

way we understand the world. Is a cognitive metaphor like a secondary quality? Lakoff and Johnson seem to think it might be, at least insofar as if it is illusory, it is a persistent illusion, and we cannot work without it.

Not everyone agrees. As an application of Lakoff and Johnson's work, psychotherapist David Grove has invented a system based on using what he calls "clean-language." This involves drawing the patient's attention to the metaphors they use in thinking about their problem.007nd Jofro7)8(torap at thinundTJ0.0008 9c 0.1534 Tw 16steef)5((s)a ea)-ner vocabuly,n

map. By apparently failing to recognise this distinction, such approaches often miss something important about the limitations of the literary approach to scientific writing. The following extract from Gillian Beer underlines these concerns:

That [chaos theory] has developed alongside deconstruction, with its refusal of parameters of interpretation, its obdurate relativism, is as intriguing as is the rediscovery of plate-tectonics at the height of the fashion for Derridean epistemology, with its emphasis on un-grounding. Are such analogies just a play of words? I do not believe so. (1996: 194)

Her answer to that last question is where we should begin to stop listening. What Beer is doing is bringing the type of interpretative skills quite valid within her own discipline of literary study and treating scientific work as if it could be evaluated or even sensibly discussed in such terms. “Un-grounding” means quite different things in each case. Tectonic plate movement is not a metaphor. Geophysicists call the sections of crust “plates” because they are flat sheets (dinner plates being, of course, only an instance of this broader definition of a plate). The movement is because the plates move. This is not a metaphor. There is no language play here. There are plates, albeit big ones, and they are moving around, albeit only very slowly and very slightly. These are matters of empirical fact. Why, then, do we have Gillian Beer pondering the metaphorical content of plate tectonics? In a sense, she is looking at the map without the key.

So metaphorical language is more common than we think and more influential than we think, but a metaphor in literary fiction is a very different thing to a cognitive metaphor. Metaphors are not always optional, inasmuch as the language may await the terminology to offer a literal description. Similarly, apparent metaphors may in fact be literal descriptions, and so how we decide on whether a sense is being metaphorical or not may depend on what we are willing to include in the extension of a particular term. Finally, the option of reading metaphorically does not exclude literal readings.

With these caveats in mind, what can we do with metaphors that cannot do without them? As if to underline the pervasiveness of metaphor, it should be apparent now that this project is predicated on a cognitive metaphor. It assumes the “movement” of facts. And, as Simon Blackburn points out with regard to “facing the facts,”

facing the facts is literally nonsense: we can face the Eiffel Tower, but facts are not things with a place. (If they were, as Wittgenstein remarked, we could move them; but while you could move the Eiffel Tower to Berlin, you cannot move the fact that the Eiffel Tower is in Paris anywhere at all.) (2001)

The project title – “How Well Do ‘Facts’ Travel?” – invites us to think of facts as things that move between places, as a boat moves between two shores, or else as flotsam and jetsam. But in a sense nothing “moves” at all, and it is equally valid to invert the image to one which

conceptualises facts as static points with fixed location, towards which disciplines approach, upon which they converge. Lakoff himself makes the case that “facts are points”:

1 The theory touches on those points.

2 You have to take into account the way the facts are laid out.

That is, facts are particulate; they have a spatial location but perhaps do not themselves occupy space – even a book “packed with facts” is not filled by the facts. It certainly seems true that a fact is roughly atomic or molecular with respect to knowledge. Unfortunately for those who would like to be rid of metaphorical talk, it does seem to be the case that it is almost impossible to think of facts without employing some or other metaphorical expression. The question is whether it matters which ones we use.

So there are several things to think about with regard to the metaphors being used here. One is how we think of “facts”: is a fact particulate and discrete, like grains or atoms? Or is it fluid? Does information “flow”? If so, how? Is it carried? Secondly, there is the issue of movement: do the facts move between the disciplines (or sites of use), or do the disciplines move and grow to extend over the facts? If we use a fluid model, there is the realm of hydraulics: of flow regulated by valve- or filter-metaphors, which allow some facts to pass and not others. Likewise, there are metaphors of resistance.

Exhausting the options isn't the purpose here. And it might be the case that you are in the camp that thinks that the language we use is really not all that important. But even those who think there's nothing useful about metaphorical language will at least be more aware of it. How we think of the motion of these facts will to some extent determine or be determined by how we think of the facts. Motion can be either active or passive, and either positive or negative. It might be possible to array these various senses on a matrix with axes that

