

Boyd on Kuzmanovich (Currie) and Kuzmanovich on Boyd (Popper) Final Round

Tagline: Having finally made it through Popper's *Conjectures and Refutations* and *Unended Quest*, Kuzmanovich reluctantly agrees to make this the final rebound:

I fully accept your third point, Brian, and I stand corrected on Nabokov's possible factual uncles (though I still have a difficult time seeing Nabokov as being factually in love with a porcelain pig).

I defer to your far greater knowledge of Popper. When I wrote that Popper "requires that the purpose of intellectual engagement be refutation," I was basing my claim on these two perhaps atypical but undeniably certain-sounding sentences. The certainty especially evident in Popper's use of "every," "always," "all," "mistaken," and "false":

For the test of a theory is, like every rigorous, always an attempt to show that the candidate is mistaken—that is, that the theory entails a false assertion. From a logical point of view, all empirical tests are therefore *attempted refutations*." (CR: 192)

I think I understand the logic of the claim that a theory **T** can be refuted by a negative instance **p** (the failure of its predictive powers), but that it cannot really be proved by positive instances since "theories cannot be logically derived from observations." (CR 260). So I understand but am not enthused by the default "double not-" logic of falsification: **If T then p; Not-p; Therefore, not-T**. In the final paragraphs of my response to your comments I was not disputing Popper's theories of science but simply expressing a preference for learning more about what sets of conditions (personal, moral, scientific, technological, and cultural) made the theorist mistakenly link **T and p** as logically or empirically connected in the first place. While some of those conditions could be examined in a proper Popperian frame of refutation ("*falsifiability, or refutability, or testability*", CR 48), a number of them cannot be. The sort of thing I have in mind here is the influence of conditions such as Joyce's failing eyesight or Nabokov's synaesthesia on what they said they saw and knew. Perhaps an example would help: I would have loved to have seen VN's promised "furious" refutation of natural selection theories based on his own observations of supervenient mimicry. From the Popper statements you quote I understand Popper to be saying that no theory/intuition/hypothesis can ever be proved but only provisionally confirmed. Still, it would have been fascinating to see what "criteria of refutation" (CR 49) Nabokov would have introduced for his claim that mimicry by an animal exceeds the noticing powers of its predators. At which point does Nabokov's synaesthesia affect his metric for estimating the predators' noticing power? And when asking such questions, I keep going back to Kant because in your essay you mentioned Kantian antinomies as linking Popper and Nabokov. There is indeed a family

resemblance, especially in the First and the Third. I do find Kant's Third antinomy (causal determinism vs. causal spontaneity) the adopted grandmother of Popper's World 3 and the real grandmother of Nabokov's hypothesis that there is a "still more vivid means of knowing" than visual scientific observation. Given Nabokov's statement about reality's layers, I think the means Nabokov has in mind is the feeling-suffused contemplation of nature's deceptions by the appreciative, possibly synaesthetic, and possibly memory-prompted re-combinative or juxtaposing "eye" of the artist, but writing such an eye's "subjective purposiveness" into the format **antecedent + consequent = conclusion** would be difficult in not impossible since both **T** and **p** would be so intersubjectively variable.

Faced by that difficulty (the gap between human reason and the world of things, between the empirical and the intelligible self), I am sent back to Kantian antinomies of space, time, causality, and his notion of respect. Popper gives credit to Tarski for solving or bypassing the problem of Kantian antinomies (CR 36). I understand those antinomies to be problems that pure reason encounters when two proofs clash and thus reason contradicts itself or when reason ignores the input from the senses while deploying some correspondence theory of truth. Even though Popper states that he learned more from Tarski than from anyone else (UQ 99), I cannot follow the logic of Tarski's proof after the point where the elimination of self-referentiality, the T-scheme, and the law of bivalence enter the discussion. But I can follow your recommendation that I see Popper as *inviting* me to refute rather than *challenging* me to do so out of some snobby sense of certainty. And if I ever do accept the invitation, I will begin with Popper's own metaphors for Kantian antinomies of space and time: "a system of pigeon-holes, or a filing system" (CR 242) and subsequent notions of causality: "Out of [our theories] we create a world: not the real world, but our own nets in which we try to catch the real world." (CR 65) Any philosopher willing to risk such metaphors or to describe a certain flavor of existentialism as "the utter boredom of the bore-in-himself bored by himself" (CR 262) is worth a far more leisurely visit than the one I can afford now.