

From: Ryo Chonabayashi

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Allow me to ask these rather minor questions!! Professor Boyd's paper:

Page 4: It seems there are some intricate issues concerning whether John Locke would support the view "individual consciousness is the source of all our knowledge". Sure, Locke thinks that what we can be directly aware are ideas, and these ideas are the source of all of our knowledge. But his reason for this claim is this: there are some causal relations between what he calls "the primary qualities of things themselves" and our ideas about these. Because there is such a causal (and mirroring) link between them, Locke thinks that we can reach (at least) some probable knowledge about the external world. Indeed, this doctrine is criticised by George Berkeley, and Berkeley reached a more radical idealist position. So I am not too sure if it is right to categorise Locke in the tradition of the view Professor Boyd discusses in the paper (Locke definitely does not support monism Nabokov attributes to himself).

Page 7: I'm curious why Nobokov thinks irrational and illogical features of arts are the reason against causal determinism. Given the idea that all states are caused by prior states and how one state causes another state is regulated by laws of nature, perhaps we can give a causal explanation of why great artists produced their pieces of work while how they did are irrational and illogical. I suppose I don't see the link between being irrational & illogical and being free from causal determinism (well, this may be a question to Nobokov, not professor Boyd!). Note how Popper argues against determinism is different from Nobokov: he rejects causal determinism by arguing that the world is not fully deterministic but a bit probabilistic.

From: Brian Boyd

Thanks so much for engaging so attentively with my paper, and keeping the discussion going, as philosophers do! Let me paste in your questions in case this circulates more widely:

Re your first question: I certainly did not mean to suggest that Locke was a monist, but only that he accepted that the source of knowledge was ideas (associations) in the mind or what we would call sense impressions of the world. This could and sometimes

eventually did lead to a radical mind-first monism, as it did in some of Mach's work, and as it did for Nabokov.

Re your second question: Nabokov did not think that only the arts argued against causal determinism but that life allowed room for indeterminism. What he did think was that the rational mind was overreaching when it proposed that everything that happened could be explained by iron laws of determinism or cause and effect. He particularly disliked storytelling (drama especially) constructed on the basis of such rigid determinism and allowing no room for unpredictable chance.

In his critique of the determinism in so much of tragic drama, for instance, Nabokov writes: "we cling to the same old iron bars of determinism which have imprisoned the spirit of playwriting for years and years. And this is where lies the tragedy of tragedy" (*Man from the USSR*, 326). In his *Lectures on Russian Literature* he praises Chekhov: "his achievement was that he showed the right way to escape the dungeon of deterministic causation, of cause and effect, and burst the bars holding the art of drama captive" (285). The most explicit elaboration of his critique of what he also calls "the idea of logical fate" (*Man from the USSR* 328) is perhaps this: "The general and greatest danger which the drama faces and the source of incalculable mischief, which has already in our times thrust back the theatre to a secondary rank in artistic endeavour, and may, eventually, shrivel it up altogether, is the miserable idea of determinism, the prison regulation of cause and effect. It is assumed – and this notion has grown upon us and blinded us, with the development of the stage from antiquity – that the leading character in all drama is the devil of causation and that whatever happens on the stage as an interplay of cause and effect. We know from real life that however obediently we may follow the paths of causation, some queer and beautiful force, which we call free will from want of a better expression, allows or at least appears to allow us to escape again and again from the laws of cause and effect. And biologists who have tried to find corresponding rules to explain the evolution of life on this earth will tell you, that nothing is explainable if these rules are unswervingly followed and that everything is explained if the idea of the unexplicable freak, the mutation, the sudden jump or whim of the vital will is accepted as a factor." (This last quote is from an essay on Soviet Drama, which I don't think has been published, though I may be wrong; I transcribed it directly from Nabokov's archive over forty years ago).

From: Ryo Chonabayashi

Thank you very much for your detailed response. Your response to my first question clarifies the issue I raised, thank you! Also, your response to my second question is very interesting I feel I know have deepened my understanding on Nabokov's attitude toward determinism. It seems we can develop two lines of argument based on what Nabokov says. First, we may argue that we should not believe determinism because belief in determinism makes artistic work unenjoyable. Second, we may argue that we can find in real life causal laws assumed are not strict enough (due to "queer and beautiful force"). Nabokov might say that such queer and beautiful forces are part of the explanations of various events, but those forces are not necessarily restricted, and this is why strict determinism is false.

From: Brian Boyd

Reading your response, I suddenly thought of another similarity between Popper and Nabokov on indeterminism. Not only Nabokov but Popper too uses the unpredictability of art as an argument for indeterminism.

Popper advances as one of his arguments against indeterminism the reductio ad absurdum of a deaf physicist with a complete knowledge of the physical world, like Laplace's demon, being able, even with no knowledge of hearing or music, to predict at any point from the start of the universe what art would emerge on earth: the particular scores of works by Mozart and Beethoven, for instance:

if physical determinism is right, then a physicist who is completely deaf and who has never heard any music could write all the symphonies and concertos written by Mozart or Beethoven, by the simple method of studying the precise physical states of their bodies and predicting where they would put down black marks on their lined paper. And our deaf physicist could do even more: by studying Mozart's or Beethoven's bodies with sufficient care he could write scores which were never actually written by Mozart or Beethoven, but which they would have written had certain external

circumstances of their lives been different: if they had eaten lamb, say, instead of chicken, or drunk tea instead of coffee. // All this could be done by our deaf physicist if supplied with a sufficient knowledge of purely physical conditions. There would be no need for him to know anything about the theory of music—though he might be able to predict what answers Mozart or Beethoven would have written down under examination conditions if presented with questions on the theory of counterpoint.// I believe that all this is absurd ;³⁵

[n35 My deaf physicist is of course closely similar to Laplace's demon (see note 15); and I believe that his achievements are absurd, simply because non-physical aspects (aims, purposes, traditions, tastes, ingenuity) play a role in the development of the physical world; or in other words, I believe in *interactionism* (see notes 43 and 62). Samuel Alexander, *Space, Time and Deity*, 1920, vol. ii, p. 328, says of what he calls the 'Laplacean calculator': 'Except in the limited sense described, the hypothesis of the calculator is absurd.' Yet the 'limited sense' *includes* the prediction of *all* purely physical events, and would thus *include* the prediction of the position of all the black marks written by Mozart and Beethoven. (Objective Knowledge, Oxford: Clarendon, 1972, p223)