Mary Midgley, 2003. *The Myths We Live By*. London/New York: Routledge. 192 pp.

Brendon Larson, Santa Barbara (blarson1@umail.ucsb.edu)

By its resonance with *Metaphors We Live By* and the promise of the dust jacket, I expected *The Myths We Live B*y to consider metaphor in relation to myth. When I turned to the index, however, there were no entries for metaphor, cognitive linguistics, George Lakoff or others one might expect. Nonetheless, cognitive linguists would immediately feel at home in the first few pages where Midgley proclaims that "such symbolism is an integral part of our thought-structure … [not; B.L.] merely a surface dressing of isolated metaphors (p. 2)." This basic insight that myths affect our interpretation of the world – and particularly our science – flavors the entire volume, which focuses on the myths of individualism, inter-related human-nature/subject-object/mind-body/reason-feeling dualities, omnicompetent science, progress and the social contract. Midgley links these myths to their origin in Enlightenment ideals,[1] and observes that they provide an example of how "people who refuse to have anything to do with philosophy have become enslaved to outdated forms of it (p. 23)." She argues that these myths are inadequate in a world of global environmental issues that demand an expansion of our moral ken and where scientistic imperialism that hopes to reduce all phenomena (including human behaviour, culture and ethics) to physics or even natural science is increasingly inappropriate.

Midgley particularly attends to metaphorical concepts such as machine, individual, and competition and the process by which they are used in science and then "reflected back into everyday life in altered forms, seemingly charged with a new scientific authority (p. 3)." These metaphors can become mythic as instantiated by the large-scale ideologies of Dawkins, Dennett, Hegel, Marx, Monod, Nietzsche, Spencer, E. O. Wilson and contemporary prophets of biotechnology that she addresses in brief, entertaining critiques. However, she also presents insightful analyses of smaller-scale metaphors. For example, she discusses limits of conceptualizing different sciences in terms of "levels," with the entailment that physics provides the underlying "hard" foundation; instead, she proposes alternative, more pluralistic metaphors. Her "map" metaphor compares science to exploration, where it is often useful to have various maps. She also proposes that we think of the world as a large aquarium into

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[1] Which she memorably refers to as "the Augustan ideology that shaped the peculiar British version of the Enlightenment – that exact mix of rationalism, empiricism, Whiggish politics, Anglican theology, pragmatism and misogyny that the champions of science in that age devised (p. 77)."

which we can look through different windows that provide alternative perspectives. At numerous points Midgley critiques determinist, reductionist metaphors of the human genome, and Dawkins' metaphor of driving that hands agency over to our genes. Finally, she considers how "Fear and distrust of the earth draws much of its force from the strong natural imagery that links the up-down dimension with difference of value (p. 122)," best exemplified in traditional HEAVEN IS UP. This metaphor gives rise to a desire to escape into space, where "Reason […] can at last divorce the unsatisfactory wife he has been complaining of since the eighteenth century, and can live comfortably for ever among the boys playing computer-games in the solitudes of space (p. 100)." In each case, Midgley recognizes the benefits of these metaphors, but questions how strongly we adhere to them. For example, she observes that the machine metaphor is "one possible way of thinking, with no special authority to prevail where it does not give useful results (p. 142)."

While Midgley's book is a beautiful and important paean to the necessity for questioning our myths to break out of obsequiousness to science and the straitjacket dualities provide by our moral traditions, a number of theoretical questions are left unanswered. What is a myth? Her closest definition is that "Myths are not lies. Nor are they detached stories. They are imaginative patterns, networks of powerful symbols that suggest particular ways of interpreting the world. They shape its meaning (p. 1)." While this helps to define their function, it does not help to distinguish them from related conceptual tools such as worldview and ideology. How does a myth relate to metaphors? When she states that "metaphorical concepts […] are living parts of powerful myths," it seems that her myths derive from large-scale metaphors – perhaps best called "root metaphors" – but this is not well laid out. It may be that these theoretical points are unimportant to non-academic readers that may form the bulk of her audience, but they would help those of us who want to relate metaphors to their larger cultural, ideological, and mythic context. In this regard, she raises an important paradox for language planners: "The belief in instant ideological change is itself a favourite myth (p. 4)," but nonetheless by changing myths we commit ourselves "to changing the wider reality (p. 175)."

There is another important question, however. Why didn't Midgley refer to cognitive linguistics and other recent studies of metaphor? Perhaps one clue comes from her critical focus on Skinner's behaviorism, which seems out-dated enough to make me wonder whether she just isn't aware of recent cognitive insights into metaphor. But I doubt it. Instead, I would wager that she doesn't feel it adds enough new insight: maybe the same insight can be

communicated without the bells and whistles of cognitive linguistics. In this sense, she raises important questions for reflexive metaphorophiles: What new insights provided by the burgeoning studies of metaphor can help people to more clearly see how they frame understanding? Does there have to be a unified theory of metaphor or can a plurality of theories each address different needs? Finally, does her critique of megalomaniacal reductionism in the natural sciences apply to the cognitivist trend in studies of metaphor?

Midgley's book won't provide any particularly new insights for cognitive linguists, but it does elucidate the relation between large-scale metaphoric myths of our time and some of the major moral quandaries arising from scientific developments. It points us away from mythic warfare and over-reliance on parsimonious explanations, and towards critical awareness of our language and greater engagement with the human condition. To her, the human condition ranges from self-knowledge and individual 'wholeness' through acknowledgement of our interdependence with the world, as captured by new ecological metaphors such as 'ecosystem' and 'Gaia' and even Darwinian evolutionary biology. As stated by Midgley (p. 25), "What we need is not an ultimate floor at the bottom of the universe but simply a planet with a good strong reassuring pull that will keep us together and stop us falling off it (p. 25)." And that is what we have, though traditional metaphors and myths still tend to dissociate us from our Earthly ground.