Encyclopedic Entry

The "Open Society" (according to Karl R. Popper [1902–1994])

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1. Introduction

When Bryan Magee published in 1973 a popular introduction book to Sir Karl Popper's philosophy he opened it somewhat apologetically, writing that "Popper is not, as yet anyway, a household name among the educated, and this fact requires explanation." (Magee, 1973:9). This no longer holds true today: Popper is well known name frequently mentioned not only by specialists in philosophy of science and intellectual history, but also in political discourse. His social and political philosophy, alongside unyielding critique of social sciences and hisotircism, makes him relevant also nowadays. Popper himself saw a clear connection between his defense of anti-positivist "critical-rationalism," as a called it, his uncompromising anti-totalitarian stance and defense of liberty, and his advocacy for an "Open Society." This entry will provide a biographical sketch of Popper's life, present the backdrop to his social and political thought and explain what he meant by the concept "Open Society."

2. Intellectual biography

Karl Raimund Popper was born on 28 July 1902 in Vienna, a third child and the only son of an assimilated higher middle-class Jewish parents who converted to Christianity two years before his birth, and raised him in the Lutheran faith. Popper's father, Simon Siegmund Karl Popper (1856–1932), was a lawyer by profession and liberal and freemason by persuasion. A law partner of Raimund Grübl, Vienna's last liberal mayor, Popper's father expressed his gratitude by making Raimund the second name of his son. While his erudite father, Karl Popper reports in his autobiography, planted in him keen interest in the classics and in philosophy, it was his mother Jenny (1864–1938; *née* Schiff), who inculcated in him a deep passion for music. Between 1908 and 1913 the young Popper went to *Freie Schule*, a private elementary school relatively free of the otherwise predominant Catholic atmosphere. It was followed by the local *Realgymnasium*, which Popper attended between 1913 and 1918, where he was unhappy with the standards of the teaching and may have encountered some anti-Semitic prejudices from teachers. In 1918, after an illness that kept him at home for a number of months, he left the *Realgymnasium* to attend the University of Vienna. Shortly thereafter Popper, persuaded by Marxist ideas,

joined the *Freie Vereingung sozialistischer Mittelschuler* (Free Association of Socialist High School Students), and became deeply involved in left-wing political activism of "Red Vienna." It was during this period that he became involved in social work with children under the aegis of Alfred Adler, the Austrian psychotherapist, and founder of the school of individual psychology, and became interested in Freud's psychoanalytical theories. (Freud's sister, Rosa Graf, was a friend of the Poppers).

In 1919, a year he later described as pivotal *annus mirabilis* in his intellectual development, Popper attended Albert Einstein's lectures on relativity theory. The supremacy of critical thinking that characterized Einstein, Popper wrote in subsequent years, stood in complete contrast when compared to the writings of Marx, Freud and Adler. This contrast, he came to argue, convinced him of the need to differentiate between science and "pseudo-science," and establish what he would come to describe as "demarcation criterion" to distinguish between the two. Popper might have over-dramatized somewhat the impact 1919 had on his intellectual formation, for it would be only a decade later that he would formulate what came to be known as the demarcation problem, allowing him to distinguish scientific theories from untestable, irrefutable non-scientific ones. Yet it seems that already at that stage he felt ill at ease with Marxism and psychoanalysis alike, a theme he would later develop in his philosophy of science and politics alike.

In 1925 Popper obtained a primary school teaching diploma, and began his PhD studies at the Pedagogical Institute, where he met his future wife, Josefine Anna ("Hennie") Henninger (1906–1985), whom he married in April 1930. In 1929 Popper obtained a second diploma which qualified him to teach mathematics and physics in secondary school. While earning his living as a teacher Popper became increasingly interested in the philosophy of science, an interest which drew him closer to the philosophers associated with the Ernst Mach Society (*Verein Ernst Mach*), better known simply as the *Wiener Kreis*. The Circle, enjoying its heydays roughly between 1924 and 1936, was led by philosopher Moritz Schlick and later by the social scientist Otto Neurath, and key members included the mathematician Hans Hahn, the physicist Philipp Frank, the mathematician Olga Hahn-Neurath (Otto Neurath's wife), the philosopher Viktor Kraft, and, since 1926, the philosopher and logician Rudolf Carnap. This circle of 'scientifically-minded' positivist philosophers who sought to re-conceptualize empiricism by means of their interpretation of then recent advances in the physical and formal sciences, in hope that this would allow them to develop a "Einheitswissenschaft" ("Unified Science"), a "totalistic" type of philosophy that would unify the sciences. Intrinsic to this mission, the members of the Circle argued, was the need to eliminate metaphysics once and for all by showing that all metaphysical propositions are, in fact, meaningless. Some members of the Circle, Schlick being especially dominant in this respect, saw a clear affinity between Ludwig Wittgenstein's early philosophy and their own the uncompromising rejection of metaphysics.

Though he studied with Hahn and was well acquainted with Carnap's theories, Popper was never a member or associate of the Circle. As much as he shared the group's esteem for rigorous empirical science, Popper could not bring himself to accept its key philosophical doctrines. (Popper's infamous personal hostility towards Wittgenstein, whom he would later accuse of "verbal and empty scholasticism" (*Open Society*, vol. II, p. 9) might have also played a role: it alienated Schlick, and for that reason he was never invited to become a member of the group.) The need to articulate his criticism and offer an

alternative view of the logic of the scientific discovery led Popper to produce a lengthy critical manuscript, part of which turned into his first book, published under the title *Logik der Forschung* in 1934. The result was an entirely new and different account of what scientific knowledge means: science, Popper argued, proceeds by formulating hypotheses, and not by collecting mere empirical data, and progresses via a series of empirical refutations. What turns a given hypothesis into a scientific one is that it generates predictions that could be falsified by reference to empirical data. In other cases (see next section) Popper reiterated his ideas by arguing that what makes a theory scientific is that it contains 'risky' predictions and that is consequently refutable by a conceivable event. Popper's falsification argument stood in complete contrast to the Logical Positivist attempt to establish a verification principle to determine whether a given utterance is meaningful. Scientists were united in rejecting falsified theories, he came to argue, not by verifying natural laws. Moreover, the implication of Popper's argument was that our scientific knowledge forever remains tentative or provisional since no hypothesis can be conclusively proved true. This thesis not only revolutionized the understanding of the nature and value of scientific knowledge, but also provided its author (as the next section will show) a powerful philosophical Archimedean point which allowed him to develop his unique view of critical rationalism and his famous criticisms of Marxism, historicism and totalitarianism.

Logik der Forschung attracted more attention than Popper had anticipated, especially among British analytical philosophers who were interested in the recent Continental developments in the field. In 1934, as the Social Democratic Party in Austria was declared illegal and storm clouds starting gathering, Popper was invited by the philosopher Susan Stebbing to lecture in England. He spent nine months there, from September 1935 until late spring 1936 and met many leading philosophers, including Bertrand Russell, Gilbert Ryle, Isaiah Berlin, and Alfred J. Ayer. The extended visit was also his way to check the English waters: The growth of Nazism in Germany and Austria, Popper knew, meant that there was no real prospects for an academic position in Austria for someone with Jewish origins like him, and he had realized that sooner or later he would have to leave his native country. Fellow Viennese émigré scholars, such as the economist Friedrich von Hayek who taught at the London School of Economics and the art historian Ernst Gombrich who was at the time a research assistant at the Warburg Institute, University of London, convinced him that British academia was a place appropriate for him. These were invaluable contacts that helped him secure a position in England after the war. Yet, with no job opening available for him neither in England nor in the USA, Popper had to settle for a less desirable academic appointment as Lecturer in Philosophy and Psychology at Canterbury University College, University of New Zealand, Christchurch. Subsequently, the Poppers moved to New Zealand in March 1937, where they remained throughout the Second World War years.

Despite having acquired a certain level of fame in Europe, Popper was unknown in New Zealand where knowledge of the significance of his contribution to the philosophy of science was minimal. As a result, his feelings about Canterbury College were ambivalent. It seems that the 1938 *Anschluss*, combined with his personal experiences, prompted Popper to make the transition into social and political philosophy, and it was during his years in exile that he began writing the manuscripts of *The Poverty of Historicism* (1957; first published as an extended essay in the journal *Economica* in 1944), and his monumental

2-volume study, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (1945; hereafter *OSE*; discussed in greater detail in section 4). In 1946 Popper moved to England to take up a position that Hayek had helped securing for him at the London School of Economics. He had stayed in England ever since. In October 1946 he addressed a philosophical meeting at Cambridge University attended by his old philosophical rival, Wittgenstein. What turned the encounter into a legend was the fact that in a midst of a philosophical debate between the two giants, Wittgenstein allegedly lost his temper threatened Popper with a poker (Edmonds and Eidinow, 2001). Promoted to professor of logic and scientific method in 1949, Popper's reputation reached its peak in the English-speaking world. In 1950 he was invited to give the distinguished William James Lectures at Harvard University, and became fascinated by what he had found in the United States.

It was not until the fall of 1959 that *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, considered today a classic in the field, appeared in English translation. It was followed in 1962 with the collection *Conjectures and Refutations* and a decade later by *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach*. Popper never had children and was known among his colleagues for his sturdy work ethic and self-discipline, but was also notoriously feared due to his impatience and bad temper towards intellectual foes or slack students. He was knighted in 1965, and retired from teaching in 1969, spending most of his time away from the crowds in his house in Penn, in Buckinghamshire, between London and Oxford. A recorded debate between Popper and Herbert Marcuse, aired in 1971 by a Bavarian Radio, helped him regain recognition outside the UK, and this was followed in 1979 by two honorary degrees from Frankfurt and Salzburg Universities. After his wife's death in 1985, Popper moved to another secluded house in Surrey. Nevertheless, he remained active as a writer, broadcaster and lecturer until his death in September 17, 1994.

3. The backdrop to Popper's Political Thought

It would be impossible to summarize Popper's rich philosophy in its entirety here. Nevertheless, precisely because Popper's theories about politics relied heavily on ideas he developed as a philosopher of science, elucidation of some key ideas Popper developed in his other writings would help illuminating what Popper meant in using the concept "Open Society." *Falsifiability*, providing Popper a criterion to distinguish science from pseudo-science, and *Historicism*, a term which received a highly idiosyncratic meaning in Popper's work, are two of these. Taken together, they provide the backdrop to Popper's political thought and his earned belief in the possibility of progress of human knowledge.

a) Falsifiability as criterion to distinguish science from pseudo-science:

One of Popper's major concerns from an early stage of his career was how to distinguish a scientific hypothesis of the kind Albert Einstein offered in physics from the non-scientific theories of Freud, Adler and Marx. The challenge of establishing this sort of distinction, Popper knew, was that non-scientific theories could also include statements with high informative content based on empirical observations, which could be equally easily couched in an apparently scientific language and jargon. And indeed, one of the classic lines of defense used in favor of what Popper named "pseudo-scientific" theories was to argue that like any scientific theory, Marxism or psychoanalysis are also theories which reached their general rules after gathering of observable empirical data from numerous

individual "test cases." Moreover, it appeared that what made these non-scientific theories so convincing in the eyes of their followers what the fact that any encounter with new observation was interpreted by them as *verifying* the theories in question. As Popper scornfully put it:

> A Marxist could not open a newspaper without funding on every page confirming evidence for his interpretation of history; not only in the news, but also in its presentation–which revealed the class bias of the paper–and especially of course in what the paper did *not* say. The Freudian in analysts emphasized that their theories were constantly verified by their 'clinical observations'. (Popper, 1968: 35)

The common mistake of all of the above was to believe that numerous observations of singular cases could, in principle, validate or verify the theory's general laws. The error was based on a fundamental misunderstanding of the *logical relationship* of empirical observations to the hypothesis itself, Popper argued. Like the vulgar empiricist, they assumed that science progresses through induction, and that the infinite empirical observations confirm the general law. Truly scientific theories, however, were based on deductive reasoning and did exactly the opposite: they began by offering a plausible general rule in the form of a hypothesis and ran a series of tests to see whether the empirical observations fit the hypothesis or not. Crucial to Popper's argument was the assertion that true scientific hypothesis included "risky predictions," that is to say that it expects that in certain circumstances a certain event will take place, and that when designing their empirical tests – whether it is an observation or a laboratory experiment – the scientists are consciously and purposely taking the risk that the test will contradict his hypothesis and thereby refute it.

This, Popper argued, was exactly what impressed him so much about Einstein's theory: it predicted that certain phenomena, known today as Gravitational Lensing, would take place in certain conditions. Einstein, in other words, took a risk when arguing in his general theory of relativity that around a massive object such a galaxy cluster light rays from a background source will be curved. These and other phenomena were highly improbable to occur in the light of the then dominant Newtonian physics. When the English astronomer Arthur Eddington conduced his famous experiments in 1919, observing Einstein predicted to happen a few years earlier, he confirmed (but not verified) Einstein's theory. This did not make Einstein theory "true," yet it did make it scientific. Nothing of this kind happened in the cases of Marxism and psychoanalysis. The fact that Marx's predictions that a social revolution would take placed in an advanced industrial society such as Germany or Britain were failed prophecies was never experienced by his followers is refutation of the theory. Similarly, nothing could, even *in principle*, falsify psychoanalytic theories. Like logical tautologies, these theories resisted refutation, and their followers considered empirical observations as only as a further verifications of the theories, never as their refutations.

From here Popper drew his famous idea that science is not based on *verification* — for it is easy to obtain confirmations, or verifications, for nearly every theory if we look for confirmations, he argued — but is all about *falsifiability* (sometimes referred to as *refutability*): the logical possibility that a scientific hypothesis can be contradicted by an observation or the outcome of a physical experiment. To use Popper's own words:

> If observation shows the predicted effect is definitely absent, then the theory is simply refuted. This theory is *incompatible with certain possible results of observation* […]. Confirmations should count only if they are the result of *risky predictions*; that is to say, if, unenlightened by the theory in question, we should have expected an event which was incompatible with the theory — an event which would have refuted the theory […] Every 'good' scientific theory is a prohibition: it forbids certain things to happen. The more a theory forbids, the better it is. (Popper, 1968: 36)

Popper's theory of knowledge, thus, can be described as "negativistic" or "anti-positivist:" tentativeness and openness to refutability, not the search for reaffirmations, is a hallmark of true scientific theory. This does not mean science never progresses. But this progress is achieved through elimination and rejection of past false theories, not by the quest for certainty. Or to use Popper's own words:

> [A]lthough in science we do our best to find the truth, we are conscious of the fact that we can never be sure whether we have got it. We have learned in the past, from many disappointments, that we must not expect finality. And we have learned not to be disappointed any longer if our scientific theories are overthrown; for we can, in most cases, determine with great confidence which of any theories it the better one. We can therefore know that we are making progress; and it is this knowledge that to most of us atones for the loss of the illusion of finality and certainty. In other words, we know that our scientific theories must always remain hypotheses, but that, in many important cases, we can find out whether or not a new hypothesis is superior to an old one. […] Thus we can say that in our search for truth, we have replaced scientific certainty buy scientific progress. (Popper, 1968: 36)

This negativistic view was sometimes described by Popper and his interpreters through various labels such as "critical realism," "falliblibalism," or "conjectural realism." What is crucial for the sake of our discussion is that the same ideas were applied into politics, allowing Popper to scrutinize not only modern ideologies but also pre-modern political and social theories. Marxism was for him a prime example of a theory that was not refutable by any conceivable event. This characteristic, he argued, was the theory's fundamental flaw, not its virtue. The Marxist believes he "knows" the laws of society and history in a scientific way, ignoring the fact that in real science there is no "knowledge" of this kind, and never allowing for the possibility that his hypothesis would be refuted via encounter with the world of experience. This irrefutability turned Marxism into a dubious pseudo-scientific dogma, masquerading as a scientific theory. A central effort of *OSE* was to apply to same criticisms to thinkers Pooper considered the pre-modern precursors of totalitarianism. This, in discussing Aristotle, for example, Popper recognized a same illusory belief in humans' ability to attain complete and final knowledge (*OSE* 2, chap. 11) which, he argued, later resurfaced in Hegel's metaphysics. In Plato's theories of Forms and Ideas Popper recognized equally erroneous type of "methodological essentialism," a term by which Popper described the belief that "the task of pure knowledge or 'science' [is] to discover and to describe the true nature of things, i.e. their hidden reality or essence." (*OSE*

1, 31). The theory Popper called *historicism*, purposely blurring the distinction between scientific prediction and historical prophecy, had the same flawed characteristics.

b) Historicism (Historizismus):

Because Popper used the term "historicism" in a unique if not even peculiar way, we should begin with a linguistic caveat to avoid unnecessary confusion: The German term *Historismus* (better translated into English as "historism" or "historicity"), popularized in the writings of the historian Friedrich Meinecke, commonly refers to a certain historiographic approach and style of narration, characteristic of nineteenth-century historians who believed that each historical epoch was unique and should be understood (*Verstehen*) in terms of its own ideas and principles. More generally, *Historismus* could also be used to refer the conviction commonly held by historians that social and cultural phenomena cannot be considered independently of their historical context, and that even the study of human behaviors, norms, aesthetics and belief systems cannot be done without reference to its historical context."

It would be a mistake, however, to equate *Historismus* ("historism") with the term "historicism" as Popper had used it. For Popper the term "historicism" stood, first and foremost, for the ardent yet unfound theoretical doctrine that was based on the assumption that history develops inexorably according to certain principles or rules towards the determined end. Historicist for Popper was a thinkers who maintained that one can develop a "social science" that would be conducted from this viewpoint, discover these "natural laws" and, by extension, able to predict future developments in human affairs. Alongside Plato, Hegel and Marx, the three major villains of *OSE*, Popper also mentions the names of August Comte, Oswald Spangler, and Arnold J. Toynbee as representatives of this viewpoint. All of the above believed in the existence of large-scale laws of historical development and in their own ability to discover them and thereby predict future historical changes. And indeed, apart from a small number of speculative historians, it was primarily the philosophers and, in modern times, sociological theorists, who turned out to be historicists.

The historicists' determinist perspective, Popper argued, was objectionable not only due to its ethical implications – for it led to a peculiar type of fatalism, leaving no room for human choice and agency – but also because it was founded what was in fact a blur of the distinction between prophecy and scientific prediction. The historicist is essentially illiberal and anti-individualist, for he "sees individual as a pawn, the somewhat insignificant instrument in the general development of mankind." (*OSE* 1: 7) Every so often what historicists mischaracterize their *interpretations* of history and take them to be "theories." This is a cardinal mistake since "as a rule, these historical 'approaches' or 'points of view' *cannot be tested*. They cannot be refuted, and apparent confirmation are therefore of no value, even if they are as numerous as the stars in the sky." (Popper, 1957: 150) As far as philosophy of history is concerned, Popper's contrary position was that of the indeterminist who holds that history does not evolve in according with intrinsic laws or principles. There might be trends in history, but not immutable laws or blueprints in the strict, Hegelian or Marxist sense. Acknowledging this opens room for human contingency, trial and error.

This argument also helped Popper to draw a line connecting historicism with what he characterized as "holistic" or "Utopian Social Engineering," that is large-scale, sweeping attempts to redesign entire social structures. Utopian planners were guided by earnest belief that "scientific" social planning, almost always coupled with centralized power, could be implemented in order to transform radically existing imperfect structure of human societies. This misguided and dangerous approach ignored the fact humans cannot adequately predict and subsequently plan for unexpected developments, and could be implemented only once all public criticism was effectively suppressed. This doesn't mean, however, that Popper was categorically opposed to *any* type of social intervention and state planning. "Piecemeal social engineering" was the label Popper chose to describe his alternative: this careful, evolutionary rather than revolutionary mechanism of change encourages institutions to attempt alter existing structures in smaller scale, and through a more careful trial and error method. The state, in other words, should concern itself with the task of progressively implementing new social policies to eliminate human misery and suffering, but must do so from a pragmatic, problem-solving perspective of the careful technicians, and never from the bombastic, large-scale ambition of the utopian historicist.

4. "Open Society:" the book and the concept

OSE, Popper's two-volume magnum opus was written in relative seclusion during wartime years in New Zealand. It was published immediately after the war in London. Although presented in hindsight as a lucid analysis of the Cold War's bipolar rivalry, when writing his book Popper knew very little about the Soviet Union and could not have anticipated neither Soviet expansion in Europe nor the containment. As historian Malachi Hacohen writes, when composing his book in exile Popper "envisioned the open society in the image of the scientific community, and use methodological arguments to dissolve political myths he held responsible for the Central European catastrophe." (Hacohen, 2000: 291). The book reiterated and developed many of Popper's earlier criticisms of historicism, and would be better understood if read against that conceptual background and seen as Popper's attempt to offer a historical genealogy of these anti-humanitarian ideas. The aims of the survey were stated boldly: to show that "Modern totalitarianism is only an episode within the perennial revolt against freedom and reason," and that our civilization "has not yet fully recovered from the shock of its birth–the transition from tribal, or 'closed society,' with its submission to medical forces, to the 'open society' which sets free the critical powers of man." (*OSE* 1:xiii; *OSE* 2: 60)

The book is in two volumes. The subtitle of the first volume, *The Spell of Plato*, captures its central premise — namely, that most Plato interpreters through the ages have been seduced by his greatness and failed to acknowledge the historicist, and by extension totalitarian implications of his work. Change, argued Popper, was seen by Plato as a threat that should be arrested. Plato's designed his idealist philosophy accordingly, bringing to the forefront a "methodological essentialism" that was based on the view that the task of pure knowledge is to "discover and to describe the true nature of things, i.e. their hidden reality or essence." (*OSE* 1: 31, 84) These premises were further carried out in Plato's "social science" which led him to produce an authoritarian theory of a state, in which stability is dubbed natural and unavoidable, citizens are requested to confirm with existing laws and taboos, and governance remains a propagative of a master-race of wise

philosopher kings. Volume two, *The High Tide of Prophecy: Hegel, Marx, and the Aftermath*, continues the historical journey: narrated purposely in a provocative and scornful manner it describes Hegel as a hysterical charlatan who radicalized Plato's idealism and historicism, making dialectic a predetermined mechanism of change. (*OSE* 2: chap. 12) Even worse was the fact Hegel was motivated by romantic, tribal instincts, which led him take nationalism seriously. The combination was a reactionary and irrational theory of nation-state, which served well Prussian authoritarianism. Interestingly enough, Marx was no charlatan in Popper's eyes, but a sincere, serious and rigorous thinker who "made an honest attempt to apply rational methods to the most urgent problems of social life" (*OSE* 2:81). Yet, Marx went astray when putting too much stress on scientific prediction of humanity's predetermined future. His adherence to this historicist belief turned him into a rigid determinist. His and his followers' inability to distinguish prophecy from scientific prediction, Popper concluded, explains their behavior in the face of fascism which they expected would prepare the ground for the inevitable revolution (*OSE* 2:163-5). The book ends with discussions of post-Marxist oracular "revolts against reason" and with the bold assertion that our corrupted intellectual and ethical education could not be fixed unless we would acknowledge the fact history has no meaning and that instead of searching for prophets we would become makers of our own fate.

One of the challenges in understanding what Popper exactly meant by the term "Open Society" is not only the fact the term carries an emotional charge but also the fact Popper offers numerous, not entirely commensurable, definitions of the term. He admitted he borrowed the term from Henri Bergson's last book, *Deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (*The Two Sources of Morality and Religion*; 1932). The French philosopher contrasted between, on the one hand, closed morality and static religion that are concerned with production and maintenance of social cohesion through rigid moral rules, and, on the other hand, a more open and dynamic morality characteristic of a less fear-driven society, wishing to promote creativity and progress. However, despite some resemblance between Bergson and Popper's distinctions, Popper changed the terms original meanings quite drastically.

Moreover, Popper had scattered throughout his book comments that allow us to understand the distinction between open and closed societies in multiple ways, as referring to sociological ideal-types, different historical stages, the difference between belief and science, or as indicating different types of human discourse and interaction. Sociologically speaking, while Popper refers to herds, tribes, villages, or small-scale semi-organic communities (*gemeinschaft*) as examples of closed societies, the open society can be understood as a certain advanced stage of development of the civil society (*gesellschaft*) in which organic ties are replaced by individualism and personal responsibility. Different inter-personal communication mechanisms operate in each case. Thus, while the closed societies maintain a strong group identity through taboos, myths and superstitions, free exchange of ideas between individuals and critical rationalism are the daily experiences of the dwellers of the latter. Adding a historical dimension to his analysis, Popper often speaks of a gradual transition from the former to the latter, of replacement of one type by the other. Nevertheless, although the concept open society directs our attention to obviously central features of modern Western societies nowhere does Popper offer a theory to explain or evaluate them. Moreover, it would be a mistake to see the dichotomy as a distinction between ancient and modern societies. As his sporadic comments about ancient Sparta and

Athens show, Popper had no principle problem thinking of closed and open societies as existing simultaneously, side-by-side, and as his discussion of Hegel and Marx shows, he believed that modernization neither made closed societies extinct nor eliminated dogmatic thinking. At times Popper hinted that commercial societies, coming in contact with other civilization, are more inclined to question their own tribal self-understanding and thus gradually transform into open societies, yet he never described it as the sole ingredient of open societies or as the indispensable, *sine qua non conditio* for their formation.

For that reason, the distinction could be better understood as referring to two types of human discourse and exchange backed by two opposing political and philosophical theories that, in principle and in practice, can exist simultaneously. Moreover, it is a distinction that relies heavily on Popper's earlier philosophical distinctions between pseudo-scientific thinking and critical rationalism. Open Society could be thus understood as a gradual yet not inevitable process in which semi-biological ties of kinship are being replaced by individualism and humanitarianism. In the latter condition critical rationalism flourishes alongside lively communication: here ideas are in constant flow and exchange, and theories are constantly debated and replaced by new ones, in accordance with the conjectural refutation model. It is tempting to read it as a eulogist vision of a cosmopolitan society, in which individuals break loose from tribal bonds that previously coerced mankind through means of myth and censorship. Yet there is also a dark side to this brave new world, for Popper describes the Open Society quite explicitly also as a place where egoist interests of individuals are the driving force of all change, and as an "abstract" and "fictitious" society, in which "men practically never meet face to face – in which all business is conducted by individuals in isolation" using sophisticated communication technologies, and where many people "have no, or extremely few, intimate personal contacts, who live in anonymity and isolation." (*OSE* 1: 174-5).

5. Reception and Critical Evaluation

Popper's ideas had enjoyed a somewhat ambivalent reception. Throughout the years his books were translated into 40 languages and numerous world leaders such as the German Chancellor Helmut Kohl, Czechoslovakia's last President Václav Havel, the Costa Rican President and Nobel Laureate Oscar Arias Sanchez and even the Dalai Lama asked for his consult and admitted they were influenced by his ideas. Since its initial publication *OSE* has gone through innumerable editions and translations into many languages, and entered the Modern Library Board's list of 100 Best Nonfiction books of the 20th century. Academics had an unequal opinion of Popper, however. While his uncompromising attack on Marxism and historical determinism was hailed by leading Cold War liberals such as Arthur Koestler, Sidney Hook and even had an enormous influence on Isaiah Berlin, he was criticized by E. H. Carr who accused him of emptying the term historicism of precise meaning (Carr, 1962). His views regarding the gradual yet consistent progress of science through constant processes of error elimination were seriously challenged by Thomas Kuhn, who focused his attention on what he described as the radical paradigmatic shifts which eventually culminate in scientific revolutions (Fuller, 2004). Many Plato scholars were appalled by Popper's vehemently hostile description of the classical Greek philosopher and his political thought (Bambrough, 1967). Subsequently, the book had very little impact on classicists, and only a limited number of contemporary historians are

willing to trace back the genealogy of twentieth century totalitarianism all the way back to the 4th century BC.

There is no doubt that the Cold War's ideological cleavages helped Popper attain his worldly reputation. Although he formulated his major political ideas against a different background, he had all the personal and intellectual credentials to become a leading cold warrior and had no objection that *OSE* and his other writings would be read as anti-communist manifestos in defense of liberal democracy. In subsequent years, however, it was often caricaturized, misread as and criticized for being a quasi-libertarian scrutinizing, in a spirit akin to that of Friedrich Hayek, not only Communism but any type of social planning and welfare state. Interestingly but not surprisingly, Popper's political writings were taken up with special enthusiasm after the Soviet collapse in the 1990s in post-communist eastern European countries, and he was avidly read – and translated – by those who wished to revitalize their democratic traditions. (Ash, 1995: 40; Abramitzky & Sin, 2010). Georges Soros, the Hungarian-born investor and philanthropist who established the Open Society Foundation to help countries make the transition to democracy, explicitly relied on Popper and continued that trend, and every so often he and others described the European Union as the embodiment of Popper's lofty ideal.

Inclusion of Popper's name in an encyclopedia dedicated to Jewish culture probably causes him to turn over in his grave: Popper did not only reject Jewish identity but also had a very negative view of Judaism and modern Jewish nationalism. In several occasions he went as far as presenting the Hebrew Bible as the *urtext* of intolerant religious persecution and tribal nationalism, and accused Babylonian Jewry for developing in exile the dangerous doctrine of the "chosen people," later hijacked by modern racists and chauvinist ethno-nationalists. He considered early Christianity to be "protest against Jewish tribalism, against its rigid and empty tribal taboos, and against its tribal exclusiveness," and attempt to supersede "Jewish parochial tribalism by internationalism." (*OSE* 2, 22 and 301) He described the Jewish ghettos of Eastern Europe as hotbeds of this petrified form of tribalism, and stressed in his 1963 autobiography his unwillingness to define himself as an assimilated Jew for the category itself, he believed, was based on ethnic if not even racist reification. Moreover, in the rare occasion in which he made his views about Zionism vocal, he clarified that he considered that the colossal mistake, a dark reaction against the ideals of Enlightenment and universalism.

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