



MIND AND METAPHOR

Your Mind is an Elephant
H B Gelatt

Humankind traveling through life is like the fly riding on the back of an elephant who thinks it is steering. The elephant doesn't mind, and it makes the ride more enjoyable.
(Unknown)

This is my favorite of the many metaphors and similes involving elephants. (If you know the author or origin, please inform me). I like this because it fits my interpretation of my life's journey. If I think I am steering the elephant, it does make the journey more enjoyable. And it encourages me to employ whatever influence I do have over where I am going.

Buddha compared the mind to a wild elephant, hard to control. He said, "Our life is the of our mind." Jonathan Haidt, in his 2006 book, The Happiness Hypothesis, says in his life's journey *he is the rider* on an elephant. The elephant is his mind that he tries to control. "I'm holding the reins in my hands, and by pulling one way or the other I can tell the elephant to turn, to stop, or to go. I can direct things, but only when the elephant doesn't have desires of its own. When the elephant wants to do something, I'm no match for him."

Haidt says the rider is conscious controlled thought; the elephant is everything else." "The goal of meditation" he says, "is to change automatic thought processes, thereby taming the elephant." The goal of this essay is to increase your awareness and understanding of your "controlled thought," I'm not sure about "everything else." The goal of my Process of Illumination is to change the direction the world is heading. I want to employ metaphor to illuminate the role of your mind in influencing the direction.

Whatever the elephant represents metaphorically (the mind, reality, human consciousness, God, etc.), I will continue to think I am having some influence over our direction (steering). Although I know I do not totally control where I am going or what is happening, it is empowering to think I have some control or influence. I can try to make something happen instead of letting it happen. In other words:

I will act as if what I do makes a difference.
William James

The Magical Metaphorical Mind

*The mind is called a scientist, logical, rational, experimental,
and an artist, intuitive, imaginative, creative.*

Do you think you have some role in steering the elephant, in making a difference in where you are going? Can you control or influence your thinking? I suggest you think of your mind as a magical, malleable, multi-faceted, personal resource. It is said that the mind can be "a gold mine or a rubbish heap." It has been referred to as a smart computer, a good magician, a library, a dream factory, an adaptive toolbox, an enchanted loom, among other metaphors.

Your mind can remember, imagine, dream, fantasize, intuit, invent, create, think, interpret, etc. This magical, personal resource you possess, right behind your eyes, is capable of empowering you to try to influence the future direction. Are you making full use of the capacity of your mind? Is the way you use your mind an asset or a liability? Here is an illumination strategy for using your magical mind as an asset.

Metaphor as Method

Metaphors are among our principle vehicles for understanding.
George Lakoff and Mark Johnson



Metaphors can generate new ways of thinking that are novel and revealing; they require us to find and create meaning. I suggest you use metaphor as a method for understanding your control of your thinking and believing and your influencing your travels through life.

To understand or develop your life metaphor as method, use the following two-part activity, adapted from Draper Kaufmann's 1976 book, Teaching The Future, as way of thinking about how you think about the future and the direction you are going.

Four Future Metaphors

Read the four metaphors and decide which one comes closest to your belief about your influence over the direction of the future. It may not be exactly right, but it is better than the others.

1. Roller Coaster

The future is a great roller coaster. It twists ahead of us in the dark, although we can only see each part as we come to it. We can sometimes see around the bend but the future is fixed and determined. We are locked in our seats and nothing we may know or do will change the course that is laid out for us.

2. Mighty River

The future is a mighty river. The great force of history flows along, carrying us with it. Its course can be changed but only by natural disasters, like earthquakes and landslides, or by massive concerted human efforts on a similar scale. However, we are free as individuals to adapt to the course of history, either well or poorly. By looking ahead, we can avoid sandbars and whirlpools and pick the best path through any rapids.

3. Great Ocean

The future is a great ocean. There are many possible destinations, and many different paths to each destination. By taking advantage of the main currents of change, keeping a sharp lookout posted, and moving carefully in uncharted waters, a good navigator can get safely to the charted destination, barring a typhoon or other disaster that cannot be predicted or avoided.

4. Colossal Dice Game

The future is entirely random, a colossal dice game. Every second things happen that could have happened another way to produce another future. Since everything is chance, all we can do is play the game, pray to the gods of fortune and enjoy what good luck comes our way.

Which metaphor most closely resembles your future vision, Roller Coaster, Mighty River, Great Ocean, Colossal Dice Game?

Why did you choose your preferred metaphor? What did you like or not like about your choice? What did you like or not like about the others? Discussing your answers with someone else, or better yet, with a group, can improve the illuminating process.

If your choice is not an accurate indication of your view of your influence over the future, what is? Next is your chance to create your own more accurate metaphor.

Your Personal Metaphor

What personal metaphor best describes your vision? You might use something familiar to you: a hobby, favorite thing, preferred activity, or an animal—anything. Don't worry about being fancy or poetic. If you have never thought of a metaphor for your life, think of this first personal metaphor as a practice metaphor. You can keep changing your metaphor or have different metaphors for different parts of your life or for different times.



Once you identify your personal metaphor, ask yourself these questions to illuminate the way you see things.

- How is your influence of the future or your life like this metaphor?
- How is it not like this metaphor?
- What feelings or emotions are associated with your metaphor?
- What insights does this metaphor elicit?
- Is this metaphor best for a certain part of your life?
- Do you want to change your metaphor? If yes, what is your new metaphor?

Keep your personal metaphor and work with it, expand it, modify it, change it, or get several new ones. Like the fly riding the elephant, see if your metaphor can help you understand and expand the way you use your mind to influence the future,

Reflective Illumination

Mind and Metaphor asks the basic question: How much influence do you believe you have over the direction you and the world are going? This belief will determine how much influence you employ.

The greatest thing by far is to be master of metaphor. Aristotle

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