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AT HOME IN HISTORY: PASTERNAK AND POPPER

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In this paper I am attempting to identify a similarity between the world-view of Boris Pasternak and that of the philosopher Karl Popper. I am concerned not with their ideas on politics or, strictly, aesthetics, but with what can perhaps be called their metaphysics.

I shall introduce my argument, indirectly, through a preliminary comparison of Pasternak with another poet: Rilke. The likeness of these two poets and the profound difference between them is something I have considered at length elsewhere, in a paper called "Pasternak and Rilke" delivered to the C.N.R.S. Colloquium on Pasternak at Cerisy-la-Salle, France, in September 1975. I am briefly adding to that study, for my present purpose, by referring to two poems.

1

A poem by Pasternak (written in 1930) and one by Rilke (1906) bear the same title: "Death of the Poet" ("Der Tod des Dichters", "Smert' poeta"). They are interestingly similar and also interestingly different.

Each poem speaks of the poet's dead face on the pillow:

Er lag. Sein aufgestelltes Antlitz war
bleich und verweigernd in den steilen Kissen.

He lay. His propped-up face was
pale and refusing in the steep pillows.

Ты спал, прижав к подушке щеку...

You slept, pressing your cheek to the pillow . .

and what seems most important about each poem is that the dead poet is conceived as not just a person but as extending beyond himself into the world at large. This is the chief link between the poems, yet it is in this very point that the main difference lies. Rilke sees his poet as extending into the world of *nature*, which still yearns towards him. Having spoken of "diese Tiefen, diese Wiesen/und diese Wasser", he says:

O sein Gesicht war diese ganze Weite,
die jetzt noch zu ihm will und um ihn wirbt . .

Oh, his face was this entire breadth
which now still tries to reach him and woos him . . .

It is a sad, unsuccessful yearning. But Pasternak, after speaking of the people who crowd about at the death of Mayakovsky, sees his poet as dashing away from his physical dead self –

В разряд преданий молодых...

Into the category of young legends . .

that is, into the continuing world of *minds and memory*. This is a successful leap outwards, an overcoming of all the situation's sadness.

So I want to start by saying that, unlike Rilke, Pasternak, despite all his intense and detailed response to "nature", believes more than anything in the *human* world, in the world of culture and world of mind, in memory, legend, tradition, human institutions and creations. In *Doctor Zhivago* he makes Vedenyapin say, in one of his central and philosophy-announcing speeches, that ever since Christ (though I think Christianity is not especially the point, which can also be made without it) "men no longer die by a fence in the road, but at home in history" – a marvellous phrase which sounds just as good in English as in the Russian: "у себя в истории". This phrase sums up, like so much in the novel, views which had been put or, more aptly, had been richly gathering, in earlier works by Pasternak, and I shall complete this introduction to my theme with a quotation from *A Safe-Conduct* (1931). It is about the way he thought of life, in his youth, especially after his visit to Italy and his first acquaintance, so he felt, with the "sources of European culture":

> I loved the living essence of the symbolics of history, in other words that instinct with whose help, like Salangane swallows, we have constructed the world – a vast nest, glued together from earth and sky, life and death, and two kinds of time, present and absent . .[1]

I see here a grand and specific conception of a human-made, real "other world"; my purpose is to relate it to the theory of a "third world" expounded by Karl Popper in his book *Objective Knowledge.*[2]

2

In the passage just quoted we read not "present and past" (which would invoke "future" and a straight line of time, a perhaps relentless progression) but "present (*nalichnoe* – at hand) and *absent*" – so that one imagines time all at once, moving yet not onward, like a hammock or a swing, rushing nowhere, an entirety. Further: "earth" and "sky" sound like references to nature, but if *we constructed* the world out of them, and "world" is in a kind of apposition to

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[1] Boris Pasternak, *Proza 1915-1958*, University of Michigan Press, 1961. p. 263. (This, and all subsequent quotations from "Okhrannaya gramota" are given from my own translation.)

[2] Karl R. Popper, *Objective Knowledge, An Evolutionary Approach*, Oxford 1972. (See especially chapter 3, "Epistemology Without a Knowing Subject", pp. 106-152).

"history", then it must be not those *things* (earth and sky) that are meant but *notions* of earth and sky: images, agreed perceptions, statements about them.

Pasternak is not concerned, of course, as Popper *is*, with epistemology. All his literary procedures, too, are different from Popper's. Pasternak often evokes "philosophical" depth, and Popper sometimes applies a "poetic" strength to the presentation of an image, but this does not make them less recognisable as, respectively, poet and philosopher. In Popper, ideas are explicit, elaborated consistently and critically and often polemically. In Pasternak, ideas as such are often just thrown out here and there, or implied, or left obscure, sometimes even contradicted. Popper is being a philosopher; Pasternak is avoiding being one.

But they have this important idea in common: an idea about the reality of an autonomous, human-constructed "world" or "universe", which is neither subjective nor material, mind nor nature; which is made by us, yet is more than us and separate from us; with which we commune or interact; our communion or interaction with which makes us *us*.

What first led me to put the two writers together was that I thought I found in both a contagious delight in the stating of what is obviously true – a deep admiration for the way things are, and hence a far-reaching optimism. How often, for example, Pasternak shows that platitudes may embody miracles. And Popper's "third world", which strikes some people as obvious and ordinary, just a way of putting it, also comes over as something to marvel at. Further reading, however, showed me that although optimistic feeling is characteristic of Pasternak, it cannot be called characteristic of Popper, for although his idea may well make his reader feel joyful, he does not himself express any joy, indeed he refers, with a pessimistic matter-of-factness that would be alien to Pasternak, to the almost infinite cosmic improbability of "the occurrence of conditions under which life, and a search for knowledge, could arise – and succeed – "[3] and of the inevitable brevity of the existence of these conditions. In place of any cosmic pessimism Pasternak apparently has God. But neither pessimism nor deity are my concern here, for it seems to me that one can learn from both the poet and the philosopher that all "ultimates" can, in a sense, be done without; that our "world" is wholly present without reference to "infinity".

It is worth pointing out that both writers call themselves "realists" and assert, as it were: "the world is *there*" – with the vigour of someone who has heard it said *not* to be (though they have each heard different people say so); both then proceed to write about the there-existing world without ever losing this basic "naive" realism, or commonsense, yet in ways that also go far beyond it: Pasternak imaginatively into the metaphysics of the (really existing) world of culture, Popper rationally into the metaphysics of the (really existing) world (it is the same one) of "knowledge."

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[3] Popper, *op. cit.* p. 23.

3

I cannot claim to understand Popper perfectly; I am taking from him as much as I hope I *have* understood and placing it next to something else which I understand better. I shall now paraphrase the two main points from Popper which I am using for this juxtaposition. The first is that there is no such thing as objective certainty. The second is that the world of human knowledge is autonomous.

First, there is no such thing, according to Popper, as "starting from scratch" in the acquiring of knowledge. Some sort of theory is present from the beginning, even if in the form of an expectation or a disposition to act or believe – no less present in an amoeba than in Einstein. Arguing against the "tabula rasa" theory of mind (that "experience consists of information received through our senses"), he says "all acquired knowledge, all learning, consists of the modification of some form of knowledge, or disposition, which was there previously . . . "[4] There can neither be any primary collecting of data (all data are "theory-impregnated") nor, since we can never collect *all* the data, or know the future, is there any possibility of absolute verification of our theories. A theory can be falsified, but not verified. A single contrary instance disproves it, but no number of supporting instances will prove it. Certainty is impossible, and our preference for one theory out of a number of competing ones is because we conjecture that it is "*a better approximation to the truth* than any competing theory so far proposed."[5]

No starting from scratch and no objective certainty: thus no first view of reality and no final view of it; and yet there is a growing and changing body of *knowledge.* This is the first point which I found cheering, indeed exhilarating: one finds oneself liberated from any idea of a world-in-itself, released from anxiety about it and about the difficulty of getting a direct approach to it. If all knowledge is, without being the less for this, hypothetical, then one may take a new, free interest in it.

The second point to dwell on is the *autonomy* of that body of knowledge. This brings in Popper's concept of a "world 3" or "third world".

Carefully noting the arbitrariness of the term "third world", which is, he says, merely a matter of convenience, Popper first distinguishes two different senses of "knowledge". There is the subjective sense: "a state of mind or of consciousness or a disposition to behave or to "react"[6]; and the objective sense: knowledge as "consisting of problems, theories, and arguments as such". The thinking of a thought is subjective but the logical content of the thought is objective: and "knowledge in this objective sense is totally independent of anybody's claim to know; it is also independent of anybody's belief, or disposition to assent: or to assert, or to act. Knowledge in the objective sense is *knowledge without a knower*: it is *knowledge without a knowing subject.*"[7]

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[4] *ibid.* p. 71.

[5] *ibid.* p. 82.

[6] *ibid.* p. 108.

[7] *ibid.* p. 109.

Not only problems, conjectures, discussions . . . belong in it, but books, libraries, logarithms, experiments . . . The world of objective knowledge is "world no. 3"; whereby world 1 is the physical world, and world 2 the subjective one. This approach is to replace traditional epistemology, which concentrates upon subjective knowledge (states of knowing and believing, etc.)

The "third world" Popper sees as something naturally produced by us, as a web is produced by a spider, or a nest by a bird (webs and nests, like paths, being all products of problem-solving) and he continually stresses its autonomousness as of the utmost importance. Although we act upon it and are acted upon by it, it is there without us, and new problems are generated within it, by it, of itself. This explains the *growth* of knowledge. For his theory is an evolutionary one – it explains how knowledge grows, how we change, and especially how we "can lift ourselves up by our own bootstraps".[8] Through our subjective interaction with the objective world 3, through this "interaction between our actions and their results", we "constantly transcend ourselves, our talents, our gifts".[9] Repeating the image, he writes: "This is how we lift ourselves by our bootstraps – up out of the morass of our ignorance; how we throw a rope into the air and then swarm up it – if it gets any purchase, however precarious, on any little twig"[10] – a splendidly life-asserting metaphor.

The autonomy of world 3 does *not* of course mean that it has nothing to do with world 1. On the contrary, it, or rather the theories which are its components, confront continual comparison with the world of matter, and are constantly (and deliberately) open to the risk of being proved wrong. World 3 consists not of fixed knowledge but of problems and suggested solutions to problems, as well as the checking of the solutions against the facts, the provisional supporting of them and the occasional falsifying of them. We are glad if our hypotheses are proved wrong, because this means progress; and we cannot ever *know* if they happen to be right. They *may* sometimes be right but there is no way of knowing it.

Popper's theory refers chiefly to scientific knowledge. His notion of "falsifiability" is a criterion of demarcation between what is, and what is not, science. Neither Marxism nor the Freudian theory of psychoanalysis, for example, can be called science because they are not open to the risk of being proved wrong. However, those theories are not excluded; with all the rest of our mind's products, they make up world 3, which is the whole intangible universe produced by man. The clear conception of such a universe, real, independent, evolving, man-made yet man-transcending, is what interests me here. This alone, to my mind, can enable us to do without God.

For though the world is ours, yet it is not small, as we are. And it is not material, as our origins and bodies are. No reduction is here implied by its having solely "diesseitig" reality: Spirit remains spirit, this is what is important, mystery remains mystery, without any need to go all the way (or any of the way) into "religion", or to take a jump into faith, though a considerable work of imagining

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[8] *ibid.* p. 119.
[9] *ibid.* p. 147.
[10] *ibid.* p. 148.

is required. I will say again that my private response to this is a philosophical optimism. By interrelating with the world of objective mind, we "transcend" ourselves, become what we didn't know we could become; we evolve, the whole thing goes forward, and the whole thing is good! From philosophy, especially from German philosophy, it is easy enough to learn despair, to learn how to lament profoundly. From Pasternak, and also, unless I misunderstand him, from Popper, one may learn the opposite.

4

I shall now try to show the parallel in Pasternak, and I start with another reference to Rilke – to the well-known lines in the first Duino Elegy – "dass wir nicht sehr verlässlich zu haus sind/in der gedeuteten Welt" (that we are not very reliably at home / in the interpreted world). "Gedeuteten"? And "Welt"? Mustn't this mean "world 3"? Doesn't Rilke mean that man is not at home in the world he has himself made? If he could get back to a natural, or puppet-like, state, or if he could attain communion with angels, he would be all right, be at home; but as he is, between the two, in a world of human thinking and interpretation – all this language and definition and convention – he is stranded and unhappy. This is the *opposite* of the Popperian and Pasternakian philosophies, which say: we are all right here *because* we have made all this, whereby "all this" exists without, so to speak, "us". Rilke's lost man can win a difficult happiness by resolving to "celebrate" the contingent world he is lost in. His poetic celebration of it, says Rilke, makes it "invisible". But I think this is to say that he puts elements of "world 1" securely into "world 3", into the world of logic and abstractions and images, things described, explained and queried. Would he not radically cheer up if he could see it like this, and see that the relationship is between the individual mind and the non-individual, autonomous, evolving "third world" (if only Popper had, after all, beautiful names for it!) – instead of, as he does, seeing it as a relationship between the mind and the earth itself (what Popper would call worlds 2 and 1)? "Erde, du liebe, ich will" . . , says Rilke in the Ninth Elegy, trying to address the *earth itself* with his decision to celebrate it.

What makes one person think tragically, and another not? One might take the following statement: All of us are separate individuals, making efforts to communicate with each other through language. To this, *one* person will respond with despair and say that communication is impossible, we are "alienated", everything is fragmented, our contacts with one another are illusory and temporary, we die alone, and so on. But to the very same fact another will respond with joy and admiration and say: language is a miracle, which *does* afford moments of communication, at least temporarily overcoming our loneliness. This second person may point out that language might well *not* have existed, for what if we had been here without speech, or had all been deaf, or nobody had ever come across anyone else but all lived in physical isolation? Yet we *are* together, speaking, and sometimes understanding each other – Hallelujah! Likewise with civilization. The one says – it's about to topple into chaos; it is always on the brink of chaos; it just isn't reliable. The other says: despite its endangerment, its precariousness, it is nonetheless

there! Blok chose a "tragic" view, which he said was more real than an "optimistic" one. And a question that might be asked about Pasternak (to which I do not think the answer is yes) is this: in choosing optimism, is he choosing the less real? Is he preferring not to know? But the question could be answered, or deflected, with another question – what is one to do with an unaccountable natural cheerfulness ("where shall I put my joy? ")[11] when the times are bad? Without being able to say where the ability to conceive of a "third world" comes from, I am suggesting that the conception of it may be an important condition for happiness.

Popper is mainly concerned with science, Pasternak with art. Popper – with knowledge, Pasternak – with feeling. But the kind of thinking each does about the branch of creation he has studied and practised is a kind that extends to the other branch too, and to human work altogether.

That there is no starting from scratch, no fresh beginning by any individual, or, to put it another way, that there is no isolated individual endeavour, was stated, in his own way, by Pasternak in one of his *Theses* of 1922: "Art never had a beginning . . . No genuine book has a first page. Like the rustling of a forest, it is begotten God knows where . . . "[12] and is implied, in *A Safe-Conduct*, in the view he puts forward of "tradition", and in his view of how art develops. To summarise this view: every person seems to be different from all the others, each has his own way of thinking and feeling, the experience of each one seems to him, and is, exceptional; yet the very exceptionality of each one's experience is given him by "tradition"; paradoxically, it is precisely "tradition" that makes each different:

> To all of us tradition has appeared, to all it has promised a face, to all, each in a different way, it has kept its promise . . . Never, under cover of its nickname, "milieu", has it been content with the compound image which people make up about it, but has always detailed some one of its most decided exceptions to us . . .[13]

This is akin to his way of describing history later in the same work.

> The unknown is dear to us, the known in advance is terrifying, and every passion is a blind leap aside from the inevitable which rolls upon us. Living species would have nowhere to exist and to repeat themselves if passion had nowhere to jump to off the common path along which rolls the common time, the time of the gradual demolition of the universe.
>
> But life does have somewhere to live and passion somewhere to jump to, because alongside the common time exists an infinity of other pathways, never-ceasing, immortal in reproduction of themselves, and every new generation is one of these.
>
> Young people, bending as they ran, hurried through the blizzard, and, though each one of them had his own reasons for haste, yet far more than by all their personal promptings they were spurred along by something they had in common, and that was: their

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[11] See Pasternak's poem "Nasha groza". See also my "Boris Pasternak: A New Romanticism" in *PN Review* (Manchester) no. 5, 1977.

[12] Pasternak, *Stikhi, 1936-1959 . . . Stikhi 1912-1957 . . . Stat'i vystuplentya.* University of Michigan Press, 1961, p. 153.

[13] Pasternak, *Proza* . . . p. 206.

> historical wholeness – their surrender to the passion with which mankind, escaping from the common path, had just dashed into them, for yet one more innumerable time avoiding its own end.[14]

This is difficult and contains a paradox. The inevitable, which is destruction, is continually coming nearer, for the path of time that we go along takes us towards it. And yet, every new generation, and every new person, and, I think he would say, every new "passion", that is, every moment of real feeling, is equivalent to an avoiding of what is "unavoidable". It is a jump off that path onto one of any number of other parallel paths. Yet the "common" path continues. Somehow he manages to conceive of the path of human development, or history, as *consisting of jumps off itself*. Into what? The continuation of the human race takes place in a "somewhere", upon "other pathways", which are "aside from", and "alongside", the "common" ones. This seems to adumbrate, feel towards, a "third" world, product of minds, a world always changing because it accommodates everything original and new.

Two paragraphs later we find Pasternak describing how he thinks of art as progressing, or how one artistic generation succeeds the previous one. "What kind of art then was it?" he asks about that art which he found flourishing (soon to come to an end) in Moscow when he returned there from abroad in 1913. He answers himself:

> It was the youthful art of Scriabin, Blok, Kommisarzhevskaya, Bely – advanced, gripping, original. And so astounding that not only did it not call up thoughts of replacing it with anything else but, just the opposite, one wished – for the sake of its greater stability – to repeat the whole of it from its very foundations, only more strongly, more hotly, more wholly. One wanted to re-say it all in a single breath, but this was unthinkable without passion, and passion kept leaping aside all the time; and so in this way the new came into being. But the new did not come to take the place of the old, as is usually thought – exactly the contrary, it arose in an enraptured reproduction of the model.[15]

That he was not merely trying to characterise the art of that time, but was saying something about art altogether is clear from the fact that, with less rapture, he comes back to this idea, this time with general reference, twenty or more years later, in *Dr. Zhivago:*

> Forward steps in art are made by attraction, through the artist's admiration and desire to follow the example of the predecessors he admires most.[16]

So the new comes about not from interaction of mind with *things* but from interaction of minds with tradition and "example" or "model" – from interaction of world 2 with world 3.

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[14] *ibid.* p. 266.
[15] *ibid.* p. 266-267.
[16] Pasternak, *Doctor Zhivago*, Milan, 1957, p. 294.

5

Science is not the same as art. Science starts with the isolating of *problems*; Popper even says that all experience can be seen in terms of problem-defining and problem-solving, the putting forward and testing of tentative solutions, and the rejecting of those shown to be false. Art doesn't concern itself with problems in this way. Desire to reproduce what is beautiful is not an urge to solve a problem. Attraction is not repulsion – and, in the same place in *Dr. Zhivago* from which I have just quoted, Pasternak says he considers that science proceeds by "repulsion", that is by reaction against false theories and delusions. The difference between art and science is something he often mentions.

Nevertheless he also sees them as going along together, and in some way equal. Zhivago says "I should so very much like to be writing a work of art or science" (no matter which). Zhivago, of course, *is* both scientist and artist: doctor and poet. And there are two places, one in *A Safe-Conduct* and one two decades later in *Dr. Zhivago*, which use similar language for the two kinds of activity and suggest an important similarity of aim and meaning between them. In *A Safe-Conduct* he imagines "art" standing like a kind of uncanny guardian "behind the trees" of the boulevards along which that new young generation was rushing (my previous quotation, page 137) and says it was "terribly similar to life" and was

> endured in life just because of this likeness, as portraits of wives and mothers are endured in the laboratories of scholars dedicated to natural science, that is, to the gradual solution of the enigma of death.[17]

Then in *Dr. Zhivago* Vedenyapin says:

> Now what is history? Its beginning is that of the centuries of systematic work devoted to the solution of the enigma of death, so that death itself may eventually be overcome. This is why people write symphonics, and why they discover mathematical infinity and electromagnetic waves.[18]

To this extent only, then, does Pasternak think of art as dealing with problems, that is he thinks of it as dealing with just one problem: the problem of death. Does he really think it may "eventually" be solved? There is nothing, except this statement, to make us suppose he does. And I should say he loves the process too much to want it to end. Without *that* problem, there might be no human universe at all, for death is the event in world 1 which calls up a need in world 2 to bring into existence world 3. ("Der Tod ist der eigentlich inspirierende Genius" – Schopenhauer).

Where Popper says that there is no possibility of certain knowledge and that if our theories *were* to coincide exactly with reality, there is no way in which we could know that this had happened, Pasternak, while not quite saying this, does imagine a never-ending series of attempts – each taking off both from the challenge

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[17] *Proza* . . . p. 266.
[18] *Doctor Zhivago*, p. 10.

of the problem itself and from previous attempts to solve it. Whereby every work of art, even though it is the solution to the enigma, leads on (because of the birth of more and more new people and talents) to the renewal of the problem and to searches for new solutions. This renewing and continuing is excellent in itself, which is to say that world three is excellent *in itself.*

Art may be unlike science in that it does not make progress. But it is like it in that it knows no accumulation of truth, and no possible finality. One might say (of both) that there may be a subjective desire for certainty but there is no objective need for it: it would mean the end of our *world.*

Further, like Popper, Pasternak stresses the unimportance of the maker's psyche. What matters is the work that is made.

Bryan Magee sums up Popper's view: "What goes on in the mind of a scientist may be of interest to him, and to people who know him, or to the man who writes his biography, or to people interested in certain aspects of his psychology, but it has no bearing on how his work is to be judged."[19] Pasternak may appear to be often concerned with the artist's private experience of creating, but this is not really an interest in something other than the work (contrast Marina Tsvetaeva, where it is), [20] it is an attempt to define the nature and status of the work through attending to its origination, i.e. to the force (subjectively experienced) which made it be what it (objectively) is. When he writes (in his most important statement on the creating of art[21]) of a new category coming about, out there in reality, and demanding to be named, this is remarkably close to Popper's account of a new *problem* coming about, out there in the evolution of the objective problem-situation, and demanding to be solved. Pasternak's arguments in favour of concealing the facts of the artist's life and personality and of concentrating solely upon the created work are as solid and central as Popper's and are put forward in various different ways in the course of his life. There is the attack on the "Romantic" view of "life as the life of the poet", in *A Safe-Conduct.* (Indeed, could we not see his rejection of Mayakovsky as, in fact, the rejection of that philosophy which excludes world 3 and seeks an ultimate value in self-expression i.e. in world 2?) and there is the poem in the late 1950s beginning "It is not beautiful to be famous", in which he says:

И надо оставлять пробелы
В судьбе, а не среди бумаг...

И окунаться в неизвестность
И прятать в ней свои шаги,
Как прячется в тумане местность...

You ought to leave gaps
In your fate, but not in your writings . . .

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[19] Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Modern Masters, 1973, p. 31.

[20] See e.g., M. Tsvetaeva, "Iskusstvo pri svete sovesti"; translated by V. Coe and myself as "Art in the Light of Conscience", in *Russian Literature Triquarterly*, Ardis, 1975, pp. 230-263.

[21] See Pasternak, *Proza* . . . p. 241f.

And plunge into obscurity
And hide your footsteps in it
As a district is hidden in fog . . .[22]

6

I am arguing that, without naming or numbering it in this way, Pasternak conceives of a "world no. 3" not very differently from how Popper does. Popper has put forward a full philosophical account of it, which helps us to consider what Pasternak may mean. And I hope to argue that this way of seeing things enables these two writers to think non-tragically, yet also not shallowly, not missing anything significant out. I am seeing this fundamental view of things in contrast with other views which (a) see man's mind in its relations with *things* – with the world of objects and natural laws, including the laws of existence (birth and death, individuation, subjection to time, inescapable ignorance, suffering . . .) or (b) think of the man-made world of history, science and art as an imperfect, unstable and endangered phenomenon that depends for its maintenance upon human minds and physical things (i.e. upon worlds 2 and 1).

The "third world" is a world in process – thus both Popper and Pasternak are miles away from any "transcendental" view of an unchanging higher sphere of which the experienced world would be an inadequate reflection. Popper explains clearly his difference from Plato, with whom he acknowledges that he has much in common. Plato's world of ideas doesn't change, Popper's world of debate essentially *does*[23] and he calls his approach "evolutionary". Pasternak does not speak of evolution as such, but there is an interesting half-sentence near the beginning of *A Safe-Conduct* in which he says that as a boy of ten he discovered nature "in a sensation resembling Gumilev's 'sixth sense' " and Gumilev's poem "*Shestoe Chuvstvo*" does express a notion of evolution. It suggests that aesthetic awarenesses are the beginnings of a new organ evolving in the human being, an organ not yet present but to come, and compares this with the sensation the still wingless creature must have had long ago when just beginning to be aware of its future wings.

I cannot prove that Pasternak always thought of culture as "autonomous". In any case his whole manner of thinking, as I have said, unlike Popper's – it proceeds by inspired, intoxicated insight, not by cool rational connection, and tends to make deliberately difficult (at least in *A Safe-Conduct*) the insights that are the most worth acquiring, rather than setting everything out with a maximum of simplicity; also it has an appearance of being very personal ("I loved . .", "I understood . .") and does not invite us to prove that he thought this or that. But there are passages which strongly suggest that he thought like this. One is the paragraph near the beginning of *A Safe-Conduct* where he states that the biography of a poet consists of everything that happens in the subconscious of his readers.[24] That is

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[22] Pasternak, *Stikhi* . . . p. 63.
[23] Popper, *op. cit.* p. 122.
[24] See Pasternak, *Proza* . . . p. 213.

to say that it cannot possibly be gathered up and written out, *yet it is there*. What can "there" mean? I assume it means what it seems to mean: there, in the outside world, "objective", a datum of feeling even if no one observes or collects it. Here I recall Popper's "books of logarithms" which constitute "knowledge" even though no one reads them, or even *could* read them. Though I must admit that my comparison here is shaky, because for this conception of Pasternak's properly to resemble Popper's conception the subconscious of all those readers would have to be *written*. It is because the logarithms are in *books* that they are called "knowledge."

Sometimes, however, more explicitly, he uses metaphors – such as "a chain of equations in images" – which speak of the autonomous movement of culture.

> I understood that the Bible, for instance, is not so much a book with a definitive text as the notebook of mankind, and that everything everlasting is like this. That it is vital not when it is obligatory but when it is receptive to all the analogies by means of which subsequent ages, issuing from it, look back at it. I understood that the history of culture is a chain of equations in images, which link in pairs the next unknown thing with something already known, whereby the known, tradition, and the unknown, new each time, is the actual moment in the flow of culture.[25]

I am not sure whether Popper uses the image of a "chain" but Bryan Magee convincingly uses it to summarise Popper's method:

> . . The history of science, or philosophy, is seen not as a record of past errors but as a running argument, a chain of linked problems and their tentative solutions, with us in the present walking forward, if we are lucky, holding one end.[26]

An image they demonstrably do both use is that of the nest. Thus Pasternak, in the passage already quoted:

> I loved the living essence of the symbolics of history, in other words the instinct with whose help, like Salanganc swallows, we have constructed the world – a vast nest, glued together from earth and sky, life and death, and two kinds of time, present and absent.

"History"is an entirety, made by us out of bits of ourselves and bits of the physical world, a secretion and artefact of ours, made for our use and comfort – yet independent of us: it would be there even if we were not. And likewise, Popper, in a passage I have referred to: the "third world" is a product of man just as natural to him, made by him and independent of him, as a nest is in relation to the animal that made it:

> A biologist may be interested in the behaviour of animals; but he may also be interested in some of the *non-living structures* which animals produce, such as spiders' webs, or nests built by wasps or ants, the burrows of badgers, dams constructed by beavers, or paths made by animals in forests.[27]

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[25] *ibid.* p. 263.
[26] Magee, *op. cit.* p. 67.
[27] Popper, *op. cit.* p. 112.

> . . A wasp's nest is a wasp's nest even after it has been deserted; a bird's nest is a bird's nest even if it was never lived in.[28]

> . . a third world of problem situations . . . has its full analogue in the realm of birds' nests . .[29]

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The "being at home" in world three is not Popper's point. For him the nest is a product of "problem-solving"; he is interested in its logical status rather than its metaphysical function. Conversely, Pasternak does stress the being-at-home in the nest, not its autonomy. But the different point stressed by each writer is there implicitly in the other's image.

"Home" is a frequent reference of Pasternak's. Usually in the image of a house and garden, it is a focal point of much of his early poetry. Not every poem has a house *in* it, but very many have something that evokes one. An article by A. Zholkovsky, "The place of the window in Pasternak's poetic world", fully establishes the centrality of the "window" image.[30] We can add that a window implies a house; and in your house you are at home.

The idea of the autonomy and entirety and *goodness* of the human-created world of culture and memory stayed with Pasternak throughout his life. I have referred hitherto mainly to *A Safe-Conduct.* Now I will draw on *Dr. Zhivago.* Here is Yury Zhivago's feeling of what it is like to grow up:

> In his twelve years at school and college Yury had studied classics and Scripture, legends and poets, history and natural science, reading all these things as if they were the chronicles of his house, his family tree. Now he was afraid of nothing, neither of life nor of death; everything in the world, each thing in it, was named in his dictionary. He felt he was on an equal footing with the universe.[31]

Growing up and being educated is the process of becoming related to world 3. It is this, as Popper says, that makes us human; this, Pasternak says, makes us free and "equal". The passage continues, with reference to the words of the funeral service where Yury has these thoughts:

> He attended to these words and demanded from them a clearly expressed meaning, as one demands from any serious thing, and there was nothing like piousness in his feeling of continuity in relation to the higher forces of earth and sky, which he revered as his great ancestors.[32]

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[28] *ibid.* p. 115.

[29] *ibid.* p. 116.

[30] A.K. Zholkovsky. Mesto okna kak "gotovogo predmeta" v poeticheskom mire Pasternaka. *Prevaritel'nye publikacii Problemnoj gruppy po eksperimental'noj i prikladnoj lingvistike,* vyp. 61, Moscow, 1974, pp. 34-37.

[31] *Dr. Zhivago* p. 88 (I have quoted here from the translation by Hayward and Harari, p. 87).

[32] *Dr. Zhivago,* 88-89 (my translation).

"Earth" and "sky" are among the *materials* from which man makes history (like the bird's twigs and grass). We know this from another passage in the novel. At the party in Moscow in the revolution period, Yury has got tired of everyone's voices, and then comes a thunder storm which clears the air:

> All at once, like electrical elements, the constituent parts of existence became perceptible, water and air, the desire for joy, earth and sky.[33]

Of course I am implying that "existence" here means human communal historical existence (because this is what Yury Zhivago is mainly concerned with) – the human being-at-home in history; that *its* constituent parts are the ones mentioned, from "water" to "desire . . . "

I want to say that because of this way of seeing the world, Pasternak doesn't need "religion". It may be that he would not agree with this statement, but such is my understanding of him. He doesn't need it, yet he doesn't forfeit the truth which it corresponds to. I conclude this from the fact that while Yury is having his thoughts about being "equal . . . with the universe" and "afraid of nothing", and about education in a given culture being like learning about one's own *home*, he is actually present at a church service. His thoughts are presented as his defining himself away from the church – he realises that he doesn't need either its mystery (he wants "clearly expressed meaning") or the self-humbling of piety. *Yet* he is able to be reverent – towards the universe, and also towards religion. He takes part in the service and feels well there; and throughout the novel he shows respect towards the characters who represent Christianity.

Yury is of course only a fictional character. But what about Pasternak's own express attitude? He is reported to have said in answer to a question as to why he put so much religious symbolism in the novel that he had put it in "the way a stove goes into a house: to warm it up" and thus warns critics not to take it as the main thing. A stove – I comment – is necessary to a house (especially a cold Russian one), nonetheless you live in the *house*, not in the stove. Thus: religion is or has been necessary to our culture, nonetheless we live in the culture, not in the religion. What matters, I would argue, is our relatedness to world 3, the world we and others together have made, and *not* our individual relation to the infinite universe, to God, or to God's absence, to the "ultimate questions".

Within the novel, Pasternak says, as author, several things of similar import. One such statement comes near the beginning of the book:

> All the movements in the world, taken separately, were sober and deliberate, but, taken together, they were all happily drunk with the general flow of life which united and carried them. People worked and struggled, they were driven on by their individual cares and anxieties, but these springs of action would have run down and jammed the mechanism if they had not been kept in check by an over-all feeling of profound unconcern. This feeling came from the comforting awareness of the interwovenness of all human lives, the sense of their flowing into one another, the happy assurance that all that happened in the world took place not only on the earth which buried the dead but also on

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[33] *ibid.* p. 186 (my translation)

> some other level known to some as the Kingdom of God, to others as history and yet to others by some other name.[34]

It is to the last part that I wish to draw most attention. Everything has meaning; the meaning has to do with the fact that human beings all share in one whole life; that sharing *can* be understood religiously – another level up there in the transcendental – but it *can* be understood without religion: as "history". He doesn't even stop there, but says it could have some other name too – rather like Popper saying he doesn't stick by his enumeration of three worlds, for one can always call them something else or count differently. Both are anxious not to insist on a particular nomenclature; words don't matter. Popper's quarrel with the logical positivists is on this ground – that they enquire into the meaning of words, whereas he says language is just a tool, *with* which we should make our enquiry into the nature of our world; it would be foolish for a workman to spend all his time studying and sharpening his instruments instead of using them to construct things. Pasternak too says that words don't matter: call it how you like, it's the thing itself that matters. But he does call it "history" more prominently and frequently than he calls it religion or anything else, and this is where I base my comparison of him with Popper.

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[34] *ibid.* p. 12-13 (Hayward and Harari translation. p. 21-2).