

Comment on Akiko Nakata's Comment on Boyd's "Nabokov and Popper"  
Brian Boyd

Thank you for your kind and rich response to my paper, Akiko.

I interviewed Lord Dahrendorf, whose comment on Popper you cite (like many I interviewed, he has since died). Popper was in fact very well received at various moments in England and the English-speaking world: from the late 1940s to the end of the 1960s he was regarded by many (including Bertrand Russell) as the most exciting philosopher in Britain, or as "incomparably the greatest philosopher of science there has ever been" (Nobel Prizewinner for Medicine Sir Peter Medawar) and so on. In 1973 philosopher Bryan Magee, who was friends with both Popper and Russell and thought Popper the greater philosopher, published a book on Popper that became the biggest seller in the Fontana Modern Masters series, outselling volumes on Darwin, Marx, Freud, Chomsky and the like. But at that very time philosophers in the English-speaking world were coming to regard Popper as passé (partly because of the machinations of his former protégé Imre Lakatos), just as he was being taken up with enormous enthusiasm in European countries. That was indeed partly because of his politics, because his reformist liberalism offered an alternative—an open society—to the fruitless tug-of-war in many countries between communist and fascist ideologies.

No, I do not think *Wittgenstein's Poker* treats Popper fairly. He comes across there as rather colorless, unpleasant and uninteresting. In fact he galvanized, inspired, and was loved by many, while he also antagonized, repelled, and alarmed others with his intensity, not least his intensity in criticizing their positions. His sense of the endless adventure of discovery in science and society frightens some but thrills others, like physicist David Deutsch, who calls his book inspired by Popper *The Beginning of Infinity*.

I wasn't aware while a BA and MA student at the University of Canterbury of Popper's impact there and indeed throughout the whole New Zealand university system. I just took it for granted that academics researched as well as taught, not realizing that that ethos owed more to Popper than anyone else. But I was interested in Popper already, and went to a public lecture he was to give there in May 1973, on a visit back to New Zealand, but which he couldn't deliver because he had had a severe tachycardia attack a few days before. His lecture was read, unsympathetically, by a Canterbury

philosopher, and I remember thinking of a series of objections to the ideas being aired.  
But now I find it hard to think of an idea of Popper's I don't like and feel excited by!