

Commentary 02 on  
Karl Jaspers Forum, Target Article 25, 7 December 1999

IN SEARCH OF THE MIND  
By Jane Cull

## COGNITION AND METAPHORS

*by Paul Jones*

21 December 1999

I would like to make a brief remark on the micro-dispute between Jane Cull and Klaus Krippendorff on the epistemological role of the metaphor. Though this does not have any direct relation to consciousness, it might be methodologically useful, especially recalling the titles like “The Metaphorical Brain” or “On the possibility of metaphorical usage of mathematical conceptions in psychology”, which can be found in the literature.

Jane Cull:

“A metaphor is a description of something that we want to explain that exists in our experience; thus a metaphor is not an explanation.”

Klaus Krippendorff:

“Jane suggests that metaphors do not explain, I think they constitute explanations of a less explicit sort.”

I cannot agree with Jane that a metaphor is a description – students in poetry are frequently told to avoid descriptive metaphors, which are considered as “empty” in the arts.

On the other hand, I do not think that a metaphor can explain anything, albeit in an implicit manner.

Still, a metaphor obviously bears certain epistemological potential, and one may feel the need of a clearer understanding about it.

My answer comes from the distinction of art, science and philosophy as the three levels of the same hierarchy. Art is the way of bringing problems to people’s attention (art creates facts, as Hegel used to say); science picks up the problems to formalize them (that is, reduce to a number of already known problems and try the same solutions); philosophy is to decide what can be called a solution and how the possible solutions might/should be applied.

In this scheme, the metaphor belongs to the arts, being one of the standard means of linking one thing to another in the essentially syncretic way appropriate for art. What science can suggest is an amalgam of description, explanation and modeling (related to observation, theory and experiment as the fundamental levels of scientific research). Philosophy, in its turn, must provide a panoramic view, showing how it comes to that very metaphor and what consequences the scientific explication of the metaphor may infer.

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<http://unism.narod.ru/kjf/index.htm>  
[unism@ya.ru](mailto:unism@ya.ru)