From: Shoko Miura

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Thank you, Brian, for your admirable paper on VN and Popper. Many congratulations for being nearly finished (already finished?) with your book on Popper.

I have three questions for you on your paper.

My first question concerns time, consciousness and the "soul."

You outline a triad to clarify Nabokov's evolutionary dialectics in which "the hereafter" can be proven, as follows:

1. Time without consciousness (the lower animal world)
2. Time with consciousness (man=chelovek=Conscious Time)
3. Consciousness without time (the future of the immortal soul)

And you add, "The last term is really the thesis of a new series." It was a mind-blowing statement. However, I find it hard to imagine what the "consciousness without time" is and what could come after it. Could you give us your idea of the "new series"? Would it be another triad about the "soul"?

My second question is about time and the motifs you found in *Ada.* Would you say that the threads linking these "motifs"—as you call them—throughout the book and in the lives of Van and Ada form an image of Nabokov's philosophical concept of Time? By linking them with the power of Van and Ada's memory, he seems to liberate Van and Ada from the limitations of chronological time and space. Is this why Van as narrator weaves them into the story?

My third question is on Popper. How does Popper conceptualize memory, which is for Nabokov the loyal, resourceful and trustworthy partner in the face of reality, death and loss?

From: Brian Boyd

Dear Shoko,

Thanks for your questions.

Question 1: That triad is Nabokov's not mine. So what *he* means by "Consciousness without time (the future of the immortal soul)" was known best only to him. But I suspect it's something along the lines of the passage from *The Gift*,

> I know that death in itself is in no way connected with the topography of the hereafter, for a door is merely the exit from the house and not a part of its surroundings, like a tree or a hill. One has to get out somehow, 'but I refuse to see in a door more than a hole, and a carpenter's job' (*Delalande, Discours sur les ombres,* p. 45). And then again: the unfortunate image of a 'road' to which the human mind has become accustomed (life as a kind of journey) is a stupid illusion: we are not going anywhere, we are sitting at home. The other world surrounds us always and is not at all at the end of some pilgrimage. In our earthly house, windows are replaced by mirrors; the door, until a given time, is closed; but air comes in through the cracks. 'For our stay-at-home senses the most accessible image of our future comprehension of those surroundings which are due to be revealed to us with the disintegration of the body is the liberation of the soul from the cyesockets of the flesh and our transformation into one complete and free eye, which can simultaneously see in all directions, or to put it differently: a supersensory insight into the world accompanied by our inner participation.' (Ibid. p. 64). (309-10).

Question 2: Yes, I think the motifs in *Ada* (and the whole structure of the novel) reflect aspects of Nabokov's sense of time. This passage

> The Past, then, is a constant accumulation of images. It can be easily contemplated and listened to, tested and tasted at random, so that it ceases to mean the orderly alternation of linked events that it does in the large theoretical sense. It is now a generous chaos out of which the genius of total recall, summoned on this summer morning in 1922, can pick anything he pleases: diamonds scattered all over the parquet in 1888; a russet black-hatted beauty at a Parisian bar in 1901; a humid red rose among artificial ones in 1883; the pensive half-smile of a young English governess, in 1880, neatly reclosing her charge's prepuce after the bedtime treat; a little girl, in 1884, licking the breakfast honey off the badly bitten nails of her spread fingers; the same, at thirty-three, confessing, rather late in the day, that she did not like flowers in vases; the awful pain striking him in the side while two children with a basket of mushrooms looked on in the merrily burning pine forest; and the startled quonk of a Belgian car, which he had overtaken and passed yesterday on a blind bend of the alpine highway. Such images tell us nothing about the texture of time into which they are woven--except, perhaps, in one matter which happens to be hard to settle. (545-46)

links both the element of succession (the chronological dates) and the resistance to succession (in memory, in collocating and multiplying references to the same element, as a motif does) in a way that makes Nabokov feel he's getting closer to, if not the texture of time, then to the texture of timelessness. Or that's my answer today!

In **Question 3**, you ask "How does Popper conceptualize memory, which is for Nabokov the loyal, resourceful and trustworthy partner in the face of reality, death and loss?" Here you've put your finger on a key difference between Nabokov and Popper: for Nabokov, memory is subjectively central, a measure of one's knowing one has lived (hence "Speak, Memory" as the title of his autobiography, "Conclusive Evidence," to use its earlier title, of his having lived). But Popper is not interested much in memory in that subjective sense,

sustaining the self (although he had an excellent memory too); he's more interested in problems, in what we can resolve now or in the future, so, in the case of memory, explaining it as a scientific problem, as part of the brain or the self. So, in *The Self and Its Brain* (1977), which he co-wrote with neuropsychologist Sir John Eccles, he lists various kinds of memory, including especially

> (7) The continuity-producing memory. In connection with this there exist several interesting theories. It is, or so it seems to me, related to what Henri Bergson [1896], [1911] calls "pure memory" (as opposed to "habits"), [142] a record of all our experiences in their proper temporal order. This record, however, is not according to Bergson recorded in the brain, or in any matter: it exists as a purely spiritual entity. (The function of the brain is to act as a filter for the pure memory, to prevent it from intruding on our attention.) It is interesting to compare this theory with the experimental results obtained by Penfield and Perot [1963] by stimulating selected regions of the exposed brains of conscious patients, described by Eccles in chapter E8: Bergson might perhaps have claimed that these experiments support his theory, since they prove the existence of a perfect record of (at least some) past experiences. However, as Eccles points out, we have no such reports from non-epileptic patients; besides, Penfield was stimulating the brain, rather than preventing it from acting as a Bergsonian filter. It still seems the most likely conjecture that the continuity-producing memory is not perfectly stored; neither in the mind nor in the brain, and that Penfield's amazing discoveries show only that certain splinters of it may be perfectly stored in some people — perhaps only in epileptics. The normal memory of past situations does not, of course, have the character of immediate re-experience, but rather of a dim "I remember that" or "I remember how". (141-42)

You can see how far from VN that is!

I joked with Akiko before writing my paper, seeing how much could go into it, that I might need to write a whole book on the topic! But now, thinking a little more about your question, I do have the idea for a new book—the seventh book project I have in line—on Nabokov and Popper as two giants of twentieth-century achievement, as I at least see them, sharing a belief in the endlessness of discovery, but also contrasting yet in complementary ways: one an artist, the other a thinker, one subjectivist, the other objectivist, one totally individualist, the other individualist but also recognizing the centrality of social interdependence.