Dark Matter of the Mind: The Culturally Articulated Unconscious by Daniel L. Everett

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In 2005 Daniel Everett published a detailed article in *Current Anthropology* on the language and culture of the Pirahã, a small tribe of Indigenous people living in a remote part of the Amazon jungle. His findings, based on intensive fieldwork, challenged a basic tenet of Chomskyian linguistics: that all grammars of the vastly diverse languages of the world are at their core based on the same syntactic principles and that this "universal grammar" is "hardwired" in the brain, thus language is a genetically programmed cognitive ability.

Everett claims that language is not genetically preprogrammed and that there is no universal grammar. Instead, he argues that language is a tool derived from general human cognitive ability, which like other tools was invented to meet a specific human need, much as the bow and arrow were invented and diffused to serve a specific purpose, a claim he further argued in his book *Language as a Cultural Tool* (2012).

This argument set off a contentious debate with Chomsky and his adherents that spilled over into the popular media: the *New Yorker*, National Public Radio, *New Scientist*, *Chronicle of Higher Education*, a film on the Smithsonian Channel, and articles in the British and German press. The dispute even became the topic of novelist and essayist Tom Wolfe's satirical book *The Kingdom of Speech*, published in 2016.

In the same year, Everett published another book in which he reiterates his original claims but extends his argument into that part of the mind that lies beyond both conscious and tacit knowledge—a kind of knowing with no clear dividing between other kinds of knowledge but that is important for cognition, personal identity, language, and culture. He calls this the "dark matter" of the mind, unspoken and in normal circumstances unarticulated, even to ourselves—a kind of unconscious knowledge that is both shared and personal and that emerges from experience and memories. The phrase "dark matter" is taken from physics, where it refers to a kind of matter that makes up the largest part of the physical universe, matter that cannot be seen but that is evident by its effects on the visible universe. Thus, in physics, says Everett, "there is a place for explanations that involve things that appear to be unseeable in principle" (p. 1). So, too, is the kind of knowledge he explores in *The Dark Matter of the Mind*.

Everett places his argument within a long tradition of Western philosophy and science, tracing two streams of thinking about the mind back to their sources: Plato's theory that there are innate ideas or inborn prior knowledge, and Aristotle's theory that our ability to solve problems is based on knowledge acquired through experience. In other words, our capacity to learn is what is innate, not any specific system of knowledge, such as language. Everett takes us through the history of philosophy to show variations on those two themes as elaborated by the famous philosophers of the Western intellectual tradition, ending with his basically Aristotelian view, in contrast to the Chomskyan theory of innate structures and universal grammar. In the process, he challenges Freud's theory of the unconscious, Jung's archetypes, Bastien's psychic unity of man, Joseph Campbell's monomyth, and other variations on that theme.

The empirical support for his claims rests on his years of fieldwork among the Pirahã, which he describes more fully in a previous book, 2012's *Don't Sleep, There Are Snakes*, a good and entertaining account of ethnographic and linguistic fieldwork. His general theoretical framework is that of Kenneth Pike's emic/etic analysis of language and culture, and the linguistic anthropological focus on the relationship between language, thought, and culture, as seen in the work of Boas, Sapir, Whorf, and others. The bulk of the book is a discussion of the nature of the dark matter of the mind, its ontogenesis and construction, as well as its relationship to language and culture: in language in the form of discourse and narratives, grammar and signs, and in culture in terms of ranked value theory and hermeneutics. Each of these topics forms separate chapters that are interesting essays of their own. One chapter that is useful, beyond its role as support of Everett's hypothesis, is on language, culture, and translation, based on his own experience as a former missionary Bible translator and within the rich centuries-long tradition of Biblical translation.

What Everett has to say in his book and elsewhere has been contended, but what he says about this broad and multifaceted scope of human behavior is interesting and informative, and can be profitably read by anthropologists in all four fields of the discipline.

REFERENCES CITED

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