Embodied Morality:
On Categorization and Mental Frames

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Abstract
Embodied Morality: On Categorization and Mental Frames follows the theory of the embodied mind George Lakoff and Mark Johnson have worked on since the late 1980s. According to this theory, all our abstract thinking is necessarily metaphoric: we have to frame our mental concepts in terms of metaphors from the physical realm we experience, and we are unable to understand abstractions outside our bodily experiences.
This article deals with several key points. First, I will describe G. Lakoff & M. Johnson's theory of abstract conceptualization because it has a crucial influence on their theories of mind and morality. As Lakoff&Johnson claim, our concepts have a radial structure, with central and non-central cases. The latter are often difficult for our reasoning to deal with due to their non-prototypical nature. I will analyze Lakoff&Johnson's critics' opinion on this matter, mainly to see that their objections are not always sound. Also, I will touch upon the notion of *idealized cognitive models*, which Lakoff&Johnson claim to be the building blocks of our abstract conceptualization. I will show how the inconsistencies in conceptualization in different languages and cultures lead Lakoff&Johnson to the denial of objectivism and absolutism, and, consequently, to the rejection of universal morality. Morality and its understanding, according to Lakoff&Johnson, cannot be found outside human experience and, hence, is directly dependant on the way people conceptualize the world around them. Last but not least, I will provide examples Lakoff&Johnson cite to prove how framing may affect people's perceptions of what is moral and what is immoral.

Introduction

George Lakoff and Mark Johnson are famous for their bold claims that all our abstract thinking is embodied in that we are unable to comprehend any abstract concepts outside the physical experiences we use to make sense of them. In addition to their comprehensive linguistic analysis, they use new technology like MRI to provide neurological proof in order to support their views on mind, thinking and, furthermore, morality.

The beginnings of Lakoff and Johnson's theory of mind can be traced back as far as 1980, with *Metaphors We Live By* as the first corner-stone of their theories. By now G. Lakoff and M. Johnson (hereafter "Lakoff&Johnson") have developed an ambitious and complex theory of the mind's embodiment. This theory, surprisingly, has metaphorical thinking as its foundation. Their book *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) opens with the three bold claims:

- the mind is inherently embodied;

- thought is mostly unconscious;

- abstract concepts are largely metaphorical[1].

Accepting these assumptions would necessarily lead to rejecting what has traditionally been thought about the mind and its connection – or rather, disconnection, transcendence – in relation to the body. Lakoff&Johnson seem to equally deny both mentalists' and physicalists' approaches to the mind/body problem, i.e. they deny the possibility of either total objectivism or subjectivism in our seeing the world and ourselves in it.

Lakoff&Johnson claim that our conscious thought is only the tip of an iceberg, structured and made possible by the "hidden" hand of unconscious pre-conceptual categorization. We do not choose whether to categorize or not, Lakoff&Johnson say; rather, categorization is an "inescapable consequence of our biological makeup"[2]. Also, "most important, it is not just that our bodies determine *that* we will categorize; they also determine what kinds of categories we will have and what structure it will be"[3]. These suggestions make Lakoff&Johnson claim that the real "locus of

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[1]G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999), p. 3.

[2]Ibid., p. 18.

[3] Ibid., p. 18.

reason would be the same as the locus of perception and motor control". This latter point leads them to adopt a certain kind of neural theory of mind:

> [F]rom a biological perspective, it is eminently plausible, that reason has grown out of the sensory and motor systems and that it still uses these systems or structures developed from them… [For why would] the brain build a whole new system to duplicate what it could do already?[4]

Frequently criticized as an "extreme form of empiricism" or as equally extreme relativism, Lakoff&Johnson's view has been polished with time and is clarified in the recent books such as *Moral Imagination* (1993) and *Philosophy in the Flesh* (1999) and in articles such as "Why cognitive linguistics requires embodied realism" (2002) and "We Are Live Creatures: Embodiment, American Pragmatism and the Cognitive Organism" (2007).

Lakoff&Johnson themselves claim that they have never been empiricists (although one can understand very well how they may be mistaken as such, since they focus on experience as the main source of our ability to conceptualize and talk about abstract notions). To clarify this point, Lakoff&Johnson state that "the question of the necessity and cognitive reality of *embodied realism* [which they call their theory] is an *empirical* issue… a question of what view of human condition is supported by the evidence and is necessary to explain human meaning and all forms of symbolic expression"[5].

This article focuses on the inevitable consequences that Lakoff&Johnson's experiential theory of knowledge and cognition has for their views on morality. In line with the embodied realism

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[4] Ibid., p. 43.

[5] Lakoff G. and Johnson M., "Why cognitive linguistics requires embodied realism" (2002), p. 246.

view they propose, Lakoff&Johnson argue strongly against absolutism and objectivism, against the possibility of the "God's Eye view" of the world and us in it. Instead, they claim that "classical" philosophical theories have always been grounded in folk-psychological explanations of things in the world.

Interestingly, Lakoff&Johnson admit that folk psychology made possible the very emergence of philosophical theories and our understanding – both of these theories and of the world. They claim, however, that world conceptualization *within* these theories is oversimplified. Consequently, lots of important issues are overlooked, impeding us from a "proper" understanding of phenomena, both physical and 'mental'. Let me elaborate on this.

§ 1. On the Nature of Categorization

The task of any theory (be it mechanics or morality) is to explain whatever it studies by conceptualizing and structuring the notions it operates with. In *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things* Lakoff offers a detailed analysis of the process of world categorization. His goal here is to prove the inconsistency of the classical notions of world categories and to shift the focus of science to a more subjectivist understanding of mind and language. In other words, Lakoff aims to challenge philosophical views claiming that the world can be divided up objectively into categories (things) existing in the external world independently of our mind. Basically, what he argues against is absolute objectivism and an externalist approach in philosophical conceptualizations of the world.

Concerning the 'classical' (read "objectivist"/"externalist") categorization, Lakoff's critique

focuses on two main points[6]:

>   (1) If (as the classical categorization view suggests) "categories are defined by properties all their members share, then no members should be better examples of the category than any other members"[7];

>   (2) If we regard the properties defining categories as independent of our process of their categorizing, categorization itself should remain independent of such subjective phenomena as human neurophysiology, peculiarities of perception, cultural divergences etc.

To show these points are mistaken Lakoff cites contemporary studies of categorization, which, as he claims, prove the complex and often subjective[8] character of this process. These studies explain reasons for categorization of certain things within a single category through *motivation*.

Among his references to works supporting his views[9], Lakoff presents Rosch's *theory of prototype effects*. Roughly, this theory shows that certain categories have *prototype effects*, with a central, easily recognizable, 'root' case – the 'prototype' - and other, noncentral, 'nonprototypical' cases, which are related asymmetrically to the central case and to one another.

When talking about prototypes Lakoff also refers to the Koleman-Kay study[10] of the concept

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[6] Here he follows the ideas presented in the research of Eleanor Rosch, a cognitive scientist, who argued against the possibility of 'objective' ('externalist') categorization.

[7] G. Lakoff, *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things,* p. 7.

[8] Subjectivity is something Lakoff repeatedly puts special emphasis on (saying that some categories are embodied (e.g., colour), and they appear only in our interactions with the world). However, one should be careful applying the term "subjectivity" to Lakoff&Johnson's theories, as they argue against both objectivist and subjectivist approaches in questions of knowledge and cognition.

[9] He also mentions such names as L. Wittgenstein (the ideas of family resemblance, centrality, and gradience), L. Zadeh (the technical study of categories with fuzzy boundaries), Paul Kay's neuroscientific research, etc. (see Chapter 2 of *Women' Fire and Dangerous Things* for details, pp. 12-67).

[10] See Chapter 4 of Lakoff's *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, pp. 71-74.

of *lie[11]*. This study has shown that the 'lie' prototype should meet the following requirements:

1. The speaker believes the statement is false;

2. The speaker intends to deceive the hearer;

3. The statement is factually false[12].

The noncentral cases tend to satisfy only one or two out of these conditions for a lie to be called a lie.

However, if categories had a classical (objectivist) structure, all the members of the category would have to represent it equally well. At the same time, Koleman and Kay show that, while having no problems with identifying the central cases of *lie,* informants were less sure about "white lies", "social lies" or jokes and exaggerations being referred to as *lies*. Moreover, although providing a sound argument against the classical view on categorization, their study of prototype effects fails to account for the most problematic cases. Lakoff says this happens because the category of lie (as well as many other categories) has a 'radial structure'.

Going beyond the prototype theory to illustrate how categories come to have a radial structure, Lakoff appeals to classifier languages (in which "nouns are marked as being members of certain categories"). He points to Dixon's grammar research which describes how a seemingly unmotivated division into four categories in the Dyirbal[13] language has its inner logic. To be more precise, there are four central members of the four categories in this language, i.e. (1) men, (2) women, (3) edible plants, (4) others. And all the other members of these four classes get attached

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[11] M. Johnson will use the very same example in *Moral Imagination* to support his view of morality as *embodied.*
[12] M. Johnson, *Moral imagination,* p. 92*.*
[13] Dyirbal is a language of Australian aborigines; the language is almost extinct now due to the pervasive use of English.

to them like a snowball, through certain associations. Thus, the sun is in the same category as 'women' because in Dyirbal mythology it is represented by a female character; fire has a relation to the sun (temperature, heat); fire is dangerous, hence, dangerous things come to belong to the same category. Due to the factor of danger, fire and water (juxtaposed in our western minds) are in the same category, etc. What we get in the end is the realization that the most peripheral cases might not have anything in common with the central case at all, being linked to other noncentral cases by certain associative resemblances. Lakoff claims that, as shown by this radical example, the process of categorization is *motivated* and is made possible due to humans' imaginative ability[14].

In their works Lakoff&Johnson suggest an alternative to both the classical categorization view and the theory of prototype effects. They claim that in our everyday reality we categorize things and concepts in terms of *idealized cognitive models* (hereafter, 'ICMs'):

> An idealized cognitive model is a simplified cognitive gestalt that organizes selected aspects of our knowledge, understanding, or experience of a given domain. Such models are *idealized*… in that they "*select* from among all the possible features of the stimuli those that are systematically efficacious (in more purely theoretical domains) or socially or instrumentally significant (in practical domains)"[15]. As such these models may not fit exactly any particular situation, but they capture features and structures that have proved to be important to us in our interactions with our physical and social environments. The

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[14] There are some who will call the above-mentioned example an atavism, a "historical relic". However, Lakoff, anticipating this, provides another example – of the currently functioning (and including new members with time) grammatical category of *hon* in Japanese, which, along with other 'long objects' it used to denote, contains now, e. g., 'telephone', or 'strike in baseball' (Lakoff G., *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things,* p. 104-109).
[15] Here Johnson is quoting R. McCauley.

models are *cognitive* in the sense that they are imaginative structures by which we organize and make sense of our experience, rather than being objectively existing features of external things. And they are *models* in that they provide structures or standards against which we measure and evaluate our particular experiences and judgments[16].

It is these very ICMs we operate with that are traditionally mistaken to be the ground for classical categorization. They provide us with a background for 'central'/prototypical cases of radially structured categories, being the starting point for our categorization.

To illustrate the way ICMs work, let us return to the above-mentioned study of *lie.* In *Moral Imagination* Mark Johnson points out two "basic idealized cognitive models… that lie behind our understanding of lying"[17]. Such models help explain people's ordinary understanding of what a lie is and why it is morally wrong:

The ICM of Ordinary Knowledge:

1. People have adequate reasons for their beliefs.

2. Beliefs for which people have adequate reasons are true.

3. So people's beliefs are true and constitute knowledge.

4. Something that is false is not believed.

The ICM of Ordinary Communication:

1. People intend to help one another (= try to help, not to harm).

2. Truthful information is helpful.

3. The speaker intends to help the hearer by sharing information.

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[16] M. Johnson, *Moral Imagination (1993),* p. 93.
[17] Ibid., p. 93.

4. A speaker who knowingly communicates false information intends to harm the hearer[18].

As we see, an ICM is a cluster of certain conditions in the background of our understanding and judgments. However, contrary to the absolutist point of view, these ICMs are not real, but *idealized,* generalized. Such generalization reflects our tendency towards being as objective as possible, arriving at a certain "conceptual stability"[19]. Nonetheless, the concepts themselves do not get their meanings *only* from ICMs that constitute them, but, rather, ICMs being the "skeleton", concept meaning is "fleshed out" in our interactions with the world and relative to other relevant conceptual frameworks.

As an example, Mark Johnson cites cases where lying may not seem so bad, or "morally wrong":

> [C]onsider what is known as the 'official lie' - an intentionally deceptive statement made by a government spokesperson on behalf of the government… We *expect* whoever fills the role of spokesperson to issue, from time to time, official lies… [to] disseminate certain sorts of information… [or] in cases where important national secrets are at issue.

Also,

> What about cases where the CIA refuses to acknowledge the existence of operatives or even to admit the existence of an operation that is, or has been, undertaken? Is lying to American people about such matters wrong? Many people will say that the CIA is obviously justified in lying to insure the safety of agents or the integrity of important

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18 Ibid., p. 93.
19 Ibid., p. 98.

operations. But some of these lies that are made allegedly to avoid putting a few agents at risk at the same time affect lives of millions of people by the way they influence international relations[20].

As one could expect, Lakoff&Johnson's argument against the 'classical' objectivist position aroused strong reactions. For instance, Walter Sinnott-Armstrong in his review of *Moral Imagination* claims that

> white lies are still not any less lies either because they are not prototypical or because they have a different moral status than prototypical lies. So it is not clear why any moral law theorist must oppose the distinction between prototypes and non-prototypes[21].

This objection is either weak or not made clear[22], in my opinion. It is not the question of a moral law theorist making juxtapositions that is at stake here. Rather, it is a question of our moral choice in this or the other situation, where the existence of "nonprototypical" cases makes it difficult to decide whether the action is moral or not. "White lies are still not any less lies", Sinnett-Armstrong says. But the awareness of "nonprototypical" cases (and their moral status) is important in social interactions, as well as in matters of moral law and justice. Otherwise, we would not have, say, presumption of innocence even when it is "clear" who the criminal is: we have to take into account all the attendant circumstances if we are to be just and make moral decisions[23].

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[20] Ibid.*,* p.96.

[21] Sinnott-Armstrong W., Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics: Review, *Mind,* July, 1994.

[22] When presenting the draft of this paper I actually got a comment from one of the readers, saying that "classical theorists need not deny what Lakoff&Johnson say. They can perfectly well admit that lies differ from one another in character and in degree of badness". However, Sinnott-Armstrong is not clear enough about that. Besides, Lakoff&Johnson's picture of the classical view is often oversimplified and the classic view, according to them (and the hard-core classicists, to be absolutely fair), does not allow for any shades of grey.

[23] Another review of *Moral Imagination* (by Dennis O'Brian) accuses Johnson of "playing imagination off against reason" and, also, of "moral relativism". However, neither of these accusations is well-grounded, with both Lakoff

In their critique of Lakoff's theory of ICMs John Vervaeke and Cristopher D. Green write:

> …as opposed to abstract classical categories, they [ICMs] are said to be derived from our everyday interactions with the world. However, Lakoff claims that the "classical" model of categorization is derived from a "folk theory" of categorization, derived presumably from "folks'" everyday use of categories. ICMs, he argues, are a more sophisticated account. Thus, it seems, Lakoff wants it both ways: he criticizes "classical" categories for being too technical and abstruse, on the one hand, and for being too crude and "folksy", on the other. Conversely, he praises ICMs for being "grounded" in ordinary people's interactions with the world, and for being the more sophisticated approach to categorization. If, as Lakoff claims, the "classical" theory of categories derives from a "folk theory", and if a "folk theory" is grounded in everyday experience, and if, as he also claims, all our knowledge is ultimately grounded in such experience, then he leaves little room for an account of how we might come to understand his own new theory of categorization, since it is not, by contrast, grounded in the folk theory we have derived from our everyday experience[24].

Vervaeke and Green's argument against the ICM theory is invalid. Let me explain.

First, Lakoff *does* point to the fact that our classical categorization is based in our folk theories. This, however, does not keep it from being too abstract, in that this view, in its attempt to generalize and objectify world experience, does not take into account the diversity of phenomena

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and Johnson claiming that (1) reason is grounded in imagination and consequently, embodied; and (2) due to this embodiment there exists a universal core of moral values.

[24] J. Vervaeke and C.D. Green, "Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things: a Critique of Lakoff's Theory of Categorization", *Metaphor and Symbol,* # 12, 1997.

in the world. At the same time, Lakoff admits the importance of folk (and, consequently, classical) categorization for the process of cognition. Next, ICMs *are* grounded in our everyday bodily experience, but they are the background which we are unconscious of. What we are conscious of is the classical (or 'folk') black-and-white categorization. Thus, Lakoff manages to explain the insufficiency of the latter, but not its overall falsity. Finally, explaining world categorization in terms of ICMs proves to be more successful, since being aware of the unconscious mechanisms responsible for our cognition is helpful for both scientific research in philosophy, psychology, linguistics, etc. and for pragmatic issues (in application to politics, a topic which I'll discuss later on).

According to Lakoff (1987) ICMs are "structured wholes, gestalts, which use four kinds of structuring principles. These are (1) propositional structuring; (2) image-schematic structuring; (3) metaphorical and (4) metonymic mappings[25]. Here things start to look complicated. Lakoff offers numerous examples to explain the plausibility of ICMs. But the overall structure of the theory of ICMs, added in together, begs the question. Strangely, while the bits of the theory make sense with the support of multiple examples from different fields of science, they just do not add up to a coherent overall picture. The readers are left to wonder how (if, at all) the principles of the ICM structure are connected to one another; whether they are applied separately to create different kinds of ICM, or whether all of the principles are supposed to play a role in its structure, etc.

§ 2. Embodied Morality

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[25] See Chapter 4 of *Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things*, where Lakoff analyzes the four principles at work in detail, accompanying his claims with many examples, which makes a lot of sense to me as a linguist and a philosopher.

The detailed introduction into Lakoff&Johnson's theory of world categorization is necessary to understand Lakoff&Johnson's views on morality as relative to a certain framework in which we are socially, historically and physically situated. According to Lakoff&Johnson, the main problem we face in our discussions of moral issues is the mistaken belief in some objective higher-order universal moral rules by which we must abide. These rules allegedly transcend our bodily 'narrow-mindedness' and are part of the Universal Reason, common for all humanity. Lakoff&Johnson point out that this view is nothing but the Moral Law Folk Theory, a 'myth' we live in, on *a par* with, say, Christianity. This 'myth', like other myths that surround us in our everyday lives, is inherently metaphorical. Just as our abstract notions (such as knowledge and time) get their meaning and conceptual structure through our ability to 'map' our bodily experience onto the abstract realm, so does our folk understanding of morality find its metaphorical framework in our experience, especially starting within the home.

As soon as we leave our inner world of sensations, we inevitably get into interactions with other human beings. And, naturally, the closest human beings who influence us will be our family. Hence, our moral views on interactions among people in a society are projected from a framework built on our understanding of family interactions. If we look at it this way, we'll see what Lakoff&Johnson mean by summing up the gist of the Universal Morality as metaphorical[26] along certain family lines:

<u>Universal Rational Morality</u> [consists of the following concepts]

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[26] G. Lakoff and M. Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh*, p. 422.

→Humankind

→Each Human Being

→Every Other Human Being

→Universal Reason [God, if you will]

→Universal Moral Authority

→Universal Moral Laws

→Obedience To Universal Moral Laws

→Universal Moral Relations

→Universal Nurturance To Be Morally Strong

Similarly, *the Universal Morality As Strict Father Morality Metaphor* is structured as follows:

<u>Strict Father Morality</u>

→Family

→Each Child

→Other Children

→Father

→Father's Moral Authority

→Father's Commands

→Obedience to Father

→Family Moral Relations

→Family Nurturance To Be Morally Strong

This complex metaphor of the *Strict Father Morality,* According to Lakoff&Johnson, presents the core of the western moral tradition (grounded in Judeo-Christian views and, more recently, Kant's worship of Reason), allowing for small variations concerning who the *Father* is. Within the framework of this – very powerful – moral view, our "essence" as being rational is sullied by our corporeal needs and desires[27]. Hence, to be "morally strong" and "free" we strive to transcend the physical and long for higher ideal ends. Though a very rough approximation, the Universal Morality in this form is the most convenient illustration for Lakoff&Johnson to present what they will argue against.

Lakoff&Johnson want their readers to be aware of the fact that, like religion, this moral myth is far from being universal, or unique, or the only *correct* view on what morality is about:

> [T]here is a core of cases about which there exists virtually universal agreement within a moral tradition. These… are the prototypical or central members of a particular moral concept. This stable core of cases is the result of the stability of the context of shared values, idealized cognitive models, practices, and purposes within a culture… All of these together make it possible for there to be clear and unproblematic cases. However, …some of our most important moral concepts are contestable even regarding what constitutes a prototype…[28].

Johnson's claim that "some of our important moral concepts are contestable" can be illustrated by

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his example of the concept of a *person.* In his book he states that it is a historically proven fact, for instance, that for a long time the western concept of a *person* would include white adult males only. Due to historical changes this category has been extended to include females, and nonwhites, and in certain cases even fetuses (nicely fitting the Conservatives' anti-abortion campaign[29]). It is now arguable as to whether we should call animals *persons*, or, maybe, apply "metaphorically our concept of *personhood* to the level of the ecosystem of our planet"[30].

Establishing the metaphorical character of common sense morality (and consequently, its relativity to a certain conceptual framework), Lakoff&Johnson notice that the metaphors we use to reason with don't have to be consistent with one another. What happens is our "cognitive unconscious"[31] picks the most conspicuous features out of the domain of our bodily interactions to "frame" in its terms our understanding of an abstract phenomenon. Thus we may be drawing upon multiple frameworks to talk about different abstract notions[32]. The previously mentioned *Strict Father Morality* metaphor is powerful, but it's not the only one to build our moral thinking upon. In fact, Johnson will speak about three main clusters of moral metaphors: "(1) those that are concerned chiefly with the *action* performed and that involve metaphorical structurings of our notions of action, purpose, law, duties, rights and so forth; (2) those by which we decide *what we owe others* and *what others owe us* as a result of our helping and harming each other; and (3) those

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[29] See Johnson's argument on pp. 222-223 of *Moral Imagination*.

[30] Ibid., p. 98.

[31] A term Lakoff&Johnson will widely use in *Philosophy in the Flesh,* p.12*: "*[W]e will use the term *cognitive* in the richest possible sense, to describe any mental operations and structures that are involved in language, meaning, perception, conceptual systems, and reason. Because our conceptual systems and our reason arise from our bodies, we will also use the term *cognitive* for aspects of our sensorimotor system that contribute to our abilities to conceptualize and to reason. Since cognitive operations are largely unconscious, the term *cognitive unconscious* accurately describes all unconscious mental operations concerned with conceptual systems, meaning, inference, and language."

[32] Or, we can have multiple frameworks to talk about one and the same phenomenon, for that matter.

by which we evaluate *moral character*"[33].

I am not planning to discuss every single metaphorical case Lakoff&Johnson analyze to prove their theory. Let me mention just a couple of instances showing that we do reason metaphorically in our everyday life, be it in morality or our abstract thinking in general.

Lakoff&Johnson claim that the human society we live in frames our moral interactions in terms of bookkeeping:

> Roughly, within the MORAL ACCOUNTING[34] metaphor, well-being is understood as wealth, so that doing something that increases the well-being of another is a moral act understood via metaphor as giving her a commodity that increases her wealth. Just as in standard financial dealings, a balance of transactions is required… in the moral domain we understand our actions metaphorically as commodities exchanged, and we expect their (metaphorical) values to be balanced in the end. If I perform good acts, I build up a form of moral credit. If I harm you, then you deserve a certain restitution or payback that balances out the harm done[35].

Johnson cites plenty of common linguistic expressions that prove the pervasiveness of this metaphor. Here are just a few of them:

Deeds/ states are objects in transactions

I'm *getting* help from Bill.

Can anyone *give/lend* me a hand?

Moral account is record of transactions

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[33] Johnson M., *Moral Imagination,* p.36.
[34] Capitalized by authors.
[35] Ibid, p. 45, also mentioned in Lakoff's article "Metaphor, Morality, and Politics…" (1995).

Don't judge him harshly – *take into account* all of the good things he's done.

When you compare his fine character with what he's accused of doing, it just doesn't

add up.

Moral balance is balance of transactions:

One good turn *deserves* another.

His crimes *exceed* his good deeds.

· *Doing moral deeds is accumulating moral credit:*

We all *owe* you so much for all you've done tonight.

She certainly *deserves credit* for her exemplary behavior.

Benefiting from moral deeds is accumulating debt:

I couldn't possibly *repay* your kindness.

Much obliged.

· *Doing immoral deeds is accumulating debt:*

I *owe* you a great deal for the hurt I've caused you.

You must *pay* for your mistakes[36].

Thus Johnson proves that we do understand our moral duties towards each other (and the

mutual responsibilities between us and the society[37]) in terms of *The Moral Interactions as*

Commodity Transactions metaphor (or the *Moral Accounting* metaphor). To paraphrase it, we

conceptualize the result of our actions as giving others "something", either of positive, or of

negative value. Moreover, this framework will necessarily include expectations arising as a

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[36] Ibid., p. 46 – I am not keeping Johnson's numbering or citing all of his examples here.
[37] Society is metaphorically taken for "person", another metaphor I'll discuss later on.

consequence of the (im)moral action, resulting in five schemas of the expected moral behavior: (1) reciprocation, or '*One good turn deserves another*'; (2) retribution, or '*You'll get yours*'; (3) restitution, or '*I'll make up for it*'; (4) revenge, or '*An eye for an eye*' ('*getting even*'); (5) altruism/charity, or '*What a saint*'[38].

All of the five schemas but one are grounded in the concept of financing, or moral "bookkeeping". The last one, however, is an odd one, as, although the altruistic person accumulates moral credit for the good they've done, they don't expect anything in return. Here Johnson raises an interesting, but unanswered "question of whether there can be truly selfless acts not motivated by any hope for moral credit"[39].

It is worth noticing that Johnson points out that

> Such [moral] schemas do not, in themselves, define 'good' or 'bad'. Instead, they give the primary structures for forms of reasoning about what we owe others… and what we are owed by others for our actions[40].

What is of primary importance here is that our definitions of moral behavior exist only by virtue of the existing metaphorical frameworks we reason with:

> Semantic frames often involve a broad range of imaginative structures, such as image schemas, various types of prototype structure, metonymy, and metaphor. As a result, they do not simply mirror some objective reality or category. Rather, they define that reality by means of imaginative structure.
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> …Knowing about the precise structure of particular frames we inherit from our moral

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38 Ibid, see p. 48-49 for details.
39 Ibid., p.49.
40 Ibid., p.49.

tradition and apply to situations is absolutely essential, if we are to be aware of the

prejudgments we bring to situations. Knowing that there will always be multiple framings

of any situation is also necessary, if we are to appreciate the nonabsolute character of our

moral understanding. Not to know these things about ourselves is morally irresponsible[41].

Johnson's conclusion is extremely important. The awareness of the nonabsolute[42] character of

morality is crucial in our contemporary world, where persons with different cultural and historical

backgrounds have to collaborate. Due to the process of globalization the world is becoming

'smaller'. And the realization of the fact that our morality might be different from our 'neighbors'

is extremely helpful for achieving both interpersonal and international understanding. This is the

reason why Lakoff&Johnson are so persistent in the application of their theory of embodied

morality to the sphere of politics.

Conclusion

To summarize, Lakoff&Johnson view morality as framed by a variety of metaphors, not

necessarily consistent with one another. Embodied social life starts in the family that might give

rise to one set of metaphors. However, our social life is not confined to family interactions, thus,

another set of metaphors in terms of which we understand moral actions is based on another type

of social interactions, e.g., accounting. It is obvious that accepting this embodied theory of morality

bears serious consequences as to how we regard others' actions around us. What may be totally

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[41] Ibid., p.192.

[42] "Nonabsolute" here does not stand for "subjective", though. Despite there being cultural and other differences – and, as a result, different "metaphors" in terms of which different cultures might think – we should remember that Lakoff&Johnson call themselves *relativist objectivists.* Thus, I remind the reader, due to our mind's *embodiment,* we do have moral (and other) universals. Thanks to these universals we escape total subjectivism. But because of these universals, we often disregard the contextual peculiarities we run into more and more often these days.

acceptable in one culture might be morally abhorrent in another, and there is no way to determine the one and only moral standard. Moreover, depending on how actions of people and larger organizations are framed they may be perceived as desirable or unconscionable. Lakoff&Johnson have more to say on the topic with the help of linguistic and semantic analysis of deep framing in contemporary politics in their later works. But this will be our topic for another day.

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