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UNITY, INTERDEPENDENCE AND RELATIVISM AS CHALLENGES FOR THE FUTURE

Introduction

I am very happy to be invited to be invited to the International Likhachev Conference, under the auspices of the Russian Academy of Sciences and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia. I would like to begin by thanking the Organizing Committee for inviting me.

I address the conference theme, “The Global World: Systemic Changes, Challenges and Contours of the Future”, via the principles of unity, interdependence and relativism that are connected by an organizing and communication principle that is so general that I use the grammar to describe it.

Unity is a basic principle of mysticism, a term I use in the same way as Bertrand Russell [24] did in a paper written just before the First World War, when he drew a comparison between the intuitive and analytical faculty required both by a creative scientist and by implication a creative artist and the intuitive faculty and analytical faculty, though perhaps of a different kind, that lies at the centre of mysticism. In the limit, complete interdependence implies unity between all things and events and spheres are being, whether one thinks of spheres are being in a spiritual sense or in a more secular sense as contrasting the conscious and the unconscious worlds, or the possible and actual world, or as the work of Borges conceived of as a sphere of Forking Paths [1] in which all the future possibilities contained in a current event are lived out simultaneously in an imaginary world; the latter, the imaginary world he conceived of being perhaps paralleled by the concept of multiverse. An idea behind the paper is that communication and organisation in different spheres or worlds is carried out via different grammars. From this follows the idea that there are many, many grammars; hence the connection with relativism.

The world is on average richer, safer, more comfortable, healthier than previous generations could have imagined. But averages can be misleading. The dispersion between rich and poor in all these respects, is huge and increasing. The state of evolution of business and national policies, despite apparent intellectual triumphs, seems to be governed by reptilian parts of the mind; ruled by a grammar that is in many ways, fearful, aggressive, lacking in empathy, without the excuse our reptile ancestors had, that their environment was beyond their control; in contrast, to a great extent, we have fashioned our environment ourselves. So, the theme of the paper amounts to saying that a change in grammar is necessary. The change involves recognition of interdependence and unity. It is an achievable stage in evolution; achievable in the first place, personally and in the second place, universally since the personal and the universal are part of the same unity.

Globalisation is an illustration of a certain kind of unity. It arose out of the interaction or interdependence between the global financial sector, the technological revolution, especially in information, computing and biotechnologies and the need to find global markets both as a source of cheap supply of labour and expanding demand as a result of spectacular world income growth in the latter part of the previous century and the early part of this century [21]. The downside of globalisation increasing inequality both within nations and between them; on average incomes increased but so did the gap between the richest and the poorest. This resulted in a sense of marginalisation by a large section of the population and, at least in the West, a rise in populism, a move to protectionism and a retreat from international cooperation as evidenced for example by Brexit in the UK and disenchantment with the Single European Currency. The world that emerged after Perestroika and the end of the Cold War is very different from the New World Order that was conceived in the 1990s.

Thus, the rather optimistic grammar that produced a phase of globalisation has evolved into a more pessimistic grammar in the current era, a phase of disarray, illustrating the yin and yang in both. Disarray is a symptom of the grammar of Neoliberalism that has permeated business and national policies, producing well-being and disparity in well-being, content and discontent, overriding inherent interdependence and unity; starving empathy.

The paper proceeds in the following way. In the next section the idea of grammar as an organising principle is outlined in relation to the many spheres of being that we inhabit. Being is conceived of in much the same way as Heidegger [9, 3] conceived of being as *Dasein*, or being in the world, except that the concept of world is extended to include many worlds. Each world has its own set of grammars and no grammar is complete. The reader will no doubt see the connection between this and Godel’s incompleteness theorem [22, 28, 16].

The idea of many grammars [27] leads to the theme of the third section, relativism. There are many grammars but they are connected in the same way perhaps as Jung saw as synchronicity and as Niels Bohr [14] conceived as correspondences.

The final section contains some illustrations of the ideas in the previous two sections. The illustrations relate to global organisations, to the global distribution of income and wealth, and to the idea of unity as being a state in which there is no grammar whatsoever; a state, if it can be conceived of in which there is no separation between the knower and the known.

Grammar as an Organizing Principle

Grammar

Grammar has a morphology, and a syntax. Here, morphology refers to the qualities of things and events and being that we choose to focus on. Syntax refers to the rules that connect them. Alternatively, we might think of grammar as a network in which the nodes (vertices) correspond to the

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morphology and the linkages (edges) correspond to syntax. To morphology and syntax, we might add rhetoric which describes how we speak about them, according to conventional wisdom, the prevailing discourse or using Kuhn's term, the paradigm.

For the moment, we focus on the plane of Being that people insist upon calling the real world and upon the or-

ganizations that exist there. The real world is, loosely speaking, the world we are part of in everyday experience, that Heidegger called Dasein. The dominant grammar conditions the way the real world or plane of Being (Dasein) behaves and conditions the way it is perceived and the criteria on which it is evaluated. The dimensions of grammar are illustrated in Figure 1.

GRAMMAR

Names or Nodes of the Network (morphology)

and

Connections or edges between nodes (syntax)

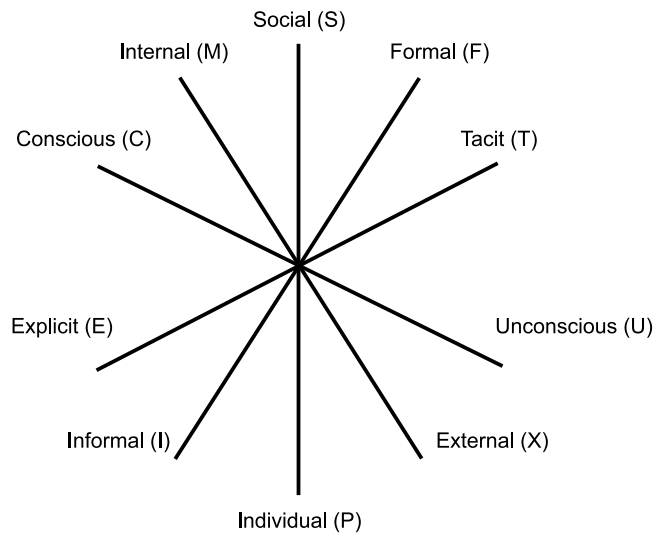


Figure 1

Figure 1 illustrates the scope of the information structure that forms the syntax of grammar. Grammar has many dimensions; formal/informal, social/personal, internal/external, explicit/implicit, conscious/unconscious. Morphology is akin to the naming; naming the artefacts that express of the dimensions of grammar.

We can think of *grammar* as having lateral or horizontal dimensions, indicating that there are many alternative grammars pertaining to each sphere of Being. The process of deconstruction might be described as that of unveiling or discovering alternative grammars in Dasein. Deconstruction is concerned with the Other that is excluded by a grammar or perspective of the world.

There are many spheres of Being, each having a distinctive grammar. Spheres of Being and related grammars have a vertical dimension, described metaphorically in various ways; the material world, the worlds of the soul, the spirit and so on is one description; another is the Freudian conscious, unconscious and the Jungian collective unconscious. Alternatively spheres of Being, may be distinguished by simply saying that, according to current thinking, ethics and norms occupy different but perhaps related spheres.

In figure 2 the horizontal and vertical dimensions of grammar are collapsed into two dimensions: from the perhaps infinite alternative grammars g_i . The set of all grammars is denoted G . Individual grammars have elements in common, they are overlapping sets.

Gödel

No grammar is complete. There is always a statement in a grammar that we know to be true and it would be desi-

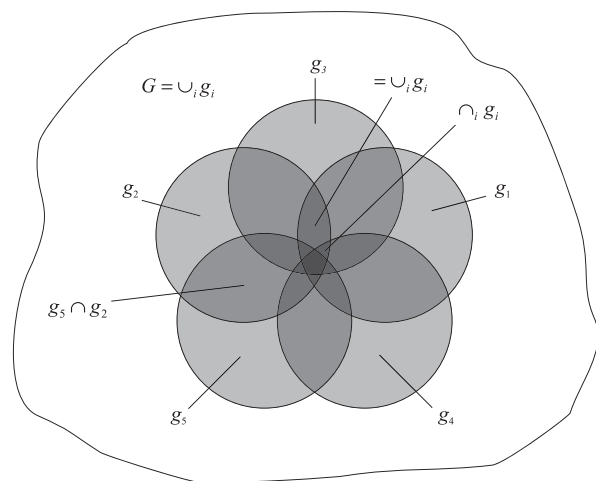


Figure 2

nable to prove, yet it cannot be proved within that grammar. The relativistic aspect of grammar can be illustrated as application of Gödel's theorem, approximately stated as the proposition that 'statement g cannot be proved within grammar G '. If the proposition is true and statement g cannot be proved within the axioms of grammar G , then grammar G contains a falsity and if the proposition is false and statement g can be proved within G then we have a contradiction. Every conceptual system must resort to another conceptual system for its completion: every grammar requires a meta grammar for its completion and even when we add the meta grammar G_m , we are still left with the original propo-

sition; ‘statement g_m cannot be proved within grammar G_m ’, and so on indefinitely. Alternatively, we might describe every grammar is undecidable in that there are statements within that grammar that are neither provable nor disprovable. In this way, the characteristics of space and dimensionality of grammar becomes important.

Deconstruction

Grammar organizes reality, structures it, partitions it and leads to the imagination or dream that what is evident in a particular grammar is the only reality. Deconstruction seeks the Other that lies outside of a particular grammar. It is like unpeeling an infinite layered onion, or an infinite Russian doll; mining to find something outside and within a grammar and discovering something more or nothing.

Alternatively, grammars are like palimpsests; layer written upon layer and never totally erased, always leaving an impression. There’s always an opening for deconstruction or unveiling because no grammar is complete or consistent. This is Gödel’s proposition and Gödel’s proposition is a grammar in its self. There is always something outside; a shadow.

Relativism

The essence of relativism can be expressed by seeing grammar as medium for communicating from one aspect of reality to another; encoding a message into a signal, transmitting the signal, then decoding it so it can be received and interpreted. Interpretation, in turn, requires grammar. Nothing is observed directly; only through a medium and the medium determines the message that is observed and perceived.

What is a medium? Clearly the senses are part of the set of all media that range from the senses to extensions of the senses; telescopes, microscopes, accelerators, software, hardware; experience and heredity wired into neuronal connections, memory, expectation, attachments, habits, memes; and beyond the senses, to dreams, imagination, fantasy, intuition, vision, illumination. Each, within its own grammar, is real; the meaning of relativism.

It is tempting to cite a critique of relativism as; ‘if everything is relative, then the statement that everything is relative is relative as well’. And that is so. Many people misinterpret relativism as a variety of amorality. But to say that a proposition is only true, in relation to a grammar is not to devalue the proposition. Understanding the physics of the fundamental forces of nature, for example, enables us to build machines of many kinds enabling us to use them to perform work of various kinds, but at the same time there may be other valid ways of understanding the universe (though they may not enable us to perform what we usually understand as work); through metaphors like Lovelock’s Gaia, or angels, or by admitting the possibility of a multi-verse or failure to discover the unified theory in physics.

Correspondences [5] and synchronicity [11]

Each sphere of being have their respective grammars. Bohr wrote of correspondence relationships between classical and quantum descriptions of the same phenomena; electromagnetic energy has particle and wave characteristics, yet particles and waves are mutually exclusive concepts. Though seemingly paradoxical, both descriptions apply.

We can describe the paradox in terms of grammar thus; they describe the same phenomenon, but the same phenomenon is expressible in different grammars; expressed non-paradoxically within a grammar but as expressed between grammars seemingly paradoxical, contradictory and inconsistent, but in a complementary relation to one another.

Grammars complementary explanations, course grained of macroscopic versions of the same reality differ from fine grained or quantum versions of that same reality. And quantum versions may only be expressible in mathematics that has no common-sense counterparts. Bohr and others have extended the notion of complementarity and correspondence relationships to the relation between science and religion. We might say that the current state of globalization has a corresponding state in other, nonmaterial, spheres of being.

Jung expressed a similar idea, that of synchronicity, which he called an a-causal connecting principle. In terms of grammar, his concept of synchronicity is a process in which, one world, the archetypal expressed itself in the worlds of dreams and actual events in time.

Illustrations

Organizations

The first illustration is the global organisation itself. We can think of global in the sense of comprising an entire system however small (a small company, or a small industry, or a family), or large (a giant corporation, a nation, a group of nation states, or a global ecosystem of which even a global corporation forms only a part). Organisations carry out many kinds of interdependent activities, producing something, selling something, buying something, disposing of something, storing something and so on. The variety and number of activities, even a small organisation is probably unaccountably large, impossible to deal with unless they are grouped into a smaller number of coalitions.

The grammar of organisations is this. Organisations consist of coalitions within coalitions within coalitions, like the familiar Russian dolls which contain dolls within dolls within dolls and so on. Forming coalitions reduces the dimensions of the organisational problem; many activities are reduced to fewer latent constructs, teams, projects, businesses, corporations and so on – which we will call generally, coalitions.

The process of data reduction, that is reducing many variables, activities or events to fewer latent constructs or coalitions means that there are many degrees of freedom according to which we might interpret organisations. The mathematics might seem complicated but the principle is quite simple. By using a grammar to reduce the dimensions of organization, makes problems of organization and their meaning, tractable. In so doing there are many ways in which the problem can be interpreted.

The problem lies not so much in data reduction as in believing that a single grammar exists according to which organisations can be interpreted. Such is the grammar of Neo Liberalism to business companies, nation states and international organisations such as the IMF are wedded to; that of the drive to competitiveness, focus on productivity, cutting costs, treating people as resources, treating the environment merely as a resource to be used for the purposes defined by Neo Liberalism as if these were the only purposes; whilst at

the same time being outraged by the reactions expressed in populism, nationalism and protectionism. And the environment is temporarily silent whilst global warming, the outcome of such grammar proceeds.

*Being; the Global World: Systemic Changes,
Challenges and Contours of the Future*

In this illustration, a return directly to the theme of the conference and to the relation between science and mysticism which Bertrand Russell drew attention to over a hundred years ago. Russell was a sceptic about religion, but surprisingly not so sceptical about mysticism. Often if we want to understand something means abandoning interpretive grammars that are familiar. Creativity in science and the arts involves doing this.

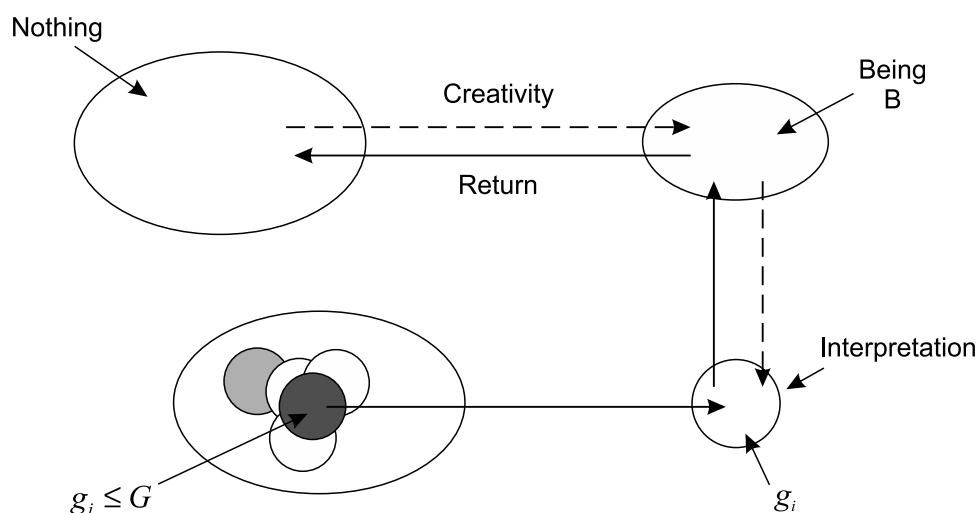


Figure 3

which the composer saw as attachment to the world in three stages. The first stage is the Chikhai Bardo, the return, now of death, which can be interpreted metaphorically as the moment of abandonment of grammar altogether. The Chikhai Bardo is the momentary grasp of reality, which immediately gives way to the Chönyid Bardo, a state illusion in which being is interpreted by some grammar or another. The third stage, the Sidpa Thödol is the onset of birth, in which the insights of the Chikhai Bardo are gradually forgotten.

The diagram itself is an analytical tool which serves as a metaphor for the mystery described by the Bardo Thodal, which again is a kind of grammar.

Alternatively, we can interpret the creative process, in which preconceptions are abandoned. Creativity, artistic, scientific, or mystical, as described by Bertrand Russell, is return to the source in the diagram, and hence the interpretation of the insights according to a grammar. Or maybe, creativity takes the form of the invention of an entirely new grammar. Such is described by economists as the revolution instituted by the work of John Maynard Keynes, and in physics, the revolution brought about by the quantum theory.

In the bottom, left half of the figure we have the set of all grammars G and a grammar g_i indicated by the black circle, which itself contain subsets of grammar. The bottom right-hand side isolates g_i as a way of interpreting being.

We can view creativity as making something, that is being, B , out of nothing and interpreting it according to one grammar g_i or another from the set of all grammars; hence relativism, there are many possible grammars. Alternatively, we can conceive of returning to the source, from whence everything emerged, which involves abandoning any grammar whatsoever. Either journey, creation or return, is impossible to conceive of, except through metaphor, which is paradoxically to impose a grammar for we can conceive of nothing except through a grammar.

The text of the Bardo Thodal is such a metaphor [4, 12]. It describes the comprehension via grammar

Conclusion

In the opening section of the paper, the theme was said to be that a change in grammar is necessary. The change involves recognition of interdependence and unity within spheres of being and between them. It is an achievable stage in evolution; achievable in the first place, personally and in the second place, universally since the personal and the universal are part of the same unity, and since personal grammar is the first port of call.

The last statement could be a description of contemplation, or reflection, or meditation however one likes to describe the same process, which is, I think, the faculty of seeing one grammar from the vantage of another. Everything in the material world is temporary. The story goes like this. An enlightened person, is seen carrying a huge and weighty backpack. How the person is known to be enlightened is not important for the purpose of the story. *What is it like to be enlightened?* The backpack is put down momentarily. *Like this.* Then the backpack is picked up again.

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