

Review 3

Title: The All New Don't Think of an Elephant. By George Lakoff (2014). 164 p. White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing. ISBN: 978-1-60358-594-1

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George Lakoff is clearly a progressive scientist. In this and other books, he tries to give progressives or liberals some understanding of where they went wrong and/or can do a better job. Lakoff's insights and knowledge fall within the domain of cognitive linguistics and science. In 2003, he published the first version of this book. Within a decade, the world has changed. For this reason, he decided to make a new version of his bestseller.

In 'The All New Don't Think of an Elephant', he calls for an understanding of the American political divide, which is according to him based on differing moral systems: the "Strict father model" and the "Nurturant parent model". These models influence how you see the world. The Strict father model is the moral system where conservatives operate from, the Nurturant parent version is the one the progressives operate from. Understanding the division consequently means understanding conservatives. I consider this division as an important characteristic of Lakoff's writings. He wants progressives to understand the conservatives instead of calling them dumb. As an alternative, Lakoff calls for a civic debate between the opponents. Though, he believes progressives strive for the ultimate good cause. In the end, he wants to help progressives to reach their goals. In addition, while Lakoff explains the moral division he wants to make it clear why progressives need to reframe their issues. The reframing needs to be in line with the values that come forth from these moral systems. It is not just coming up with clever slogans. The frames need to fit within the brain. Therefore, just citing the facts won't convince conservatives or biconceptuals. Another essential guideline is that you need to 'repeat, repeat, repeat' the frames to make them part of public discourse. Reframing does not happen overnight. Coupled with calling for reframing, he tells the readers how to apply the theory in daily life. He gives examples of issues where reframing is crucial and how to do it. Global warming, inequality, and taxation are just a few examples of these issues. So, if you want to understand what conservatives really think, what can help progressives to win back the public discourse (and eventually more votes) and just how our brain works in politics, you need to read the book! I think this publication can be read by a variety of people because Lakoff's explanation is written in a clear and smooth way. The book is far from boring because the author uses a lot of daily life examples, so you can apply it di-

rectly to your experience. For academic readers, and especially for political science students, I would say it is a good starting point to get a sense of the importance of cognitive linguistic in politics.

The book is structured as follows. First, Lakoff guides you through the basic theory of framing. He explains why it is such an important subject in daily lives and especially in politics. In the second part, he talks about the key mechanism and concepts of framing more in-depth. Part three focuses on specific issues. In this way, he makes the theory more tangible. By doing that, he builds on the insights of the French economist Thomas Piketty to explain that almost all political issues are freedom issues. In the penultimate chapter, he duplicated some parts of his initial volume but edited or added some elements. A lot has changed since then. Some of his propositions about framing have been successfully applied (e.g. gay marriage) or things he warned us of have happened (e.g. Second Gulf War and Iraq war). The last part discusses what divides and unites the conservatives, but also what divides and unites the progressives. At the end, he briefly mentions ways to respond to conservatives and he answers frequently asked questions. Every chapter will now be discussed.

Starting with the introduction, Lakoff points out that we can only understand what our brain allows us to understand. Furthermore, the brain does not change easily and most of the time we are unconscious of what our brain is doing. The frames are great interest for politics. These are 'mental structures that shape the way we see the world' (p. xi). In other words, it influences how we think about policies. It leads to the use of particular language because we know frames through language. When language is used, frames are activated. E.g. 'don't think of an elephant' = using 'don't' or 'not' you actually activate the frame of an elephant. Reframing is a matter of accessing what we already believe unconsciously, making it conscious, and repeat it till it enters the normal public discourse. The breeding ground for frames are the two morality models: the Strict father and the Nurturant parent model. What is important to notice is that most people have both models in their brain but activate one more than the other or switch between the two in specific cases (unconsciously!). The possession of the two models is what Lakoff calls biconceptualism. Because of biconceptualism, owning the public discourse can cause political change since all politics is moral. Another outcome of understanding the world through frames is that facts won't set you free. Facts will not be accepted if they do not fit within the frames people hold.

What is framing? This question is answered in part one. In chapter one, Lakoff gives the reader guidelines to take back the public discourse. 'Back' insinuates that conservatives overrule public discourse. According to Lakoff, the conservatives master the public discourse because they own the language/frames in the media and as a result the minds of people. Progressives need to stop this by reframing. This brings us to rule number one: 'Notice what conservatives have done right and where progressives have missed the boat.' They were good at successively framing their issues. But before you can grasp all of this you should start by understanding where conservatives are coming from. This means understanding the moral division between people. This division is led by family values. You have the Strict father model and the Nurturant parent model. The first one is the model extreme conservatives hold and the last one is the one true progressives hold. All other values descent from these frames. In short, the Strict father model implies you

believe in a world that is dangerous and where competition between good and bad is inherent. A strong father is needed to protect and support the family. Punishment and discipline are central concepts. Further, it links morality with prosperity: if you are disciplined and self-interested you will become prosperous. Rich persons, on the other hand, are moral and should rule. There is accordingly a moral hierarchy. All of this contradicts the other value model: the Nurturant family model. People holding this view believe that the world can be made a better place. 'Nurturant' implies empathy and responsibility for others and yourself. In politics, this means a government that protects freedom and opportunities. This model is what progressives share. It should unite them despite the differences between the various types of progressives. This is where another rule pops in: unite and cooperate. He calls for this because at the moment the progressives do not see what unites them. Lakoff offers the 'unite glasses' by explaining the Nurturant family model (see also chapter 14). Conservatives, on the other hand, had already understood this need for unity. Though, Lakoff emphasizes that this understanding did not happen overnight. Conservatives learned how to frame their issues via research and think tanks. Another problem that Lakoff sees when looking at progressives is the ultimate belief in facts. As already stated, it does not work. Also, progressives seem to believe that people would vote in their self-interest. This is not the case. People vote their identity. This is also why facts won't set you free, identities are not necessarily factual. Another implication of this logic is that you should speak from your moral perspective at all times in order to take back public discourse. Progressives, currently, are not doing this. Opinion polls are their holy grail. This is wrong according to the author. By talking from your moral perspective, you talk to the progressive base of biconceptual voters (see introduction). A separate guideline concerns the detection of the use of Orwellian language by conservatives. It shows their weak points. Hypocognition is another problem progressives must deal with. Hypocognition is the lack of relatively simple fixed frames that can be evoked by a word or two. Today, for example, there is no progressive wording for Tax relief, which is a conservative frame. Furthermore, progressives should start to think proactive instead of reactive. Progressives always react and defend themselves. Lakoff gives a solution: talk about your values and integrate these issues in strategic initiatives. Strategic initiatives are plans in which change in one carefully chosen area has automatic effects on many other issues. Conservatives are already doing it while liberals think issue by issue. A note of criticism can be given here. Lakoff is an excellent explainer but it happens often that different paragraphs are not smoothly connected. Especially in this part of the book, he jumps from one idea to another while the link between the two ideas is not always clear.

Part two consists of short chapters which explain key concepts and mechanisms associated with framing. Here Lakoff repeats a lot from the first part. Only new insights are discussed in this book review. Chapter two can be centered around one idea: slogans can't overcome hypocognition and that is why only sustained public discussion based on re-framing has a chance. 'Reflexivity: the brain and the world' is the title of chapter three. Reflexivity is about the world reflecting our understandings through our actions and our understandings reflect the world shaped by the frame-informed actions of ourselves and others. Reframing is about how reflexivity can be used for the good. Chapter four is about systemic causation. It is different from direct causation which implies an immediate change. Systemic causation, on the other hand, cannot be experienced directly, it must be

learned, studied and repeatedly communicated before it can be widely comprehended. I think Lakoff explains it in a pleasant way: 'The science is excellent, the scientists' ability to communicate is lacking.' (p. 39). One of the hardest cases of systemic causation to get into public discourse is the relationship between politics and personhood. Chapter five deals with this problem. The element that links the two concepts is again morality. The moral sense to justify our actions is central to personhood, which implies having a personal identity. Further, as said above, all politics is moral. The next part, under the sub-heading 'the science behind empathy and morality', is very technical. It discusses the neuroscientist insights. In sum, it states that people have two systems in their brain which interact with each other: the empathy system (based on the mirror neuron system in our brains where we can modulate empathy) and the well-being system. The latter system regulates whether you feel bad or good by producing different hormones. These brain structures form the neural basis not only of your own sensibilities but also of your views on what an ideal person ought to be. The ideal person of a conservative is very different from the one of the progressives. Progressives admire balance between the empathy and the well-being system whereas conservatives center the well-being system. Later, Lakoff links the term reflexivity and personhood. The basic idea is that someone's personhood, and therefore his or her ideal person, can change over time because of reflexivity. And since personhood is linked with politics it influences the political view too. Lakoff ends the chapter by telling the history of politics and personhood in America. The next chapter also starts by referring to history: why did people gather in democracies? They take responsibility to afford public resources for all and to provide decent private lives for most of the citizens. Public resources make private life possible. For conservatives, this reasoning is immoral because they look at responsibility with the 'personal' glasses whereas progressives link responsibility with empathy. That is why conservatives want and think it is moral, a government that does not interfere too much. The problem is that conservatives have won the battle over the 'private depends on the public'- frame. Lakoff's solution? Connect freedom to 'private depends on the public' because freedom is something conservatives understand.

That is how the author furthers his book to part three where he identifies specific cases that progressives can work on. Moreover, he zooms in on how they can do this: frame it as a freedom issue. However, conservatives have owned the definition of freedom over time. Progressives must take them back because every policy issue is a freedom issue. He does not just state it but gives examples of policy issues and their link with freedom. He does this with: health care, education, poverty, discrimination, unions and pensions and immigration. The following chapter eight is about 'The Piketty insight on the accelerating wealth gap'. According to the French economist Thomas Piketty, the wealth gap between the ultra-rich and the rest is accelerating, not just widening. This is alarming because wealth gives freedom and power. What is even more alarming to Lakoff is that this insight is not yet framed. Piketty states that the trend of the accelerating wealth gap is reversible by political interfering. Though, for the reason of systemic causation, this political solution is not likely because greater wealth leads to greater political leverage and power over public discourse etc. To reverse this trend, the progressives must build frames and make them part of public discourse. Further, Lakoff states that it is pivotal that global warming and the Piketty insight are linked in public discourse. If the conservatives,

who deny global warming, own the public discourse, the people will deny it too. In other words, framing Piketty can have massive systemic effects, just as the absence of it can. What should American people do? They should strengthen the frame of progressive morality, as well as the view of democracy based on empathy, responsibility and the frame 'the private depends on the public'. Another unframed systemic causation is 'government by corporation'. Lakoff dedicates a whole chapter (9) to this issue. The negative effects of runaway wealth are a result of 'government by corporation'. If the government is ruled by corporations the possibility for a political solution to the accelerating wealth gap (and the negative systemic effects) is reduced. Therefore, it is important to frame the government by corporation. There are lot of other unconscious metaphors linked to this frame in public discourse. Lakoff analyses them on pages 84-90 and clarifies how they became part of public discourse.

Part four is about some insights he gave in the first edition of his book (2003). A lot has changed since then. For instance, Iraq happened, gay marriage became legalized etc. Chapter ten deals with gay marriage. It became widely supported (since the first edition) but there are still a lot of states which have not legalized it. The author points out that conservatives are having a hard time accepting gay marriage because it goes against their morality: the strict father model. Conservatives morality and identity is at stake. Progressives nevertheless reframed the issue successfully and need to continue doing this. Chapter eleven deals with the metaphors of 9/11. This terrorist attack was an awakening of the unconscious identity and images of people. The Bush administration framed this event as an 'axis of evil' which is a pure strict father model application according to Lakoff. The problem of the conservative frame and the implications following from it is that they only look at one of the three causes of radical Islamic terrorists. What can the progressives do? Lakoff suggests a positive form of discourse by referring to the Nurturant model. This should be done in domestic as well as foreign policies because these two are inextricably linked. Chapter twelve is about 'metaphors that kill'. Central to the Gulf War and the Iraq war was the metaphor "nations are persons". What this metaphor misses about the truth is that, when bombing Iraq, not just Saddam Hussein is killed. The metaphor of 'nations are persons' is frequently used to justify war. This metaphor is accompanied by two stories: the Self-defence story and the Rescue story. Lakoff spells out how the Bush administration applied them to the two wars. The Bush strategy worked, even though it didn't fit with the facts. The lesson is again that facts won't set you free.

Part five brings 'the action', it is the more practical part. It starts by showing what divides and unites the conservatives. The divisions between conservatives are commonly viewed as forces that will tear the conservatives apart and make them weak. Lakoff offers another viewpoint. These differences lie in the domain of interest. Together they form every aspect of life. The structure that binds them is the Strict father morality. Afterward, there is a second part which deals with the phenomena of the Economic disunity as Lakoff calls it. It is about the fact that conservatives were rather the rich ones and they needed the support of the 'poor conservatives' to stay in power. Lakoff articulates that they managed this (voting against your own interest) by focusing on identity and framing it. The next chapter (14) applies the same logic to the progressives: What divides and what unites them? Despite their differences on specific policies, progressives are united by the progressive vision, values coming out from it and policy directions based on these

values. The core values are derived from the Nurturant family morality. The unity of progressives should become discussed openly and made part of public discourse. Arriving at chapter 15, you will find a repetition of what Lakoff already discussed but in another format. He answers questions that people ask him a lot. If you have read the book in-depth you can easily answer the questions yourself. But it might be informative to know how to respond to questions people might ask you when you talk about the book. At the end, the final chapter provides practical guidelines about how to respond to conservatives. This adds value to the book. Looking across the guidelines learns that they are all about a civil discourse (showing respect), reframing and the importance of values.