

Of Diversity and Locality

In the background of all my work there has been a fundamental experience which I cannot escape. Among the trees in a wood (or among linguistic phenomena) I am struck by the fact how differently various entities exist. Or in better words: what difference there is! An incredibly fat and colourful caterpillar tries to escape the fringes of an ants' nest. A short distance away a wolf's milk, a species of slime mould, moves at a significantly slower speed. Life forms quite alien to each other exercise their livelihoods in the same place. I was fascinated by the fact that intuitively all of them seemed quite unreducible to each other. The fact that things did exist, but all of them in a completely different manner. That organisms (us) live almost the same location, but their way of existing is different from each other, perhaps so fundamentally that only a small sliver of common ground remains; something we may mundanely call a place or more grandly, their ambit of life.

Eventually I became convinced that the concept of diversity does not reflect the fundamental nature of my recurring experience. At this point my impression was that we are dealing with an idea: diversity. But the powerful sense of reality that I encountered was connected to the fact that there is no diversity, that indeed there can not be none. In fact the opposite is true: what I saw was a group of organisms, all turned out mind-bogglingly different due to their economy of genetics, just meeting each other as by a quirk of fate.

There is in evolutionary biology the concept of 'hopeful monster', which refers to the dimension of uniqueness among living organisms. Every living thing exists irrevocably on the basis of its own genetic heritage, and armed with that heritage, with its own features, it searches for a suitable place to live, as if it was searching for a meaning for what it has become due to a random process. According to evolutionary mechanics nothing ever reaches its final form; instead, organs and genetic mutations tend facilitate variable functions that become possible as circumstances change. For example, the feathers of modern birds had their origin in temperature regulation, but as result of some process, maybe slow, maybe driven by sudden jolts, they turned into a part of an apparatus for flying through the air. A bewildering thought. Or is it a thought at all?

What the entities in that copse of woods were exuding, was total in its difference between them. Full of its own being. It was as if something was on the brink of collapse as the result of that meeting. If diversity like that is possible in such a small area, what can we expect to find somewhere else? What circumstances, what processes can end up in such a different array of results?

Later I have studied ontology, logic, epistemology, physics, evolutionary biology and biolinguistics, all of which are proffering their own research questions and accordingly their own stories on how it might be possible to explain the totality of this ambit of life.

But at the same time, the whole assembly seems to seem to disintegrate due to its own groundlessness, because we know so little. Or in better words: even the concept of knowledge is in constant peril, as any single definition of knowledge does not seem to cover every instance of knowledge imaginable. However, the fundamental idea of diversity did not fade, since, like my interest in those disciplines at the fringes and the core of science, I became fascinated with the process of meanings being woven together: how they themselves had formed and how they channel their story. Simply put I became interested in language itself, something that was only supposed to be a tool.

As it happens, a same kind of formal diversity that exists in the copse of woods can clearly be also be found in language. Different languages produce a different kinds of thinking. Their sensitivity of perception varies in direction, and they result in different metaphysics, different views of structuring reality. In addition, within a single language there exist radically different processes in the closing of meaning. Now, writing this paper, I am committing to a rather narrow set of linguistic procedures, something the listeners are used to in this context. We call them discourses, by which we mean signing into some particular universe of speech. To put in other words, when exploring reality via language one necessarily signs into some specific mode of structuring one's experience. This mode of structured perception partly determines all the information that becomes available. And that's not all. Even direct perceptions are not disconnected from this conditioning; instead, they have a connection to the way the perceiver has previously conceived everything they encounter, or to the

cognitive processes their brain has been exposed to. Even formal logic is to a degree culturally determined.

It is rather commonly accepted that a person can not be located in two places at the same time. This statement defines the concept of place as well as it defines the concept of a living human being. Place means something indisputable and real, something we usually take for granted. We do not ask what a place means. We are only located in it, and a place, however we draw its borders, has its own features, which are defined by its own history, and the easy existence of those features is corollary to the fact that there are also other places, which are in many ways different. In addition places are mute, in a sense that reading the history they present, the factors that have formed them, requires special commitment. If I tell you I am writing this text at the Ylä-Ruth restaurant in Uptown Jyväskylä 28th of January year 2019 AD, when the time is 14.08 and outside winter frost has slowly mellowed to -18 °C, I am giving out coordinates from which an enlightened listener, who has lived culturally close enough, may be able to determine some significant parts of the creation process.

I would like to draw your attention to place, a category which, despite its marvellous qualities, is easily overlooked. A place: the stageless area of all meetings where perceptions are born. The total of that extraneous and random that calls reality into the open. The placeness of a place is born when the way it rests within itself becomes obvious in a way that makes it possible to first perceive events happening and afterwards imagine everything that is possible happening there, because it is in places where everything that is possible happens. The gravity of a place starts to be real. It is grounded. 'Mater' is latin and means mother.

Experiences like the one in the copse of trees finally led me to keep bees as a hobby. It is extremely inspiring to examine the realization of such a totally different life form. Spending time with them even language starts to find a metaphor of their oneness.

If we accept the fact that thinking has a certain history and certain formal features (language), it might as well be said that it has a ground of its own or that it is to some extent local. From the perspective of evolutionary dynamics, specialization requires changing circumstances,

and those circumstances places as adjacent localities provide. Hopeful monsters find environments which suit them.

Maybe in our concept of knowledge we might by now admit that the material terms (e.g. the energy basis) and formal terms (e.g. language) of each ambit of life play a part of determining knowledge, along with the monotheism of spirit or reason. For my personal Utopia, I am content with the thought that parallel knowledge is possible, that there are abodes for knowing differently, where everything is as true as it is in here. But in many ways different.

(Dedicated to Aimo Nurminen, whose work was instrumental in preserving the stock of the Nordic Brown Bee.)