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The Universe of Meanings

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“Russian Visionary”—this was the subtitle of an article in an American journal (Thompson, 1993) devoted to Vassily Vassilievich Nalimov—a Russian scientist, whose fate is dramatic, absurd, and at times fantastic in a rather Russian way.

Although he had no possibility of graduating from the Physico-Mathematical Department of Moscow State University because of his moral and political conflict with Komsomol, much later Nalimov became a Professor at this University, where for a period of ten years he worked as assistant director of the Interfaculty Laboratory of Statistical Methods headed by the academician Andrei Nikolaevich Kolmogorov, one of the most distinguished mathematicians of our time.

The Gulag period of VVN, covering 18 years of prisons, labor camps, and exile, was not just a “dramatic misfortune,” but rather a result of conscious opposition by this free thinker to the totalitarian ideology. Brought up by teachers of one of the branches of the Western esoteric underground, throughout his life he carried through the ideas of Christian anarchism.

One of the books by Nalimov, abundant with ideas, was defined by one reviewer as a “feast,” plentiful enough for anyone to find a treat. This feast metaphor can be related to all the works of Vassily Vassilievich.

SSM.¹ One of the central features of your world outlook is a special interpretation of the notion of *meaning* distinguished from its common use in logic. Would you, please, explain your idea.

VVN. My position is close to philosophical hermeneutics. From my point of view, *meaning* is an ontological notion and not a logical one. It is a category of Being. Meanings, to my mind, exist primordially, just as fundamental physical constants do (the Anthropic principle). They are not created—they exist.

The nature of meanings can be grasped only through their changes, only through their manifestations in Being, containing consciousness.

The dynamic revelation of the nature of meanings can be realized only by the simultaneous analysis of a semantic triad: *meaning, text, language*. Each element of this triad can be defined by the two others. Here we address the so-called “cyclic definition.” Let’s state it as follows:

Meanings are what create texts by means of *Language*.

Texts are what is created out of *Meanings* with the aid of *Language*.

Language is what turns meanings into *Text*.

The triad becomes a synonym for *Consciousness*.

Texts, as I see it, are structures arranged by probabilistic weighting of meanings. Weighting is ascribing a probabilistic measure to elementary meanings.

Probabilistic weighting is anti-Aristotelian logic. It allows operating with fuzzy meanings which are revealed at the deep levels of consciousness. It is the logic of creative process. The Aristotelian logic is that of a secondary one. It reduces the semantic continuum to the discrete words behind which a variety of meanings are hidden. Wishing seriously to understand discretely written texts, we appeal to hidden fuzziness. Understanding becomes *personal*. Moreover, it is always defined by the situation. Let's recollect: during the two last millennia religious thought was incessantly occupied with reinterpretation of the same initial texts, charging them with various meanings—weights. Nowadays this process seems to have become accelerated. In a more veiled form it takes place both in philosophy and even in science.

My task is an attempt to understand the role of meanings in the Universe: to put it in a more modest way, at least to estimate the role of meanings in the existence of humankind.

SSM. Vassily Vassiliyevich, why, in considering philosophical problems, do you resort to mathematics? Many readers fail to accept such an approach.

VVN. There are sufficient grounds for it. Understanding comes into us in images. Apparently the thinkers of the Christian Mediterranean were already conscious of it. In the Gospel of Philip we read the surprising words: "Truth did not come into the world naked, but it came in types and images. One will not receive truth in any other way. There is a rebirth and an image of rebirth. It is certainly necessary that they should be born again through the image" (Robinson, 1981, p. 140).

In previous times, people borrowed images from ordinary life, directly addressing sensory experience. Now these images are semantically exhausted. Philosophy is coming to a standstill—

I wrote about it in my book *In Quest of Other Meanings* (Nalimov, 1993).

Further development of philosophy requires some new images. As I see it, they can be borrowed from mathematics and modern physics, which is also mathematically saturated. Finally, it has become clear that humankind is so uniquely arranged as to perceive the world through mathematical notions: through *number* in all the varieties of its manifestation; through *time* estimated by number; through *space* given by a variety of geometries; through *probabilistic measure* also calculated by number; and, finally, through *logic* joining with mathematics (logic of calculus). In the beginning of the twentieth century it became possible to speak about the mathematization of logic, although this theme had been brought up earlier by Leibniz.

The resort to mathematics has allowed me to axiomatize my system of notions. Philosophy is properly to become deductive (such as Spinoza tried to make it). Nowadays, especially in existentialism, we deal rather with philosophical...poetry. And this is perfect in a way. But a lack of axiomatics precludes the possibility of further discussion. And then what is the meaning of philosophy?

In my constructions, mathematics is easily understood. I formulate axioms and construct a model proceeding from them, not proving theorems. My approach is close to the so-called *intuitionistic* logic, on which intuitionistic mathematics and related branches of constructivist mathematics (Brouwer; Geiting) are based.

SSM. Would you please speak about the mathematical model of consciousness you are evolving?

VVN. As my main achievement, I consider elaboration of *the probabilistically-oriented theory of consciousness*—an axiomatic system constructed by applying the Bayesian formula used earlier only in mathematical statistics.

My initial premises are the following:

1. Assume that the entire evolving world that we perceive may be regarded as a set of *texts*. Our culture is based on texts. Human beings

themselves are texts. When we deal, for example, with the biosphere, then individual species and other constituents represent texts. In the inanimate sphere, landscapes are texts as well.

2. Texts are characterized by *discrete* (semiotic) and *continual* (semantic) constituents.
3. Semantics are determined by the probabilistically given structure of *meanings*. Meanings are what turn a symbolic system into a text.
4. All potential meanings of the world are *initially* correlated with the linear continuum of Cantor, the numerical axis, μ , on which all real numbers are located in the order of their increasing values. Otherwise, the meanings of the world are compressed the way numbers are compressed on the real axis.
5. Compressed meanings represent the *packed* (unmanifested) World: the *semantic vacuum*.
6. *Unpacking* (emergence of texts) is realized through probabilistic weighting of the axis μ : different measures are ascribed to its different intervals. The metric of the scale μ is assumed to be initially given and remains unaltered.
7. Correspondingly, the semantics of each concrete text is given by the *distribution function* (probability density) $p(\mu)$. We shall assume the distribution function to be sufficiently smooth and asymptotically close (if it is not stated otherwise) to the abscissa. In the general case it is possible to speak of texts determined by the probability distribution function set on a multidimensional space. Meanings in the text are always given selectively. We are not to know everything. Recall the proverb: "To know everything is to know nothing." The function $p(\mu)$ turns out to be the *window* through which we can examine the semantic world.

And now the *Rule of Inference*:

Any change in the text—its evolution—is linked with a *spontaneous* emergence in a situation y of the filter $p(y/\mu)$ that interacts multiplicatively with the initial function $p(\mu)$. The interaction is given by the well-known *Bayesian formula*:

$$p(\mu/y) = kp(\mu)p(y/\mu)$$

where: the distribution function $p(\mu/y)$ determines the semantics of a new text emerging after the evolutionary impetus y ; k is a normalizing constant. In our case, the Bayesian formula acts as a *syllogism*: from the two premises $p(\mu)$ and $p(y/\mu)$ necessarily follows a text with new semantics $p(\mu/y)$. In Bayes' syllogism, in contrast to the categorical syllogism of Aristotle, both the premises and the corollary are not atomic but *probabilistically fuzzy*.

The Bayes formula (theorem) is traditionally used for calculating a posteriori events through a priori probabilities. I have made a generalization, attaching to the statistical formula a new—*logic* meaning. Now it is possible to speak of a *Bayes-Nalimov syllogism*, and accordingly, of a new *Bayesian logic*.

SSM. What does the probabilistic logic given by the Bayesian syllogism yield?

VVN. It opens up an opportunity to comprehend the process of grasping texts. How do we understand texts? How do we understand one another when we speak a language whose words are semantically polymorphous (have no atomic meanings)? For instance, how do Russians guess which meaning of the English word "set" is used in a phrase if it is explained by 1,816 words in the two-volume English-Russian dictionary? Why do we enjoy texts rich in metaphors? How do we understand phrases obviously illogical, sometimes meaningless, in terms of ordinary logic? How do we translate foreign texts when we often fail to find proper synonyms in the other language for the key words of the text?

I think that these and similar questions are key ones, both for understanding the nature of our consciousness and in searching for ways of developing artificial intelligence. I already formulated them acutely twenty-five years ago. The first answer, although not elaborated precisely enough theoretically, was my book *Probabilistic Model of Language*. Later, I returned to this subject in all publications dealing with the problem of consciousness.

To put it briefly, the answer is: in reading or conversation we get involved in a language game, submerging the words important for the

given text into any new situation y , generating the understanding filter $p(y/\mu)$. The verbal meaning, thus, is narrowed down—is concretized. But the choice of the filter is always personal. Bayesian logic, unlike Aristotelian logic, is always free—free in understanding the text. We know, by experience, how totalitarianism tried to get rid of this freedom. That very freedom in understanding is what makes society flexible.

Language games may not only narrow down verbal meanings but expand them as well. In such cases, filters, related to a new situation y , attach a high level of significance to the verbally not-enough-manifested (for the given word) interval of the scale μ . Another example of meaning expansion is forming new two-word terms. Such a newly coined term is, for example, the word combination “artificial intelligence,” which combined two principally opposed elements. The meaning of this term should be regarded as given by a two-dimensional distribution $p(\mu_1, \mu_2)$ revealing a correlation between two probabilistically arranged semantic structures. I myself introduced a new two-word term, *Bayesian syllogism*, which unites meanings which were not united before. It is noteworthy that to elucidate the meaning of a word in ancient India, it was ascribed a long chain of synonyms (as mentioned by V. Toporov). Thus multidimensional semantics was used.

Understanding of scientific, philosophical, and religious concepts is also Bayesian by nature. It is possible to ask, say: Was Lysenko a Darwinist? The answer will undoubtedly be positive. Darwin’s theory was constructed as a rather fuzzy system of notions. Lysenko approached Darwin’s theory of evolution from his deeply personal viewpoint. His filter of preference was such that the major mass of probability density of the function $p(y/\mu)$ got into the tail part of the distribution $p(\mu)$ that determined Darwin’s structures. Thus Lysenko’s version of Darwinism came into being—a bad joke in science. But, you see, in our country, Hegelian Marxism was also perceived in Lenin’s version and was maintained by millions of people, including many scientists, philosophers, and members of the church orthodoxy. And here it would be necessary to note that some interpretations of philosophical

or quasiphilosophical statements can take on the proportions of a world outlook epidemic. And today, Dietrich Bonhoeffer’s warning is urgent: “Stupidity—is an even more dangerous enemy of good than rage...Against stupidity we are unprotected.” And how will our philosophical elaborations be interpreted? Filters arise spontaneously, and this means that we can fail to discover the reason for their emergence. They cannot be predicted.

In the system of Bayesian logic, responsible for deep thinking, some ideas are being revealed more clearly than in the system of accepted logical constructions. Let’s explain this with one example.

Free will—what does it mean? It was Hegel who paid attention to the fact that the idea of freedom is subjected to the “greatest distortions” to a greater degree than any other idea. Indeed, Western thinkers, following the path of logical thought, always tried to thoroughly separate free conduct proper from determined conduct. And this, naturally, resulted in endless misunderstandings.

Unconditional freedom is inconceivable. An absolutely free person must first of all be free from the system of personal value concepts. It means that a person’s state of mind, defined by the function $p(\mu)$, degenerates into a nontruncated (tending towards infinity) rectangular distribution. Due to the normalizing condition, the segment cut off on the ordinate by the straight line setting this distribution will tend to zero. Strictly speaking, the notion of the distribution function $p(\mu)$ loses sense, and the generation of any filter $p(y/\mu)$ also becomes senseless. Individuality dies a natural death, having been deprived of its value properties; it turns into nothing or everything. Meanings disappear, having lost their selective evaluation. The semantic continuum returns to its initial, packed state. It appears that freedom is only *freedom for the choice of filters*. And if so, then *only a nonfree person can be free*. Here lies the paradox of the notion of *freedom*.

The above considerations give us an opportunity to comprehend the meaning of the state of *Nirvana*—the most difficult Asian concept to be

grasped by Western culture. Nirvana is the smoothing down, karma-given selectivity in the system of value concepts. It is loss of personality set by semantic selectivity. It is also loss of creativity, due to the inability to use filters. It is absolute freedom. Freedom generated by the death of personality.

SSM. Let us talk now about your concept of the semantic nature of personality. In your book *Spontaneity of Consciousness* there is an intriguing paragraph about human ego as a probabilistically given manifestation of the semantic field. Will you explain it, please?

VVN. I distinguish four structural constituents of personality:

1. Human individuality—an individual's *Ego*—is set by the probability density $p(\mu)$. This function may be needle-shaped, fuzzy, sometimes many-apexed, or sharply asymmetric, depending on the individual's psychic peculiarities. *Ego* is not a stable state but a *process*, for the system of values is under continual change, especially in crucial situations. *Ego* may be regarded as a text, but a perfect text, alive, and capable of incessant *reinterpretation of itself*.

2. *Metaego* is a faculty of *spontaneous* generating filters. This seems to be the most powerful characteristic of personality: a person remains oneself until he or she preserves the faculty of generating nontrivial filters, especially in crucial situations. In its moral aspect, human dignity is so realized. And if human *Ego* is openness to the world of terrestrial activity, then *Metaego* is openness to the cosmic or else—to the transpersonal realm. Humans act as a bridge between two aspects of the Universe: its presentness and its timelessness. (Note, my approach is close to transpersonal psychology, based on transbiographic experience.) The Cosmic principle—is timeless; it preserves the still-persisting past as well as the potential diversity of the possible future. By a free choice of selectivity filters, we are merged in transpersonal aspects of the world's history, bearing the responsibility for its evolution.

3. *Multidimensionality of consciousness*. It is described by probability densities on multidimensional semantic space $p(\mu_1, \mu_2, \dots, \mu_n)$.

Thus separate components of personality manifestations are correlated to a certain degree. Each of us is at least two-dimensional, or the inner dialogue that we ceaselessly engaged in with ourselves would be senseless.

Multidimensionality of personality may be very great. The striking example of such a personality was F. Dostoyevsky, the author of a paradoxical variety of characters. It seems as if Dostoyevsky "splashed out" his burdensome multidimensionality into the heroes of his novels.

Multidimensionality is broadly discussed in Western psychiatry. It has proven to be related both to obvious pathology and creativity. An absolutely disordered, orthogonally split personality is pathological. In extreme cases, such splitting may result in manifestations, at different times, of discrete personality components, one being unaware of the other's drives. It may also happen that two components of a personality will separately use the same body. But correlation of the personality components may, as well, form a harmonious multipersonality open to the free perception of the world. A multidimensional approach to personality is undoubtedly the way to overcome social alienation and aggression. This is a formation of a *new person*, adapted to the environment of social and intellectual polymorphism. The increase of the text dimension leads to the growing sophistication of unpacking the semantic continuum: there emerge new parameters of unpacking, namely, the correlation coefficients.

4. *Hyperpersonality* is a concept of a personality as a semantic structure embodied in various physical objects. Examples of this are hypnosis, the psychoanalytical phenomenon of transference, the formation of the collective consciousness in the agitated crowd, the collective ecstasy in religious mysteries, and the special practice of merging personalities in Tantrism.

SSM. To complete your concept it probably makes sense to talk also of the map of consciousness you have proposed.

VVN. We can present our consciousness as a multilevel structure:

1. Level of *Logical Thinking*. Meanings are revealed here through Aristotelian logic. This is

a computer-like part of consciousness. Here texts adaptable for comprehension are created. This level functions as an information service of consciousness.

2. Level of *Pre-Thinking*. On this level, the initial premises based on Bayesian logic are worked out, whereupon texts using Aristotelian logic are constructed.

3. *Cellars of Consciousness*. On this level, sensual contemplation of images takes place. Here we meet with archetypes of the collective unconscious (in Jung's terms).

4. The *Structure as a Whole* is based on the *physical body* where neuropeptides act. What is meant is primarily the general somatic state of a person. The *altered* states of consciousness that are the object of transpersonal psychology arise when the upper, logically structured level is switched off. Switching off is achieved by directed influence on the body: relaxation, sensory deprivation, regulated breathing, special physical exercises or even special kinds of massage, or by taking psychedelic drugs. Everything that can affect personal time may be controlled. Within this system of ideas, it is not the brain but the whole body that represents a level of consciousness.

5. Level of *Metaconsciousness*. This level seems to belong to transpersonal, cosmic consciousness (noosphere, or cosmic pleroma of the Gnostics) interacting with human, bodily encapsulated consciousness via Bayesian logic. On this cosmic level (we shall call them "Bayesian filters"), the spontaneous emergence of creative impulses occurs.

6. Involvement in a proper *Cosmic Process*. There are enough grounds to presume that in the Cosmos—in other worlds—flowing processes, though beyond direct influence, still affect human earthly life through people. It is hard to believe that we are the only dwellers in the Universe. Here I speak not so much of a belief in such a possibility as of the wisdom of our imagination.

SSM. Hence, it seems to the point to speak about meanings in the biosphere?

VVN. I proceed from the fact that all morphophysiological properties can be considered as elementary meanings generating texts of the animate world. All possible variety of these properties was assumed to be originally packed on numerical axis μ . Then the biosphere appears as probabilistically weighted unpacking of the continuum of biological meanings. Here I refer to the concept by the geneticist Khesin, who stated that universal elements of the total gene pool of the living world are incorporated in different combinations into individual genomes of different systematic groups. Separate individuals—elementary units of the living world—are same texts given by the probability density $p(\mu)$. Hence, species are respectively given by multidimensional distributions constructed on the axis $\mu_1, \mu_2, \dots, \mu_n$ corresponding to individuals.

Omitting details of the Bayesian description of evolutionism, I confine myself to some brief examples. To begin with, we pay attention to the teleogenetic similarity of animals noted by A. A. Lubishchev, manifested by the fact that evolution yields similar solutions independently of factors that bring them about (similarity between ichthyosauruses, dolphins, and fishes); N. I. Vavilov's homological series—the idea that whole families of plants are, in general, characterized by a definite cycle of changeability; the neotenic theory of human origin justifying the notion of the spotty nature of evolution, that is, rapid and radical change of the entire pattern of attributes.

SSM. Let us dwell upon the problem "consciousness-matter." You have been working on it for a long time, haven't you?

VVN. It is a perennial problem which will hardly ever be elucidated enough. The Cartesian view prohibited the discussion of this problem for three hundred years. Descartes' dualism: body is spatially extended, mind is not. Consequently, we deal with two different substances. This opposition was not destroyed by Kant's concept of space, which is nothing more than an a priori given form of sensual perception.

Now we know that an a priori given form of sensual perception depends upon an *observer*

and can be differently set. In my model, I have shown that consciousness can be interpreted in terms of *geometrical* notions. This is essential, since theoretical physics is being realized via nontrivial geometrization of physical concepts.

Wishing to bridge consciousness (meaning) and matter, we should deepen the degree of geometrization of semantic constructions. It is possible to show that constancy of metric Bayesian logic is equivalent in a certain degree to possible *metric logic*. This means that the postulate on constancy of metric can be rejected and evolution of the $p(\mu)$ function can be regarded as occurring at the expense of local deformation of the scale in the proximity of the points of semantic space. Thus, a deeply geometrized image of the World can be revealed. Any text is now regarded as an exited (i.e., of different scales) state of semantically satiated space. Here we came close to the ideas, which back in the beginning of our century, were elaborated by the well-known German mathematician Weyl. Now those ideas have resulted in the creation of a general theory of gauge fields by Utiyama and Regger. Thus, there appears hope for the possibility of constructing a super unified field theory embracing both worlds—physical and semantical. True, a unified field theory is still under construction.

SSM. In your latest book (Nalimov, 1993), the reader's attention is drawn to the chapter devoted to self-organization. Would you talk about this subject?

VVN. It is a serious and at the same time very difficult topic. If we look at the history of human evolution, we see that the world outlook of early humankind was predominated by *cause-effect* relations. The world was endowed with strict logic. Everything was created by someone, and ruled by someone, up to the very last detail. In the Gospel it is said that "the very hairs of your head are all numbered."

At present the situation has changed essentially. We have no more imagination to explain with reference to the *cause-conditioned* principle, the emergence of fundamental constants in the Anthropic principle or the origin of the total genepool. And how to explain a demonic

principle, so powerfully exposed in the twentieth century! The "archetype" of determinism does not work any more. It was Nietzsche who understood that the "world *seems* logical to us because we *have made it logical*."

We begin reflecting on self-organization. Self-organization is spontaneity. Spontaneity is absence of reason. It is resorting to probabilistic logic, the logic of free thinking—which is not restricted by the Aristotelian syllogism.

Earlier in our conversation, I tried to show how spontaneity generates texts in the field of thinking and in biological evolutionism. The same is supposed to be observed in animate nature—the border between the animate and the inanimate, as we now know, is indistinct.

Here, say, let us consider a landscape of a rocky sea bay. All processes in it flow very slowly, imperceptible to our eyes. But make a mental attempt to change the time scale, and watch it from the position of a long-living plant such as a sequoia. Then we shall observe lifelike changes, especially in the case of our regarding the bay as a holistic ecological system. There arises a natural question: do changes in this system follow cause-effect relations, or do we rather deal here with spontaneity of the occurring processes? Who can give an answer without referring to a previously set conviction? Let's be reminded of Hegel's words that "Earth is a living wholeness or a special organism..." or recollect myths wherein Earth is an alive body being under a dream state.

Spontaneity is involuntarily associated with consciousness, for only consciousness can act *freely*—irrespectively of cause-effect relations. Resorting to spontaneity is a rejection of the tyranny of our making the World logical. And again questions arise: "Does consciousness exist in the whole Universe, at least in weak forms?" "How is it possible?"

According to the Anthropic principle, the state of our Universe is conditioned by the selection of some definite numbers. In Schrödinger's equation we deal with the probability density expressed by number. But the nature of number is not physical but semantical. We can speak of number in the Universe only if there is an

Observer. And do we know that only a human can be an Observer? Maybe the whole Universe is arranged in such a way that it is provided with an ability to be an Observer? And if so, then the whole Universe is the carrier of quasi-consciousness.

This is a serious subject for reflection. It is a radical shift in our world outlook.

SSM. What you have said results in the conclusion that accumulating *knowledge* we simultaneously increase *ignorance*, which, in addition, is seriously established.

VVN. Yes, while developing our Knowledge, we come nearer and nearer to approaching the Ultimate, the Mystery. We are facing a gigantic Image of learned Ignorance (Non-Knowledge), which cannot be diminished by narrowing, but deepened by expanding. Mysterious is humankind. Mysterious is the World. And God is a Mystery.

We may speak of nonknowledge, for as people, it is not given to us to know the truth. Everything comprehended by us is very *conventional*. Nothing more. Our progress lies in incessantly expanding and deepening the context under which we are wording our statements. But nevertheless, all our constructions turn out to be ignorance. Long ago our ancestors were confident to know how the World was created; but they knew only one geometry—Euclidean, and only one logic—Aristotelian.

And what do we know now with the same assurance? Our “confident” knowledge is turning out to be nonknowledge.

Our Knowledge is extended through learned Ignorance.

SSM. How are your ideas attuned to philosophical classics?

VVN. My approach may be considered as a further development of Plato’s philosophy (to a certain degree, even of Anaxagoras), and also, certainly, of Plotinus, who intuitively grasped the role of *number* in the Universe. Plato stated the primordial existence of *ideas*. His doctrine of *One* (in the Dialogue “Parmenides”) looks like an

attempt at revealing the idea of a continuum via the then available notions. Plato’s *One* is related to *many* by number. His *many* is not a part of *One* but embraces the entire whole. And that is exactly what is shown in my model—that the primordially existing continuum of meanings is manifested through number without being split into parts.

Nicholas Cusanus, in 1440, wrote a work under the title “On Learned Ignorance.” Descartes had a statement (though quite a cursory one) concerning the incalculable nature of meaning: “...It would not be easy to enumerate the eternal truths.” Spinoza’s concept of the primary principle, Substance, consisting of infinite attributes, looks almost like our concept of a semantic vacuum. Kant stated that “...all human cognition begins with intuitions, proceeds from thence to conceptions, and ends with ideas.” Hegel speaks respectively of the reproductive power of imagination “elevating images on the surface of consciousness.” Nietzsche said: “First *images*—to explain how images arise in the spirit. Then words applied to images.” He says on the nature of personality: “My hypothesis: The subject is multiplicity.” Wittgenstein: “What the picture represents is its sense.” Merleau-Ponty wrote: “Because we are in the world, we are *condemned to meanings*.” Sartre: “transcendental consciousness is impersonal spontaneity,” “man is condemned to be free,” “man...is condemned at each moment to invent man.” From Heidegger: “Language is a home of Being.” Gadamer: “...language is a central point where ‘I’ and world meet or, rather, manifest their original unity.” And last but not least, Whitehead: “*Creativity* is the universal of universals, characterizing ultimate matters of fact.”

In my model, creativity is superpersonal. It is transcendental Spontaneity. I wish to regard the creative principle as the basis of the World. It opens up the prospect of elucidating the meaning of the World and the place humankind occupies in it. The meaning of the World lies in the revelation of its potential meanings. The meaning of human life lies in the active participation in this process.

SSM. Vassily Vassilievich, you are a combination of a philosopher, physicist, mathematician,

logician, maybe, even an esotericist...Who are you in your own mind?

VVN. I am a free thinker—by calling and not by profession. For a large part of my life I worked as a scientist in the field of physics and applied mathematics. I received my wages exactly for that very work. Philosophy and religion were the subjects of my concern since early youth—and that was paid for by years of Gulag. I studied philosophy selectively, reading and discussing only what I was interested in. For my candidate exam on philosophy I received only satisfactory, as I could not answer what was written in the epilogue to the third volume of *Das Kapital* by Marx. Yes, I failed to have ever read this classical work—it is beyond my reading.

My philosophically orientated books were issued in large editions and rather quickly went out of print. But I have no idea who read them. In any case, the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences displays no interest in them. Yet, following the Russian poet Maximilian Voloshin, I can say, “my home is open to meet all roads.” Many people come to my place, including students and postgraduate students of the philosophy department of Moscow State University, as though restoring the old university tradition—holding seminars at the home of their professor...the old professor.

As before, I am interested in religious themes, assuming each of us, even though not being a professional theologian, can develop one’s own personal theology.

SSM. You are not afraid to be reproached as a dilettante, are you?

VVN. Dilettantism, undoubtedly, is dangerous. But often it comes about due to narrowness of knowledge, due to excessive specialization. And that is exactly what becomes a serious danger.

Narrow specialization is especially obvious in the USA—the leading country of the world. The temptation of success through narrow specialization is simultaneously great and dangerous.

We are facing a very strange situation: each individual engaged in creative activity is good

only in a narrow field. Culture acquires a scrappy character. It stops working. It has the appearance of existing, but does not exist—there is culture, but it does not actually work.

The system of higher education needs to be reformed. A university, in accord with its meaning should prepare not just narrow experts, but intellectuals educated in a broad way. Specialization should be provided in the course of work—but grounded on a well-prepared foundation which prevents immersion only in professional affairs. I wrote about this, but it was not responded to. I like the above-mentioned Russian poet Voloshin, liked him since my youth. And one of his lines remains forever in my memory: humans are “saturated with memory, as the Earth is,” which means that humankind is multidimensional, is great. That should come to be true.

SSM. What is your idea of the future, if it’s possible to make a forecast on the basis of accumulated knowledge, collective and individual experience?

VVN. I do not believe in forecasts. They are always insufficient with respect to data. The rejected (as insignificant) factor easily can become essential and even crucial. In real life we deal with spontaneity, that is, with unpredictability.

And nevertheless, if forced to extrapolate (it is not yet a forecast), destruction seems to be inevitable in the near future.

What can rescue the Earth and humankind living on it?

I think only the emergence of a new Culture in the third millennium. The Culture which is Christianly humane, humane without hypocrisy. The Culture of new meanings, and, accordingly, of other values.

What is necessary for it to come about? To make people understand the *tragedy* of the situation. To make an attempt to formulate a new world outlook, to offer for consideration new meanings, new value preferences, to propose a new image of a hero.

The problem of Consciousness is pushed to the foreground. To be exact—the problem of

Consciousness/Matter and Life/Death associated with it. This is what I am concerned about now most of all, as these problems become key ones for the individual and collective future of people. We have not yet learned “to be death dressed,” a phrase once bequeathed by “the poet and penniless rider,” Alexander Vvedensky.² Though it is time. High time.

And more: we are in need of a renewed mental impulse. We are in need of new charismatic personalities. And this is an appeal to Cosmic powers, to those who have already visited the Earth, and wandering in worlds and in centuries, enriched and prepared, could help to transform the earthly situation.

Everything said here may seem strange and provocative, but what else can be expected when the worst of all evils—stupidity—is raging like an epidemic all over the Earth!

SSM. We would like to end our conversation with one more question: What are you working on now, what will your readers be rejoicing at next?

VVN. The Publishing House “Progress” is issuing my book of memoirs *The Rope-Dancer*, in which I tell about the fate of Russia through the example of my own family, who suffered heavily like many other families of our country, and about my spiritual teachers, about a spiritual philosophical movement to which I belonged, about the Gulag, about science—about everything that has influenced my life as a free thinker brought up by the ideas of Christian anarchism.

Another Publishing House, “Labyrinth,” is preparing to publish the brochure “On the Verge of the Third Millennium: What We Have Grasped Approaching the XXIst Century.” In the summer of 1995, I expect to have out my article “Am I a Christian?” I have also started preparation for publishing the book *Reality of the Unreal: Probabilistic Model of the Unconscious. An Attempt of Modern Natural Philosophy*. This book was issued in the USA in 1982. In Russian, it will appear for the first time, as Glavlit³ in due time has authorized the manuscript only “for

export.” So, we are now trying “to import” the manuscript.⁴

SSM. Vassily Vassilievich, in 1863, the Russian poet and diplomat Fedor Tyutchev wrote the following lines which, unfortunately, are becoming even more manifest nowadays:

*An awful sleep is burdened over us,
An awful, ugly dream:
In blood up to heels, we are fighting the dead,
Having revived for new burials...*

Is it possible to say that all your philosophical books and articles are written so as to interrupt that “awful dream”?

VVN. Perhaps...but am I heard?

Notes

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1. This interview was originally published in Russian in the journal of the Russian Academy of Sciences, *Social Sciences and Modernity* [SSM] (*Obshchestvennye Nauki i Sovremennost'*—ONS), 1995, No. 3, pp. 122-132. The interviewers were Jeanna Drogalina-Nalimov (Moscow State University) and K. Zuyev (an editor of SSM).

2. He was arrested and perished in 1941.

3. Chief State censorship in literature in the Soviet Union.

4. It is noteworthy to add here that in the period 1992-1996, VVN published four books and some thirty-two papers. Moreover, it was the period after his heart infarction when although he was physically very weak, spiritually he was very strong, responsible, and focused.

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