not in a total representation of working reality.

CONCEPTUAL METAPHORS

In a prior publication, *Metaphors we live by* (1999; 2003), Lakoff and Mark Johnson discuss the pervasiveness of metaphor in our everyday conceptual systems, rather than seeing it as a tool reserved for literary elegance or panache (cf. Lakoff & Turner 1989). Metaphors necessarily structure the way we perceive, think and act – indeed they govern our very functioning in the world, especially when we are attempting to understand complex occurrences. Following their theory, what we do is to identify a partial relationship of identification between two separate concepts, i.e. A is B. The two concepts are different from each other but we use certain selected parts of each in our structuring of the metaphor which result in hiding or highlighting certain features. We are not born with (innate) metaphors in our brain, but they form quickly and they develop over time and are “grounded in our embodied structures of meaning” (Johnson 1994: 1).

Consider one of Lakoff and Johnson’s many examples, *more is up*: From the time a baby sees the level of milk rising in the bottle, the circuitry of this metaphor is connected in the brain. Due to repeated recurrence over time these circuits become more permanent, and hundreds and hundreds of such metaphors are similarly formed in our brains. Most of our conceptual structuring is not literal. We do not actually think that “more” literally means “up”, but we mentally map the concept of “more” onto the concept of “verticality” in order that we may better understand and express the more abstract concept. Through the constant and repeated mapping of such concepts, they assume an unconscious status in our minds and we take them for granted in political and moral discourse without even being

aware of it most of the time. Lakoff and Johnson frequently assemble commonly used examples as well as less typical examples employed by those with more flair, and they form general metaphors with which we can all identify quite easily.

Relevance for a South African context

One general metaphor Lakoff mentions which concerns us here is *the state is a family*. “Family” is the source domain with which we are all intimately familiar, and “the state” is the target domain which is abstract and which we experience more difficulty in grasping and communicating. We could identify our own examples of the *nation as family* metaphor, for example when we refer to “coming home” we could mean either our family home or our home country. Many South Africans talk about their “fatherland” or the “land of their ancestors” or the “land of their forefathers” and refer to fellow citizens as “brothers” and “sisters”. There are many everyday expressions which convey the idea that the state and its members are conceptualised in terms of family ties – the government being the parent and the people being the children. Another example is a 1996 documentary titled *Mandela: Son of Africa, father of a nation*. During a recent ceremony at the UFS in which Emeritus Archbishop Desmond Tutu received an honorary doctorate, the Vice-chancellor and Rector, Prof. Jonathan Jansen, called Tutu a “great son of South Africa”. In philosophical discourse, this metaphor dates back to the dialogues of Plato, and the character of Socrates uses it explicitly in his proposal of the social contract relationship between a government and its citizens in the *Crito* (Plato 1993: 87. trans.).

The family metaphor in the South African historical context

The crimes of apartheid are by now quite well-documented and for the present purpose of recognising particular functions in conceptual systems they will not be addressed in any great detail. In terms of generalised racial categories, the architects and executors of the apartheid system were largely white male⁶ authorities, while those denigrated were people of colour. In terms of the present South African society this resulted in many members still seeing white people as possessing the power and capability, while people of colour are not, and this categorisation affects thought and behaviour. From various media, conferences and conversations it is evident that many South Africans still identify themselves, and others, in these groups, be it consciously or unconsciously, correctly or incorrectly. Understandably this can cause massive frustration on many levels for both the identifier and the identified. The problem of racial categorisation is that it positively allows for a particular group to celebrate its unique features, yet at the same time it negatively allows for divisions within the larger group which could result in privileging or maligning of individuals within an institution.

The family metaphor in the context of the lifeworld⁷ of the UFS

Given the above-mentioned rationale it is not too much of a leap to work from the assumption that that this type of metaphorical (partial) identification might also happen with the teacher-student relationship as it occurs within the context of the university, which is also structured like a mini-society.

Since the fourteenth century, the mode of thinking in the West has been significantly dominated by the effects of nominalism, which denies the real existence of universals. We are by now well aware of the resulting overemphasis on the individual and repudiation of abstract entities thereby supporting the opposite trends of subjectivism and particularism in philosophy. Groups have been perceived as fictitious constructs, but more recently, there has been some recognition that organisations are indeed conceptualised as having some kind of collective subjectivity and are identified and handled as such, which is why we can hold them responsible for their actions. An example would be a motor vehicle manufacturing company that could be held legally liable should it be proven that a production error has caused injury to a person. Lakoff's analysis supports this view in that he acknowledges that people do think of states and institutions as subjective entities (which can be "guilty", and "suffer" or "die"), therefore they think of them metaphorically, but may be unconsciously experienced and characterised as actual.

The UFS is an institution that comes out of a conservative patriarchal tradition. Up until about a decade ago, the lecturing staff would very much have represented the members of our government in the apartheid era, i.e. mostly white Afrikaans Christian males⁸. This is in direct opposition to the school system, where there were (and still are) many females in teaching roles. Also, most South African learners were (and are) not habitually taught by people outside of their own race at school level. One can therefore well imagine how difficult and awkward it might be for a presently more diverse university student body to encounter educators from a different background for the first time in their individual learning process. The *university is a family* metaphor will probably come into play here as mentors or lecturers are often considered to be a guide to their students, as well as being seen by some as a kind of parental authority in the learning processes of individuals. This view would also resonate with the observations of Foucault who noted that the pastoral power traditionally administered by the church has been taken over, in modern Western culture, by the state and its institutions including the family and the university as well as other power networks (in Rabinow 1984: 64, 263). Now, if the teacher in question happens to be a white Afrikaans male and the student in question, from a different race and/or gender, has made an unconscious mental identification between *teacher* and *father* – what might that entail?

The Strict Father

Firstly, let us take the metaphorical identification of the Strict Father family model of morality. As suggested by the Lakoff model, those roles would be clearly defined in a strict relational system, with little room for manoeuvring for either party. The role of teacher is one of (knowing) authority, there to teach the (unknowing) student what the student needs to know for the course, and the student is expected to attend classes as required and submit to the learning process in a respectful and obedient fashion. The communication process almost exclusively flows in one direction – the teacher delivers the learning material and the student listens and takes notes, and completes various assignments as designated by the teacher. Furthermore, senior members in the system make the rules and determine the policy of the institution to which all subordinate members must adhere. Those who do not adhere to the rules are punished. Taking care of students (and other such mentoring functions as discussed below) is relegated to a minor task in comparison to the central authoritative function of the teacher.

One should note that the above model is an idealisation and may vary somewhat in actuality, e.g. that the authoritative role may be filled by a woman, but the model itself will be familiar to people who grew up in South Africa⁹, even if it does not fit their personal experience exactly; and, obviously, there may be exceptions in institutions that in no way adhere to the model at all. However, careful attention must be paid so that one or two exceptional examples are not used to determine the central case. What the model wants to get at, is “...a technical recognition of the nature of the concept and the way it functions in our conceptual systems” (Lakoff 2002: 71).

What we can then roughly formulate from the model for our purposes is that the student is encouraged to obey the rules, and s/he will not do well in the system, or his/her profession in the future, if s/he does not obey the rules. Discipline is administered in order to develop the student’s sense of self-discipline for the future because this is perceived as a necessary skill to survive in the world which is seen as a difficult and competitive environment. The process of recognising a legitimate authority is carried out beyond the mini-society of the university into the world which is then perceived as hierarchical with some people filling the role of authority and others filling the roles of subordinates. What’s more, the authority figure sees himself as carrying out his duty when exercising his authority and does not typically accept what he may perceive as insubordination.

The Abusive Father

The hypothetical Abusive Father family model could be loosely formulated as follows: he would exercise power in all levels of society and have expressed it for its own sake. At the most negative end of the scale, this expression has come

with the intent of self-definition and self-promotion and has not been exercised in genuine relationship with other members of the society, not unlike the antisocial personality (PDM 2006: 36). Their relationship with others is largely characterised by fear, manipulation, aggression, violence, and exploitation to serve their own ends. This Abusive Father persona may come across as charismatic and engaging, but that façade often hides a far more sinister and insincere character with little honest connection to others. They have minimal feeling for the needs of others and lose interest in their targets when their purpose is served. Their lack of remorse can be astounding.

The difference between this model and the Strict Father model is that it is driven, not by straightforward authority, but by fear-inducing domination. The relationship is not characterised by simple establishment hierarchy, but by a more cruel or ominous power over the other. Once people have suffered at the hands of an abusive authority, the ritualised decimation of personal dignity leaves scant hope of a balanced, well-formed relationship based on mutual trust and respect. The guilty authorities during the apartheid era were in such a relationship with many members of their society. Many members who suffered abuse during this time have found the path to recovery to be a rocky one with feelings of anger enclosing them and forgiveness near impossible. On the other hand, many members who were favoured, or advantaged, have had to handle feelings of guilt, resentment and remorse, and many have claimed not to know what was happening (with varying levels of sincerity). The outcome is a lifeworld characterised by confusion – confusion about where members are to position themselves and about what is expected of them, as well as what they can expect from others, and how to conduct themselves appropriately under the new order. Indeed, the official Truth and Reconciliation website states, “No section of society escaped from these abuses.”

POSSIBLE PROTOTYPES FOR THE UFS

Prototypes provide a good explanation of what we identify as central members of radial categories; in other words we have a reductive tendency in our thought processes to use single prototypes to identify a whole group that may actually consist of numerous differentiated members, which are consequently overlooked. All prototypes are cognitive constructions used to perform a certain kind of reasoning; they are not objective features of the world, states Lakoff (2002: 9). He offers a brief explanation of different prototypes which is useful and insightful, and should sound familiar. Examples from the university lifeworld will be used to explain further.

The *central subcategory* of a radial category, according to Lakoff (*ibid.*), “provides the basis for extending the category in new ways and for defining variations”.

Examples may include, for our purposes, central types of teachers, central types of students, and central types of relationships within the lifeworld of the university.

Lakoff defines a *typical case prototype* as one which “is used to draw inferences about category members as a whole, unless it is made clear that we are operating with a non-typical case” (*ibid.*). For example, if I had to picture a typical professor at the UFS, what comes to mind is an adult, white male, who is native born, probably speaks native Afrikaans, and so on, unless it is specified otherwise.

An *ideal case prototype* would be what students consider to be an ideal lecturer. For example, a black Sesotho speaking male student who grew up in the Mangaung area might prefer, as an ideal, to have a black male lecturer with whom he can most easily identify or communicate.

The *anti-ideal prototype* defines the negative standard of the subcategory, i.e. the worst possible ideal of a lecturer. For example, this type of professor could be identified with the Abusive Father metaphor depicted above which Lakoff would term a “demon” subcategory.

Social stereotypes are pervasive in all cultures and make for the snap-judgment we all resort to without much deliberation. For example, a snap judgment from a female student might be that all older, white, male professors are arrogant and will patronise her intelligence.

A *salient exemplar* is when one takes a single isolated example and uses it to make probability judgments or form conclusions about what is typical of category members. For instance, if a single student gets drunk and disorderly on campus and that one case is used to portray all students as irresponsible drunks, with the decision taken by management that they all need to be disciplined like children.

Lastly, an *essential prototype* is a hypothesised collection of properties that serves to determine what makes a thing the kind of thing it is, or what makes a person the kind of person s/he is. For example, a good student might be determined as one who does her work well, hands it in on time, gets good marks, and contributes positively to campus life. She does these things because she is a good student.

The most pressing problem here is that a prototype is the central element of a category that is used to identify the whole category, and we should be acutely aware of the difference in possible prototypes enclosed in categories as we can easily make inaccurate assumptions which could have disastrous consequences for all members. Rational reflection will reveal that no single selected prototype represents a balanced, precise account of all elements of the set. We should aim to allow for the generation of as many variations in a set as needed to secure an accurate representation, as well as constraint in what may not be included in the category, thereby bringing to our conscious understanding that, e.g. the

male professor is not necessarily the *best* professor or the *worst* professor, but he is a prototype, possibly a central case, and therefore the variants are defined with reference to him, because “he” may be acting as the “cognitive reference point” (Lakoff 2002: 45). Lakoff argues that there is nothing abnormal about these prototypes forming in our minds, but we do need to be aware of how they are used. It is critical that we do not confuse, say, a typical case (female kindergarten teacher) with an ideal case (excellent teacher).

A central case prototype of the mentor-student relationship

Johann Visagie (2006: 14) proposes a Postural Theory¹⁰ which deals with the most basic characteristics of the human condition, formulated around the central question: “What should I do?” It seems most appropriate here as it was observed to be one of the predominant and pressing questions that emerged from all stakeholders, on both a personal and group level, in the colloquia mentioned earlier.

The postural model is an attempt to establish what can be regarded as overarching norms or conditions for being human and/or living meaningfully (and ethically). In this version of the model, the “dark” postures are the experience of *suffering*, *meaninglessness*, and *guilt*. We may allow ourselves to experience these dark postures, but they may not be outputs, since formulating an ethical attitude implies that it must be a good one. The “light” postures that we may assume for ourselves would be formulated from the postural complex of alternating *creative work* with *respite* at home or elsewhere. Besides being busy with ordinary life, there is also withdrawal into *contemplation*; *letting go*; *humility*; *taking care*; *peace*; *joy*; *hope*; *transcendence*. Visagie goes on to discuss the opposite poles of *success* and *failure*, as well as the “grey” side of postures which includes the potentially irritating, yet harmless, daily duties which must be fulfilled, but hamper us from realising all sorts of goals and ideals.

It is obvious that the “dark” postures could not be reasonably accommodated within the learning process as it is conducted in the lifeworld of the university. No-one would want to be part of a learning process that allowed suffering, meaninglessness and guilt to dominate that process. Even though, when a student fails an exam, s/he may experience suffering, making students suffer should not be the intent of the lecturer. When struggling students are unable to understand the learning material, they may experience meaninglessness but should be able to find help with tutoring or teaching staff. When students plagiarise documents, various members of the institution may experience guilt but this could be easily avoided. It would be up to all members within the process to work creatively in order to avoid such postures as far as possible.

The “grey” postures of getting the nitty-gritty work done and fulfilling administrative duties would be incorporated into the process, but not as an end in itself. The central prototypical concern of the university lifeworld should be that of knowledge – the imparting, acquiring, facilitating, developing and expansion of knowledge. Other radial concerns may be technical know-how, practical knowledge, life and work skills development, personal development, project-based research, training, organisation, financial management, community service (Visagie 2005: 223), and so forth. These may be accommodated as long as it supports the kernel function of knowledge without assuming power over it.

One could suggest, perhaps, that in forming the central case prototype of a mentor-student relationship, pointing towards a goal of what we may term “light postural output” would be the ideal for all active members within the institution. Pragmatically speaking, the whole relationship would be designed against the background of creatively working towards successful actualisation of all positive aspects of knowledge: the postural positions of *contemplation* and *reflection* on knowledge and its role in our lives; *letting go* of potentially harmful agendas even when one feels deep personal attachment to them; personal *humility* in the higher pursuit of knowledge for its own sake; *taking care* of all members in the various relationships of the institution; forming an overarching, and a general atmosphere of *peace* and *joy* instead of conflict and controversy with a clear direction to *transcending* problems that may be encountered in any area of the learning process. These would be the central considerations, with others forming the radial categories orbiting and sustaining those objectives, thereby making a sharp and purposeful turn away from any potentially “abusive” or “authoritative” models toward a “nurturant” one in order to serve the best interests of all members optimally.

Rethinking metaphors within the context of the mentor-student relationship

Interfacing metaphors and postural sub-theories will allow for the construction of useful models which can either license valid discourse for the university, or expose constraints on what might be prohibited in such discourse. Tom Gasner (1997) identifies useful metaphors for mentoring from various studies and surveys in his paper *Metaphors for mentoring: An exploratory study*. These are based on interpersonal relationships; teaching; problem prevention – emergency service; providing direction; growth and creation; and the positive and negative experiences of the mentor.

The *interpersonal relationship* metaphor is seen in the *taking care* posture which is characterised by various ties resembling that of a family, where the student reasonably expects to be cared for as a family member (e.g. parent or older sibling)

would care for him, ensuring his personal well-being and development while at the institution, but not beyond the institution, while the student would take care in the form of due diligence in his tasks.

The *teaching* metaphor would include that the mentor makes sure s/he has the necessary material and access to resources in order that s/he may acquire the knowledge needed to navigate successfully his or her way through the learning process, thereby assuming the *humility* posture demanded by any profession where serving the needs of others is tantamount to their success. At the same time, the student would be required to assume humility in deferring to the mentor with adequate respect for his/her expertise.

The *problem-prevention* and *providing direction* metaphors could be loosely interpreted as assuming the “light” postures of *peace, joy and hope*. In this way the student does not feel overwhelmed in the context of the lifeworld of the university and all the stress that higher education entails. At the same time, the student learns and implements the necessary problem-solving skills needed to transcend problems while s/he assumes these postures in a healthy or positive attitude to his/her work, the institution, his/her peers, and so on.

The facilitating metaphor of *growth and creation* would fall to the postures of *success* and *creative work* which, if pursued by both parties, could result in significant reduction of the “dark” and “grey” postures by engaging in interesting and stimulating projects.

By making such goals and attitudes explicit in open communication, we could relieve ourselves of some of the confusion that these relationships might cause because postures are assumed to be normative in their individual manifestations of universally being human. Determining our roles in lifeworlds seems to be a very normal need among human beings, and should not be seen as restrictive, but rather as a resource to eliminate feelings of insecurity and inadequacy, especially where these feelings hamper the person’s success and creativity in the wider context of authenticity in lived experience.

The two postures not overtly linked with the metaphors identified by Gasner are that of *letting go* and that of *withdrawal into contemplation*. These are important for both mentor and student, and should be addressed. In *letting go*, the mentor would have to make a concerted effort to abandon any intrusive commitments to e.g., personal beliefs, or his/her own cultural convictions that may have detrimental effects on the imparting of knowledge to students. The authoritative role that the mentor assumes must be linked to all the other “light” postures and cannot be construed as what Visagie (1990: 46) would term a “negative posturing of power” over the student, especially not with the intent of promoting the mentor’s

own objectives, as the relationship must be characterised by the joint pursuit of knowledge as a goal in itself.

The student, on the other hand, may also not manipulate the learning process to his/her own ends and disrupt the process negatively for his/her own ideological ends. Examples of useful metaphors representing the mentor-student relationship could be those of *responsibility* and *guidance* or *facilitating*. The *contemplative* posture would have an integral role to play in forming metaphors of the reflective or considered type. Such contemplation would serve to bring about coherent, balanced structures in response to problems contained in the learning process, e.g. variations in the medium of instruction, the need for added learning support, access to materials, economic concerns, representational diversity of members, and so on. Honest¹¹ contemplation of the roles of self and others should be encouraged in all facets of the mentor-student roles.

We may gain much insight into problems and their solutions if we not only contemplate the metaphors that play a role in our everyday understanding of the university lifeworld, but also if we think of new and innovative ways in which to understand this lifeworld. Gasner (1997: 5) makes a useful suggestion of dialogue "... between mentors and their protégés by examining the metaphors for mentoring that each brings to the experience". Communication, along with research and analysis, will prove extremely valuable in opening and expanding the relationships within the university to free the essential goal of knowledge from possible inessential constraints.

These inessential constraints may assume centre stage thus hindering the knowledge essence of the university. They may be illustrated by various metaphors of the university being identified with e.g. a *religious* or *political* institution which might have specific ideological agendas that do not have knowledge at its core. This means all knowledge imparted by such an institution will be framed by a specific ideology which will determine what information is allowed to filter through to students and indeed how it will be interpreted because any knowledge acquired will have to be subservient to the dominant ideology controlling the institution. An example would be a *corporate* institution which sees students as clients and mentors as suppliers, so the whole context is shaped by economic factors such as profit and performance, with quality of knowledge and quality of students dangerously being relegated to an outer category. Another example is a *flux and transformation*¹² system which elevates its goal of personal development above that of knowledge.

Identifying these metaphors as well as when they come into play must lead to the question, "Is this category necessary in the collaborative procedure of knowledge production?" If it is not integral to the process, it can only exist in

the category as a non-essential, non-definitive periphery which is simply “there” and cannot be allowed to have any negative effect.

CONCLUSION

Becoming consciously aware of various metaphors, and evaluating how they are employed in lifeworlds, do not allow these metaphors to be absolute determiners. Metaphors themselves are normal or natural (in our thought processes), but they are not normative in that they are fluid and can be re-evaluated. In other words, the mechanism for metaphor formation is probably innate and can be argued to begin in the mind, but the metaphors themselves are experiential and embodied.

From Lakoff (2002: 323) we understand that universities and governments are not literally families linked by genetic markers and bonds of love and affection, but our understanding of models of morality as informed by such metaphors will filter into how we carry out our roles and the comprehend the roles of others in various lifeworlds. Grasping the meaning of different prototypes will draw our attention to the fact that, for instance, the ideal case of an excellent teacher is only part, albeit a defining part, of a category which will include many other cases like male and female teachers; older and younger teachers; teachers from different races, cultures, backgrounds, and countries; teachers with different belief systems, ethical systems, religions, qualifications, and areas of expertise; teachers with different biographies, languages, and ways of expressing themselves. The list goes on, but it would be a grave error to assume that any one of these factors determines a good teacher or a bad teacher. The central determining factor should be that the excellent teacher effectively communicates the requisite knowledge to the student in a way that ensures the success of the student and lecturer as well as the learning process itself.

The postural model shows that the complex generated in order to answer questions is exactly that – a *complex*. What postural complexes reveal is that we are able to formulate intricate structures in order to clarify and differentiate which applications of power are acceptable in certain instances, and which are not. There is no need for any continuing confusion, because when we make the unconscious conscious, we exercise power over assumption, thereby allowing ourselves to relate in a far more meaningful, deliberate and productive manner. In an ideal university, this should be the primary goal of all stakeholders in order to diminish imbalance, unreasonable expectations and distorted representations. Interfacing as many valid models as possible, without pitting them against one another, would feasibly point them in the right direction so as to generate discourse which is clear about what can be accommodated as well as to eliminate elements that could undermine the legitimacy of the learning process. Perhaps most importantly, we could take the discussion in a new direction – beyond that of recounting history –

towards forming new ethical models which can effectively answer that persistent question, “what must I/we do?”, with growing insight and empathy.

Endnotes

- ¹ The present discourse targets racial divisions, but it is conceivable that the models could be applied to divisions of a different nature such as gender, sexuality, language, culture, and so on, where there has been a history of injurious application of power by one group over another.
- ² Some of the referenced material is written in conjunction with Mark Johnson, and it is noted that there are many other cognitive scientists conducting important work in similar areas.
- ³ Visagie has developed a way of practicing philosophy known as Discourse Archaeology (DA) which is “...not so much to argue for some or other ‘grand narrative’ that is of foundational importance for (large segments of) the world around us, but rather to investigate the structures and systems, patterns and relationships, from which discourse – also the discourse of grand narratives – originates” (Visagie 2001: 87). In DA, there are 20 departments altogether (Postural Theory and Metaphor Theory, amongst others), which ideally interact simultaneously in order to give the fullest representation of reality possible, and it is in this context that this evaluation takes place. Not all models have been explicitly stated, for the sake of brevity. Essentially, I have abstracted two “parts” of DA for this analysis.
- ⁴ DVDs of these events are available at the International Institute for Studies in Race, Reconciliation and Social Justice at the University of the Free State, Bloemfontein, South Africa.
- ⁵ It would be widely accepted in South African society, during apartheid (and in many homes today), that most family structures were distinctly patriarchal, therefore a “nurturant parent” would have been designated specifically to the role of the mother (or female caregiver) in the family, so more accurately, a Nurturant Mother model would be recognisable. Furthermore, the father customarily would not have been involved in establishing the emotional climate of the home; his role was seen as a provider and authority, and if need be, a protector. Many fathers in such a conservative environment were largely emotionally distant, or even physically absent, as in the case of migrant labour which was a common occurrence during apartheid.
- ⁶ Again, this is not to say that all and only white South Africans were perpetrators of crimes during this period and that all and only black people were victims of these crimes. In actuality, we know the issues are far more complex than that.
- ⁷ In this article, the term *institution* will be interchanged with the term *lifeworld* which is borrowed from the German philosopher Jurgen Habermas.
- ⁸ See research figures in Pretorius *et al.* (2002: 1-38).
- ⁹ Not only South Africans, but many other conservative institutions or societies’ members will be familiar with such a model.

- ¹⁰ This would be a version of an idealised ethical model to be adopted within the archaeological machinery of the whole complex known as Discourse Archaeology as it is practiced at the Department of Philosophy at the UFS, of which Postural Theory is one department among 20 others.
- ¹¹ Honesty and transparency is implied in the postures as one cannot allow for situations where e.g. a student blames his personal shortcomings on the incompetence of a lecturer when he knows this not to be the case.
- ¹² This is mentioned by Morgan (1986) in Gasner (1997: 6). My italics.

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