

# Metaphor and conceptual evolution

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## Abstract:

This paper investigates perspectives of applying the notion of “evolution” to the development of conceptual metaphors. It presents evidence for historical changes in mappings from the source domain of LIFE-BODY-HEALTH to the target domain of STATE-SOCIETY. The data show that the *body politic* metaphor has retained a strong influence on popular conceptualisations of the political domain. However, some source scenarios appear to be particularly prominent as inputs for argumentative exploitation, whilst other domain aspects show little productivity. On the basis of corpus data for the use of *body*-, especially *heart*-metaphors in British and German debates about the EU, I shall discuss how conceptual variation may be interpreted as evidence of “evolutionary” development, and which methodological consequences would follow from such an approach.

Der Artikel untersucht Möglichkeiten zur Anwendung des Konzepts der „Evolution“ auf die historische Entwicklung von Metaphern anhand des Wandels der politischen Körpermetaphorik. Es lässt sich nachweisen, dass die Metapher des Staates als *Körper* – im Englischen lexikalisiert in der *body politic*-Terminologie – immer noch einen starken Einfluss auf Politikkonzepte im öffentlichen Diskurs ausübt. Dabei spielen bestimmte Bildspender-Szenarios eine wichtigere Rolle als andere in Bezug auf ihre Verwendung in öffentlichen Debatten. Anhand von Korpusdaten zur *Körper*-, speziell: *Herz*-Metaphorik in der öffentlichen Diskussion über die EU in Großbritannien und Deutschland wird erörtert, inwieweit konzeptuelle Variation als Indiz für ‚evolutionäre‘ Entwicklungen gewertet werden kann und welche methodischen Konsequenzen sich hieraus für die kognitive Metaphertheorie ergeben.

## 1. Evolutionist approaches to conceptual history

Can the notion of “(conceptual) evolution” be applied to the development and variation of metaphors over time? Traditionally, the diachronic dimension of concept development was the object of the “history of ideas”, as it was practised in the hermeneutically oriented, continental European disciplines of *Begriffsgeschichte* or the *histoire des mentalités*, or the more pragmatically oriented Anglo-American approaches of “conceptual history”.<sup>1</sup> Some of these studies have provided seminal insights into the history of key-metaphors of Western thought. Over the past three decades, however, new approaches have been developed, which attempt to liken the notion of conceptual history to that of “evolution” in the sense established in the biological sciences since Charles Darwin. Irrespective of the many disagreements about the specific biological mechanisms involved, “evolution” in this sense can be characterised broadly as a chain of minimal “adaptive” changes in the genetic make-up of organisms that are linked to ecological pressures (Dennett 1995:39-60). This explanatory model may conceivably be applied by way of analogy to the development of cultural phenomena, and its proponents, e.g. Richard Dawkins and Daniel Dennett, claim that such a form of “good” epistemological reductionism makes cultural change amenable to scientific empirical analysis (Dawkins 1989:13-20; Dennett 1995:80-83).

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<sup>1</sup> Cf. Hampsher-Monk, Tilmans and van Vree (edd.) 1998, Skinner 1978, Rauff 1987.

The application of a biological model of evolution in the humanities is by no means a recent phenomenon: some 19<sup>th</sup> century linguists, for instance, seized upon Darwin's theory to construe historical narratives of national languages as *organisms* that had *familial lines of descent, life-cycles, etc.*<sup>2</sup> Whilst such attempts were mainly motivated by the classical version of Darwinist theory, the focus of more recent evolutionist approaches has shifted to the application of insights gained from modern genetics. Richard Dawkins, in *The Selfish Gene*, has proposed the concept of “memes” to characterise conceptual entities such as “tunes, ideas, catch-phrases, clothes fashions, ways of building pots or of building arches” as the cultural counterparts of genes: like the latter, memes are to be thought of as “replicators” of strings of information (Dawkins 1989:192). If genes “propagate themselves in the gene pool by leaping from body to body via sperms or eggs”, then memes can be regarded as “[propagating] themselves in the meme pool by leaping from brain to brain via a process which, in the broad sense, can be called imitation” (Dawkins 1989:192). The gene-meme analogy is superimposed on this primary analogy, i.e. the meme is conceived of as a hypothetical counterpart of a conception of the gene that is in itself metaphorical (i.e. the gene as a “selfish” agent). The status of the meme concept as secondary analogy must be taken into account when talking of memes as “replicators” that *behave as if* they were *intent* on propagation, just as the supposedly *selfish* genes.

If the gene-meme analogy were to be validated, its potential for application to cultural phenomena could indeed revolutionise cultural and conceptual history. All kinds of symbolic structures, including linguistic forms, are in principle conceivable as “competitors” for dissemination by the greatest possible number of “vehicles” – i.e. human brains – and their “phenotypic” extensions, e.g., texts, mass media, internet etc. Blackmore (1999:82-107) and Worden (2000) have used the notion of the meme to propose new theoretical approaches to the evolution of language; Gabora (1997) and Conte (2000) have designed mathematical models to account for the social dissemination and evolution of memes. So far, however, no independent evidence for meme theory has been found. In later writings, Dawkins has conceded that there are fundamental differences between genetic and cultural reproduction but he maintains the validity of the basic analogy: like genes, memes are seen as competing for optimal conditions of reproduction and diffusion (Dawkins 1999:109-112). Blackmore, too, states that genes and memes are “very different” and only comparable as regards their function as “replicators” (Blackmore 1999:17-18). In view of the empirical problems of

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Hoenigswald/Wiener (edd.) 1987, Nerlich 1989.

meme theory, Dennett (1995:369) regards “the prospects of elaborating a rigorous science of memetics [as] doubtful”; however, he still insists that the meme model “provides a valuable perspective from which to investigate the complex relationship between cultural and genetic heritage”. This perspective is characterised by the switch from focusing on the vehicles’ supposed interest (i.e., the survival and/or well-being of organisms) to concentrating on the replicators’ (i.e. genes’ or memes’) evolutionary success. This focus on the replicators’ “interest” in optimal propagation can help explain cases where evolutionary adaptation seems to work against the “vehicle” organisms: “The gene-centred perspective is valuable precisely because it handles the ‘exceptional’ cases in which the good of the organism counts for nothing, and shows how the ‘normal’ circumstance is a derivative and exceptional regularity” (Dennett 1995:364).

Whilst Dennett defends the gene-meme analogy as a heuristic perspective, Dan Sperber (1996, 2000) insists that the differences in the “replication” of genes and memes demand a radical reconceptualisation of the evolutionist (in his terminology: “naturalistic”) approach. Whereas genes are normally replicated with extremely high fidelity, exact copying occurs rarely in the cultural sphere, perhaps only in exceptional cases such as facsimiles, computer viruses and chain letters (Sperber 1996:102-104). Concepts have a vastly higher rate of change than genetic mutation in neo-Darwinist theory, due to their dependency on continuous transformation from “mental” to “public representations” and vice versa as the only mode of reproduction available to human brains. This likens them in Sperber’s view to *viruses* rather than to *genes*, and leads to the question why “some representations propagate, either generally or in specific contexts?” – the answer to such a question amounts, in Sperber’s view, to developing “a kind of ‘epidemiology of representations’”, which can help as a heuristic metaphor, “provided we recognize its limits” (Sperber 1996:25). The “transformations” from mental to public representations (and back) are modelled on linguistic communication, not on genetic or even viral replication. Their “evolution” is not determined just by the need to survive and propagate (as in the case of genes and viruses), but by the tendency to produce “contents that require lesser mental effort and provide greater cognitive effects” (Sperber 1996:53). Such a tendency in the development of conceptual representations requires an explanation not in terms “of some global macro-mechanism” but in terms of “the combined effect of countless micro-mechanisms” that are amenable to empirical research (Sperber 1996:54).

Building on Dennett's and Sperber's qualifications of the evolutionist approach,<sup>3</sup> we can formulate two guiding questions for its possible application to the study of the history of conceptual metaphors:

- a) In which way does a naturalistic approach provide an explanation for seemingly 'odd' or 'exceptional' cases of conceptual development?
- b) In which way can the conceptual development of metaphors be interpreted in terms of micro-mechanisms that combine to form conceptual trends or traditions?

These questions will serve as perspectives for the following discussion of changes in metaphorical mappings from the source domain of LIFE-BODY-HEALTH to the target domain of STATE-SOCIETY.

## **2. The body as a source concept in political discourse**

The mapping 'A POLITICAL ENTITY IS A (HUMAN) BODY' is part of the conceptual metaphor complex of the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING, whose central role in the Western philosophy was brought to prominence in two classic studies in the "history of ideas" tradition, i.e. Lovejoy (1936) and Tillyard (1982, first published in 1943). Within the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING system, lower-order concepts (e.g. ANIMAL ORGANISMS) and higher-order ones (e.g. SOCIAL INSTITUTIONS) are parts of an over-arching ontological whole, in which all levels are in correspondence (Lovejoy 1936:55-66). In this multi-layered system of ontological correspondences, the concept of society and the state as a "body politic" played a central role as the interface between "macrocosm" and "microcosm" (Tillyard 1982:96-106). According to Hale (1971:47), the notion of the "body politic" originated "as an expression of the unity of the Greek *polis*", and subsequently became "an important concept in the arsenal of the Stoic philosophers, Christian theologians, and spokesmen for the rising monarchies of the late medieval Europe". One strand of the BODY POLITIC tradition focused on the person of the ruler, as epitomised in the theory of the *King's two bodies*. In this tradition, the ruler was seen, as having "in him" both a "Body natural [...], subject to all Infirmities that come by Nature or Accident" and a "Body politic" that "cannot be seen or handled, consisting of Policy and Government, and constituted for the Direction of the People, and the Management of the public weal" (Kantorowicz 1997:7). This analogy between the concrete, natural body of the monarch and his abstract political and legal powers served to separate conceptually the

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<sup>3</sup> For further evolutionist models of language change that go beyond direct applications of meme theory cf. Croft (2000) and the contributions in Christiansen and Kirby (2003).

person who happened to be the ruler from the immortal, supposedly divinely legitimised systems of authority, justice and dynasty (Kantorowicz 1997:7-23).

A second strand of BODY POLITIC theory focused on explicating the functions of parts of the political entity by reference to the parts and organs of the body and their state of health. The medieval political philosopher and bishop, John of Salisbury (ca. 1120-1180), for instance, assigned “the place of the heart, from which proceeds the origin of good and bad works” to the “senate”.<sup>4</sup> The *heart* is seen here as the seat of moral and ethical responsibility, whilst the most powerful position is accorded to the *head*, i.e. the prince, who “is subject only to God and to those who exercise His office and represent Him on Earth, even as in the human body the head is given life and is governed by the soul”.<sup>5</sup> The allocation of particular body organs to parts of the state was by no means a static conceptual strategy. Writing four centuries after John of Salisbury, Shakespeare, in his *Coriolanus*, retold the ancient fable of Menenius, who in an attempt to quell a citizens’ revolt, depicted the senate (of Rome) not as the *heart* but as the *belly*, against whom to mutiny (on account of its apparent idleness) would make no sense for the other *body* (=state) *parts*. For it is the belly that sends the food “through the rivers of your blood, Even to the court, the heart, to the seat o’ the brain” (Shakespeare 1983, *Coriolanus*, I, 1, 146-147).<sup>6</sup> In Thomas Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, first published in 1651, the *body politic* metaphor was still the basis for the idea of the state or “Common-Wealth” but this time the prince and the state council were no longer depicted as *head* and *heart*, but as *soul* (for John of Salisbury = God) and *memory*, respectively.<sup>7</sup> According to Hale (1971:130), Hobbes’s use of the metaphor revealed the final “decay of meaning in the organic analogy”, because Hobbes shifted the allegorical meaning of the *body politic* towards a mechanistic perspective by combining it with machine imagery (Hale 1971:129-131). In Hale’s view, it was the English Renaissance that “witnessed the final flourishing of the idea of the body politic”, while it also produced “challenges to the anthropomorphic view of the universe”, which would eventually lead to “that perplexing world view which we call ‘modern’” (Hale 1971:47).

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. the translation of John of Salisbury’s treatise *Policraticus*, in Bass 1997:206; for the original Latin passage cf. John of Salisbury 1965, vol. I:283; for interpretation of its position in the *body politic* tradition cf. Struve 1984 and Bass 1997.

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Bass 1997: 206-207; compare also John of Salisbury 1965, vol. I:282-283.

<sup>6</sup> For the history of the Menenius parable since its first appearance as an Aesopic tale cf. Hale 1971:26-28, 92-107.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Hobbes (1996:9): „For by Art is created that great LEVIATHAN called a COMMON-WEALTH, or STATE, [...] in which the *Sovereignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; [...] *Counsellors*, by whom all things needfull for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *Memory* [...]”.

Hale's conclusion that the *body politic* metaphor ceased to function as the conceptual basis of 'thinking the state' by the time of Hobbes may be correct as regards the 'top flight', so to speak, of political theory formulations by philosophers and political scientists. However, as regards its use in everyday political discourse, especially in the media, and also to some extent in literary texts, the mapping of BODY, LIFE and HEALTH concepts onto the domain of state and society can be demonstrated to have remained active up to the present time. Not only do we still speak of the *body politic*, *heads of state* or *government*, as well as of the military *arm* or the *organ* of political parties,<sup>8</sup> but in modern extremist and totalitarian ideologies, for instance in Nazi-discourse, the conceptualisation of the nation as *a body that must be shielded from disease and parasites at any cost* has gained new potency, with horrific consequences. In *Mein Kampf*, Hitler depicted the Jewish "race" as *parasites* („Schmarotzer") that endangered the *life* of the *German national body* („deutscher Volkskörper") and had to be eliminated.<sup>9</sup>

Cognitive research has revealed that the super-ordinate system of the "GREAT CHAIN OF BEING" metaphor, of which the BODY POLITIC concept forms a part, is ubiquitous in folk-ontologies.<sup>10</sup> Ultimately, even the GREAT CHAIN OF BEING complex can be subsumed under the general cognitive mode of EMBODIMENT, i.e. of organising knowledge into cognitive schemata based on "bodily movements through space, our manipulation of objects, and our perceptual interactions" (Johnson 1987:29).<sup>11</sup> BODY-related concepts have been shown to be prolific in providing sources for complex mappings in idioms and public discourse.<sup>12</sup> However, the mere existence of such phrases in modern idioms and public discourse is not necessarily proof of a continuous tradition that reaches back to the classical formulations of the *body politic* theories. How can we know whether modern mappings between the domain of BODY-related concepts and the sphere of politics are related to the ancient tradition? Unless we have a continuous 'chain' of statements linked by inter-textual allusions and cross-references, the assertion of a conceptual tradition is merely a supposition and can in principle be challenged by the assumption of a basic BODY schema that is activated from scratch in each instance of use. Beyond the narrow band of prominent philosophical and literary formulations that are

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<sup>8</sup> Cf. Deignan 1995:2, *Brewer's Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 1999:149, 713.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Hitler 1933 (esp. chapter I.11: 316-360: *Volk und Rasse*); English translation: Hitler 1992:258-298. For analyses of the BODY-ILLNESS metaphors in Nazi-ideology and racist theories in general cf. Sontag 1991:82-84 and passim; Schmitz-Berning 1998:460-464; Hawkins 2001:44-47.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Lakoff/Turner 1989:167, Kövecses 2002:124-127.

<sup>11</sup> For recent developments of *Embodiment* theory cf. Lakoff/Johnson 1999, Wilson 2002 and Ziemke 2003.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. e.g. Pauwels and Simon-Vandenberg 1995, Boers 1999, Niemeier 2000, Charteris-Black 2000, White 2003.

built explicitly one upon the other, the evidence for a continuous chain of concept formulations is relatively thin and even the existing evidence does not prove a link between the historical concept and popular conceptualisations in present-day folk-theories and ‘ordinary’ language use. On the other hand, such a link cannot be ruled out *a priori* either, and it would be interesting in many ways to find out how currently popular metaphors are related to past conceptual traditions, how they build up to new traditions, and whether the evolutionist approach can help us to model their diachronic developments.

### **3. HEART-based metaphors in EU debates**

It is here that corpus-based studies of lexical development can provide an empirical complement to conceptual history. “General” corpora are designed to give the best approximation to a representative overview over language systems in use (Sinclair 1991:13-15; Hunston 2002:14-15), and this makes them an attractive basis for empirical discourse studies, in particular for contrastive analyses (Altenberg/Granger 2002). By making intertextual references (e.g. in the form of quotations of or allusions to specific texts), lexical and phraseological repetition, collocation and encyclopaedic links empirically accessible in statistically significant numbers, a corpus provides an empirical basis for interpreting linguistic data as evidence of conceptual continuity. In this section I shall present data from a bilingual corpus of current British and German press texts that contain metaphorical passages, in which BODY-related metaphors are applied to the topic of European politics, specifically to the policies of the “European Union” (EU) – until 1993: “European Community” (EC). These examples can be seen as a part of a prospective historical corpus that combines modern and historical data for mappings from the domain of BODY-concepts to that of POLITICAL ENTITIES.<sup>13</sup> One interesting aspect of our data is that they concern a multi-national political entity, i.e. the “European Union”, which is regarded as one *body* (unlike in the classical tradition of nation-based *body politic* concepts).

The corpus consists of a pilot version, called EUROMETA I, which includes some 2100 passages from 28 British and German newspapers from the years 1989 to 2001,<sup>14</sup> and a larger version, called EUROMETA II, which consists of more than 19000 texts and covers the same period but was compiled from two general corpora, i.e. the COBUILD “Bank of English” at

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<sup>13</sup> For the methodological specificities of historical corpora cf. Kay 1998, Allan 2003, and the Internet site of the English historical thesaurus <http://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/SESL/EngLang/thesaur/homepage.htm> (13.12. 2004).

<sup>14</sup> The pilot corpus is accessible at <http://www.dur.ac.uk/SMEL/depts/german/Arcindex.htm> (13.12.2004).

the University of Birmingham and “COSMAS” at the Institute for German Language in Mannheim (Germany).<sup>15</sup> Viewed from an evolutionist perspective, the data drawn from general corpora can be regarded as (the best approximation to) a representative<sup>16</sup> sample of “public representations” that *compete* (metaphorically speaking) for *evolutionary success* in terms of widest possible distribution among members of the respective discourse community. When the texts are read and interpreted by the members of the public, they are turned into individual “mental representations”. Given that some of the readers participate actively in the debate (e.g. politicians, media commentators and writers of letters to editors), their interpretations are re-introduced into the ensemble of generally known “public representations”. We can thus treat the corpus as a (limited) manifestation of conceptual structures that are present in and perhaps also characteristic of a specific discourse community. Provided there is a sufficient number of discourse data in our corpus that can be grouped together as belonging to the same source domain or sub-domain, we can then reconstruct their patterns of change as evidence of ‘evolutionary’ conceptual developments.

For the present study, I shall concentrate on one element of the source domain of LIFE-BODY-HEALTH concepts, i.e. the concept of the HEART OF EUROPE, which is by far the most frequently used concept in EUROMETA II with 545 out of 1189 tokens from the LIFE-BODY-HEALTH domain altogether.<sup>17</sup> Of these 545 tokens, 209 are from the British and 336 from the German sample. The strong representation of the HEART-concept is hardly a surprise, considering the fact that it is one of the most prominent BODY-related concepts in the Western cultural tradition, including BODY POLITIC concepts, and has given rise to a vast number of metonymy-based metaphors in popular idioms and proverbs.<sup>18</sup> In EU-related debates, the metaphorical mapping: A POLITICAL ENTITY IS A (HUMAN) BODY, together with the specification that the EU is the political entity in question, leads to the inference: IF THE EU (as a political entity) IS A (HUMAN) BODY, IT HAS A HEART (which is subject to the physical

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<sup>15</sup> For analyses of EUROMETA II material cf. Musolff 2004. For information on the “Bank of English” and “COSMAS” cf. the Internet web-sites: <http://www.collins.co.uk/books.aspx?group=140>, and <http://www.ids-mannheim.de/kt/corpora.shtml> (13.12.2004).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the representativeness of metaphor corpora cf. Cameron and Deignan 2003:150-159 and Musolff 2004:8-13, 63-81.

<sup>17</sup> The differences in absolute numbers of German and British tokens are most probably due to the fact that the German source corpus COSMAS (1500+ million word forms) is much larger than the *Bank of English* (450+ million). For details of the sampling cf. Musolff 2004:63-68. For an overview over all *body part* source concepts and their English and German lexical items found in EUROMETA II cf. the appendix.

<sup>18</sup> Niemeier (2000:210-213) has proposed that the metonymic link of HEART and EMOTION, which is grounded in salient bodily experiences (i.e. of the heartbeat quickening or slowing), is the basis for a “cline” of further removed metaphorical mappings. For further empirical evidence cf. the entries for *heart* in *Brewer’s Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* 1999:557-558 and for *Herz* in German cf. Röhrich 2001, vol. 2:704-708.



conditions that usually apply to the body organ). Significantly, the scope and the ‘concreteness’ of this inference differs across the corpus texts, as we shall see shortly. There are a number of examples that highlight physical aspects of the *heart of Europe*, but there are others that only use a general notion of the HEART AS A CENTRE. Some of these latter uses have a kind of residual physical meaning aspect that relates to the target notion of GEOGRAPHIC CENTRALITY but the largest group represent a more abstract notion of FUNCTIONAL CENTRALITY. In the following sections, we shall discuss examples of all types of *heart* metaphor that occur in EUROMETA II to see if and how their conceptual development in public discourse in Britain and Germany can be interpreted in terms of an evolutionist perspective.

### 3.1. The HEART as the CENTRE

The CENTRALITY aspect of the *heart of Europe* metaphor is evident in references to cities, regions or countries as being situated geographically *in the heart of Europe*. These are by far the most frequent uses of the metaphor in the German sample, accounting for 252 out of altogether 336 tokens, and they make up a sizeable portion in the smaller English sample (i.e. 34 out of 209). Nearly half, i.e. 116, out of the 252 German tokens and 7 out of 34 English tokens picture Germany as a whole or German regions and cities as constituting *the heart of Europe* or as being situated *in the heart of Europe*:

- (1) Auch der Präsident der Industrie- und Handelskammer [...] richtete [...] einen „dringenden Appell“ an die Adresse der Politik [...]: „Berlin ist keine Insel mehr, sondern liegt *im Herzen Europas*.“ (*die tageszeitung*, 21 November 1992)<sup>19</sup>
- (2) Milosevics Entscheidung, sich an Deutschland zu wenden, ist eine weitere Bestätigung für die wachsende Macht *dieses Landes im Herzen Europas*. (*Die Zeit*, 24 June 1999)
- (3) We saw the process [of reunification] at work most vividly, *in the heart of Europe, at the time of the collapse of East Germany*, at the time when the crowds in Leipzig and Dresden began to change the slogan from “We are the people” to “We are one people”. (*The Independent*, 18 September 1995)

Other local and regional references of the *heart of Europe* metaphor can be found for many parts of Europe but there are no references to Britain in either the British or the German sample of EUROMETA II. This finding may seem to be sufficiently motivated on the grounds of geography; however, the data suggest that the HEART = CENTRE mapping extends not exclusively to countries of central Europe (i.e. Poland, the Czech Republic, Austria, Croatia, Slovenia and Switzerland, apart from Germany). It also includes, for instance, Belgium,

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<sup>19</sup> Italics in quotations have been added by the author to indicate the metaphorical passage under discussion.

Franco-German border regions, and, occasionally, even peripheral regions such as Denmark or Belarus:

- (4) Am 1. Juli 2000, sagt Dänemarks Ministerin für Industrie und Handel, „*rückt das Herz Europas nach Norden*“. (*Berliner Zeitung*, 18 October 1999)
- (5) Millions of Bielarussians [...] have what may be a last chance tomorrow to prevent a *despotic stronghold being created in the heart of Europe*. (*The Guardian*, 28 November 1995)

The HEART = CENTRE mapping even features in references to the wars in the former Yugoslavia as taking place *in the heart of Europe*, with the implication that what happens *in the heart* is – or should be – close to, and of special concern for one’s *emotional centre*:

- (6) Von 1991 bis 1995 wurde im Herzen Europas ein Krieg geführt, dessen Brutalität und Menschenverachtung wir der Vergangenheit angehörig glaubten. (*Die Zeit*, 18 February 1999)
- (7) Headlines about this war [in Kosovo] being in the ‘heart of Europe’ [...] and other similar comments [...] have the implication that if this was happening thousands of miles away it would be more explicable and almost normal. (*The Guardian*, 5 April 1999)

The last example shows that there is a close connection between the HEART-AS- CENTRE and the HEART-AS-SEAT OF EMOTIONS concepts. What is *in the heart* is – or should be, according to standard cultural assumptions in the West – close to, and of particular importance for, one’s emotional centre. This emotive dimension of positioning a nation *in the heart of Europe* is also discernible in references to candidate states for the EU enlargement process, such as the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary (which in the first of the following two examples are represented metonymically by their capital cities):

- (8) „Prag, Warschau und Budapest gehören zum Herzen Europas“, sagte er [= E. Diepgen, the Lord Mayor of Berlin]. (*die tageszeitung*, 2 January 1995)
- (9) Some may see the accession of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland mainly [...] as the final step in overcoming the division of Europe which followed the Yalta agreement in 1945 and Stalin’s imposition of *an iron curtain in the heart of Europe*. Yet such a view would miss the real significance of enlargement [...]. (*The Economist*, 13 March 1999)

The appeal of relating a nation to the *heart of Europe* is even more evident when we study examples where the notion of CENTRALITY that is embodied in the HEART concept is extended beyond positional to functional aspects. In this context, Britain finally comes into the picture (i.e. into the corpus data): indeed, the British public debate about EC-/EU-politics over the course of the 1990s can be summarised largely as a dispute about Britain’s relationship to the *heart of Europe*. There is no question of Britain being *in that heart*, but the issue is whether Britain should or should not be *at the heart of Europe* as the functional centre of influence

and power within the EU. The starting point for the British *heart of Europe* debates in the 1990s was a speech held by the then Prime Minister, John Major, in Germany in early 1991. Major committed his government to supporting further integration of the “European Community”:

- (10) John Major last night signalled a decisive break with the Thatcherite era, pledging to a delighted German audience *that Britain would work “at the very heart of Europe”* with its partners in forging an integrated European community. (*The Guardian*, 12 March 1991)

Major’s speech optimistically suggested an active role (*working, forging*) at the most central part (*the very heart*) of the decision taking EC institutions. Initially, most reports and comments interpreted his statement along the lines of the FUNCTIONAL CENTRALITY perspective, even though, of course, the political evaluations of Major’s vision differed according to the Euro-political preferences of commentators:

- (11) Most galling of all, the British prime minister has decided *that Britain is at the ‘very heart of Europe’*. Here is a dangerous new twist to British pragmatism. (*The Economist*, 23 March 1991)
- (12) [Major] said that [...] *Britain wants to be “at the heart of Europe”*. For a year that banality was his European policy; only this week has he started to explain what it means. *Of course Britain should be at the heart of Europe whenever it possibly can*, for that is where the decisions that affect many British interests are being taken. (*The Economist*, 23 November 1991)
- (13) Britain is still pulled both ways. *It is not ‘at the heart of Europe’ – geographically and temperamentally, it is on the periphery.* (*The Economist*, 26 September 1992)
- (14) [Iain Vallance, chairman of British Telecom] urged the Government *to put Britain at the heart of Europe* and play a full part in debates over monetary union, employment, social costs, innovation and regional aid. (*The Guardian*, 16 November 1993)
- (15) Statt außen vor zu bleiben, versucht Großbritannien unter ihm, *“im Herzen Europas”* Politik zu machen. (*Die Zeit*, 22 May 1992)<sup>20</sup>

In these examples, the HEART OF EUROPE is the politically most important ‘place’ in the European Community/Union, the political centre where decisions are taken. Britain’s position vis-à-vis this *heart* is being defined in terms of CLOSENESS or DISTANCE, and it is evident that this relationship was contentious right from the start – otherwise it would make little sense for politicians and commentators to “urge” that Britain should *be* or *work at the heart of Europe*. Over the mid-1990s, this proposition became ever more controversial. When Major’s government appeared to be moving away from the political *heart* of the Union on account of

its “opt outs” from social and economic integration as well as disputes over the EU ban of British beef, British and German commentators began to refer to Major’s 1991 promise in order to accuse him of a *change of heart* or hypocrisy:

- (16) Mr Major seems not to recall that his original project was to place Britain ‘*at the heart of Europe*’. His eyes are increasingly fixed on [...] the next British general election. (*The Economist*, 4 February 1995)
- (17) Der Regierungschef, der einst Großbritannien ‘*im Herzen Europas*’ verankern wollte, hat keine feste Überzeugung. (*Die Zeit*, 13 December 1996)

Unlike the Conservative government, the formula of *Britain (working) at the heart of Europe* ‘survived’ the landslide Labour victory in the general election of 1997. “New Labour’s” new Prime Minister, Tony Blair, inherited it, and he was soon credited and criticised for it in ways similar to his predecessor, sometimes to the self-conscious *ennui* of the journalists commenting on its use:

- (18) The litany passes from government to government. A *Britain at the heart of Europe*. We’ll hear the chant 1,000 times again this month [...]. (*The Guardian*, 1 December 1997)
- (19) Tony Blair’s attempts to place *Britain at the heart of Europe* faced a direct challenge [...]. (*The Times*, 23 March 1998)
- (20) Blair will, im Kontrast zu den britischen Konservativen, sein Land *wirklich ‘im Herzen Europas’* ansiedeln. (*Frankfurter Rundschau*, 24 March 1999)

In these examples, the notion of Britain as a state that *is at the heart of Europe* has become independent from the initial use by Major. If we follow Dennett’s suggestion and take the metaphor’s *viewpoint* (figuratively speaking), we may conclude that the first phase of its ‘evolution’ was successful: it had been ‘replicated’ often enough and had become sufficiently prominent to represent a specific (pro-European) political stance irrespective of whether it was the Tory or a Labour government that was said to be promoting it.

### 3.2. The heart of Europe as an ORGAN

Pursuing the ‘discourse career’ of the British *heart of Europe* debate further, we also find examples in which the corporeal dimension of the *heart* metaphor is explicitly alluded to:

- (21) [...] if Mr Major wanted to be *at the heart of Europe*, it was, presumably, as a *blood clot*. (*The Independent*, 11 September 1994)
- (22) Britain may be advised that *it can’t be at the heart of Europe if it is detached from its arteries*. (*The Guardian*, 10 June 1997)

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<sup>20</sup> NB: German texts that quote Major’s statement or otherwise refer to it consistently translate *at the heart of Europe* as *im Herzen Europas*.

- (23) *The Rotten Heart of Europe* (title of book by B. Connolly, published in 1995)  
(24) The European Commission is undemocratic. The truth is *the rotten heart of Europe will never be cleaned out.* (*The SUN*, 17 March 1999)

In these examples, the reassuring promise that *Britain would be at the heart of Europe* has become the premise for a critical comment by way of a re-contextualisation of the HEART concept within crudely put scenarios of HEART ILLNESS or DISEASE. The *heart-as-an-organ* metaphor provides a warrant for an argument based on common-sense/folk-medical knowledge that a human body cannot function without a heart and is in grave danger if the heart is diseased or in some way organically dysfunctional. On the basis of this knowledge, a political entity depicted as a *body* can be said to be in danger if its metaphorical *heart* is sick or *rotten*. In examples (21) and (22) the source variants of a *blood clot at the heart* and *detachment from arteries* are used to refute the promise of closer British involvement in EU decisions, highlighting the discrepancy between the presupposition of a *healthy heart* contained in the promise and the *life-threatening* consequences of specific government policies. In (23) and (24) the variant *rotten* (i.e. *dead* or *dying*) *heart* is applied to the allegations of nepotism and mismanagement against the EU commission that led to the commission's resignation in March 1999. In these quotations, the commission itself is seen as the *heart of Europe* that is not functioning properly on account of the state of *rot* that it is in. The implied inferences of these examples at the level of the target topic are strongly Euro-sceptical: if the Commission, as the EU's *heart*, is *rotting* or *rotten*, then the whole *body* (= the EU) is in danger or perhaps even past hope of recovery. Hence, any further involvement in it or closeness to its *heart* is presented as foolish and dangerous.

This sarcastic and dismissive assessment also comes through in facetious uses of the phrase *heart of Europe* in the context of further BODY-related terminology:

- (25) These are just a handful of the issues which echo around Brussels' conference and dinner tables. There are many more in a similar vein — and one thing binds them together. They bear no relationship to *the British "debate", hearts, livers, gall bladders and all.* (*The Guardian*, 1 December 1997)  
(26) The contempt with which the French government treats Britain [in the dispute over an immigrant camp near Calais] is beyond belief. *Tony Blair says he wants Britain to be at the heart of Europe. Well it looks this morning as if Europe is showing us its backside.* (*The SUN*, 3 September 2001)

The conceptual 'proximity' of the body parts of liver, gall bladder or bottom to the heart is used here mainly to ridicule the slogan of *Britain at the heart of Europe*. The political slant of these examples varies: in (25), the *Guardian's* late chief political commentator Hugo Young criticises the irrelevance of the British discussion about *Britain at the heart of Europe* to the

‘really’ important debates conducted at the EU’s political centre (Brussels). In example (26), Rupert Murdoch’s Euro-sceptical *SUN* uses the *heart of Europe* phrase as a clue for its denunciation of French immigration policy by way of referring to a crude gesture involving an ‘undignified’ part of the body. The conceptual basis and the associative use of the source domain BODY, is, however, quite similar: in both examples the reference to the *heart of Europe* phrase is used as a kind of key word to invoke further aspects of the BODY domain. Both examples also have in common that they appeal to ancient value-systems for the various body parts that are based on the *body politic* tradition, contrasting a high-value HEART concept with lower-value notions of ‘inner’ and ‘lower’ parts of the body.<sup>21</sup>

Overall, tokens of the ‘organic’ scenario account for the largest part of the 209 *heart of Europe* tokens in the British sample, i.e. 175 tokens (= 83%), 31 of which belong to the *heart disease/failure* scenarios. By contrast, just 84 (=25%) of the 336 German tokens for *Herz Europas* invoke organic/corporeal scenarios. Out of these, only two rather specialised cases fit a *heart disease/failure* scenario. One example refers to a row between the French and German governments over the planned euro currency as revealing ‘the *faulty cardiac valve behind the fainting fit*’ („Herzklappenfehler hinter dem Schwächeanfall”, cf. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 16 June 1997). The second case is a denunciation of the *heart of Europe* as *ill* in an allegation by an extremist right wing party that ‘Germany, as the heart of Europe, is ill due to its supposed ‘humiliation’ after World War II („Wenn das Herz Europas krank ist”, quoted in *die tageszeitung*, 12 January 1990). Another 19 tokens appear in the context of (non-committal) reports about the British debate about *being/working at the heart of Europe* and six refer to the title of Connolly’s 1995 book *The Rotten Heart of Europe*, without endorsing its damning *diagnosis*. Even on the occasion of the 1999 nepotism scandal, which elicited as much critical coverage in Germany as in Britain, we find no equivalent of the British *rot at the heart of Europe* tokens. It thus seems plausible to conclude that whereas both national samples rely on the metaphor of the *heart of Europe* as embodying a geographic-cum-political notion of CENTRALITY, the British sample is characterised specifically by a strong emphasis on organic scenarios, in particular the notion of the *heart of Europe* as *suffering from a disease* or some other *organic deterioration*. This finding is in keeping with the general result of the corpus

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<sup>21</sup> For the invocation of the ‘lower’, ‘less dignified’ body parts (e.g. *feet, back, stomach*) in the *body politic* tradition, especially in Renaissance debates challenging traditional (monarchical) government cf. Hale 1971:113-119. In Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus* passage which was referred to in section 2, above, Menenius insults the rebellious citizens’ leader by calling him the “big toe”, reasoning that “being one o’ the lowest, basest, poorest, Of this most wise rebellion, thou go’st foremost: Thou rascal, that art worst in blood to run, Lead’st first to win some vantage” (*Coriolanus*, I, 1, 163-164).

analysis, i.e. that the British press use the *heart of Europe* metaphor far more often in sceptical or critical contexts than the German press – which comes as no surprise given the strength of Euro-sceptical tendencies in British public opinion.<sup>22</sup>

#### 4. Conclusions

The *heart disease/failure* scenario as it appears in the British sample of EUROMETA II carries with it, so to speak, an implicit reference to the phraseologism of *Britain being at the heart of Europe*, which was initially ‘coined’ by John Major and later adopted by Tony Blair. The main notion conveyed by that phraseologism was the sense of FUNCTIONAL CENTRALITY of the *heart* for the *survival* of the *organism*. If the EC/EU is seen as a political *body*, then its *heart* is its political centre, and it is important for Britain to be *at* or *close* to it, assuming that it functions properly. This functional (rather than positional) understanding of the phrase *heart of Europe* paved the way for reinterpretations in terms of organic scenarios, especially *illness/disease* scenarios, which were certainly not intended by Major, or later, by Blair. The HEART concept of the Prime Ministers’ optimistic promises about Britain’s involvement in EU policy proved an easy target for Euro-sceptical critics, who only needed to pick up on its latent organic connotations to introduce the ILLNESS/DISEASE aspect. From Major and Blair’s viewpoint, this distortion of ‘their’ metaphor source (from ‘HEART as the FUNCTIONAL CENTRE’ to ‘HEART as a DISEASED, DYSFUNCTIONAL ORGAN’) must have been unwelcome. On the other hand, once the *heart of Europe* metaphor had been put in the public domain – the general pool of “public representations” –, they could do little to prevent this re-conceptualisation from being publicised and gaining, at least temporarily, greater prominence than their own versions.

If we regard the *functional centre* and *illness* scenarios as two versions of the same metaphor ‘meme’ or ‘representation’, i.e. *the heart of Europe*, we can interpret the ‘deterioration’ from FUNCTIONAL CENTRE to DISEASED, DYSFUNCTIONAL ORGAN as a kind of adaptive conceptual change. Within the space of 12 years a (micro-)tradition emerged that was certainly not intended by its initial users. When we regard this micro-history of the phraseologism of *Britain being/working at the heart of Europe* in British public discourse over the 1990s from what Dennett might call the ‘metaphor-meme’s point of view’, the *illness/disease* scenario can help to explain how the *heart of Europe* metaphor ‘managed’ to survive in competition

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<sup>22</sup> For general analyses of British attitudes towards Europe in the last two decades cf. George 1994,

against the many other metaphors and slogans of EU-related debates (e.g. to name but a few: *the two-speed Europe, the (Common) European House, the European family*).<sup>23</sup> Once the original appeal of the promise *to work at the heart (= centre) of the EU* had worn out, the *heart of Europe* metaphor became the focus of renewed debate thanks to its changed appearance as part of an *illness* scenario. Its ‘ability’ to turn into a strongly contested notion heightened its chances of “replication” among the competing political concepts. The metaphor did not change completely: in fact, its use in the organic scenario version foregrounded its latent corporeal meaning aspects that linked up to the public’s encyclopaedic and folk-theoretical knowledge about ORGAN FUNCTIONS, ILLNESS, MEDICINE etc. Thus, while changing some aspects of its conceptual structure, the metaphor has retained the basic characteristics of its source domain, which relate to experientially grounded knowledge aspects that make it easily accessible and attractive to use. We may therefore conclude that the ‘discourse career’ of a metaphor seems to depend on at least two complementary factors: 1) experiential grounding, which ensures that an essential meaning consistency is preserved, and 2) sufficient conceptual flexibility that allows for use in differing or even contrasting scenarios. Adopting the metaphor’s *viewpoint* thus opens a perspective on the fact that even the very reversal of the political bias in a scenario (in this case, from a Euro-optimistic to a Euro-sceptical bias) can enhance the longevity of a conceptual metaphor.

With regard to the question of how discursive micro-mechanisms combine to form conceptual trends or traditions, the present study can at best provide the sketch of a research programme. In order to count as evidence for a continuation of the BODY-POLITICAL ENTITY mapping that is linked to the ancient tradition of the *body politic* metaphor, the data presented here need more statistical validation in terms of their representativeness for present-day discourse as well as corroboration from long-term diachronic studies. These should include historical corpus data and a reassessment of hypotheses about the *body politic* metaphor that have been formulated in the context of the “History of Ideas” and “conceptual history” approaches. Traditionally, these approaches concentrated on prominent periods of concept change on the basis of explicit theory formulations, and they only noted in passing that an ancient concept cluster such as the *body politic* metaphor ‘survived’ in present-day discourse in the form of a few lexicalised expressions such as *head of government* etc. By contrast, the corpus data presented here and other cognitive studies of *body* metaphors suggest that the most likely

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Baker/Seawright (edd.) 1998, Musolff/Good/Points/Wittlinger (edd.) 2001.

<sup>23</sup> For an overview over the range of major metaphor domains used British and German Euro-debates cf. Musolff 2000.



‘inheritors’ of this long-standing metaphor tradition are conceptual clusters that invoke vivid source domain configurations, e.g. the contrasts between the *heart-as-centre* and the *healthy* vs. *rotten heart* concepts, or between ‘noble’ organs – *head* and *heart* – and ‘lower’ organs. These contrasts provide the basis for variation and – in terms of conceptual evolution – for competition between different metaphor scenarios. Without this competitive variation, even a conceptual tradition that spans two millennia, such as the *body politic* concept, would stagnate and come to an end. Its apparent survival beyond its prominent theoretical and poetical formulations in the late Renaissance shows – *pace* Hale – that sufficiently many micro-changes must have taken place to maintain its discursive attraction and argumentative flexibility for the general public up until today – and probably, for some time to come.

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## Appendix

### Conceptual elements of the LIFE-BODY-HEALTH domain in EUROMETA II

| Source concepts           | English lexemes   | German lexemes   |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| LIFE, SURVIVAL            | <i>to live, life, alive, survival</i>   | <i>Leben, leben, lebendig, überleben, Weiterleben, ins Leben rufen</i>                 |
| BIRTH/BABY                | <i>birth, rebirth, born, still-born, premature birth, abortion, baptism, baby, (bouncing) child</i> | <i>Geburt, geboren, Wiedergeburt, Frühgeburt, Missgeburt, Kind, Baby</i>               |
| DEATH                     | <i>dead, death, death sentence/ warrant/ knell</i>  | <i>Tod, tot</i>  |
| ILLNESS/DISEASE (general) | <i>ill, illness, sick, sick man of Europe</i>   | <i>krank, kranker Mann Europas, kränkelnd</i>  |
| I/D: EUROSCLEROSIS        | <i>Euro(-)sclerosis</i>   | <i>Eurosklerose</i>  |
| I/D: MADNESS              | <i>(Euro-)madness</i>   |  |
| I/D: INFLUENZA            | <i>Asian (economic) flu</i>   | <i>Grippe</i>  |
| I/D: VIRUS                | <i>virus</i>  |  |
| I/D: COLIC                | <i>colic</i>  |  |
| I/D: WOUND                |   | <i>Wunde, Narbe</i>  |
| I/D: WASTING/TBC          |   | <i>Schwindsucht</i>  |
| I/D: HURT                 |   | <i>Wehtun</i>  |
| CURE/THERAPY/CARE         | <i>therapy, diagnose</i>  | <i>Pflege, pflegen, Nachsorge</i>  |
| HEALTH/FITNESS/RECOVERY   | <i>to recover, recovery, revive, health, healthy</i>  | <i>Gesundheit, gesund, gesünder, gesunden, sich erholen, Fit, Fitness<sup>24</sup></i> |
| BODY PART: HEART          | <i>heart</i>  | <i>Herz</i>  |
| BODY PART: GALL BLADDER   | <i>gall bladder</i>   |  |
| BODY PART: LIVER          | <i>liver</i>  |  |
| BODY PARTS: EYES          |   | <i>Augen</i>   |
| BODY PART: HEAD           |   | <i>Kopf</i>  |
| BODY PARTS: LEGS          |   | <i>Beine</i>   |

<sup>24</sup> The German ‘loanwords’ from English, *fit* and *Fitness*, in the sense of ‘physical prowess/health’ seem to enjoy particular popularity in the German press, whereas they do not figure in the *Bank of English* sample. The only occurrences of *fit* among tokens from the *Bank of English* have the meaning of ‘matching’, as in “Britain would fit into euroland” (*The Times*, 1 March 1999). *Fit* and *fitness* do occur in HEALTH-related senses in the English sample of EUROMETA I; their absence from EUROMETA II must therefore be a result of sampling procedures.

|                     |                 |                |
|---------------------|-----------------|----------------|
| BODY PARTS: FEET    |                 | <i>Füße</i>    |
| BODY PARTS: MUSCLES |                 | <i>Muskeln</i> |
| BODY PART: BOTTOM   | <i>backside</i> |                |