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## **Conflation and the Essence of Thinking**

In this talk I lay out some of the philosophical implications of metaphor/conceptual blending theories. I argue that these theories, although different in some respects, point to a single model of thinking that should be developed as a challenge to traditional models and assumptions.

Ever since Plato, with few exceptions, reason has been characterized in terms of collecting and dividing, naming, defining, separating, and organizing. In other words—putting everything in its proper place, among its proper kind, and in the proper order. These metaphors are so deeply entrenched that much of philosophy can be viewed as debates over the precise nature, origin, and method of such ordering, rather than a questioning of the metaphor itself.

Conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual blending theory challenge this Platonic model, first, by exposing it as one metaphor among others, and second by suggesting an alternative account of reasoning. But what is this alternative, and how does it stand against the model that Plato inaugurated? I suggest that the alternative has not been sufficiently laid out and that it is best described as *conflation*. The essence of metaphorical cognition/blending is a the conflation of things, understanding one as another, *thinking one as another*. Thinking operates not only by dividing and separating (Plato was not entirely wrong) but also by conflating things, confusing them in ways that produce meaning. Conflation is the cognitive operation that underlays the insights of conceptual metaphor theory and conceptual blending theory.

Conflation can be found at all levels of experience and meaning. As Merleau-Ponty showed, perception involves a conflation of body flesh and world. The hand reveals texture because it has a texture that can receive other textures. Metaphor reveals the conflation at the heart of meaning, as abstract domains are worked out, played out, in terms of more concrete, often bodily events. Conceptual blending theory tries to capture this conflation through the notion of blending, but it quickly tries to interpret it in terms of discreet operations, elements, and rules. Such an account obscures the conflation at work. Ritual, too, depends on conflation. It is metaphor in the flesh, or metaphor returning to its carnal roots. In ritual we think about sin and salvation, suffering and liberation, social division and harmony, by moving, feeling, and acting in specific ways. Action is conflated with thinking; thinking happens in action. Thinking happens as action.

I summarize (briefly) these forms of conflation and outline the basic nature of conflation as a model of thinking at the root of cognitive linguistics in its various forms.