Ontological Metaphors for Moral Concepts in the Bible: Introduction

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Abstract

The article reveals the peculiarities of ontological mappings involving ethical concepts in the text of the Bible. The paper hypothesizes that ethical concepts as abstract phenomena are understood as physical entities and living beings, therefore there must be corresponding metaphorical projections, which underlie their conceptualization. The metaphor is viewed from two perspectives: within the classical and conceptual metaphor theories. From the perspective of the classical theory, metaphor is a literary expressive means, part of figurative language, which consists in using one word instead of the other for the sake of drawing attention or attaining poetic or elevated style. From the conceptual perspective, metaphor is a way humans perceive and conceptualize the objective reality by means of understanding complex abstract ideas or phenomena on the basis of some simple concrete things from the central life experience. This is carried out by means of projection of the source domain features onto the target domain, the latter being more complex than the former. Ontological metaphoric transferences with the target ethical concepts, which are found in the Bible involve two superordinate source domains: PERSON and THING. The extension of these two primary metaphors, which make up the central mapping is represented by a number of hyponymic domains, each of which is discussed separately. Besides the extension, the article pays special attention to the elaboration of metaphors, which involves the extension of the conceptual zone and projection of other source domain features, different from the central ones. The research infers the conclusion that the use of cross-domain mappings plays an important role in conveying ontological and deontological messages since such type of narrative helps to deliver the essential message to the broader audience most

efficiently as the more complex moral implications expressed in this way are conceived through simpler ideas and notions.

Keywords: elaboration of metaphor, extension of metaphor, mapping, source domain, target domain

INTRODUCTION

Moral concepts form the basis of any developed society since they underlie principles of interpersonal relations, which are imprinted in the human outlook and codified in legal norms. Therefore, research into their objectivization by language means gives better insight into their mental conceptualization, which is revealed in cross-domain mappings. Material for the research was context samples, which contained moral concepts as target domains for metaphorical projections retrieved from the Bible (New International Version). The choice of the Bible as a source of material for analysis is stipulated by the fact that it codifies the moral doctrine of the most widespread religion in the world – Christianity. Just as for any religion, one of the most salient tasks of Christianity are prescriptive and imperative regulations of social relations. The purpose of the paper is to examine ontological mappings involving moral concepts as target domains in the text of the Bible. The object of investigation is the metaphorical conceptual projections involving moral concepts. The paper hypothesizes that ethical values as abstract phenomena are understood as physical entities. Therefore, their conceptualization is realized through metaphoric cross-domain mappings, where material things act as source domains, the properties of which are mapped upon abstract concepts. This is confirmed by the text of the Bible, where one can find an extensive number of mapping instances.

It's worth mentioning that there exists a wide number of researches focused on metaphor studies and their quantity is constantly increasing, which can be illustrated by partly ironical Booth's (1979: 49) opinion that there will be more students of metaphor than humans by the year 2039. Currently, there also exists an impressive number of works dedicated to the research of Biblical metaphors. Among them one can distinguish studies: 1) focused on the particular Biblical book, like Isaian metaphors (Nielsen, 1989; Doyle, 2000; Dille, 2004); Jeremiah (Bourguet, 1987); Hosea (Nwaoru, 1999; Eidevall, 1996), etc; 2) surveys aiming at specific source and target domains among the latest researches include Brueggemann (2008), Cruz (2016), Spencer (2017), Lam (2016), Zimran (2018); 3) researches dealing with metaphors of gender and marriage: Haddox (2016); Sherwood (2018); Smit (2017). A far more exhaustive list is given in Lancaster (2021).

However, having searched the online compendium of Biblical metaphors (biblicalmetaphor.com) we concluded that among such a copious variety of research on the given topic there aren't any studies, dedicated to the analysis of moral concepts, like DUTY, CONSCIENCE, HONOUR, DIGNITY, PRIDE, acting as target domains in conceptual projections. Moreover, all the mentioned researches study Biblical metaphors exclusively in the literary sense, in which the metaphor is defined as a "novel or poetic linguistic expression, where one or more words for a concept are used outside of its normal conventional meaning to express a similar concept" (Lakoff 1993: 202). However, the metaphor is not just a stylistic device of a language but rather a matter of thought and reason. From this perspective, the language metaphor is secondary in relation to the conceptual metaphor (mapping), which is primary, as it sanctions the use of source domain language and inference patterns for target domain concepts (Lakoff, 1993: 208). Therefore, we believe that it is necessary to view the Bible metaphors not only from a linguistic perspective and treat them merely as a stylistic expressive means but also from a conceptual viewpoint. The mappings are conventional by their nature, that is they are a fixed part of the human conceptual system; therefore, such a twofold approach will cast light upon both issues: how metaphoric language contributes to the delivery of the Biblical ethical messages and how ethical concepts, which bear this message are codified in the human mind. The article has the following structure: an introduction, a brief overview of classical and conceptual metaphor theories, an analysis of cross-domain mappings with the ethical concepts, a delineation of the range of metaphor for ethical concepts and conclusions.

CLASSICAL VS CONCEPTUAL METAPHOR THEORY

The classical metaphor theory is rooted in the realm of literary studies, particularly in rhetoric and poetics, originally being based on the views of Aristotle and Cicero. Aristotle (1995) identifies metaphor as the substitution of one word or phrase for another in order to elevate the style. Cicero (1942) described metaphor as essential for theology, being one of its most efficient rhetorical devices. But as it was mentioned in the Introduction, metaphor can be viewed not merely as a literary means, realizing stylistic and rhetorical purposes, but as a cognitive mechanism for structuring experience and knowledge about the world. This view is based on the theory of conceptual metaphor (Kövecses, 2017a; Kövecses, 2017b; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980), which explains the mechanisms of features projection from one domain to another.

Such a dual interpretation of the term 'metaphor' (in the literary and cognitive senses) leads to the necessity to differentiate between some terms to avoid

ambiguity. Within the given paper the term 'metaphor' refers to the conceptual mapping, and the term 'metaphorical expression' is used to refer to an individual linguistic expression (like a *dead-end street*, for instance), which is sanctioned by the mapping and can be viewed as a stylistic device, serving rhetoric purposes in a given literary context.

Quite a clear distinction between literary and ontological metaphor is given in Cazeux (2007):

> Within metaphor, a distinction can be drawn between mere and ontological metaphor; whereas the former simply associates a physical concept with a metaphysical one, the latter recognizes that all concepts resonate with possible transpositions and, as such, brings to the fore the world-making power of speaking. Furthermore, ontological metaphor structures experience as an openness to …movement between concepts.

Within the Conceptual Metaphor Theory Lakoff & Johnson (1980) distinguish three types of metaphorical projections: ontological, structural, and orientational.

The given paper is focused on the ontological type of metaphor, which normally involves the projection of something concrete onto something abstract. According to Lakoff and Johnson:

> Ontological metaphors are so natural and persuasive in our thought that they are usually taken as self-evident, direct descriptions of mental phenomena. (Lakoff & Johnson 1980).

The ontological metaphorical transfer involves understanding one domain of experience (moral concept) in terms of an absolutely different domain of experience (PERSON or THING, for instance). More technically, the metaphor can be understood (in the mathematical sense) as a mapping from a source domain (like PERSON & THING) to a target domain (moral concept). The mapping is tightly structured. There are ontological correspondences, according to which the features of the target domains (moral concepts), like "giving orders", etc. correspond systematically to the features of the source domains, like "judging", "testifying", "stumbling", etc.

Summarizing, an ontological mapping is carried out between the two domains: the source and the target ones. The analyzed moral concepts act as the target domains, while the source domains are the concrete concepts, which map their features within the conceptual projections. The primary features of the target concept that overlap with the features of the source concept make up the area of central mapping, which enables a conceptual intersection that usually includes a very limited set of conceptual features. Such an overlap of features couples the source

and target domains that enables elaboration and extension of the central projection with further mappings of source domain features upon the target domain. All such mappings taken together constitute the cross-mapping zone, also known as the conceptual projection zone.

THE CROSS-DOMAIN MAPPINGS

As it was mentioned, the aim of this paper is to highlight the Biblical cross-domain mappings and to analyze a range of metaphor used in the Bible to express moral concepts. Under the term 'range of metaphor' we understand a set of source domains, the features of which are transferred to the target concept (Kövecses, 2017a: 64). The conducted analysis has proven that the two main source domains are PERSON and OBJECT, which we will treat separately.

The source domain PERSON

One of the instances of ontological metaphor is personification, in which human qualities are given to nonhuman entities. This type of metaphor is not only a very common literary device and stylistic expressive means, but also a very representative cognitive mechanism of conceptualization of the world. As Kövecses (2002) claims:

> Personification makes use of one of the best source domains we have – ourselves. In personifying nonhumans as humans, we can begin to understand them a little better.

The personification of ethical categories proves the fact that being part of human consciousness and nature, they are subconsciously viewed as living beings that can, just like any person, carry out actions. This is because human deeds are often triggered by an inner drive, stipulated by the moral outlook. In this connection, the mapping ETHICAL CONCEPT is a PERSON is based on the central mapping: ethical values, like honour, duty, and conscience, are imperative by their nature and can prescribe certain actions, just like a human can give orders and commands. Therefore, the essential central mapping is represented by the feature the "ability to give commands and govern behaviour", which both source and target domains share. Extension of central mapping constitutes a metaphoric conceptual space represented by the cognitive traits of the involved source domains: JUDGE, WITNESS, and WALKER, which are all hyponyms of the superordinate concept PERSON.

Firstly, let's consider the domain JUDGE:

> …*the other man's conscience, I mean, not yours. For why should my freedom be **judged by another's conscience?*** (1Co. 10:29)

The ethical concept CONSCIENCE in this example is metaphorically represented as a judge, who can deliver a verdict. Thus, the mapping consists in the transference of the feature the "ability to judge" (as one of the human abilities) upon the ethical concept CONSCIENCE. The metaphor CONSCIENCE is a JUDGE evolves further, yielding more specific conceptual projections. In case the verdict of the judgement is negative conscience becomes "able to reproach":

> *I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my **conscience will not reproach** me as long as I live.* (Job 27:6)

Along with the mentioned elaboration, one can find an extension of this metaphoric projection, which involves the domain DEFENDANT. The result of self-judgement can be condemnation, which leads to the transference of the defendant's feature "guilty" upon the moral concept CONSCIENCE:

> *Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a **guilty conscience** and having our bodies washed with pure water.* (He. 10:22)

In this and previous examples one can find two opposing source domains: JUDGE and DEFENDANT. Such a combination makes it possible to more clearly convey the general Bible idea that conscience is an entity in the human soul that judges, brings out a verdict, and bears responsibility for the committed actions simultaneously.

The idea of being guilty is also conveyed through the elaboration of the primary source domain PERSON, which involves the transference of the feature the "ability to be scorched" upon the target domain CONSCIENCE:

> *Such teachings come through hypocritical liars, whose **consciences have been seared** as with a hot iron. (1Ti. 4:2)*

As noted by Gibbs et al. (2004: 1190):

> The poetic value and the communicative expressiveness of metaphoric language partly arise from its roots in people's ordinary, felt sensations of their bodies in action.

The provided above Biblical context (1Ti. 4:) exemplifies the realization of the embodiment principle. According to the central life experience searing destroys physical senses, so that scorched skin receptors or eyes cannot function properly. Using metaphor enables appealing to such knowledge, which underlies the understanding of Biblical context.

The analyzed metaphoric mappings have a cognitive nature, but along with this, they are not deprived of stylistic functions, which a metaphor normally performs. Saying that conscience is a judge, defendant or culprit evokes in the reader's mind an image of a corresponding person, who is able to carry out the corresponding typical activities, therefore, the deployment of the metaphoric language conveys the input message in a more concise, understandable, and clear way, compared to the descriptive, or declarative non-metaphoric narrative.

The next metaphoric transference is represented by the mapping MORAL CONCEPT is a WITNESS:

> *Now, this is our boast: Our **conscience testifies** that we have conducted ourselves in the world, and especially in our relations with you, in the holiness and sincerity that are from God. We have done so not according to worldly wisdom but according to God's grace.* (2Co. 1:12)

> *And my **honesty will testify** for me in the future, whenever you check on the wages you have paid me. Any goat in my possession that is not peckled or spotted, or any lamb that is not dark-coloured, will be considered stolen.* (Ge. 30:33)

> *…since they show that the **requirements of the law are written on their hearts**, their **consciences also bearing witness**, and their **thoughts** now **accusing**, now even **defending** them.* (Ro. 2:15)

This mapping is based on the transference of the trait the "ability to testify". Deployment of such a metaphoric expression is aligned with the superordinate source domain COURT, which also embraces the domains WITNESS and JUDGE.

The last quote also instantiates one more mapping: HEART, which is considered to be the core of personality, is viewed as a RECORD-BOOK, which stores the "inscriptions" of all person's virtues and misdeeds. Conceptual transference HEART is a RECORD BOOK is based on the mapping of the feature the "ability to be written on" upon the target domain.

The next metaphoric transference is "MORAL CONCEPT is a WALKING PERSON" which is an extension of the superordinate metaphor "MORAL CONCEPT is a PERSON".

Within this metaphoric projection, the central mapping is made up by the superordinate source domain feature the "ability to move", which is specified to the

different kinds of movement: the "ability to be driven back; to stumble; to stand; to enter; to come; to go":

> So, **justice is driven back**, and **righteousness stands at a distance**; **truth has stumbled** in the streets, **honesty cannot enter**. (Is. 59:14)
>
> **Pride goes** before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. (Pr. 16:18)
>
> When **pride comes**, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom. (Pr. 11:2)

The analysis of the wider context makes us claim that in the last two examples the verbs *come* and *go* express motion rather than a temporal succession of the events, like in the phrase "autumn comes after summer", as the general sense of verses conveys the idea that ethical concept PRIDE has "companions" – destruction and disgrace.

The next transference is represented by the metaphoric extension "MORAL CONCEPT is a PART OF BODY", within the framework of which the feature the "ability to be cut off" is mapped on the target concept:

> …and do not ever **cut off your kindness** from my family — not even when the LORD has cut off every one of David's enemies from the face of the earth. (1Sa. 20:15)
>
> Foreigners will occupy Ashdod, and I **will cut off the pride** of the Philistines. (Zec. 9:6)

In the elaboration of these conceptual mappings we find the features the "ability to deceive", the "ability to breed", and the "ability to carry things":

> The terror you inspire and the **pride** of your heart have **deceived** you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks, who occupy the heights of the hill. Though you build your nest as high as the eagle's, from there I will bring you down," declares the LORD. (Je. 49:16)
>
> Pride only **breeds quarrels**, but wisdom is found in those who take advice. (Pr. 13:10)
>
> My master will not have **on his conscience the staggering** burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant. (1Sa. 25:31)

Summarizing, one should mention that all the aforementioned conceptual cross-domain transferences involve projections of the core human qualities upon the target moral concept.

The source domain THING

The next big mapping is MORAL CATEGORY is a THING. The central mapping is represented by the quality the "ability to be possessed", which is shared by both source and target concepts (one can possess a thing and a character trait). This central mapping is extended by the projection of the other qualities, peculiar to a physical object, upon ethical values. Primarily, it is the "ability to occupy a position in space":

> *Woe to that wreath, the pride of Ephraim's drunkards, to the fading flower, his glorious beauty, set on the head of a fertile valley — to that city, the* **pride** *of those* **laid low by wine***!* (Is. 28:1)

> *Is. 25:11 They will spread out their hands in it, as a swimmer spreads out his hands to swim. God will* **bring down** *their pride despite the cleverness of their hands.* (Is. 25:11)

The expressions *to lay low* and *to bring down* can be considered to be trite (or dead) metaphors, as they have a lexicographically registered meaning "to feel weak" and "to reduce" correspondently. But these expressions can also be treated as metaphoric since their inner form is constituted by the orientational metaphor – "high is big (or a lot)" and "low is little (and normally bad)". The next examples also instantiate the transference within the orientational metaphor:

> *Though his* **pride reaches to the heavens** *and his* **head touches the clouds***…* (Job 20:6)

Another deployment of orientational metaphor in relation to moral concepts is treating them as a vertical landmark:

> *Now since we are* **under obligation** *to the palace and it is not proper for us to see the king dishonoured, we are sending this message to inform the king…* (Ezr. 4:14)

> *If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other* **duty laid on him***. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.* (De. 24:5)

In these mappings, we observe that ethical concepts such as OBLIGATION or DUTY are viewed as something which hangs over a person. This means that these concepts are ascribed with the feature the "ability to press". Such a transference helps to convey the message that duty is something that cannot be ignored (so as a weight on the shoulders cannot be unnoticed) and is obligatory to carry out.

One more metaphoric projection is motivated by the conceptualization of moral concepts through the domain HEIGHT, which is a part of the domain VERTICAL LANDMARK:

> *When this became known to the Jews and Greeks living in Ephesus, they were all seized with fear, and the name of the Lord Jesus was held in* **high honour**. (Ac. 19:17)

The other projected feature of the source domain OBJECT is "fragility", which, judging by the basic life experience, is one of the intrinsic traits of many physical things:

> *I will cause your hordes to fall by the swords of mighty men – the most ruthless of all nations. They will* **shatter the pride** *of Egypt, and all her hordes will be overthrown.* (Ez. 32:12)

One of the hyponyms of the domain OBJECT is WEAPON, which projects its nucleus feature the "ability to strike" upon the target domain:

> *Afterwards, David was* **conscience-stricken** *for having cut off a corner of his robe.* (1Sa. 24:5)

The other projected source domain feature is "clear":

> *Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, He is my brother'? I have done this with* **a clear conscience** *and clean hands.* (Ge. 20:5)

> The next feature mapped upon the target moral concept is the "ability to be driven away":

> *Terrors overwhelm me;* **my dignity is driven away as by the wind**, *my safety vanishes like a cloud.* (Job 30:15)

In these lines, DIGNITY is represented as an object rather than a living thing like in the example above, since in central life experience wind normally carries away things but not humans unless it is a hurricane, which is not the case within the mentioned context.

The next metaphoric projection is represented by the mapping MORAL CONCEPT is CLOTHES, which means that the corresponding feature – "ability to be worn" is transferred to the moral concept:

> *I* **put on righteousness as my clothing; justice was my robe** *and* **my turban.** (Job 29:14)

> *She is* **clothed with strength and dignity;** *she can laugh at the days to come* (Pr. 31:25)

This metaphoric projection along with the domain CLOTHES involves also the hyponymic domain ACCESSORY:

> *Therefore,* **pride is their necklace**; *they* **clothe themselves with violence**. (Ps. 73:6)

The highlighted conceptual metaphoric mappings sanction the use of corresponding metaphoric expressions, which provides for the creation of a more vivid and 'illustrated' image that in its turn contributes to a clearer understanding and conceiving of the Bible implications.

THE RANGE OF METAPHOR FOR THE ETHICAL CONCEPTS

The analyzed mappings represent conceptual metaphor space, the range of which is constituted by the corpus of source domains involved in the conceptual metaphoric projections. The generalized analysis of the source and target domain mappings is given in Table 1.

Table 1. The Biblical cross-domain mappings for target moral concepts

The superordinate source domain	Source domain	Source domain feature	Target domain
PERSON	**giving directions and governing behaviour**		
	JUDGE	judging reproaching	CONSCIENCE
	DEFENDANT	guilty seared	CONSCIENCE
	WITNESS	testifying	CONSCIENCE HONESTY
	WALKER	being driven back; stumbling; standing; entering; coming; going	JUSTICE RIGHTEOUSNESS TRUTH HONESTY PRIDE
	PART OF BODY	cutting off	KINDNESS
	TRAITOR	deceiving	PRIDE
	FARMER	breeding	PRIDE
	PORTER	burden	CONSCIENCE

The superordinate source domain	Source domain	Source domain feature	Target domain
OBJECT	**the ability to be possessed**		
	RECORD BOOK	being written on	HEART
		occupying position in space: lying low, bringing down	PRIDE
	VERTICAL SCALE	reaching heaven	PRIDE
	BURDEN	being under being laid on	OBLIGATION DUTY
	VERTICAL SCALE	high	HONOUR
	WEAPON	striking	CONSCIENCE
	CLEAN OBJECT	clear	CONSCIENCE
	LIGHT OBJECT	being driven away	DIGNITY
	CLOTHES (ROBE, TURBAN)	putting on	RIGHTEOUSNESS JUSTICE STRENGTH DIGNITY VIOLENCE
	ACCESSORY	wearing	PRIDE

CONCLUSIONS

The central motifs of the Bible, as the main book of Christianity, are centred around the deontological and axiological parameters of interpersonal relations, which is why ethical concepts are at the core of its narrative. Since ethical concepts bear the highest level of abstraction, their actualization is carried out via extensive use of metaphorical expressions, which can be viewed from both classical and conceptual metaphor theories. Therefore, the deployed metaphors for the target ethical concepts are, on the one hand, stylistic expressive means, which are aimed at an elevation of style, and, on the other hand, cross-domain mappings, which describe ethical concepts within the framework of knowledge of concrete entities, like PERSON and THING, which are superordinate for a number of hyponymic extensions and elaborations. The use of cross-domain mappings plays an important role in conveying ontological and deontological messages since their source domains belong to basic well-known things, the awareness of which makes up the basic life experience. Such a metaphoric type of narrative helps to deliver the essential message to the masses in the most efficient way as the more complex moral implications expressed in cross-domain mappings are conceived through more simple ideas and notions.

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Ontološke metafore za moralne koncepte v Bibliji

Članek razkriva posebnosti ontoloških preslikav, ki vključujejo etične pojme v svetopisemskem besedilu. Namen članka je opozoriti, da so etični pojmi kot abstraktni pojavi razumljeni kot fizične entitete in živa bitja, zato morajo obstajati ustrezne metaforične projekcije, na katerih temelji njihova konceptualizacija. Metafora je tako obravnavana z dveh vidikov: v okviru klasične in konceptualne teorije metafore. Z vidika klasične teorije je metafora literarno izrazno sredstvo, del figurativnega jezika, ki je sestavljen iz uporabe ene besede namesto druge zaradi pritegnitve pozornosti ali doseganja poetičnega ali označenega sloga. S konceptualnega vidika je metafora način, kako človek dojema in pojmuje objektivno resničnost s pomočjo razumevanja zapletenih abstraktnih idej ali pojavov na podlagi nekaterih konkretnih stvari iz osrednjih življenjskih izkušenj. To poteka s projekcijo značilnosti izvorne domene na ciljno domeno, pri čemer je slednja kompleksnejša od prve. Ontološke metaforične transference z etičnimi koncepti kot ciljnimi domenami, ki jih najdemo v Svetem pismu, vključujejo dve nadrejeni izvorni domeni: Oseba in stvar. Razširitev teh dveh primarnih metafor, ki tvorita osrednje preslikave, predstavljajo številne hiponimične domene, od katerih je vsaka obravnavana posebej. Poleg razširitve je v članku posebna pozornost namenjena elaboraciji metafor, ki vključuje razširitev pojmovnega

območja in projekcijo drugih značilnosti izvornih domen ob osrednjih. Raziskava izpeljuje sklep, da ima uporaba meddomenskih preslikav pomembno vlogo pri posredovanju ontoloških in deontoloških sporočil, saj takšna vrsta pripovedi pripomore k najučinkovitejšemu posredovanju bistvenega sporočila širšemu občinstvu, saj so na ta način izražene kompleksnejše moralne implikacije pojmovane s preprostejšimi idejami in pojmi.

Ključne besede: elaboracija metafore, razširitev metafore, kartiranje, izvorno področje, ciljno področje