

Delusions Well-Hid from Myself

by strannikov

“I'm sure I don't know,” I said to myself before the mirror.

“Well, don't ask me,” I answered. Then instantly, I thought the same thing, exactly the same thing!

The mirror smiled, but my eyes narrowed with suspicion.

That was thirteen weeks ago. Today, I am almost entirely self-coincidental, though I still feel a lag lurking somewhere. Now the mirror frowns. The mirror and I touch, the mirror blurs then turns opaque. I'd been making so much progress.

Can Nature be said to be conscious of any teleology? A clever phenomenologist could argue that it is we ourselves who constitute that consciousness, we human beings, that is. Our species has invested everything in this conceit that it (our species, or we, all of us) ever and always constitutes Nature's teleological summit. But we undermine this conceit with our stern commitments to remaining unconscious for days at a time. We who are committed to remaining unconscious cannot serve as the consciousness of Nature. —But who would dare sit by while Nature pushed some other candidate of teleological prowess or merit? The direction or aim of Nature could lie as concretely in the loins of some species of slimy salamander or newt unknown to us.

Surely, no one alive today will ever know. I for one promise never to tell. Well, but only to the newts. I find the newts attentive and appreciative listeners, overall. They remain bereft of the knowledge that their day will come: true, it's early yet.

Certainly, the newts show no sign of operating with the categories “teleology” or “evolution”. To test their critical ability, I continue to urge them not to adopt these categories. All I can say is: so far, my advice seems to be paying off. But reminding them cannot hurt. Likewise, I do my best to dissuade them from adopting the

concepts “precipice”, “chasm”, and “abyss”. There's no place for these even in Newton's system, I take pains to assure them. (In Newton's diary is the little-read account that he in fact glued the apple stem back to the tree, just to watch the apple fall all over again [that's empiricism!]. Quite unlike many of his other ventures, Sir Isaac's “Apple Stem Glue” never proved a marketing success.) In short, for now at least, the newts are all agreeable to operate with restricted categories.

However, I report with genuine regret that no matter how much I pleaded with them not to employ much less rely on Category K—they persisted! In itself, this will do precious little to curve the trajectory of their evolutionary potential (of course, I withheld this observation from them when making my initial arguments), but it could lead to feathers instead of fur. In point of fact, the newts scoffed at my importunities: nonetheless, I continue to urge restraint with their resort to Category K. (“It should be restrained, he drank enough paregoric last night!” mused the lines between the lines.) Good camphorated tincture of opium would be wasted on them now: maybe they'll be content with an inflatable wading pool.

Perhaps it can be said that I'm on close terms with only one of them, Triturus Caudata, who confesses absolutely no interest in teleology. “But in another forty generations or so,” he confided recently over post-prandial cognacs, “we hope to be able to operate keypads.” Yes, yes, I know, but this need not be construed as some sneaky back-door accommodation to teleology! Other researchers (don't worry, I read all the competing journals!) claim that the newts have attained this capability already. (Text messaging is most often cited.) —but for all the anecdotal accounts circulating thus far, not one single sighting of a newt messaging text! I report confidently that I've spied not one text message relating to their capabilities or proclivities, much less any newt text message regarding our capabilities or proclivities, not one! (Although, granted, while nocturnal juggling appeals to some spectators, chiefly in dimly-lit alleyways, a crowd will inevitably gather. I find the newts to be always absent from such performances: but then, so are wading

pools, which are not as common today as they were just last year. These entertainments are not likely to impress the newts much either way, I continue to contend, and it's not as if they [or we] need assurances, exactly. But—where was I? —and who put all of these newts in my wading pool!)

As the sun rose behind tangerine and magenta clouds the next morning, three weird sisters—all three carrying staffs but only one of them limping—were obliged to leave town all a-cackle after the constable cited them for loitering near some filched inflatable wading pool that someone had placed in a quiet alley well off the main drag.

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