
Our Metaphorical Bodies: Why Metaphor May Be Everywhere

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Metaphors play a critical role in how we think and express ourselves in various linguistic and non-linguistic (e.g., gesture, art, music) contexts. But metaphors are not just special literary devices, as they are now seen as fundamental to human concepts, reasoning, and imagination, we typically think of metaphor in both thought and language as resulting from the mapping of a non-metaphorical source domain over to better structure, and even create, a metaphorical target domain. For example, when one says “Life is a journey,” we can infer many different metaphorical ideas about life given our knowledge and experiences with journeys. One of the main realizations in contemporary metaphor research is that many source domains in metaphorical ideas are tied to recurring aspects of bodily experience (e.g., taking physical journeys). However, these source domain are not seen as metaphorical. My talk aims to refute this belief by suggesting that the human body, and bodily experiences, are routinely understood in metaphorical terms (e.g., journeys are metaphorical!). I will present numerous examples of the metaphorical body, specifically in terms of human body parts, bodily sensations, illness and bodily disorders, and bodily metaphorical performances. The ubiquity of metaphor in bodily experience suggests that metaphor may not simply be important for understanding abstract concepts, but is actually everywhere in our experience. This conclusion has important implications for our understanding of human bodies in action, theories of metaphorical thought and understanding, and for better appreciating the role that metaphor plays in the daily creation of meaningful human life.