Cognitive Linguistics and Theology

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Theology that Emerges from Cognitive Science: Applied to African Development

Abstract: Recent developments in cognitive science are here interpreted as an apologetic for Christian theology. Naturalistic faiths are suggested to be dependent on the invention of 'religion', and domestication of the foreign through translation. A refusal to accept that a relationship with God is something that develops in the course of reflection, has added to his apparent invisibility. Advocates of embodied thinking who effectively undermine Descartes' philosophy, open the door to theological reflection. A gender-based exploration reveals that means of predicting the embodied nature of thinking also point to the significance of God. Because human thinking is embodied, God also is perceived by people through his embodied impact – much as is the wind. That correct understanding of God brings human wellbeing, is here suggested to be as true for Africa as for Europe.

Keywords: theology; cognitive science; positivism; naturalism; embodied thinking; atheism; development; Africa; cognitive linguistics

Outsiders to Western communities are easily struck by the latter's determination to illegitimise faith in and especially reflection on God. At least from the time of Descartes – a notion of the sufficiency of human reasoning in and of itself has been prevalent. Western philosophers and thinkers seem to have divided what they consider to be real from what is unreal, then have demoted what they call 'unreal,' that includes God, into the realm of presumed non-existence.

While the above practice was reaching its crescendo in the 1970s and 1980s, another group of scholars took advantage of recent technological innovation to investigate human cognition. Far from Descartes' understanding that thinking is prior to embodied existence (*Cogito Ergo Sum*), these researchers found that, essentially through the mechanism of metaphor, human thinking is thoroughly embodied. Strewn through human communication, they have found endless references to life in an embodied spatial world. The question arises – how can thinking be prior to embodied existence, while being at the same time so profoundly impregnated with it?

This article explores the implications of the embodiment of language on the relationship of the contemporary West, and the rest of humanity, with God. Detractors to God's role in human life have claimed human thinking to be 'self-sufficient,' i.e. to not need God. That has been undermined by recent discoveries to the effect that thinking is inherently embodied: If embodiment is foundational to human thinking, then why not God? Myths about the nature of 'religion',[1] and a refusal to acknowledge reflection on faith in God, are exposed, to reveal an ongoing necessary role of theological engagement in today's world. This necessary role is briefly illustrated in relation to promotion of the socio-economic development of Africa.

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1 The way I use the term 'religion' in this article varies. I consider it to be a synonym for 'Christianity,' but because it is popularly used as if incorporating 'other religions', I also at times use it in this way.

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1 The popularity of positivism and naturalism

"I am not going to allow my understanding of truth to be compromised through listening to other people's myths." This statement seems to represent a widespread default ontology in the Western world. This is a lynch-pin of (Western) secularism.[2] It forms the basis for rejection of theology as a public discipline in recent centuries. Why, many people seem to ask themselves, have theology upset things, when really the West has achieved what it wants, and has science on which to build?

It should not be difficult to see the foundational influence of positivism on the above. Positivism is "a philosophical system that holds that every rationally justifiable assertion can be scientifically verified or is capable of logical or mathematical proof and that therefore rejects metaphysics and theism."[3] I suggest that this belief is widely held in the Western world.[4] It is implicit and presupposed in an enormous amount that goes on, but it is also misguided. Positivism has been discredited. It is no longer considered to be legitimate as a foundational belief. This is because there is no positivistic foundation for belief in positivism.[5] Positivism does not bring us any values: "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is and happens as it does happen. *In* it there is no value – and if there were, it would be of no value. If there is value which is of value, it must lie outside of all happening and being-so."[6] The choice to believe in positivism, and thus assume meaninglessness and godlessness, is at best arbitrary. At worst, it is a denial of the cognitive basis that tells us that life must have some meaning.[7] It seems then that the very widely spread faith of many in the Western world in positivism is misguided or at least, it is only a 'faith.' It does seem to me remarkable that such faith on unjustifiable foundations should be so widespread and so little challenged.

Building on positivism, the basic presupposition underlying much contemporary philosophy is atheistic.[8] Atheism only thrives, I argue, based on certain assumptions regarding the nature of God who atheists suppose not-to-be, and the nature of humanity as a whole. It seems to be a peculiar, and a little dated Christian vision of God that atheists choose not to believe in. Atheists are frustrated when one appears to move the goalposts.[9] The problem is – that God may be other than one thinks, and may be hiding where one is not looking (or cannot look). Descriptions of God have always been metaphorical.[10] Belief in God is filling gaps in human understanding using metaphor. This is the practice that Lakoff and Johnson are reviving.[11]

A parallel view to that of positivism above, is the view that the West is guided by something akin to naturalism.[12] In this view, anything of the ilk of religion is an illegitimate unwanted intrusion into a

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2 Secularism tends to be re-defined when exported to other parts of the world outside of the West (Jakobsen and Pellegrini, *Secularisms,* back page. See also Stepan, 'Multiple,' 139.) Hence I focus on Western or European/American understandings of secularism.

3 "Positivism."

4 "Economists in particular, and most social scientists in general, continue to believe in positivist ideas, and to use them as a basis for research. Inertia keeps professionals wedded to this obsolete philosophy, since replacing it would require rejection of 50 years or more of theorising. Nonetheless, a radical re-thinking is the need of the hour, since the positivist rejection of human experience as a source of knowledge has led to impoverished theories in social sciences, which are manifestly incapable of dealing with looming catastrophes on several fronts" (Zaman, 'Rise.').

5 The choice of whether to believe in positivism is arbitrary.

6 Wittgenstein, *Tractatus,* 105. See also Lakoff, *Philosophy*, 90.

7 Many metaphors people use to navigate life are 'meaningful', or there would be no terminology of up as happy or down as sad, or 'morality is happiness' (Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction*) and so on.

8 See Harries, *Godless*, for a fuller critique of this.

9 Reitan, 'Moving'.

10 People being limited to an earthly existence have no choice but to seek to understand God (or the divine) using familiar terms in metaphorical ways. Only metaphor can begin to grasp his nature and being.

11 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*. See Harries, *Godless,* 48-49, for a discussion on whether it is legitimate in a dualistic categorisation simply to consider people to fall on the side of the non-divine, suggesting a 'divine' role especially in human imagination.

12 "A philosophical viewpoint according to which everything arises from natural properties and causes, and supernatural or spiritual explanations are excluded or discounted." ("Naturalism")

preferred or at least satisfactory natural state of affairs. With strong parallels to atheism, I suggest that this also has been a very misleading faith. The current state of intercultural translation underwrites naturalism: Followers of naturalism want to believe that their philosophy is of global relevance. Venuti points to the domesticating impact of translation.[13] I elaborate on this in various writings.[14] The domestification that Venuti points us to is what, I suggest, results in Westernisation of texts from other parts of the world. The domestification that arises in the process of translation into European languages effectively produces any appearance of naturalism. If naturalism is to be 'found' globally, then this is as a result of peculiar processes of translation into Western languages. These processes use "mapping"[15] to domesticate.[16]

For the natural to be a global default with which 'religion' interferes, as is widely held to be the case, requires 'religions' to be found in diverse parts of the world. These 'religions' should be recognisable as accretions to an otherwise relatively stable 'natural' state. For the last one hundred years many in the West have believed that there are world religions that have this feature. Fortunately or unfortunately, however, it has transpired that these world 'religions' have been invented.[17] There were no 'religions' until they were invented by Western man, Masuzawa tells us.[18] So-called world religions are a product of domestification of the foreign. They are an interpretation of other people's lives in the light of Western Protestantism.[19] World religions are an invention, because there is no universal 'natural' alternative to them: Because secularism is not a homogenous universal, neither can there be a homogenous 'other' to it called 'religion'.[20] It is very widely acknowledged even by scholars of religion – that world religions are constructed on the back of Christianity, not on the back of 'nature.'[21] I suggest it is illegitimate to use them as a foil for secularism.

2 The rise of embodied thinking

The deep, innate, and widespread popularity of naturalistic and positivistic thinking seems to have stood despite the existence of some very profound negations to the same mentioned above. Clearly human beings can thrive on less-than-rational belief. CSR (Cognitive Science of Religion) has at times supported such naturalistic and positivistic positions, thus debunking religion. A critical view of CSR taken in this article finds this to be due to the refusal to accord any legitimacy to *reflection* on experienced 'religion.'[22]

There is an alternative stream of cognitive-science research, typified by the work of Lakoff and Johnson,[23] that takes a different approach to that of CSR mentioned above. This has brought a new challenge to godlessness coming from a hither-to largely unseen direction. Positivism and naturalism have been built on the assumption that human thought is abstract and prior to the complexities of human existence. Hence, "I think therefore I am," said Descartes. Science is thought to be an ongoing objective building on objective foundations, the less subjective, the more successful. Cognitive science introduces us to truth that is "neither

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13 Venuti, *Scandals*, 5.

14 For example Harries, 'Linguistic' and Harries, 'Language'.

15 Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction*.

16 Content of the English language is effectively 'mapped' over other people's cultures in the process of translation from their languages and cultures into English.

17 Masuzawa, *Invention,* xiv. Prior to the 20th Century, Christianity was in much of the West considered to be universally true. Since the 20th Century, on the basis of the supposition that all kinds of 'religion' compliment a basic secular substratum, this status has been given to secularism.

18 Masuzawa, *Invention*.

19 Literatures concerning world religions such as Buddhism were studied and analysed by Western scholars raised in contexts profoundly influenced by Western Protestant Christianity (Almond, *British*, 5-6). As a result of "mapping from a source to a target concept" (Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction*), world religions came out profoundly resembling such Christianity (Masuzawa, *Invention*, 144).

20 Asad, 'Construction'. While the term secular is used in many parts of the world that have appropriated European languages, what the term refers to can be very un-European.

21 E.g. see Cusack, 'Vestigial,' 4.

22 Oviedo, 'Religious,' 49. For more on this see the section below entitled 'A Curious Blindspot.'

23 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*.

subjective nor objective."[24] Cognitive studies has in recent decades pointed out that human thinking is not abstract, instead it is dependent on metaphor,[25] that in turn derives from embodied 'physical' reality.[26]

Contrary to the then-trend of the 1970s associated with positivism, Lakoff and Johnson point out that metaphor is a key and essential part of human language and inter-human communication.[27] Metaphors are not at all only different ways of saying the same thing. Instead – they are depicted as central to the whole thrust of human understanding.

Metaphors, Lakoff and Jackson point out, originate in the context of human living. That is to say – they have roots or origins outside of the human mind or brain. They are situational, contextual, we could say environmental. They are *embodied*, hence Lakoff and Johnson tell us, "reason is fundamentally embodied."[28] Reason presupposes a context of three-dimensional space: "The peculiar nature of our bodies shapes the very possibilities for conceptualisation and categorisation."[29] The discovery that metaphors are central to human thinking, and that they arise from embodied existence in three-dimensional space, in turn means that human thinking is itself an outcome of spatial relationships. Human thinking and understanding is not then pure, abstract or self-generating (as science claims to be, see above). Instead, use of conceptual metaphor projects "inference patterns from one conceptual domain into another. The result is that conceptual metaphor allows us to reason about the target domain in a way that we otherwise would not."[30] This challenges the prior view that something could be taken literally or non-literally. Sanders gives us an example.[31] To say, "Susan loves Bill" would seem to be a literal statement of something going on between Susan and Bill. But, Sanders asks, can a sentence like 'Susan loves Bill' be meaningful without any metaphorical interpretation or transfer of inference patterns? 'Susan loves Bill' could be 'Susan is nuts about Bill', or that she has 'fallen in love' with Bill, or that she is on a 'journey of love' with Bill. Unless so expounded-on using bodily metaphor, the term 'love' is pretty-meaningless. Susan being nuts about Bill presents an image to us, that is profoundly different from her having fallen in love with him. Both of these express an intensity of immediate emotion, different from the metaphor of a journey of love. Choice of metaphor determines the very nature of the love being referred to. So much so, that we could suggest that without metaphor, love is nothing. Whether or how metaphors like being 'nuts about' someone, 'falling in love', or 'journeying in love' can be translated into non-Western context, is considered later in this article.

"I think therefore I am," as Descartes famously stated, was misguided. The reverse now might appear more accurate: "I am an embodied being in three-dimensional physical and social space, which feature(s) are essentially enabling to my thinking." In other words, "I am, therefore I [can] think."

Lakoff and Johnson give numerous examples of ways in which human bodily existence is foundational to routine uses of language that express our thoughts. They "supply sweeping judgements on philosophers from" before Socrates, to Chomsky.[32] "Cognitive linguists see this as an advantage" they add, as it is "a freeing … from a priori philosophy that restricts and distorts the study of language."[33] Lakoff and Johnson declare that "the body is not merely somehow involved in conceptualisation but is shaping its very nature."[34] For example, they talk of the "life is a journey" metaphor.[35] Arising from this, life-events are understood as legs of a journey. What goes on in life is structured on a comparison with a journey through physical space. Hence, we get metaphorical phrases like, 'I am getting there,' or, 'we are reaching take-off,' or 'we have hit a brick wall.' Yet these metaphors are also commonly applied to human endeavours that are not journeys,

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24 Ibid., 26.
25 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*.
26 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*.
27 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*.
28 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*, 17.
29 Ibid., 19.
30 Ibid., 82.
31 Sanders, 'Podcast'.
32 Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction*, footnote 18.
33 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*, 512.
34 Ibid., 37.
35 Ibid., 61.

such as the progress of a business or organisation. A business can be said to be 'getting there', 'taking off' or 'hitting a wall' – although of course literally speaking businesses do not go on journeys, so these things do not happen to them. It is only a short step from there to the realisation that conceptualisation of any entity, be it a business, school, government, community, is framed by and defined by metaphors arising from a journey through space.

The human body itself provides numerous metaphors that are widely applied: He's my right-hand man; Keep an eye on it; We are part of the same body; So-and-so is the head of the company; Business is strong; He is two steps behind. Metaphors related to horses continue to hold much sway in English, Lakoff and Jackson additionally point out.[36] Don't stare a gift horse in the mouth, we are told. Then we have horses for courses, and beating a dead horse, and reigning in the business, plus making sure you stay in the saddle, and so on.

The above and numerous other examples with greater or lesser complexity and breadth, should be making it abundantly clear that it is misguided to take human thinking as coming to abstractly address the world around us. The human mind cannot take an abstract disinterested perspective on the world around it, if the very language in which it functions is so heavily invested in its physical spaces. Contemplation about the world is invariably at the same time contemplation from within the world, in terms of the very world. No perspective can be free from embodiment. It should be little wonder that positivism had to go out of the window (note this spatial metaphor of the window!). It should be all the more amazing to us that positivism remains the default faith of so many in the West today.

3 Theology in the light of embodied thinking

I want to mention a few works of others in cognitive studies and thinking before continuing my own analysis and drawing further conclusions in this article. Work done by Heiphatz et al. gives a clear indication that teleological thinking, and an understanding that God has a mind much like that of people, is implicit to much human comprehension: "Distinguishing God's mind from human minds requires socio-cognitive development and deliberate reasoning."[37] Even top physical scientists cannot help but reason teleologically, Keleman et al. tell us.[38] Louchakova-Schwartz researches ancient reports of ladders-to-heaven, particularly on the part of Orthodox theologians.[39] She finds these to be traceable to "measures of the nested fractal organisation of non-linear brain patterns,"[40] i.e. to be of physiological or embodied origins! Cresswell and Rivas criticise evolutionary explanations for contemporary human religiosity. There is no "universal cognitive architecture [of religion] created by evolution," they suggest.[41] 'Religion' does not arise from some obscure "inner essence ... but from experience in a world of meanings, images and social bonds in which all persons are inevitably involved."[42] According to this analysis by Cresswell and Rivas, if so called 'religion' itself arises from embodied experiences, then 'religion' cannot be hived-off as separate and distinct from the rest of existence.

My main focus in this article is on a theoretical perspective through which to examine theology as a reversal of our above recognition of the embodiment of human existence. If indeed Lakoff and Johnson have made a clear case for embodied existence, then presumably as embodiment has generated human thinking, so human thinking reflects embodiment. In other words, an intelligent approach to human thinking presented in an unembodied way (for example, simply a text written on a sheet of paper) could be extrapolated to recreate the structures of embodied human existence. For example, a Martian making a study of human communication would realise that humans habitually engage with something called a

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36 Ibid., 192.
37 Heiphatz et al., 'How,' 123.
38 Keleman et al., 'Professional.'
39 Louchakova-Schwartz, 'Theophanis.'
40 Ibid., 70.
41 Cresswell and Rivas, 'Cognition,' 113.
42 Ibid., 122.

horse. The horse has a mouth, is strong, might be beaten to encourage it to stand up, but beating it when it is dead is useless, it can be ridden by a person, it is controlled by reigns, it has eyes that see sideways (hence horses can be given blinkers), and so on. The Martian would just as easily perceive that authors of human language have bodies, and many features of their bodies.

A very familiar example could be drawn by looking at human marriage. An examination of the life, thinking, and even communication of a female human being will reveal the existence of something called *a man*, without one ever having a physical encounter with that *man*. A close examination of a woman's body would reveal that a certain part of the body is particularly sensitive to a fleshly contact that it appears would have to come from outside of itself. That is the female vagina. A woman's embodied actions, careful attention to dressing, wearing of cosmetics, shopping for more food than she could eat by herself, the height of some of the shelves in her home, the possibility that the seat of the toilet can be lifted, would all point to the existence of a man. Continued observation of the woman would continue to reveal more and more about the body of a man whom she lives with.

One could presumably build on the above, and acquire an ability at advising the above woman with respect to the man whom one had not yet seen. The failure to provide periodic meat can be associated with reduced levels of happiness on the part of the woman, even if she herself does not like eating meat. One might tell a woman that it is in her own best interests to be home by 5.00 p.m. One might realise that a voice with a lower pitch is particularly soothing and assuring for a woman. One can recommend that she bathe regularly, wear particular clothes, and numerous other things based on her embodied behaviour, all without ever having met a male human. Advice one gives may well not be either peripheral or inconsequential. On the contrary, it could easily make the difference for her between happiness and misery.

The astute reader should notice that the above paragraph resembles an introduction to theology. Theology, words about God, can be said to be how the nature of the unseen that is of most value to human ability is identified and then articulated. The fact that God may never have been physically observed is immaterial (as in the case of the husband above). Similarly, as in the case of the man above, a great deal can be surmised about God from what we can observe of people in general. Getting God's identity right is critical. It is very contextual – theology is about God's interaction with people in embodied context(s). It is likely to be the difference between happiness and misery.

I suggest that perceiving thinking as being embodied is making theology evident. "Metaphysics, for example, is a fancy name for our concern for what is real," Lakoff and Johnson tell us.[43] "The classical philosophical view of scientific realism is challenged."[44] We simply need to reverse the process taken by contemporary cognitive researchers: Cognitive researchers like Lakoff have been able to trace ways in which embodiment dictates numerous avenues of human thinking. It shows why human thinking works as it does. Reversing this, knowing how human thinking functions, will begin to reveal necessary truth that lies behind it.

I don't think any cognitive scientists would say that embodiment is a sufficient cause for all human thinking. That would be to make the Lockean fallacy – that the material can birth the conjectural, that the secrets of town-planning can be found by studying bricks.[45] Origins of our thinking that might *appear to be* other than material and spatial, can be no less 'real'. Working 'backwards' in human thinking, as from the wife to her husband above, can help us to discover things about the origins of such 'other' in our thinking. It can reveal things about God.[46]

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43 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*, 9.

44 Ibid., 90.

45 The above point is related to the arbitrariness or otherwise of our bodies. Body shape and physical laws seemed to be an object of our thinking, until cognitive scientists told us they are also the origin of our thinking. Given this, were our bodies and physical laws (e.g. up = more = better) to be different than the way they are, then our perception of who we are and what is around us would also be different from what it is. For our knowledge to be meaningful, ultimately, requires our bodies to have been meaningfully designed.

46 Christians realise that mere conjecture from living experience of an individual falls short. They acknowledge that drawing on the reflected upon lived experience of prior generations brings great value to one's contemporary existence. This latter of course is the nature of the bible.

My major point here though, is that as embodiment is seen to result in avenues of thought, so avenues of thought can presuppose origins in embodiment. In a parallel way, avenues of thought presuppose God. I am not here trying to prove God. We need not prove God, we need only suppose God, as we would correctly suppose embodied features of others from the way that we ourselves think.

Some may respond to my argument here by telling me that, but God is not embodied. But, yet, God is embodied. Our minds that are in tune with our embodied world perceive of God exactly because God engages with us in an embodied way. This is another way of saying what I have already said above – that human existence extrapolates beyond the bodily. Our language is bodily, but our thoughts also extend beyond. It is widely believed that 'God is Spirit' (John 4:24), i.e. wind (John 3:8), we don't see the wind, but its bodily out-workings.[47] Hence so is spirit. Scientists have discovered much about air and wind from its impact on other things, see for example Brownian motion.[48] We use a parallel means to learn about God. His being invisible is not the same as his not being embodied in the broad sense in which we are using that term here.

Disembodied engagement by God who is spirit (cf. wind) operates in an embodied way. Even a vision or dream will invariably be of embodiment – people, eyes, voices (sounds of course have embodied origins), perhaps also animals, noises, rocks and trees. This is no different from science, on principle; no matter how non-embodied a process identified by science (e.g. an electron field), we (people) will only ever receive it or conceive of it, in an embodied way. Our embodied nature gives us no choice in this. God knows this.

Any notion that a search for God is other-than a search for human kind's wellbeing has, I suggest, been a recent invention of the West. Masuzawa makes this clear – the West prior to about 1900 searched for God in the interest of prosperity, as did presumably everyone else. Then the West's having found God and prosperity, this finding became an embarrassment to it, resulting in something like a 'loss of nerve': By incredible *aporia*, a "sympathetic attitude," was taken as axiomatically valuable for the study of world religions.[49] In other words, people turned against the very source of their prosperity. Incredibly, the search for God was in a formal sense from that point on abandoned – as other world religions were taken as equivalents to Western people's 'religion'. As a result, God's own reality seemed to disappear.[50] What was reified into existence to take his place was *religion* (as understood in the modern West). Considering religion to be universal to people, reified in turn something called secularism into existence – considered to be whatever remains that is not religion. The assumption of the equivalence of world religions was made on the basis that origins are arbitrary – that how God is depicted is of little consequence, as long as the outcome is a 'religion'. Cognitive science having shown that other origins are not arbitrary, suggests that neither can be God as originator of 'religion'.[51]

4 A curious blind spot

We have found, amazingly, that dominant thinking that recently denied that anything from outside of the mind could dictate to it (i.e. that God could speak to people), has had to accommodate claims that physical embodiment is absolutely foundational to all thought! This adjustment has happened discretely, trying not to upset apple-carts of scientific endeavour: Science has been built on the assumption that the human mind was able to perceive a world outside of itself. We are now proposing that what it perceives from outside of itself is a part of itself. Such thinking could, to some, be threatening the very foundations of scientific endeavour. Theologically speaking, we are shifting the supposed foundation of science from 'objectivity' to 'God'.

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47 The English term 'spirit' originated in the Latin *spiritus*, breath.
48 Editors, 'Brownian'.
49 Masuzawa, *Invention*, 97.
50 Troeltsch, 'Christianity,' 78.
51 For more articulation of the origin of 'world religions' and the way this is impacting on contemporary theological understanding, see Harries, 'Shadow'.

The relationship between world and mind is found to be a cyclical one, in which our world "is ... found [by us] ... it is also our structure that enables us to reflect upon this world ... we find ourselves in a circle."[52] In other words, the world would be different, if not perceived through the structure of which we our self are made. Scientists had, in the era of positivism, told us that science explains everything. Then there appeared to be no need for God. Now we are told that human thinking cannot help but be bodily and metaphorical. The structure of our bodies has provided the foundation stones for our understanding, including that of science. Then science cannot be 'objective', and it cannot be prior to human existence. Had our embodiment been of a different nature, then science could not have been what it is.

I suggest that contemporary thinking has thus discretely opened the once-closed door to theological endeavour and comment. The understanding of science that once closed the door on theological endeavour and comment, is gone. If human being is as original as is science, then science cannot have originated human being. A space has opened for God. But, theologians have not been informed; academia continues *as if* nothing has changed, *as if* they can still take God as being irrelevant.

Academia has ignored human blending with the Word of God. Fauconnier and Turner make much reference to ways in which people blend things that can on the surface appear to be very different.[53] Such blending, by putting two different things together[54] enables people to make radical inferences about reality that to Fauconnier and Turner can be said to have been causal of the peculiarities of human thinking so that "most of everyday communication involves multiple blends."[55] Fauconnier and Turner seem to make much too little of the determined blending over hundreds of years of European ancestors between two very different things: the Kingdom of God and regular 'life on earth', which has been and continues to be the pre-occupation of Christians. One might even suggest that "mappings from two input spaces [God and the world, bring us to a] third, blended space", which is the church.[56]

If bodily metaphor has contributed to the discovery of science, to re-iterate this point again; that bodily metaphor has not gone unguided! Science was not found. It was 'founded'. Who founded it? Humanly speaking, when we trace the history of modern science, we find it was people profoundly influenced by Western Protestant Christianity. See for example Weber.[57] We can also mention Mangalwadi.[58]

Theologians should also be aware, that they are not alone on the scene, as they perhaps thought they were in the 19th Century. That is, 'embodiment' is also there. Theologians have no choice but to work with bodily, earthly metaphors. Although, actually, for theologians that is not new. Words about God have traditionally been understood as metaphorical. It has only been more recently, in the modern era, that words about God have at times been considered 'non-metaphorical,' thus providing ammunition to proponents of secular and atheistic worldviews.[59] Louchakova-Schwartz has already explained above how God is understood metaphorically in the Christian tradition. So also Varela et al. regarding a Buddhist tradition, that also goes back thousands of years.[60]

An additional reason some in the contemporary world have rejected belief in God, is so as not to upset 'religious others', e.g. followers of Muhammed. This is on the basis of the assumption that 'rejecting all traditions', Christianity, Islam and Judaism alike, can seem to be a 'fair' and neutral position.[61] To accept Christian belief is however to cast aspersions on Muhammed's teaching: Assuming Jesus' way to be the

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52 Varela et al., *Embodied*, 3.
53 Fauconnier and Turner, *Way*, 25.
54 Ibid., 174.
55 Ibid., 294.
56 Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction*.
57 Weber, *Protestant*, 13-15.
58 Mangalwadi, *Book*, 220-245.
59 Reitan, ('Moving'), already cited above, considers ways in which atheists don't appreciate 'moving of the goalposts' with regard to God's identity. Before Lakoff and Johnson's text reminding people of the centrality of metaphor in human communication (*Metaphors*), and even to date, there is a tendency to fault the Christian Scriptures when they are found to be not literally true. Such fault-finding commonly ignores ways in which God has always been understood through metaphor.
60 Varela et al., *Embodied*, xviii.
61 A similar argument was presented to me in 2013 by a Christian believer who used to live in the Arab world. For him, atheism might be a more effective means of countering extremism in Islam than is Christianity.

exclusive way to truth, immediately puts one into a position of apparent contradiction with followers of Muhammed, for whom Muhammed has the final say. That is to say, if there 'is no God', then Muhammed was merely as misled as was Jesus, and presumably Moses. Hence according to Western secularism; the correct path is the path of 'no-religion'.

Assuming the adherence to a particular creed, such as that of Islam, to be merely a private affair that is largely inconsequential for issues such as economics, politics, social adhesion and other critical concerns, enables sidestepping a great number of controversies with an apparently clean conscience. Things looks very different when the foundation to Western life and development is faith in Christ, rather than secularism. Given our example above, if Christian belief is as determinative as we are proposing, then the solution to today's issues of Islamic fundamentalist killings that are repeatedly hitting the headlines, looks to be conversion to Christianity.

Most people in the world have not been so naïve as to follow Western secularism. Problems brushed under the carpet by the West's implicit faith in its own secularism, are floating quickly back to the surface. "Too bad we're so relevant," said Marty, concluding a large-scale project exploring the contemporary relevance of so-called 'fundamentalists', most of whom are Islamic.[62]

Vainio has discovered "a curious blind-spot in contemporary theorizing."[63] Scholars have taken, Vainio tells us, a peculiarly narrow view of religion, such that were the same view taken of other disciplines such as politics and ethics, they would have been totally undermined: Things that debunk 'religions', also "eat through everything else."[64] Contemporary wisdom has been that, "In politics and ethics we can, and should, engage in T2 reasoning (i.e. 'reflection'), because it can produce true beliefs but in religion [reflection] is futile."[65] "Why would this be so? Why should we think that religion is a special case?" he asks.[66] That view, that 'religion' is a primal thing of which all its relevance is entirely by intuition and never reflected upon, is widely held by researchers of CSR (the Cognitive Science of Religion). When this comes to be the total sum of acknowledged 'religion', then this is the basis on which the same 'religion' has increasingly been put aside, we could say almost 'laid to rest', as Cusack reflects for Australians; "religion is a good thing for other people to have."[67]

Vainio points out that, according to contemporary scholarship, scientists, scholars in general, and even the wider populace, all reflect upon every facet of life, but nobody reflects on religion! That is to say, in contemporary life religion must be tolerated but not taken seriously. The same is then anachronistically and graphically and very misleadingly projected back into history, as if 'religion' has always been a silent partner in people's endeavours at coming to terms with 'life' in this world as we know it. On the basis of such false anachronism, swathes of history are lost from view!

The peculiarity of this take on 'religion' presumably arises from ways it has come to be understood in today's dualistic West. Dualistic, that is to say, in so far as concerns related to 'religion' have been bracketed into a distinct category. This is reflected in the use of terms such as 'supernatural' being considered the foundation for religion, whereas every other facet of human life is considered to thrive without recourse to the supernatural.[68] Nongbri tells us that this kind of understanding of religion is peculiar to modern times: "ancient cultures differ from a modern, post-enlightenment world that typically posits sharp divides between religion and politics or religion and economics."[69] This understanding of religion, that posits sharp divides, is quite unlike my findings in Africa whereby 'religion', if we can call it that, is as much a part of normal life as is anything else.[70] It is as if neurological researchers expected to find religion in a small box

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62 Marty, 'Too Bad.'

63 Vainio, 'What does,' title of article.

64 Ibid., 110.

65 Ibid., 109.

66 Ibid., 109.

67 Cusack, 'Vestigial,' 3-4.

68 For the illegitimacy of contemporary understandings of the 'supernatural' see Harries, *Godless,* xxii. The cognitive study of religion (CSR) can be said to be hung-up on this question of supernatural, for example see Slyke, *Cognitive.*

69 Nongbri, 'Dislodging,' 440.

70 Harries, *Godless,* 71.

in the brain containing an antenna sending and receiving signals from God somewhere in outer space, and that until this was found modern conceptions of what 'religion' ought to be remained unsatisfied. Reflection on what is thus not identifiable is considered illegitimate. We could say that in reality, reflecting on all the above, that God's influence on contemporary life is far from absent, but is determinedly, illogically and unscientifically, being ignored.

To close, I want to consider a few implications of our above argument from a perspective of non-Western theology. Lakoff and Johnson identify aspects of Western culture, which are apparently peculiar to modern times and Western people. 'Life is a journey' is, they tell us, far from being a universal metaphor.[71] Others do not conceive of 'life as a journey'. Other people might also conceive of an argument other than as a war.[72] Lakoff and Johnson root contemporary American English conceptual metaphors in the times of Plato and Aristotle.[73] What then of the thinking and metaphorical systems of people whose way of life was, until very recently, carried out in total ignorance of Plato's and Aristotle's teachings? In the light of the realisation that human understanding is metaphorical, and that metaphor is inherently bodily, I want to explore theological and missiological implications of this for cross-cultural engagement with non-Western people. Non-Western people I take to be those who are not dualistic. Not having made a dualistic distinction between the material and the spiritual, the kinds of impacts that positivistic and naturalistic philosophies have had on the West cannot be there in the non-West. Undermining of positivism and naturalism therefore takes us a step closer to non-Western theologies.

While much ink is often spilt discussing the hegemony of Western theological thinking, it does not seem to be at all easy to overcome such hegemony.[74] One reason for this is perhaps, because the West is not really listening. The prevalence of the conduit metaphor has had people believe that all languages are equivalent.[75] The conduit metaphor takes a word as being a container that carries an idea from one person to another.[76] Implicit in many people's understanding of this, is that translation involves finding the word in your language that will carry the same idea as that in the source language. On that basis, there is no need to listen to indigenous people expressing themselves in their own languages. They can as well be heard in translation into a European language like English. On the contrary, Sharifian points out, a metaphor can be *conceptualised* differently,[77] resulting in false-friend metaphors.[78]

How then will metaphor be translated? Taking ARGUMENT IS WAR in native English[79] (Ungerer and Schmid instead consider argument to be "a battle"[80]), if a term for argument of an African people is translated as *argument* in English, then if that term is different from 'war', we will be transforming and domesticating the metaphor.[81] An indigenous term that translates *argument* in English may be different from *war* in at least two ways. First, argument in the indigenous language is not considered to be 'war' in that language. Second, war in that language is not the same as war in English. In the above cases, much of the content and implications of whatever term is used in an African language that translates into *argument* in English will simply have been lost. In the contemporary world in which Western scholars predominantly learn of 'the other' through texts about them in English, important content is lost in translation.

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71 Lakoff and Johnson tells us that "in our culture … a purposeful life is a journey" (*Philosophy,* 61), implying that this may not be the case in other cultures.

72 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 6.

73 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy,* 122.

74 Georges and Baker, *Ministering*, 20.

75 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 10.

76 The conduit metaphor is: "The speaker puts ideas (objects) into words (containers) and sends them (along a conduit) to a hearer who takes the idea/objects out of the word/containers" (Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors*, 10).

77 Sharifian, *Cultural,* 284.

78 These 'false-friend' metaphors "are suggestive of a cross-language equivalence that is only superficial and can trip up L2-learners and translators" (Musolff, 'Metaphors,' 48).

79 Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors, 5.*

80 Ungerer and Schmid, *Introduction.*

81 Venuti, *Scandals,* 5. Equivalent terminology in the field of cognitive linguistics would be mapping or blending. These result in inventions for African people of argument styles familiar to Westerners.

I will endeavour to illustrate the above using the term *dhaw* used in the Luo language of Kenyan. Someone who *dhaw kodi* (argues with you) could be said to *goyoni lweny* (be doing war with you), and *lweny* could be translated into English as war. Nevertheless, translating argue as *dhaw* would be false friend metaphor, because ways in which Luo people understand engaging in warfare are very different from those of dominant contemporary Western English. For example, *en lweny* (it is war), typically refers to a struggle with *juogi* or *jochiende* (ancestral spirits). The term given for argument by Capen is *mbaka*.[82] The term *mbaka* is however more like a lively conversation than the English 'argument'. Another alternative to 'he argued with him or her' would be *lwero*. *Lwero yath*, is to cut all the branches off a tree, leaving only the stem or trunk. This is a live metaphor when it comes to the use of *lwero* with respect to people. In this sense, *lwero* would be better translated into English as 'dress down', as in 'he gave her a dressing down'. Contributing to the prevalence of *lwero* as argument is the tradition amongst Luo people by which one does not argue-back to someone who is senior. *Dhaw* as a result frequently being one-way tends to be *lwero*. In each of the above cases, the metaphorical sense of the terms for 'argument', add to difficulty in accurate translation.

Today's thinking on development of poor countries continues to be rooted in a time when the conduit metaphor was still very much extant.[83] It is thus assumed that teaching African people English will be enabling them to manipulate a limited number of 'real' or 'literal' meanings in appropriate ways, so that they can become like the West. Without the conduit metaphor majority world development needs radical re-conceptualisation. 'Developing Africa' requires building on pre-understanding, i.e. the metaphorical foundation of African languages, which requires use of African languages rooted in African worldviews.

As well as being very important, the above is also an enormously difficult issue. The difficulty involved in doing the above is, I believe, much exacerbated by the contemporary prevalence of English and other European languages in African countries. English is often the official language, for example in Uganda, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya, Zambia and so on. Yet the physical, social, historical and many other contexts are very different to those found in the West. African people themselves implicitly translate from their own languages into English in order to use English. The international community that hears only the English, has little or no clue about the *false-friendships* (see above) going on in the course of translation. The English they hear, ends up only a very approximate representation of people's own inherent understanding of their lives. These days, policy decisions in many areas including business, planning, government and so forth, are conducted by African people in English that typically requires international donor approval. That is to say, no matter how much the African people concerned may prefer to use English in a way that aligns with their own languages and thus makes sense to them, they are required officially to formulate their English on international, i.e. approximately native-English, standard. We could say, that any interim requirement for translation is ignored. These issues, outcomes of mapping and blending across cultures, that I have only very briefly articulated in this paragraph, create a great deal of chaos and, to say the least 'failures', in African development initiatives.[84]

The very nature of this issue makes it hard to provide specific examples of the kinds of 'chaos' mentioned above to native English speakers unfamiliar with the African languages and cultures concerned. Were it not difficult, then people in the West would have 'got it', and insist on use of African languages in Africa, instead of considering global English to be useful for so many things. Differences between time-orientation and event-orientation, use of a term such as 'mother' to refer to one's aunt, the understanding that prosperity arises from pleasing ancestors, the existence of ancient law codes largely unknown to the Western world that people endeavour to follow while also pleasing donors, a relatively extreme fear of the consequences on one's prosperity of the envy of others, reference to a house being understood as being to a family, having more than one house meaning one has more than one wife, eating money instead of spending it, and numerous other such factors all trip up intercultural communicators.[85]

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82 Capen, *Bilingual*.

83 I.e. the 1950s. Moyo, *Dead*, 13.

84 For more on this see: Harries, 'Great,' 44-61, and Harries, 'African'.

85 The author himself having lived in Eastern Africa since 1988 using African languages on a daily basis, has certainly been affected by the metaphorical composition of African languages in his use of English. Exactly how much this plays out in this article is hard to tell.

Lakoff and Johnson tell us other people do not have the 'life is a journey' metaphor.[86] In this case, presumably their life-understanding is foundationally different to that of Westerners.[87] Perhaps it is that 'life is a circle.'[88] Franks notes the prominence of funerals in South Africa.[89] Too much attendance at funerals is hindering social and economic growth, he suggests. Yet, if 'life' is a circle, then facilitating the transitions from living to dead then back to living is a vital or even the vital part of enabling future generations. "In practice it is not easy to shake off the sense of forward movement and historical purpose derived from Christianity in order to embrace mere rotation or to accept a meaningless passage of time and change leading nowhere."[90] If funerals are hindering socio-economic progress in Africa, and the transformation of cyclical metaphors into purposeful metaphors comes from blending with the Kingdom of God (see above), then knowing God is the key to African development. "The idea of divine agency seems to be the natural or default belief in human cognitive development," Sanders tells us.[91] From my analysis here, it is not only a default belief, but also a necessary belief.

Space prevents me from going into more detail on this issue of economic development. Mangalwadi makes a very strong case for Christianity as the harbinger of the amazing recent economic success of Western Europe.[92]

5 Summary and conclusion

This article has taken a historical view of the development of human thinking. It has been informed particularly by recent developments in cognitive science.

While the 20th century saw the rise and then collapse of the case for positivism, many Western people continue to make it their foundational faith. Foundational weaknesses in atheism and naturalism as well as positivism have been brought to our attention. The understanding that thinking is embodied challenges presumptions of the abstract nature of understanding and replaces them with metaphor. Metaphors are rooted in embodied physical existence. Far from discovering their physical context as impartial bystanders, thinking people are found to be explorers of what in absolute terms would seem to be contingent – human perception of reality. (It is contingent, as the perception of reality depends on the reality that it perceives.) Various illustrations are used to show that endeavours to hive-off 'religion' as an isolated entity, have been flawed. God, who holds the key to human well-being, can be explored by reversing the process by which cognitive scientists have found the impacts of embodiment. The refusal to accept the legitimacy of reflection on 'religion' (i.e. really Christian theology), illegitimately projected back into history, is suggested as having been a deception that has supported atheistic positions.

By way of conclusion, this paper has endeavoured to show how recent work in cognitive science has effectively closed the door on arguments previously put up to defend positivist, naturalist, and atheist positions. This is because by allowing embodied metaphor, it has discredited what was a hegemony of abstract thought. Once embodiment is accepted as being foundational to all human thought, endeavours by advocates of the primacy of thought over matter to discredit God no longer hold water. The implications of the above are explored with specific reference to contemporary African contexts, considered as an example of how the West engages with alternatives to its own dominant metaphors.

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86 Lakoff and Johnson, *Philosophy*, 61.
87 As I explore this issue, I need to add that the hegemonic effect of Western thinking and languages globally has made research on this kind of question in Africa almost impossible. Not least because someone assuming that African people might not possess the foundational metaphors needed for modern economic development is at risk of being accused of being racist. Hence my own research is not very advanced.
88 Gale, 'African.'
89 Franks, 'Warning.'
90 Martin, *Secularization,* 6.
91 Sanders, *Theology,* 271.
92 Mangalwadi, *Book*, see for example 88. See also: Harries, 'Faith' and Harries, 'Enabling.'

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