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Abstrakt:

Diese Arbeit behandelt die Beiträge Karl Poppers zu den Sozialwissenschaften im Hinblick auf seine Nähe zur und Engagement mit der österreichischen Sozialdemokratie und die zentrale Bedeutung dieser Ideen angesichts der prekären Lage der liberalen Demokratie im 21. Jahrhundert. Die Sozialdemokratie wird erläutert als eine egalitäre Tradition innerhalb des klassischen Liberalismus, die während der Zeit der „Wiener Spätaufklärung“ 1918-1938, die einzige demokratische Kraft im Land war. Poppers Wissenschaftsphilosophie und ihre Verbindung zu seiner politischen und Moralphilosophie werden in diesem Zusammenhang erläutert. Durch seine akribische Marxkritik gelingt es Popper, eine rationale kantische Interpretation von Marx aufzustellen. Diese Interpretation ist in der Lage, Marx' Philosophie von ihren negativen hegelianischen Zügen zu befreien. Poppers Einsichten liefern eine wissenschaftliche Basis für eine Neuausrichtung der Sozialdemokratie als essenzielles Gegengewicht zum Neoliberalismus. Poppers sozialdemokratisches Programm der stückweisen Sozialtechnik als rationale Form des Interventionismus steht als vernünftiger Mittelweg den irrationalen Positionen von Links und Rechts gegenüber. Das Schisma zwischen den zwei großen liberalen Strömungen, mit der sozialdemokratischen Mischwirtschaft auf der einen Seite und dem neoliberalen Marktfundamentalismus auf der anderen Seite, wird von Popper als „Fatal Split“, *tödliche Spaltung*, beklagt. Diese Spaltung wird hier durch eine wissenschaftliche und programmatische Auseinandersetzung zwischen Popper und dem einflussreichen Ökonomen der österreichischen Schule der Nationalökonomie, Ludwig von Mises, erörtert. In weiterer Folge wird die These aufgestellt, dass diese Spaltung, die noch immer besteht, eine wesentliche Ursache für die extreme Polarisierung innerhalb des Westens ist und dass Poppers Ideen Lösungsansätze bieten, um den Liberalismus aus seiner derzeitigen Krise zu befreien.

Abstract:

This thesis deals with Karl Popper's contributions to the social sciences with regard to his proximity to and engagement with Austrian Social Democracy and with the vital importance of these ideas in light of the precarious state of liberal democracy in the 21st century. Social Democracy is explored as an egalitarian tradition within classical liberalism that, during the time of the „Viennese Late Enlightenment“, represented the only democratic force in the country. Popper's philosophy of science and its connection to his political and moral philosophy are illustrated in this context. Through his detailed critical analysis of Marx Popper is able to advance a rational Kantian interpretation of Marxism. This interpretation manages to free Marx's philosophy of its harmful Hegelian elements. Popper's insights provide a scientific basis for a repositioning of Social Democracy as an essential counterweight to Neo-liberalism. Popper's Social Democratic program of piecemeal social engineering as a rational form of intervention stands as a reasonable middle way between the irrational positions of the left and the right. The schism between the two main tendencies in liberalism, between the Social Democratic mixed economy on the one hand and the neo-liberal market fundamentalism on the other is what Popper condemned as the “fatal split“. This split is investigated here through a methodological and programmatic comparison between Popper and influential Austrian economist Ludwig von Mises. In turn the thesis is maintained that this split, which is still in effect, is a significant cause of the extreme polarization taking place in the West and that Popper's ideas offer possible ways of saving liberalism from its present crisis.

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Preface:

“Looking over a century that knew two world wars and put the survival of civilization in question, I have sought to rescue, from amid the ruins, hope and vision for the next century. Popper is their embodiment.”¹

So ends Malachi Haim Hacoheh’s monumental Popper biography. It will be the aim of this thesis to demonstrate why this pronouncement is not an exaggeration.

Published in 2000, capping humanity’s bloodiest century, Hacoheh’s book captures and resurrects the life and spirit of an era that is long gone but not forgotten. It is the vibrant, liberatory cosmopolitan “world of Fin-de-siecle progressivism and Red Vienna”² that dared to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat, to build a new world upon the ashes of The Great War.

After the reaction of the 1848 crackdown, the Danube monarchy experienced a gradual period of liberalization. The constitutional reforms of 1867 gave Jews full equal rights. Vienna’s Jewish citizens had finally found a home after centuries of segregation, marginalization, and oppression. Within an astoundingly short time they became enormously successful. “They dominated the liberal professions. In the 1880s, they constituted over half of the medical doctors in Vienna, and about three-fifths of the lawyers.”³

¹ (Hacoheh, 2000), p 551

² (Hacoheh, 2000)

³ (Hacoheh, 2000)p. 29

Hacohen describes how through their embrace of liberal Kantian Germanism, *Deutschtum*, Vienna's Jews, together with their liberal⁴ and socialist allies, formed the basis of a cosmopolitan and egalitarian cultural movement that Friedrich Stadler has referred to as the Viennese Late Enlightenment, *Spätaufklärung*⁵

Those who survived the interwar years and their aftermath bore witness to the downfall of this culture and this hope. The rational progressive cosmopolitanism of the time, the only force capable of resolving central Europe's ethno-political conundrums, was destroyed by the poison of nationalism and anti-Semitism, and was finally annihilated by fascism. The cultural loss that Central European powers suffered by this willful act of self-mutilation is hardly fathomable. Their best, their brightest, their most productive citizens were exiled and exterminated, not for their vices but for their virtues, and what is left is a mere shadow of its former self.

However, before it was all drowned in blood, during that fleeting moment of hope, a young man of extraordinary intelligence and moral character came of age. Karl Popper was born the son of a successful lawyer in Vienna in 1902. The Poppers were assimilated Jews, converts to Lutheranism, with interests in music philosophy and culture; as a boy Karl made use of his father's extensive

⁴ Wherever the term "liberal" appears in this thesis it refers to the historically rooted sense of the word used by Popper, that is to say to the Neo-Classical Enlightenment liberalism of Locke, Montesquieu, Paine, Kant, Humboldt, etc. That is to say, it refers to the philosophical tradition that favors individual rights, freedom of expression, popular sovereignty and seeks to counteract tyrannical power. It does not refer to the implicitly "left wing" North American use of the word, or any "woke" connotation thereof. It is also distinct from the authoritarian market fundamentalist policies of Neo-liberalism. (N.B: In keeping with Popper's anti-essentialism, I must point out emphatically that this is not a definition, but rather a historical exposition of the tradition the word is associated with, a word that has unfortunately been severely abused by in contemporary political discourse)

⁵ (Stadler, *The Vienna Circle: studies in the origins, development and influence of logical empiricism* , 2001)

14, 000 volume library and was already auditing university classes at 16. With his revolutionary contributions to philosophy and social science Karl Popper became one of the most important and influential philosophers of the 20th Century.

It will be my aim in this thesis to elucidate the connections between Popper's philosophy of science and his political and moral philosophy, and to outline the importance of this philosophy for the present day, particularly in recreating the rational progressivism of Social Democracy. This, I will argue, is essential for preserving what Popper described as The Open Society⁶, that is to say our western liberal democratic civilization, which is increasingly threatened by the reemergence of the kind of irrationalism, tribalism and authoritarianism that in Popper's own day "put the survival of civilization in question"⁷ and could now very well put an end to it altogether.

⁶ In the text of this thesis every instance of the term Open Society or The Open Society (unitalicized) is meant to refer to the society that Popper describes and advocates in his book. Similarly, the opposite type of society that Popper rejects will be capitalized and unitalicized as "The Closed Society". Every instance with these words italicized such as *The Open Society*, or its full version *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, refers to the book itself.

⁷ (Hacohen, 2000) p. 551

Introduction:

In May of 1943 Karl Popper wrote a letter to his friend Ernst Gombrich in England asking for his help in finding a publisher for a book he had just written. He describes the 700-page manuscript he was proposing to send him as “a new philosophy of politics and of history, and an examination of the principles of democratic reconstruction.”⁸ Given that place and time, England in the Middle of WWII, the prospect of such a philosophy that could also offer “an understanding of the totalitarian revolt against civilization”⁹ was something that was, no doubt, devoutly to be wished.

The working title at the time was “A Political Philosophy for Everyman” and, unlike many other philosophers, whose convoluted texts are often mere obscurantism, Popper indeed writes for “everyman”; that is to say, he writes to be *understood*, to teach and not to “bewitch the reader”¹⁰ with “high sounding verbiage”. This ethos of *clarity* is part and parcel of Popper’s rational humanitarianism, the origins of which he attributes to the egalitarianism of the “Great Generation”¹¹ of Pericles and Socrates, an egalitarianism that has had to defend itself against its aristocratic enemies throughout history. As Gombrich duly emphasizes, the depth of Popper’s analysis of totalitarianism would lie in Popper’s ability to show that the revolt against civilization “is as old as our democratic civilization itself.”¹²

⁸ (Gombrich, "Personal Recollections of the Publication of The Open Society", 2002/2013)

⁹ (Gombrich, "Personal Recollections of the Publication of The Open Society", 2002/2013)

¹⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Popper quoting Schopenhauer on Hegel, p. 237

¹¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 67

¹² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. xxiv

It would take another two years for the book, hence known to us as *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, to be published. This work launched Popper's career internationally and has become one of the most influential books of the 20th century. It represents a fusion, on the basis of his philosophy of science, of the natural and the social sciences. It "offers an explanatory hypothesis for the persistent hostility to the open society".¹³ It was, however, only the starting point. In later publications and lectures he expanded and developed his ideas on social science methodology further. Although he focused more on the natural sciences toward the end of his career, the problems of social theory remained a key interest of his until the end. His work on the science of society, which is closely linked to his philosophy of science, provides, I would argue, a point of departure and a crucial impetus, if further developed, for the development of a comprehensive methodology to solve what have been some of the most pressing problems in social theory till this day.

The current state in critical reception of Popper's work in the social sciences shows a tremendously wide range of interpretations. He has for years been invoked by both the left and the right; the left leaning interpretations, like that of Haim Hacohen emphasize the Social Democracy of his "formative years", whereby the work of Jeremy Shearmur, Hannes Gissurarson and others stresses his more conservative later years. On the basis of what Popper has actually written and its implications for the current state of liberal democratic society, I tend to stress the centrality of his formative years, that is of his contributions to Social Democracy, a position that I will establish systematically in this work.

¹³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. xxv

My thesis in a nutshell is the following:

*Karl Popper's work on the social sciences provides the impetus for a rational humanist egalitarianism that I refer to as Social Democracy, where this term refers to a continuation of the Viennese liberal democratic tradition thereof, a tradition that is just as, if not more, needed in our own day.*¹⁴

Popper's values and understanding of society correspond very closely to those defended by Vienna's Social Democratic labor movement in its heroic struggle for freedom and democracy against the rising tide of totalitarianism. Furthermore, Popper's discoveries in the fields of the philosophy of science and social theory, though consciously not articulated as a "system", build a coherent whole with far reaching ramifications beyond the ideas in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, the book that he termed his "war effort". Ian Jarvie, one of Popper's PhD students and professor of philosophy at York University in Toronto, has identified Popper's philosophical project from 1935-1945 as a "social turn" in the philosophy of science that began already with his writing of *Logik der Forschung*, 1934.¹⁵

This "social turn" is just one of the many ways in which Popper's approach toward *the unity of scientific method* helps to provide an effective rational methodology applicable to both the natural and the social sciences. I will show that this approach to the unity of science has only become more relevant in the

¹⁴ My use of the term Social Democracy in "the Viennese liberal democratic tradition thereof" refers not to the specific historical development of Austrian social democracy but rather to the general rational and anti-authoritarian tendency to reinterpret Marx's contributions to social theory, adapting them to changing circumstances so as to reach the kind of balance between state and corporate power characteristic of Austria as well as what can be viewed as the general western European mixed economy model. (See section 4.4.2 "The Necessity of Intervention" below)

¹⁵ (Jarvie, 2001) pp. 9-23 The book referred to was later published in English in 1958 under the title *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. The "social turn" Jarvie refers to consists in the intersubjective critical discussion of and comparison of conjectural theories within the scientific community, something Popper viewed as indispensable to the rationality and progress of science.

21st century¹⁶. The Popperian critique of the pernicious doctrines of his day¹⁷ are just as effective when brought to bear against contemporary ills. These trends include the reactionary nationalism of today's "anti-globalists", the various forms of Clerical fascism, both Muslim and Christian, the irrational tribalism and relativism of the regressive "left", and the authoritarian market fundamentalism of so-called "libertarians".

A careful reading of Popper's analysis reveals the reasons for the continued existence of these ills. They are in part the outgrowth of what Popper called "the typical backwardness of the social sciences"¹⁸. I will argue that in some areas this backwardness continues till this day¹⁹. More specifically these ills, which our social science fails to deal with rationally, are ills which partially overlap and partially exacerbate one another, and are the irrational responses to what Popper referred to as "the strain of civilization", the strain caused by living in a world that is free, that develops, that changes. They are the

¹⁶ Scientific objectivity is eroded from both the natural and the social sciences by various relativist schools of thought that tend to conflate science and ideology, or knowledge with "strong belief".

¹⁷ What is here meant by "pernicious doctrines" are all the doctrines essential to the twin totalitarianisms of the 20th Century: fascism and communism. In Popper's view these movements were in large part an outgrowth of the downfall of rationality caused by Hegelianism which served as a bridge between the modern and the ancient enemies of The Open Society.

¹⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 459 In Popper's Day much of this "backwardness" was characteristic of the extreme reactionary historicism and collectivism of right Hegelians like Othmar Spann, Oswald Spengler and others. His criticism was also aimed at the historicism and Hegelian "dialectics" within Marxism, and thus is applicable to contemporary forms of Critical Theory that have come down from the *Frankfurter Schule* associated with the "New Left". (See note 34 regarding the term "historicism")

¹⁹ Some examples of these faulty social theories that will be examined in this thesis are: 1) psychologism: the, for Popper, misguided attempt to explain the behavior of social aggregates on the basis of innate and "immutable" "human nature" and the related tradition of deriving social contract theory therefrom, 2) the attempt to found economic theory on purely a priori methods 3) schools of thought like that of "the sociology of knowledge" of Karl Manheim and others as well as the "critical theory" of the Frankfurter Schule that tend to conflate science and ideology. 4) The incommensurability thesis of Kuhn. 5) Institutional essentialism in contemporary Jurisprudence 6) Authoritarian forms of market fundamentalism 7) the failure to maintain the same scientific standards of clarity and objectivity in the social sciences as are maintained in the natural sciences.

reactionary and poisonous failures of our social theories and hence our social institutions²⁰ to deal effectively and rationally with the problems inherent in the Open Society.

By failing to correct social ills like poverty, corruption, and hopelessness that result from institutional dysfunction, faulty social policy informed by backward social science has fostered the present disunity among the rationalist defenders of freedom, a disunity that has, as always, been easily exploited by tyrants and demagogues. Popper explains in depth and in detail the ways that the totalitarianism of the 20th century evolved out of the pernicious philosophical movements emanating from German idealism. Authoritarian movements, past and present, particularly those that establish themselves by overthrowing a democratic republic, are the result of inadequate social theory resulting from obscurantist philosophies. All forms of authoritarianism are either based on a profoundly unscientific approach to social theory or are even consciously hostile to science or to rationality itself.²¹ The long-term consequences of these doctrines today are also the same as those of their predecessors; their unavoidable effects are the destruction of democracy, of equality, of freedom, of science and of all progress. In short, they result in the replacement of the Open Society with the Closed Society, the closed society of arrested development, and the dictatorship of “natural masters” over “natural slaves”.²²

²⁰ It will become clear in this thesis that Popper, like Marx, takes an institutional approach to sociology as opposed to an approach based on psychology i.e., psychologism. (See Ch.4)

²¹ This includes both the open hostility toward reason advanced by authoritarian religion along with its political manifestations in absolutism and fascism as well as the pseudo-rationalist destruction of reason inherent in Hegelian dialectics as employed by the totalitarian left.

²² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 67

Popper's advocacy of the Open Society is founded on his recognition of the importance of scientific rationality for the progress of humankind, combined with his recognition of the fact that it is only within the Open Society that the free exercise of criticism, and hence science itself, is possible. Thus, science, rationality, and liberal democracy are all intertwined, co-determined and co-dependent on one another. In his own time the forces waged against reason and the Open Society led to totalitarianism and world war.

However, the assault on the essential rationality of The Open Society is alive and well today and, according to Francis Fukuyama, in his most recent book, this philosophical assault has contributed to a "deep cognitive crisis" "facing modern democracies" that has helped to place us in a post fact universe in which "nothing is true and everything is possible"²³. Rationality has always been anathema to authoritarian religion and to its absolutist and fascist offshoots. We also see Clero-fascist tendencies today in Vladimir Putin's neo-absolutist Orthodox revival, in fundamentalist Islam and in Donald Trump's evangelical MAGA movement. In addition to this, the systematic demolition of liberal enlightenment rationality by the left in the form of post-modernism and critical theory has led to unintended consequences. "The postmodernist critique of liberalism and its associated cognitive methods has now drifted over to the right."²⁴ Liberalism, the Open Society, is now faced with unprecedented challenges from both the left and the right. It is challenged by doctrines openly hostile to scientific rationality that have now coalesced in the forces arrayed against the West by the Post-modern²⁵ fascism of Putin's

²³ (Fukuyama, 2022) Ch. 6 "The Critique of Rationality"

²⁴ (Fukuyama, 2022) Ch. 6 "The Critique of Rationality"

²⁵ Post-modernism has been explicitly invoked by, for example, Alexander Dugin, a prominent Russian fascist philosopher in order to justify the relativist approach of Russian propaganda. BBC interview (46) [Aleksandr Dugin: 'We have our special Russian truth' - BBC Newsnight - YouTube](#) Also according to

Russia and its allied movements in the West in a bid to change the global order against liberalism with their war on Ukraine.²⁶

It is his profound understanding of the philosophical roots of totalitarianism and their attendant problem situations and his insight into how to fight back with our reason that form the basis for Popper's lasting contribution to humanity, a contribution that must be taken up and further developed if we are to avoid the impending doom of the Open Society.

1. Chapter 1: The Viennese Late Enlightenment and Red Vienna

In order to fully grasp the foundations of Popper's basic ethical and political orientation, it is necessary to examine the cultural milieu that formed him and the specific historical "problem situation" in which he and the other Social Democrats of his day found themselves, that is in the building and safeguarding of a new democracy of their own making in the face of great poverty, instability and the looming fascist threat. Popper's view of life was formed in the crucible of Austria's post-war democratic revolution of 1918, in Social Democratic Vienna during the time of the *Viennese Late Enlightenment*.²⁷ It was a time of great hardships that tempered the mettle of great hopes. Like the 18th century Enlightenment, the Viennese late Enlightenment was a philosophical, cultural

Timothy Schneider the term or rather tactic of "fake news", that is to say attacking established media as "fake news" in order to discredit it, in Russia this was done in part by intentionally leaking false information, was first employed by Putin's government during its successful campaign to replace independent media with state TV and media controlled by Kremlin loyalists. It was a tactic famously taken over by Donald Trump. (Schneider, 2018)

²⁶ (Schneider, 2018) (See also Ch. 6 of this thesis)

²⁷ The Term „Viennese Late Enlightenment“ (*Wiener Spätaufklärung*) was coined by Friedrich Stadler of the University of Vienna, see (Stadler, "Spätaufklärung und Sozialdemokratie in Wien 1918–1938. Soziologisches und Ideologisches zur Spätaufklärung in Österreich", 1981) pp. 466-468

and political movement for the emancipation of mankind, but in the new context of industrialization this meant the enlightenment faith in human progress could embrace all classes, including the poorest.²⁸ Between 1919²⁹ and 1934, against incredible odds, the most astounding reforms for the material, intellectual and spiritual liberation of the working class ever imagined became a reality.

1.1 Popper's Viennese Enlightenment

Two points must be stressed here in order to grasp the importance of this movement. The first is that, as I indicated above, this *Late Enlightenment* was taking place in an industrializing society. That means that its egalitarian program as expressed in the slogan of 1789³⁰, was one for which the material conditions for its practical realization were being provided.³¹ That is to say it was an enlightenment that reached down to liberate the minds and spirits of the very poorest of society, the masses of the servile class, the peasants who had become the industrial proletariat³². The second key point is that the Social

²⁸ The dependence of modern mass democracy on the industrial revolution has been quite obvious to any serious political economist for years. Not until the mechanical revolution and industrialization was it possible to replace the toil of the servile class with that of machines and thus allow for an egalitarian society above the level of the stone age to exist. (See section 4.4.2.2 below regarding historical materialism)

²⁹ 1919 saw the first municipal elections conducted in Vienna under universal suffrage. This was a hard fought for achievement of the Social Democratic labor movement it was first achieved for men in 1907 and then for women in 1918. The Viennese election of 1919 resulted in an absolute majority for the Social Democrats of 54.2%. Universal male suffrage was in place from the 1907 election onwards, but only for the parliament; the municipal elections still excluded the working class and women until after WWI.

³⁰ *Liberte, Egalite, Fraternite*, -- Liberty, Equality, Brotherhood. These three values are represented in the three downward pointing arrows of the Social Democrats party emblem.

³¹ See section 4.4.2.2 below regarding historical materialism

³² It should be pointed out here that in the First Republic it was certainly not the case that all or the vast majority of the peasant class had become industrial workers; industry, though advanced, was highly concentrated in the cities. Industrial workers made up about 32% of the laboring classes as against about 20% agricultural workers. This significant rural and highly religious population was to become an important factor for the later growth of Austrian Clerical Fascism. In Russia the situation was even more

Democratic Party that brought it all about was by and large a *liberal* party very much in the tradition of classical enlightenment liberalism; that is to say its theoreticians believed freedom took precedence over all else but that *liberty and democracy, that is to say freedom and equality were one and the same goal; they represented two sides of the same coin* and were not taken to be mutually exclusive as is the case with market fundamentalists.³³

As we will see, much of the philosophical work done by the so-called “Austro-Marxists” and later more profoundly by Popper himself was to adapt and revise both Marxism and liberalism. On the one hand the humanitarian values of classical liberalism are adapted by means of a Marxist analysis to the previously ignored consequences of industrialization, and on the other hand, in the case of Popper at least, Marx’s philosophy is purified of its Hegelian³⁴ obscurantism and historicism³⁵. In great contrast to many false perceptions regarding socialism, Austria’s Social Democrats were and are a consistently non-violent and democratic party through and through. Not only did these socialists stick to

pronounced; the industrial workers were only about 6% of the population. This is an important reason for Russia’s failure to create a socialist society after the revolution of 1917.

³³ Later on, Popper became more conservative with age and questioned the compatibility of equality and freedom: “*I remained a socialist for several years, even after my rejection of Marxism; and if there could be such a thing as socialism combined with individual liberty, I would be a socialist still. For nothing could be better than living a modest, simple, and free life in an egalitarian society. It took some time before I recognized this as no more than a beautiful dream; that freedom is more important than equality; that the attempt to realize equality endangers freedom; and that, if freedom is lost, there will not even be equality among the unfree.*” (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 35. However, it seems clear here that the equality Popper is talking about is equality of outcomes and not equality of opportunity. (See section 5.1 “A Preliminary Discourse on Equality” below)

³⁴ In contradistinction to many of the Austro-Marxists, Popper was highly critical of Hegel and his influence on philosophy, especially on Marxism. Otto Bauer and Max Adler, on the other hand, stuck to the Hegelian elements of Marxism, a fact that explains much of Popper’s criticism of the Marxism of his day and his Kantian reinterpretation of Marx. (See section 1.2.2 “Liberal Kantian Approach to Socialism”).

³⁵ Historicism, a doctrine rampant on both the left and the right in Popper’s Day, is the determinist belief in the ability of a theorist to predict the inevitable course of history.

their rejection of violent revolution and their adherence to parliamentary democracy until the end, perhaps even longer than they should have³⁶, when the democratic state was threatened by Bolshevik insurrection³⁷, it was not the right-wing parties but the Social Democrats themselves³⁸ that kept them in check both by tactics and by force.³⁹ In the democratic Austrian First Republic, that they themselves brought about, the Social Democratic Labor Party was not merely *a* democratic party, it was in fact the *only* democratic party in the country.

Over 100 years ago, in 1919, Vienna was the first city of over a million people in the world to elect a social democratic mayor, and besides the puppet mayors under fascism, the city, which has the highest quality of life rating in the world⁴⁰, has, to the *present day*, been under the leadership of the Social Democrats.

Both Popper and the “Austro-Marxists” adapted Marx’s ideas to the realities of the successful political efforts that had yielded genuine improvements in the

³⁶ (Hacohen, 2000) On their failure to use violence against the fascists: “*The socialist leaders were flowers of the European intelligentsia, humanists and visionaries, lovers of peace and civility, an inimitable model of political leadership. They were not fighters. An insufficient commitment to democracy was not their problem; an excessive one was.*”

³⁷ It should be pointed out that a big part of the reason Otto Bauer had rejected the idea of soviet style seizure of power was because the material reality that the rump post-war republic found itself in meant that it would likely not be able to feed its population without the continued aid of the allies, aide that would be cut off had the Bolsheviks taken over. Bauer, like many at the time both on the left and right, believed a unification with Germany necessary for Austria to survive. Unlike the German Social Democrats, however, the Austrians remain united and were able to avoid the destructive blood feud between communists and social democrats that arose after the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht (Gulick, 1948) pp. 64-84

³⁸ (Gulick, 1948) see Ch. IV “The Struggle Against Bolshevism” pp. 69-83

³⁹ (Gulick, 1948) see Ch. IV “The Struggle Against Bolshevism” pp. 69-83

⁴⁰ Grace Dean “Vienna Ranked World’s Most Livable City. No US Cities Made the Top Ten”, *Business Insider*, June 24, 2022 [Vienna Ranked World's Most Livable City; No US Cities in Top 10 \(businessinsider.com\)](https://www.businessinsider.com/vienna-ranked-worlds-most-livable-city-no-us-cities-in-top-10)

lives of the working class since the time of Marx's writing.⁴¹ Hence the social democrats rejected violence, put their faith in parliamentary democracy and effectively prevented Bolshevik insurrection⁴². That is why any notion that fascism somehow deserves praise because it "saved European civilization"⁴³ bears no relation to historical fact.

Under the leadership of this party "Red Vienna" was a laboratory of progress. Between 1923-1934 the city built more than 380 housing estates with over 64,000 apartments. These complexes were provided with playgrounds, schools, washing facilities, kindergartens, dentists, public baths, schools and libraries. People who had been *literally* living in holes dug into the ground were suddenly living in bright, comfortable living quarters where they could raise their children as human beings, in a new world where they could not only survive but flourish both physically, mentally and culturally.

As Walther Federn writes in his forward to Charles Gulick's voluminous history of the period:

⁴¹ Roughly around 1867, the publishing of the first volume of Capital.

⁴² It should be pointed out that a big part of the reason Otto Bauer had rejected the idea of soviet style seizure of power was because the material reality that the rump post-war republic found itself in meant it would likely not be able to feed its population without the continued aid of the allies, aid that would be cut off had the Bolsheviks taken over. Bauer, like many at the time, both on the left and right, believed a unification with Germany necessary for Austria to survive. Unlike the German Social Democrats, however, the Austrians were able to avoid the destructive blood feud between communists and social democrats that arose after the murders of Rosa Luxemburg and Karl Liebknecht that did so much damage to their ability to ward off Hitler. (Gulick, 1948) pp. 64-84

⁴³ (Mises, *Liberalismus*, 1927)p. 45 German: „Es kann nicht geleugnet werden, daß der Faschismus und alle ähnlichen Diktaturbestrebungen voll von den besten Absichten sind und daß ihr Eingreifen für den Augenblick die europäische Gesittung gerettet hat. Das Verdienst, das sich der Faschismus damit erworben hat, wird in der Geschichte ewig fortleben.“:
English: "It cannot be denied that fascism and all the similar dictatorial tendencies are full of the best intentions and that their intervention has, for the moment, saved European civilization. The achievement that fascism has thereby earned for itself will live on eternally in history."

“The Socialist administration of Vienna fostered health-improvement programs, combated the high infant mortality, and worked to curb tuberculosis. The city built hospitals, maternity homes, kindergartens, day homes for children, public baths, playgrounds, and parks. The party promoted all kinds of sports—swimming, mountain climbing, hiking, and skiing—to acquaint the workers with the beauties which nature had bestowed so prodigiously on their homeland. Intellectual and artistic activities were not neglected, for the people were provided with low-priced tickets for theaters, concerts and museums”⁴⁴

The labor movement rested on three pillars: The Social Democratic Workers Party (the forerunner to today’s SPÖ), The Labor Unions, and The Cooperative Societies. There were dozens of workers associations like the consumer cooperatives dedicated to producing and distributing food at affordable prices, as well as clubs devoted to sports and all kinds of recreation. There were other associations dedicated to advising poor mothers on the care of their newborn children and providing for their immediate necessities. To improve the education of the working class, a long overdue school reform movement was initiated as well as a network of “People’s Universities” (*Volkshochschulen*) and dozens of “worker’s libraries”. These feats and many more were all achieved during the time of extreme economic crises and political polarization after the great war.

In a chapter of his autobiography describing his own disappointing attempts at becoming a manual laborer, Karl Popper describes his admiration for the workers’ movement of Red Vienna:

“Perhaps this is the place to say how much I admired the workers of Vienna and their great movement—led by the social democratic party... Their leaders were able to inspire them with a marvelous faith in their mission, which was nothing less, they believed, than the liberation of mankind. Although the social democratic movement was largely atheistic ... the whole movement was inspired by what can only be described as an ardent religious and humanitarian faith. It was a movement of the workers to educate themselves in order to fulfil their

⁴⁴ (Gulick, 1948) p. viii

*'historic mission'; to emancipate themselves, and thus to help liberate mankind; and above all, to end war. In their restricted spare time many workers, young and old, went to extension courses, or to one of the "People's Universities" (Volkshochschulen). They took a great interest not only in self-education but in the education of their children, and in improving housing conditions. It was an admirable program. ... These activities were all peaceful, and they were carried on in an atmosphere poisoned by fascism and latent civil war'*⁴⁵

As we see in this excerpt and will see in more detail below, much of this "marvelous...ardent religious and humanitarian faith" had infected the young Popper to the very core of his being.

1.2 Popper and the Austro-Marxists⁴⁶

Popper's engagement with Marx and with Marxism plays a central role in Popper's approach to social science. It is an engagement that has been widely misunderstood by detractors and advocates alike, both on the right and on the left. Much of this thesis is devoted to clearing up this confusion. His engagement was not merely on the literary/theoretical level but was fleshed out in the tumultuous slow burning and then exploding civil war that characterized the First Republic. Popper was active in the Social Democratic led school reform movement⁴⁷ and was even briefly active with The Austrian Communist Party. His primary interlocutors, however, were the members and activists of the Social Democratic Party, who were, with various purposes, also referred to as Austro-Marxists.

The term Austro-Marxists was originally given to the Social Democrats by their enemies to the left and to the right. "Austro-Marxism was associated with

⁴⁵ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)pp. 35-36

⁴⁶ The term Austro-Marxist is, as explained, is used by different commentators for different purposes. The more revisionist Social Democrats like Karl Renner and Hans Kelsen would fit with the Marxist label much less than would Fritz Adler, Max Adler or Otto Bauer.

⁴⁷ (Popper, *Frühe Schriften*, 2006)

ruthless revolutionary methods by its major political opponents in Austria, but by the Communists with treason to the sacred ideas of revolution and class war.”⁴⁸ Austro-Marxism represented a position of self-proclaimed “centrism” between “the naïve impatience” of the Bolshevik Third International, i.e., the Soviet COMINTERN, and the “skeptical disbelief” of the revisionist Second International of the European Social Democrats. The Austro-Marxists in fact held an international conference of centrist Socialist parties in February of 1921 in Vienna that established the International Working Union of Socialist Parties (*Die Internationale Arbeitsgemeinschaft Sozialistischer Parteien*) also known as “the 2 ½ International”. In April of 1922 this organization arranged a conference in Berlin to create one organization uniting the three internationals. This effort by the Viennese to unite the international workers movement ultimately failed because of the intractability of the other two organizations.

This episode is interesting in spite of the fact that it failed to achieve the same unity Viktor Adler had achieved when he unified the radical and moderate camps to form the Austrian Social Democratic Workers Party on New Year’s Day 1889. It says an awful lot about the character of the Austro-Marxists as the voice of reason, moderation and unity between the factions, a unifying rationalism, personified in Viktor Adler, that was the very basis of their founding at Hainfeld in 1888/89. The Austro-Marxists were primarily liberal rationalists, which means, among many other things, that they were more interested in truth, than in power.

⁴⁸ (Gulick, 1948)p. 1365

As we will see below in more detail, this rationalist ethos, that Popper both espouses and personifies, is the ethos encapsulated in his well-known epigram,

“I may be wrong; you may be right and with an effort we may get closer to the truth”.

There was at least some of this spirit in the less dogmatic of the Austro-Marxists, or rather Social Democrats, themselves. This tendency, which is at the core of Popper’s Marx analysis, of embracing liberal rationalism over irrationalism, is something Popper shares with moderate Social Democrats, like Victor Adler and Karl Renner.

The open-mindedness of the Austro-Marxists can be readily attested to by the history of the so-called *Socialist Calculation Debates* that were conducted between the Austro-Marxists and the members of the laissez-faire Austrian school of economics. These debates attest to the fact that the Austro-Marxists were perfectly willing to debate extensively, both with the Austrian School conservatives and among themselves, issues concerning fundamental economics, with an eye to learning from a critical discussion. This represents a profound contrast to the doctrinaire fanaticism of the Bolsheviks.

Popper was constantly engaged in debates with socialist friends and was a regular reader of *The Workers’ Newspaper (Die Arbeiter-Zeitung)* started by Viktor Adler. It was a daily newspaper that presented the news of the day from a Social Democratic perspective and continued its publication till 1991. Popper comes to some positions that are similar to those of the Austro-Marxists. Given his background and proximity to the debates of these problems, it is not surprising that he would later come up with similar solutions to similar problems, or at the very least, acquire useful theoretical assumptions from such debates for analysis. From his reading of *Die Arbeiter-Zeitung* and from his

critical discussions with his many socialist friends, Popper developed a way of understanding Marx that opens up whole new vistas in social theory hardly ever explored. Popper devotes ten chapters to Karl Marx in his magnum opus, *The Open Society*, not to bury him, as many Marxists and anti-Marxists *falsely* assume, but to purify his philosophy of its Hegelianism and thus to unlock its potential for improving the methods of the theoretical social sciences. In the *Open Society and its Enemies* as an introduction to his ten chapters of critical analysis of Marx, Popper, far from condemning him, almost eulogizes him for his vital contributions to social theory:

*“He opened and sharpened our eyes in many ways. A return to pre-Marxian social science is inconceivable. All modern writers are indebted to Marx, even if they do not know it. This is especially true of those who disagree with his doctrines, as I do; and I readily admit that my treatment, for example of Plato and Hegel, bears the stamp of his influence”*⁴⁹

As we shall see in the chapters that follow, it is Popper’s intellectual integrity that allows him to derive good, and in this case immanently useful good, from a philosophy that is severely flawed in some ways, but profoundly insightful in others.

1.2.1 Family and Early Influences

As mentioned above, Popper comes from a tradition that embraced the progressive values of the European Enlightenment and its secular humanism. Popper’s father had chosen Lutheranism⁵⁰ as his path to assimilation as did many of Vienna’s Jews⁵¹ One can see elements of this conversion in Karl

⁴⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 294

⁵⁰ Given the strong dominance of Roman Catholicism, this conversion to Lutheranism sets a certain boundary to the level of assimilation here. This is especially significant given the fact that it was the Catholic political party, the *Christsoziale Partei*, that served as a platform for Karl Lueger’s virulent antisemitism.

⁵¹ (Hacohen, 2000) pp. 61-70

Popper's later work. His admiration for Socrates' philosophy that comes out in the *Open Society* and elsewhere is often compared to the egalitarianism, individualism and humanism of early Christianity⁵². His father, whom Popper describes as "more of a scholar than a lawyer"⁵³ was a close friend and partner of Vienna's last liberal mayor, Raimund Grübl, and was the chair of Austria's leading Masonic lodge of the Free Masons.⁵⁴ Through their newspaper (*Wiener Freimauerzeitung*) and the founding of several associations promoting education, peace, freedom, religious tolerance and other causes⁵⁵, the Free Masons played a crucial background role in the creation of the cosmopolitan humanist culture of the Viennese Late Enlightenment. Although the Free Masons were more philosophical than political and functioned out of the sight of the public, two of their leaders, Julius Tandler and Ferdinand Hanusch, went on to become shining figures of Austrian social democracy.⁵⁶

At the time of Karl's birth his father, Simon Popper, had, through marriage and hard work, made it into the top ranks of Viennese bourgeois Jewry. The Poppers' elegant apartment of more than 20 rooms sat in the very center of the city across the central square from St. Stevens Cathedral itself. Karl describes, with wonder, his scholarly father's 14,000 volume library⁵⁷ He writes that, besides many great works of literature from several countries, the library

⁵² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 63-64

⁵³ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 6

⁵⁴ (Hacohen, 2000)p. 216

⁵⁵. These associations included, among others the following: *Die Österreichische Friedensgesellschaft, Internationalen Frauen für Frieden und Freiheit, Die Landesliege für Religionsfreiheit, Verein zur Abwehr des Antisemitismus*. (Stadler, "Spätaufklärung und Sozialdemokratie in Wien 1918–1938. Soziologisches und Ideologisches zur Spätaufklärung in Österreich", 1981)pp. 466-467

⁵⁶ (Stadler, "Spätaufklärung und Sozialdemokratie in Wien 1918–1938. Soziologisches und Ideologisches zur Spätaufklärung in Österreich", 1981) 466-467

⁵⁷ Karl Popper remembered bitterly having to sell off nearly all of this library for ridiculously little money after the post war inflation destroyed the family's wealth.

reflected his father's interests in history, particularly the Hellenistic period, and in social issues. He singles out Theodor Gomperz' three volume *Greek Thinkers*, as well as a German translation of the works of J.S. Mill that Gomperz had edited. Prominent among the works in social philosophy were the works of Marx and Engels as well as their opponents both in the Austrian School of Economics and among leftist thinkers like P.A. Kropotkin and Joseph Popper-Lynkeus,⁵⁸ a distant relative of Popper's and a popular contemporary social thinker among the Free Masons, whose writings were often published in their journal.⁵⁹

Einstein wrote of Popper-Lynkeus that he was "one of the few outstanding personalities to embody the conscience of the generation."⁶⁰ One of the most famous of Popper-Lynkeus' initiatives was to create an organization aimed at replacing the compulsory military service with a compulsory *nutrition* service for feeding the poor (*Allgemeine Nährdienst instead of Allgemeine Wehrdienst*). The idea was inspired by the writings of American writer Edward Bellamy⁶¹, whose famous utopian socialist novel, *Looking Backwards: 2000-1887*, Karl Popper had read at the age of 12. In his autobiography Popper said the book had "made a great impression"⁶² on him. Many of these influences can be seen in Popper's later work in social theory.

⁵⁸ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)pp. 6-7

⁵⁹ (Stadler, "Spätaufklärung und Sozialdemokratie in Wien 1918–1938. Soziologisches und Ideologisches zur Spätaufklärung in Österreich", 1981)p. 466

⁶⁰ (Seelig, 1953)p. 39

⁶¹ (Johnston, 1972/2000)p. 309

⁶² (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)p. 8

Although he enjoyed exploring his library, Karl's father was a very busy man. Though he did encourage his son's intellectual development from a distance, "he never discussed with Karl his scholarly interests and only rarely his social views. The precocious child's questions were first redirected to 'Uncle Poldi'⁶³ and, a little later, to his friend Arthur Arndt"⁶⁴ In his autobiography Popper writes the following about his childhood mentor, Arthur Arndt:

*"He had studied engineering at the University of Riga and had been one of the student leaders during the abortive Russian revolution of 1905. He was a socialist and at the same time a strong opponent of the Bolsheviks, some of whose leaders he knew personally from 1905. He described them as the Jesuits of socialism, that is, capable of sacrificing innocent men, even of their own persuasion, because great ends justified all means. Arndt was not a convinced Marxist, yet he thought that Marx had been the most important theorist of socialism so far. He found me very willing to listen to socialist ideas; nothing, I felt, could be more important than to end poverty"*⁶⁵

This anti-Bolshevik democratic socialist revulsion of fanaticism and violence did not fully sink into Popper's moral fabric until he had made his own early political experiences during his "two or three months" as a Communist⁶⁶.

The incident, which Popper later writes "was one of the most important incidents in my life"⁶⁷ took place on June 15th 1919. The Social Democrats, as explained above, had rejected the idea of a violent seizure of power in favor of parliamentarianism. They were in charge of a coalition government that they led under socialist Chancellor Karl Renner. There had been a soviet style seizure of power in both Bavaria and Hungary, whereby the Bavarian *Räterepublik*

⁶³ Karl Popper's childless paternal uncle, Dr. Leopold Popper.

⁶⁴ (Hacohen, 2000)p. 62

⁶⁵ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)p. 8

⁶⁶ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 32

⁶⁷ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)p. 32

(government of workers councils) had already been crushed by the German socialist government in May. Under the threat of a Romanian invasion, Bela Kun, the Hungarian Communist leader, set out to initiate a communist putsch in Austria. The plot, however, had been discovered and the communist soldiers intended to be used for the coup were not released from prison as scheduled and the Communist Party leaders had been arrested.^{68 69}

The 16-year-old Popper had been participating in the meetings of socialist and communist youth organizations for some time and was among the crowd of students and workers sent to the central police station in the Hörlgasse in Vienna to demand the release of the party leaders. Shots were fired. Twelve workers lay dead and another 80 or so had been injured. Popper was shocked by the violence and by the smug justifications given by the communists, who insisted that the deaths were necessary, because “Marxist theory demands that the class struggle be intensified”.⁷⁰

“That was the Marxist theory—part of so-called “scientific socialism”. I now asked myself whether such a calculation could ever be supported by “science”. The whole experience, and especially this question, produced in me a life-long revulsion of feeling”⁷¹

Popper came to the conclusion that one could never justify such a calculation, of sacrificing the lives of others for some prophesized supposedly inevitable

⁶⁸ (Hacohen, 2000) p. 81-82

⁶⁹ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002)

⁷⁰ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 33

⁷¹ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 33

future. Popper's lifelong critique of "oracular philosophy"⁷², of historicism, of ethical positivism⁷³ and so-called "scientific socialism" had begun.

The utilitarian, ethical positivist "might makes right", "the ends justify the means" position that allows the sacrificing of others for "the greater good" merely on the basis of ones' arrogant oracular pretense to knowledge, ran counter to his Kantian moral sentiments. Kant had emphasized that to act morally one must maintain a respect for others and for oneself; that is to say one must respect the sanctity of the individual:

*"Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of another, always at the same time as an end and never simply as a means."*⁷⁴

We will see in the next section and in the rest of this thesis that, in a way similar to that of the Austrian Social Democrats, it was Popper's mission to solve the problems that historical developments had revealed in Marx's theories. Both Popper and the social democrats saw that the best way of doing this was to take a rationalist Kantian approach to socialism. In Popper's view this rational Kantian approach required a firm rejection, if not vilification, of Hegel for the irrationalism and historicism of his "oracular philosophy"⁷⁵ and an elimination of all traces of Hegel in Marxism.

⁷² (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 430

⁷³ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 68 Popper also uses the term "moral positivism" interchangeably

⁷⁴ (Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785)

⁷⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 217

1.2.2 A Liberal Kantian Approach to Socialism

The generation of Popper's father and grandfather followed a spiritual journey not unlike that of Viktor Adler (1852-1918), the founder of Social Democratic Party. Adler came from a wealthy family of assimilated Jews that, like the Popper and many others, had immigrated to Vienna from Bohemia. Adler studied medicine in Vienna during a time when, in the spirit of 1848, the liberals and the nationalists were still brothers in arms. For many middle-class liberals at the time Germanness (*Deutschtum*) was associated with Kant, Humboldt and the 18th Century Enlightenment.⁷⁶ Adler joined a German nationalist student organization⁷⁷, or *Burschenschaft*, and became part of the German nationalist movement around Georg von Schönerer. This party had at first been more liberal, as had many nationalist groups. The program that Adler coauthored included a call for universal suffrage, promoting secular education and social reform, goals similar to those he was to formulate later with the Social Democrats. As Schönerer's movement rejected the social reforms and became increasingly antisemitic, Adler gravitated toward the working-class movement and later, after working as a doctor for the poor, founded the Social Democratic Workers Party by uniting the radical and moderate wings at the celebrated Hainfeld party conference on New Year's Day 1889.

Adler's liberal humanism and that of other "Austro-Marxists" was to become a distinctive feature of Austrian socialism. As a doctor for the poor and as an activist and an author Adler stirred the conscience of many Austrians when, starting on December 1st 1888, he began writing devastating exposés on the

⁷⁶ (Hacohen, 2000)

⁷⁷ Burschenschaft, *Arminia Wien*

inhuman and utterly tortuous conditions of the brick workers of the Wienerberger brick factory, the forerunner of today's Wienerberger AG. Adler's series of articles appeared in the weekly newspaper he had founded, *Equality (Gleichheit)*. Adler had infiltrated the factory as a doctor to treat the workers for tuberculosis and other maladies. On top of being forced to live in massively overcrowded freezing or sweltering⁷⁸, disease and vermin infested dwellings, working class families at the Wienerberger plant were subject to the so-called "truck system", an illegal practice in which they were only paid in tokens, "*Draschedollars*"⁷⁹, that is with lead coins only redeemable in overpriced company stores. The victims were locked into conditions of literal slavery comparable to that of a forced labor camp. It was a prison camp from which, because of the lack of real money, there was no escape. Adler describes this "bloody exploitation of the most miserable of all proletarians" and how the truck system traps them into permanent enslavement.

There were subdivisions of 80 to 100 men run by a Group-leader (*Partieführer*) who managed his particular group of wage slaves through bogus "debt":

"Of course, under this lead token economy⁸⁰ none of the workers knows what the balance of his debt actually is; he only hears that there is 'leftover debt', that he still owes money, thus he can never free himself from the claws of the loan shark."⁸¹

The criminal loan sharks and taskmasters of Wienerberger, who had enslaved the mostly Czech Bohemian immigrant workers at their plant, were providing

⁷⁸ Some dwellings were placed so close to the furnaces as to be unbearably hot all the time.

⁷⁹ Named after the founder of the Wienerberger AG, Heinrich Drasche. (1811-1880).

⁸⁰ *Blechwirtschaft*

⁸¹ (Adler V. , 1 Dec. 1888) „Bei dieser Blechwirtschaft weiß natürlich kein Arbeiter, wie eigentlich seine Rechnung beim Partieführer steht; er erfährt nur, dass er immer noch „Rest“, das heißt schuldig ist, so dass er sich aus den Klauen der Wucherer nie frei machen kann.“

bricks for the growing empire. They and other interests threatened by Adler's advocacy could rely on the Austrian state to intervene on their behalf. Adler's newspaper, *Gleichheit*, was later banned; he himself had been charged several times for his activities and spent nine months in prison. Later he put the last of his savings into starting a new newspaper, *Die Arbeiter-Zeitung*, which remained the voice of the working class for many years. At the party founding it was Adler's clear-headed rational approach that unified the moderate and the radical wings of the workers movement to found the Social Democratic Workers Party of Austria, now Austria's oldest political party, the SPÖ.

In his voluminous analysis of Austro-Marxism Norbert Leser describes Viktor Adler's socialism as follows:

*"It was indeed characteristic of the way Dr. Adler grew into politics [...] that his approach to political activism was not that of a doctrinaire or of a man driven by political ambition, but rather overwhelmingly that of one driven by humanitarian motives from beginning to end"*⁸²

Adler's approach was to appeal to the workers' reason, to emphasize education and rational understanding in decision making, and to always put in their proper place, those hotheads who tried to work by inflaming the violent passion and anger of masses.⁸³ "Middle-class Jews gravitated to the party out of sympathy for laborers, whose exclusion from society seemed to mirror their own."⁸⁴ As the leader of the Social Democrats and a member of the Reichsrat Adler fought tirelessly, first for universal manhood suffrage, which was achieved in 1907 and for women in 1918. Later after the downfall of the Habsburg monarchy during the revolution that formed the First Republic, the long fought for 8-hour day was finally achieved. From the late 19th century until now Austrian democracy

⁸² (Leser, 1968)p. 195

⁸³ (Leser, 1968)

⁸⁴ (Johnston, 1972/2000)p. 100

itself, as well as its unique kind of mixed economy⁸⁵, has been to a great extent the creation of the Social Democrats.

The biography of Popper and of those who influenced him was similar to that of Adler and as we see above, his moral sentiments are very much shaped by the monumental achievements of Adler's party. The Popper's were, like Adler, also liberal, assimilated Jews and very secular in their outlook. Though he grew up in an atmosphere of well-educated affluence, Karl Popper's family was suddenly impoverished by the mass inflation that followed WWI. The young Popper tried his hand at road construction, only to find out he did not have the stamina for it. He finished an apprenticeship as a cabinet maker and for his first proper job he became a math teacher and physics teacher and a day care instructor for working class children. He was involved in the Social Democratic school reform movement and published articles on pedagogy for Vienna's Pedagogical Institute, *Pädagogische Institut*.⁸⁶ He stressed his great debt to his elementary school teacher and early school reform advocate, Emma Goldberger.⁸⁷ Popper was a product of and a proponent of the Viennese Late Enlightenment. As Friedrich Stadler puts it in his study of the period:

*“What all the late Enlightenment currents had in common was a basic humanitarian-cosmopolitan perspective, an uncompromising orientation toward progress and reason, and the advocacy of social and cultural reform”*⁸⁸

⁸⁵ By mixed economy I mean primarily the regime of robust protections of employee rights that by various means, including social insurance, collective contracts, institutions like the Chamber of Labor (*Arbeiterkammer*) and others, that tend to create a balance of power *both on the labor market and in politics* that is much more advantageous to employees than is the case in England or in the USA. (See section 4.4.2 below)

⁸⁶ (Popper, *Frühe Schriften* , 2006)

⁸⁷ (Popper, *Frühe Schriften* , 2006) p. 498 „Einige Bemerkungen über die Wiener Schulreform und ihr Einfluss auf Mich“

⁸⁸ (Stadler, *The Vienna Circle: studies in the origins, development and influence of logical empiricism* , 2001) p. 31

One could leave the similarities between Popper and the socialists at what has been written thus far and have a pretty good case to refute the interpretations of him as a transatlantic conservative that became so popular during the cold war. However, the fact of the matter is that the similarities between Karl Popper and the Austro-Marxists run far deeper than these general philosophical considerations indicate on their own.

1.2.2.1 Theoretical Positions Shared by Popper and the Austro-Marxists

If I were to briefly describe the *problem situation* for the Austro-Marxists/Social Democrats and Popper, I would say it was about finding a way to reinterpret Marx given the historical development of capitalist society since Marx's time. As we shall see in later chapters, many of Marx's own doctrines and the dogmatic interpretations of his ideas had become quite problematic. Much of what Marx had deemed inevitable simply had not taken place. For example, it was clear to social Democrats and to Popper⁸⁹ that Marx's theory of classes had to be revised. As the first Social Democratic Chancellor, Karl Renner, put it in reference to the workers:

*“... the class itself has also undergone a profound transformation. The former textbook example of the unified equally oppressed proletariat has not turned out to be true.”*⁹⁰

There was also the sudden takeover by the Bolsheviks in Russia of a country that was, according to Marx's doctrine, much too backward industrially for a

⁸⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 16 “The Classes”.

⁹⁰ (Leser, 1968)p. 94 “Denn die Klasse selbst hat gleichfalls einen tiefgehenden Wandel erfahren. Das einstmalige Schulbeispiel des einheitlich gewordenen, gleichmäßig geknechteten Proletariats hat sich nicht bewahrheitet.“

Socialist Revolution. The revolution was supposed to begin in one of the advanced countries like England or Germany well under the control of the middle class, not in an agrarian country like Russia that was still under the control of Tsarism, a particularly repressive form of absolutism, under developed industrially and with merely 6% of the population in the working class. It was, in fact, the position of what was in 1917 the majority of Social Democrats in Russia, the misnamed Mensheviks, that a revolution in Russia would remain impossible until the country had become industrialized. It was the historicist blind fanaticism of his famous dictum “Sometimes history needs a push” that led V.I. Lenin, smuggled into Petrograd in a sealed railroad car by the Germans, to the disastrous decision to seize power in October/November of 1917. By 1920 the Russian Civil War (1917-1920) that had immediately ensued, which was more or less inevitable given these circumstances, had already taken the lives of over 8 million people. Attempts at establishing workers’ control in Bavaria and Hungary were being violently repressed, as they had been repressed by the Bolsheviks in Russia in 1918.

These and many other problems in Marxism that will be explored in later chapters led Popper and the Austro-Marxists and more conservative Social Democrats like Renner and Kelsen to reevaluate Marx’s theory. The approach was to take a critical approach to Marxism and to revise elements of his theory. As mentioned above, for Popper this meant, above all things, the exorcizing of Hegelianism from Marx’s philosophy in favor of a Kantian reinterpretation.

In *The Open Society* Popper writes in footnote 9 to chapter 23 “I wish to apologize to the Kantians for mentioning them in the same breath as the Hegelians.”⁹¹ Such is the starkness of the distinction to be made, according to

⁹¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 717

Popper, between these two German idealist philosophers. According to Popper's understanding Kant was a critical idealist and a rationalist. Hegel was an absolute Idealist and an irrationalist. Kant analyzed pure reason and showed that theories devoid of empirical content can start from the same axiom and yield contradictory conclusions or antinomies such that an ontology of "pure reason" without any empirical input has to be abandoned as empty metaphysics because this procedure on its own would produce theories full of these contradictions and would therefore be irrational. Hegel, on the other hand, simply accepted contradictions as part of reality and conflated thought and reality to the point where a theory could be bent in any direction and prove anything at all to be true.⁹² Kant's system points the way to clear rational scientific thinking. Hegel's system points the way to obfuscation, obscurantism and doublethink.⁹³ Kant advocated what he called "perpetual peace" envisioning a confederation of free liberal democratic states living in peace with one another, something akin to the European Union.⁹⁴ The vision of a "*Weltstaat*" (Worldstate) was also advocated by Karl Renner.⁹⁵ Hegel, by contrast, convinced a whole generation of totalitarians that nations were irreducible entities, corporate personalities, that must "emerge on the stage of history" by fighting wars with one another.⁹⁶ For Kant the state was a vehicle for protecting the rights of the individual. For Hegel, who was the official court philosopher of Prussian militarist absolutism, the state was everything and the individual was nothing.⁹⁷

⁹² Karl Popper *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, BASIC BOOKS Publishers; New York London, 1962 See "What is Dialectic"

⁹³ See section 4.4.2.1. below dealing with Popper's paper "What is Dialectic".

⁹⁴ Immanuel Kant, "Perpetual Peace: a philosophical sketch", 1795

⁹⁵ (Leser, 1968)pp. 97-100

⁹⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 225

⁹⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 246

As we shall see below in detail, Hegel's historicism, essentialism, his dialectic method and to a certain degree his absolute understanding of sovereignty as articulated in his *Philosophy of Right* all suffuse Marxism with tragic flaws that Popper endeavors to overcome. Some of these Hegelian maladies are native to Marx himself. As Popper puts it "unfortunately he did not altogether escape the corrupting influence of an upbringing in the atmosphere of Hegelian dialectics, described by Schopenhauer as 'destructive of all intelligence'"⁹⁸. Other Hegelian maladies are more prominent in the exaggerations of later Marxists like those of The Frankfurter Schule, who insist on Marx's closeness to Hegel. For Popper and some Austro-Marxists, however, Marx is best evaluated on a Kantian basis not on a Hegelian basis.

Here are just a few of the Austro-Marxists' revisionist positions that Popper shares that, we will see below, form the basis of much of Popper's reevaluation of Marx:

Revisionist Positions (the phrases within quotation marks are from Charles Gulick; the phrases in parenthesis are my explications thereof)⁹⁹:

- 1) "Revisionism questioned the value of the connection between Marxism and a metaphysical system" (Popper's and Max Adler's insistence that Marx was not a vulgar materialist)
- 2) "Revisionism questioned the absolute character of the general laws of social development as formulated by Marx, and laid stress on the

⁹⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 294

⁹⁹ (Gulick, 1948)pp. 1366-1367

importance of the will of men in that development” (Popper’s vigorous opposition to historicism and determinism)

- 3) “The law of concentration of capital implied that the middle strata of society, especially the small manufacturers and the peasants, were bound to disappear...it [revisionism] came to the conclusion that there were no signs of the vanishing of these middle groups” (Popper’s falsification of Marx’s doctrine on classes, Ch. 16 *OS*)
- 4) “Revisionism denounced Marx’s and Engels’ belief in the ‘creative power of violence.’ The Marxist theory of the state and the alleged necessity for the proletariat to smash (zerbrechen) it were declared anarchistic.” (Popper’s falsification of the Marx’s doctrine of the impotence of politics Ch. 17 *OS*)

For the Austro-Marxists it was not as clear as it was to Popper that many of these flaws in Marxism were due to the influence of Hegel. However, what will become clear in later chapters is that, if one looks at the revisionist positions detailed above, there is more than enough reason to think that they were at least on the same track as Popper in solving the problems mentioned at the beginning of this chapter in spite of their continued respect for Hegel, which was common among Austro-Marxists and, according to Popper, clouded their judgement.¹⁰⁰

Much of this revisionism informed the policies of the Social Democratic leadership. They worked in parliament as a governing party and not in an effort to “destroy the bourgeois state” and hope that justice will fill the vacuum. They formed coalitions with other parties, and as a result were able to pass universal

¹⁰⁰ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 53

male suffrage allowing for a series of electoral wins by the Social Democrats and eventually the assumption of the chancellorship in 1920.

Of the Austro-Marxist attempts to reevaluate Marx in Neo-Kantian terms, none was quite as sophisticated as that of Max Adler (1873-1937). Max Adler was a professor of sociology, a party activist and, together with Rudolf Hilferding, he edited the prominent theoretical journal, *Marx Studien*. His idea of the so-called “Social A-priori” as a basic foundation of social science bears a family resemblance to some of Popper’s notions concerning the inherent social nature of reason and language and to his advocacy of an autonomous sociology that, in accordance with Marx’s ideas, is not based on individual psychology but on social aggregates or institutional structures.¹⁰¹

In his 1936 Treatise *Das Rätsel der Gesellschaft (The Enigma of Society)* Max Adler maintains some positions that are strikingly similar to those of Popper in the *Open Society*. Of particular interest is his argument for the *unity of scientific method*, which, as we will later see, is quite similar to the position taken by Popper:

*“Social science does not distinguish itself from natural science by virtue of it being another kind of science...it is just as much of a causal science as is natural science and aims at finding laws of action in the same way. In this sense there is therefore only **one** science, the logical character of which is most developed in the natural sciences”¹⁰²*

¹⁰¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch 14 (see also section 4.2 “Anti-psychologism and the Autonomy of Sociology” below)

¹⁰² (Adler M. , 1936/1972) p. 197 “*Die Sozialwissenschaft ist also etwas anderes als die Naturwissenschaft, nicht deshalb, weil sie eine andere Art von Wissenschaft wäre...sie ist genau so strenge Kausalwissenschaft wie die Naturwissenschaft und strebt wie diese nach Gesetzen des Geschehens. In diesem Sinne gibt es daher nur **eine** Wissenschaft, deren logischer Charakter durch die Naturwissenschaften am deutlichsten ausgeprägt ist*“

The last sentence in its reference to the logical character of all science being “most developed in the natural sciences” bears a particularly close resemblance to many of Popper’s notions about the rationality of scientific method throughout his career.¹⁰³ The unity of scientific method is one of the essential characteristics of Popper’s approach to social theory.¹⁰⁴

Another similarity can be seen in the distinction Max Adler makes between ethics and science, that is similar to Popper’s doctrine of “critical dualism” (see section 3.2.2 below), the dualism of facts and decisions, also known as the fact value dichotomy. Adler draws a distinction between a “*Seinswissenschaft*” (ontological Science) and a “*Normwissenschaft*” (normative science)¹⁰⁵. Both are seen as “*sciences*” and hence are subject to rational scientific methodology and are distinguished from one another by mere prefixes. This suggests that, in a way similar to Popper, fact and value are distinguished but not *reason* and value, that is to say that a rational investigation and analysis can be applied to an ethical problem.¹⁰⁶

Not all was harmony between Popper and the Austro-Marxists, far from it. In fact, it was his confrontation in the 1920’s with the dogmatic tendencies among the prophets of vulgar Marxism and with those among the proponents of psychoanalysis, that got him started on the problems that were to propel the development of his own philosophy of science. Much later in a paper first published in 1976, that provides the title of the last book published in his

¹⁰³ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)

¹⁰⁴ See section 4.1 “Evolutionary Cosmology and The Unity of Scientific Method” below.

¹⁰⁵ (Adler M. , 1936/1972)p. 197

¹⁰⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) See Addenda “Facts, Standards, and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism (1961)” pp. 485-511

lifetime, *The Myth of the Framework*, 1994, Popper reflects on his intellectual awakening as follows:

“It was during the great and heated discussions after the First World War that I found out how difficult it was to get anywhere with people living in a closed framework – I mean people like the Marxists, the Freudians, and the Adlerians. None of them could ever be shaken in his adopted view of the world. Every argument against their framework was interpreted by them so as to fit into it. ...I found the stereotyped pattern of these attitudes depressing and repelling, the more so as I could find nothing of the kind in the debates of the physicists about Einstein’s General Theory, although it too was hotly debated at the time...I certainly made use of my clashes with the addicts of the various frameworks in order to impress upon my mind the ideal of liberating oneself from the intellectual prison of a theory in which one might get stuck unconsciously at any moment of one’s life.”¹⁰⁷

The contrast illustrated here, between vulgar Marxism and psychoanalysis on the one hand and modern physics on the other, presented Popper with one of his first problems, a problem that was to be the fruitful fountainhead of his later problems throughout his career. This is the problem of demarcation, of distinguishing between science and non-science or pseudo-science, or better said between empirical science and non-empirical science, that is between theories that are useful and lead to the discovery of new knowledge about the external world and those that are not empirical and at best can provide mathematical proofs or speculative ideas regarding theory formation. Thus, the theories of these Marxists and psycho-analysts, though they may provide an impetus for theory formation or for theoretical models, are, in the form presented, untestable and therefore are not empirical theories.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁷ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)pp. 52-53

¹⁰⁸ This is meant as a characterization of vulgar Marxism, not to Marx’s contribution to economics which had an empirical basis or to the more nuanced interpretation of Marx’s writings that Popper develops (see Ch. 4 below)

It was Popper's "depressing and repelling" experience with the dogmatic tendencies described above that launched his philosophical project. The sounding board for the ensuing investigations was a vibrant and world-renown group of thinkers, who, according to Popper, were "men of originality and of the highest intellectual and moral standards"¹⁰⁹, the members of the Vienna Circle.

1.3 The Vienna Circle and Logical Positivism¹¹⁰

Front and center of *The Late Enlightenment* was a movement in philosophy that sought to make philosophy and, by extension, all of society more rational, *The Vienna Circle*.¹¹¹ Their mission was to free society and overcome the retrograde philosophy that was typical of that time and replace it with a philosophy that would be the handmaiden of science and not of mysticism. This mysticism included not only the remnants of what Popper would call "authoritarian religion"¹¹² but also the obscurantist tendencies of Romanticism, German Idealism, and Heideggerian phenomenology. These were tendencies that were seen by the Circle as retrograde and full of meaningless metaphysical expressions or pseudo-statements (*Scheinsätze*)¹¹³

¹⁰⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)p. 76 Popper commenting on the Vienna Circle in a footnote to Ch. 3.

¹¹⁰ This school of thought that emanated from the Vienna Circle was, under the influence of Hans Reichenbach, later called Logical Empiricism.

¹¹¹ Popper's relationship the circle was quite complex. He was never invited to join their meetings, purportedly because of his criticism of Wittgenstein, and never "fished" for an invitation. However, he was in close contact with several Circle members and the Circle did publish and discuss intensely his first major work *Logik der Forschung*-

¹¹² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 498

¹¹³ (Carnap, *Überwindung der Metaphysik durch logische Analyse der Sprache*, 1931/1932) See also *Das Manifest des Wiener Kreises, „Die Wissenschaftliche Weltauffassung“*, 1929

Under the influence of Ludwig Wittgenstein, the logical positivists insisted on dismissing metaphysics as altogether meaningless. The metaphysicians were described by Rudolf Carnap as “musicians without musical ability”¹¹⁴ and by Moritz Schlick as out dated and left over, like “actors who continue to play for some time before noticing that the audience has slowly departed.”¹¹⁵ Although this position of the positivists, this classifying of metaphysics as meaningless, was a position Popper would criticize vigorously, he did share their rejection of the obscurantism of the above-mentioned philosophies, Hegel in particular, and, in the form of Popper’s egalitarianism and his “piecemeal social engineering”, Popper did share the Circle’s “demand for the rationalization of society”¹¹⁶

The philosophers of the Vienna circle were strict empiricists and took Hume’s fork¹¹⁷ seriously. If any statement is neither verifiable, that is to say it can neither be traced back to sensory input nor proven by math or logic, one must take it and “cast it into the flames” as Hume had suggested. The flames they cast such statements into was the bonfire upon which all “metaphysical” statements would be burned and dismissed as irrational and irrelevant. This formed the basis for their radical empiricism, and in the Marxist philosophy of prominent member Otto Neurath, a move toward radical materialism, physicalism and behaviorism,

¹¹⁴ (Carnap, "The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language", 1959) p. 80 (see German original above, 1931)

¹¹⁵ (Schlick, 1959) p. 59

¹¹⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 443

¹¹⁷ Hume, David: *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, 1748 “If we take in our hand any volume; of divinity or school metaphysics, for instance; let us ask: Does it contain any abstract reasoning concerning quantity or number? No. Does it contain any experimental reasoning concerning matter of fact and existence? No. Commit it then to the flames: for it can contain nothing but sophistry and illusion.”

all positions that Popper, in spite of his affection for Neurath¹¹⁸, firmly rejected. There was one thing, however, that Popper and Neurath did agree on that placed Popper, in spite of all disagreements, in the same progressive spirit as the Circle:

“Neurath and I had disagreed deeply on many matters, historical, political, and philosophical; in fact, on almost all matters which interested us both except one—the view that the theory of knowledge was important for an understanding of history and of political problems. Yet though we had disagreed so deeply about so many and important matters, I shall always feel that he was one of the strongest personalities I ever met; a real original thinker, and an undaunted fighter who dreamed of a better and more humane world”¹¹⁹

It was not so much on values but on the above-mentioned “theory of knowledge” that Popper and the Circle differed. The logical positivists tended to believe that induction was the only foundation for empirical science and tried, in part, to deal with its limitations through probability calculus¹²⁰. Some, like Mach, also favored neutral monism, which Popper rejected as a reversion to idealism.¹²¹ Also the criterion for demarcation¹²² used by members of the circle was verifiability and not falsifiability.¹²³ In spite of these differences,

¹¹⁸ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) “Memories of Otto Neurath” 1973 pp. 25-30

¹¹⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) “Memories of Otto Neurath” 1973 p. 30

¹²⁰ Reichenbach, Hans, *Experience and Prediction: An Analysis of the Foundations and the Structure of Knowledge* 1938

¹²¹ This was the position of Ernst Mach, rejected by Mises, Popper, and V.I. Lenin. (Hacohen (2000) pp. 56-57)

¹²² In general terms one could say the problem of demarcation deals broadly with the question of deciding boundaries between various forms of inquiry and categorizing where they belong—either to the purview of science or some other pursuit like art, religion, etc. The term can also refer to the boundaries established, justified or not, between various sciences.

¹²³ It has been a mistake of both positivists and their opponents, Habermas and Mises, for example, to see Popper’s *falsifiability* criterion of demarcation as an unimportant variant of *verifiability* and therefore to identify Popper as a positivist. This misunderstanding, as we shall see, has been the cause of some of the misunderstandings between Popper and these other schools of thought to the “left” and “right” of him.

there were many general philosophical and moral priorities that Popper and the circle had in common¹²⁴. The differences between Popper and The Circle would, however, have a profound influence on the development of Popper's political and moral philosophy and on his approach to one of the Circle's central principles: the unity of science.

2. Chapter 2: Popper's Philosophy of Science

In this and the following chapters I will explore Popper's philosophy of science and its connection to his moral and political philosophy and to his social science methodology. This does not represent a detour of any kind but is rather intended to give form and substance to Popper's rational scientific approach to Social Democracy and to explain its significance for our own time.

Karl Popper called his philosophy *critical rationalism*, a name that already says a lot about its approach.¹²⁵ As we shall see critical rationalism resolves a whole litany of philosophical problems dating back to David Hume (1711-1776). It favors rationalism¹²⁶ as a moral and scientific ideal and defends it successfully

(See Ch. 5 regarding Misesian praxeology and Ch. 6 regarding the so-called *Positivismusstreit* involving the Frankfurter Schule, respectively)

¹²⁴ The similarity I mean is their shared Social Democratic values of tolerance, rational humanism, the advancement of the working class, and of liberation through knowledge. (There were of course some differences between members of the Circle, but the politics of most members were largely progressive and modernist in spirit)

¹²⁵ In epistemological terms it is *critical* in the Kantian sense in that it accepts Kant's central thesis in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781, namely that there is an inherent and unavoidable theory laden nature of *all* observation. This flies in the face of the naïve realism or dogmatic empiricism of Francis Bacon and many others. On the other hand, critical rationalism accepts Kant's arguments concerning antinomies and the need for empirical testing and hence for the principle of external realism. (See section 1.2.2.1 regarding the contrast between Kant and Hegel)

¹²⁶ "Rationalism" can be seen in its epistemological sense to mean the doctrine that certainty and hence truth is to be found in the abstract ideas of mathematics and logic as opposed to the information from the senses. In Popper's philosophy, however, there is another meaning that bears a whole package of moral

against all the formidable forces waged against it.¹²⁷ The twin problems of induction and demarcation are only a starting point; critical rationalism resolves many of the other unsolved problems of philosophy like the problem of universals, the dichotomy between rationalism and empiricism, between relativism and absolutism. It overcomes all forms of dogmatism and authoritarianism yet keeps skepticism and relativism in check by maintaining truth as a regulative idea.¹²⁸

Its conception of rationality is humanitarian and egalitarian through its embrace of “the rational unity of mankind”.¹²⁹ It celebrates the western rational tradition of Ancient Greece, the egalitarianism and freedom of Athens in the time of Socrates and Pericles, but celebrates it in a way that cannot be accused of being racist or Eurocentric, because it stresses, above all other factors, the fact that the very rationality upon which this birth of science and democracy is founded has, throughout history, itself not been the product of European intellectual inbreeding, but of profound and prolonged culture clash and integration with the cultures of the Near East, Africa, and beyond.¹³⁰ It views culture clash as the impetus of both scientific and cultural progress. Where relativistic doctrines build impenetrable walls between philosophical and cultural frameworks, Popper builds bridges of understanding.¹³¹ The cultural relativism and the

precepts. It is deeply connected to humanism and to a passionate belief in the “rational unity of mankind”, with *The Open Society*, with science and with a respect for the truth and a belief in our ability to get closer to it together.

¹²⁷ These include, among others: Hegelianism, Romanticism, Medievalism, Scholasticism, Relativism, Authoritarian Religion, Fascism, radical materialism and empiricism, behaviorism and the pseudo-rationalism of Platonic intuitionism

¹²⁸ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) Ch. 10

¹²⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 448

¹³⁰ (Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, 1994) Ch. 8 “On Culture Clash”, pp. 117-125 See also Ch. 2 of (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)

¹³¹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 2 pp. 33-64

incommensurability thesis in science¹³² give way to the “intersubjectivity of scientific method”¹³³, a process that becomes *more* rather than less “fruitful” when conducted across divergent theoretical and cultural frameworks.¹³⁴ Popper called this “transcendent criticism”¹³⁵, that is from outside the framework, as opposed to “immanent criticism”, which functions under the assumptions of the framework, the former was a principle that Popper rejects in his early writings but accepts later on.¹³⁶ Thus, in a globalized world with the deliberately hyped “Clash of Civilizations”¹³⁷ both between and within sovereign states posing an ever increasing existential threat, Popper’s critical rationalism provides a way out of the “mental prison”¹³⁸ of highly ingrained cultural frameworks by rational critical discussion on equal terms and as such is a way forward to greater peace, understanding and human progress.¹³⁹

Popper’s view of the growth of human knowledge is also connected with a particular cosmology. It is an evolutionary view of the growth of scientific knowledge as a form of adaptation through trial and error that connects micro and macro levels of existence from the DNA strand to the development of scientific theories¹⁴⁰. As the title of one of his later books *All Life is Problem*

¹³² (Kuhn, 1962/2012)

¹³³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 424

¹³⁴ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 36

¹³⁵ (Popper, *The Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*, 2009/2012) p. 155

¹³⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994), (see citation in note 123 for a contrast)

¹³⁷ See the article in *Foreign Affairs*, “The Clash of Civilizations?” (1993), and the book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, 1996, both by. Samuel Huntington.

¹³⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 53

¹³⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)Ch. 2

¹⁴⁰ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “The Rationality of Scientific Revolutions” pp. 1-32

Solving indicates, for Popper life is problem solving “all the way from the amoeba to Einstein.”¹⁴¹ This view is also connected with his three worlds hypothesis, which has far-reaching implications for the conceptualization and facilitation of human progress.¹⁴² Such a global conception of the growth of knowledge as the process of conjectures and refutations employing the critical method of error elimination and critical testing almost completely obliterates the barriers that are put up between the sciences. Against the *apartheid of the sciences* Popper staunchly and effectively defends the principle of the unity of scientific method. This allows for the objectivity¹⁴³ of the natural sciences to be carried over to the social sciences, a fact of vital importance for social science and for the world. These last considerations will be of vital importance for this thesis.

I hope that what has thus far been written provides a concise characterization of the unique and revolutionary nature of Popper’s philosophy and his ethical foundation in the Viennese Late Enlightenment. Explaining *how* these ingredients combine to perform the glorious feats mentioned will occupy the

¹⁴¹ (Popper, *All Life is Problem Solving*, 1999/2007) p. 9

¹⁴² (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) pp. 106-152

¹⁴³ My use here of the word “objectivity” must not be confused with the way the idea has been understood by naïve realists adhering to what Popper called the “Baconian myth” (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 138. According to Bacon one could simply free one’s mind of “prejudice” and “read the book of nature” so as to fully grasp the revealed truth. Popper was very critical of this doctrine of revealed truth. (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 9. Popper’s approach is not Baconian but rather Kantian: he acknowledges the inherent theory laden nature of all observation. He is not, however, a relativist; truth continues to function for Popper as a “regulative idea” (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 229. That is to say that our theories never manage to fully capture “das ding a sich”, the “noumenal world”, as Kant called it, beyond our limited powers of perception and cognition, however, we can get closer to the truth only through “intersubjective” critical discussion. The sense of “objectivity” I am emphasizing here is the contrast between Popper’s external realism, his insistence that the goal of science is to get closer to the truth, on the one hand and various approaches instrumentalism that reject this goal or others that tend to either implicitly or explicitly conflate science with ideology. Examples of this to my mind would be Critical Theory, some approaches to the sociology of scientific knowledge, various forms of post-modernism, and to a lesser extent, aprioristic economic theories like that of Ludwig von Mises (see Ch. 5)

remainder of this thesis. I will continue to outline the essential features of his philosophy of science in the rest of this chapter and show how these facilitate the solving of other problems in the chapters that follow.

2.1 Fallibilism: Popper's Solution to the Twin Problems of Induction and Demarcation

According to Popper the *Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*¹⁴⁴ are *the problems of induction and demarcation*. Induction refers to the traditional empiricist method of making content enlarging and truth preserving inferences from experience. The problem of demarcation is formulated by Popper as follows: "The problem of finding a criterion which would enable us to distinguish between the empirical sciences on the one hand, and mathematics and logic as well as 'metaphysical' systems on the other, I call the *problem of demarcation*."¹⁴⁵

Hume had shown that induction is logically invalid. On logical grounds there is no valid way of making content enlarging and truth preserving inferences from singular observational statements. That is to say that the aim of science, which is to discover strictly universal laws that are empirical, contains an inherent contradiction; so, Popper's problem could be paraphrased as follows:

If that which is universal is not empirical and that which is empirical is not universal, how can the two requirements of empirical science, strict universality and empiricism, be satisfied simultaneously?

¹⁴⁴ *Die Beiden Grundprobleme der Erkenntnistheorie*, Popper's first book, written mostly in 1930-1932 though it was published long afterwards.

¹⁴⁵ (Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934-35/1958) p. 11

Popper's solution involves the use of logically valid *deductive* inferences rather than the invalid inductive inferences. Science does not proceed from careful observation to the production of theories that are later strengthened through verification and classified as true, but rather science always *starts with theories*, with bold conjectures from which the implications of the theory are *deduced* and then subject to severe tests aimed at error elimination. Science grows cumulatively and rationally by means of criticism of existing theories and the proposing of new ones which need to be evaluated through empirical tests and critical intersubjective criticism that requires specific methodological rules to maintain external realism, a metaphysical position that Popper holds to but reformulates in methodological terms. Truth is the regulative principle, but there is no theory at all that can lay claim to certainty; certainty is exchanged for truth, a truth that exists outside of our minds that we cannot know fully but that science can get closer to, just as a mountain climber, because of cloud cover, cannot be sure of having reached the highest peak, though he knows he has been moving upward and is at *a peak*.¹⁴⁶

His insights are based on his rational interpretation of Kant that he shares with thinkers like Jakob Fries and Julius Kraft. Kant famously insisted that Hume had awakened him "from his dogmatic slumber" and so Kant tried to reconcile classical rationalism with classical empiricism. "Hume's Fork" divided truth statements into two categories: *a-priori, analytical, necessary(certain)* truth

¹⁴⁶ Popper explains this idea using the metaphor of a mountain climber: "*The status of truth in the objective sense, as correspondence to the facts, and its role as a regulative principle, may be compared to that of a mountain peak which is permanently, or almost permanently, wrapped in clouds. The climber may not merely have difficulties in getting there--he may not know when he gets there, because he may be unable to distinguish, in the clouds, between the main summit and some subsidiary peak. Yet this does not affect the objective existence of the summit, and if the climber tells us 'I have some doubts whether I reached the actual summit', then he does, by implication, recognize the objective existence of the summit. The very idea of error, or of doubt (in its normal straightforward sense) implies the idea of an objective truth which we may fail to reach.*" (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 226

statements on the one prong of Hume’s fork and *a posteriori, synthetic, contingent (uncertain)* truth statements on the other prong of the fork.¹⁴⁷ A-priori knowledge is analytic and certain because of the law of identity¹⁴⁸ but is merely tautological¹⁴⁹, *not* synthetic and not empirical. A posteriori knowledge is synthetic, contingent, *and* empirical. The latter only gives us observations of individual objects and events, not of universal laws that would apply across space and time. The analytic prong of the fork gives us universally a-priori valid self-evident truths, but only about math and logic; they say nothing about the real world of experience.¹⁵⁰ A version of this “analytic/synthetic dichotomy” was famously formulated by Einstein as follows:

“As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality.”

Kant tried to overcome the analytic/synthetic dichotomy implied in Hume’s fork by arguing that there were synthetic statements that were a priori valid like, for

¹⁴⁷ Another way of explaining this dichotomy is to say that *analytical* statements are those that are true merely by definition. “A bachelor is an unmarried adult male” is a definition so the statement “Thomas is a bachelor” allows the deduction, i.e., logical imputation “Thomas is unmarried”, but this is nothing more than the information already contained in the term “bachelor”; it is possible without any observation of Thomas or by an inquiry of Thomas: “Are you married?”. However, if instead I do not have a definition to serve as a deductive premise like the statement “75.4% of American bachelors have beer in their refrigerator”, I have a *synthetic statement*, one that in contrast to the analytic statement *does* in fact add information. I will not be able to know this statement to be true or false until I do some kind of survey of American bachelors to find out the truth of the matter.

¹⁴⁸ In logic, the law of identity states that each thing is identical with itself. It is the first of the three laws of thought, along with the law of noncontradiction, and the law of excluded middle. Its symbolic formulation is $A=A$. It is true logically not psychologically and as such is distinct from any genetic or psychological a priori postulated as the product an “innate structure of the human mind”. Any form of it, however, expresses a mere tautology; it merely restates a definition of the subject in the predicate and is tautological and says nothing about the observable world of matter and objects.

¹⁴⁹ A tautology offers no new knowledge because it merely states the same thing twice. Ex: “A bald man is a man” = a man is a man= $A=A$: the law of identity; a tautology

¹⁵⁰ What is meant here by analytic are statements that are true by definition i.e., by the law of identity “A is A” Examples would be analytic statements like “A bald man is a man”, “A bachelor is unmarried” or the statements of arithmetic like $7+5=12$ which by means of analysis of both sides turns out to be nothing more than a tautology i.e., $1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1 = 1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1+1$. That is to say such statements are not synthetic and do not yield any new knowledge about the physical world.

example, the equation $7+5=12$ ¹⁵¹ or the proofs of Euclidian geometry. However, later philosophers, among others Bertrand Russell, the members of the Vienna Circle and Popper himself in his “deductivist-empiricist view”, in part in consideration of the discovery of non-Euclidian geometry, came to the conclusion “that there are no synthetic judgements which are a priori valid.”¹⁵²

Hume, in contrast to Popper and Kant, tried to “solve” the problem of induction through an appeal to psychology. He had pointed out that induction was impossible for logical reasons (logical problem of induction) but for practical reasons (practical problem of induction) Hume accepted the notion that we could simply trust our psychological habit of making content enlarging and truth preserving inferences from experience. For Popper this meant accepting an “irrational epistemology”¹⁵³ because it was based merely on human habit or expectation, a form of psychologism.¹⁵⁴

Popper’s solution is to reject induction as a method and to sacrifice certainty, which he believes is impossible in the sciences, for truth. “The Truth”, which we can never know fully can nonetheless be used as a “regulative idea”. After studying Tarski, in a sort of epiphany, Popper realized he could maintain the principle of *verisimilitude*, or truth likeness, based on Tarski’s work in logic which establishes argues for the “the correspondence theory of truth”.¹⁵⁵ Thus, critical rationalism preserves external realism and objectivity by retaining

¹⁵¹ (Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781/1998), Cambridge Edition, 1998 p. 144

¹⁵² (Popper, *The Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*, 2009/2012), pp. 94-95

¹⁵³ Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 7

¹⁵⁴ See section 4.2 below

¹⁵⁵ Karl Popper *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, BASIC BOOKS Publishers; New York London, 1962 pp. 219-228

empiricism as a critical standard of truth, and at the same time is distinct from positivism because it rejects induction and views all knowledge as unjustifiable by any authority. Even our best theories can only be classified as provisionally true or provisionally false. There is no ultimate verification and no ultimate falsification. The rejection of a theory is a rational decision that can only take place on a case to case in the course of an intersubjective discussion; it is not an automatic mechanism. Another fact that distinguishes him sharply from the positivists, who under the influence of Wittgenstein viewed metaphysical problems as mere gibberish, was, as mentioned above, the fact that he strongly believed that metaphysical ideas were essential for the theorizing that goes into forming conjectures and that they are not as problematic as the positivists think. In Popper's view metaphysical problems can be reformulated in methodological terms and thereby become solvable.¹⁵⁶

His solution to the problem of induction was to proceed with deductive methods. A theory serves as a conjecture, a conjecture that can be inspired by anything at all, even a random creative inspiration. The conjecture is usually given as an attempt to solve a problem revealed by the inadequacy of a previous theory. The logical consequences of the proposed theory are then deduced from it and then tested. Induction is not needed for the formation of theories. Popper held that theories cannot be *verified*, as the logical positivists insisted, but rather they can only be *falsified*, but not rejected automatically as explained above. Using verification would lead to the kind of verification or confirmation bias that is

¹⁵⁶ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) pp. 27-34

typical of pseudoscience.¹⁵⁷ That is because there is an asymmetry between verification and falsification¹⁵⁸.

Because there are always many things that are true about a theory, an observation as a confirmation of one of these truths is meaningless as far as the truth of the entire theory is concerned. Testing a theory, therefore, means searching for what is *wrong* with it, to *falsify* it, it is an act of error correction. Thus, his way of maintaining empiricism was to insist that only theories that can contradict a real or conceivable observation are admitted as empirical/scientific theories. This is Popper's criterion for demarcation. Theories with the potential to be falsified are considered scientific because they can be refuted by experience. Once clearly articulated publicly in their falsifiable form they are subject to critical discussion and testing aimed at falsification and if they survive, they are compared with other theories on the basis of specific rational methodological criteria aimed at determining which of the theories is closest to the truth.

Science progresses as a form of creative mythmaking¹⁵⁹ Established theories are subject to critical discussion and falsifying tests and theoretical discourse is used to come up with alternative myths in the form of falsifiable theories.¹⁶⁰ This greatly distinguishes critical rationalism from logical positivism. The key factor in preserving *the objectivity of science* is not induction in theory formation but testability and intersubjective critical discussion. As we shall see below, this has

¹⁵⁷ Examples of these for Popper were Freudian psychoanalysis and Marxism. The key factor here is that because a pseudoscientific theory explains *too much* it is highly susceptible to confirmation bias.

¹⁵⁸ Popper, *Objective Knowledge, an evolutionary approach*, Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1972, p. 7

¹⁵⁹ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) "Back to the Pre-Socratics"

¹⁶⁰ Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Press, 1973, pp. 45-46

tremendous implications for the sociology of science. For a fallibilist all theories remain only provisionally true even after they have passed severe tests; they are conjectures and are never justified or confirmed as true. However, a rational selection can be made among the corroborated theories or even falsified theories through a critical discussion among scientists.¹⁶¹

Popper's explicitly "normative proposal"¹⁶² of methodological rules and his assumption of a community of scientists unified by their honest desire to get closer to the truth are the elements of *Logik der Forschung* (1934) that Ian Jarvie views as the beginning of Popper's undeclared "social turn" in the philosophy of science.¹⁶³

In his study of Popper and Frege Mark Notturmo proposes the idea of a paradigm shift in the philosophy of science from an "EP1" epistemology to an "EP2" epistemology. The first is the traditional rationalist program of establishing certain and proven, necessarily true theories from "self-evident" axioms and the other is Popper's more modern fallibilist approach that views all theories as genuinely conjectural.¹⁶⁴ The (impossible) "quest for certainty" is abandoned

¹⁶¹ Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, Ch 10 „Truth Rationality and the Growth of Scientific Knowledge”, pp. 120-135

¹⁶² (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) See “The Rationality of Scientific Revolutions” p. 29 Note 41 “my gospel is not ‘scientific’, i.e., it does not belong to empirical science, but it is, rather, a (normative) proposal.” Popper’s approach, however, is not merely normative, but rather *transcendental* in the sense that he examined the structure of the strictly universal and empirical statements of previous examples of what he called “great science”, the tradition of scientists like Aristarchus, Kepler, Newton, Galileo, and Einstein.

¹⁶³ (Jarvie, 2001) pp. 9-34

¹⁶⁴ (Notturmo M. , 1985)pp. 2-5

for the possible and crucial “quest for truth”, for the *non-probabilistic* standard of verisimilitude or truth-likeness, for getting nearer to the truth.¹⁶⁵

As stated above this approach maintains objectivity and scientific progress while avoiding dogmatism and the negative consequences of verificationist and authoritarian approaches to knowledge.

2.2 Anti-essentialism and non-justification

Another crucial element in Popper’s philosophy of science was something that he discovered long before his engagement with the Vienna Circle; it in fact came to him at the age of 15. It is a problem with its roots in metaphysical questions regarding the problem of change and rest raised by Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle but is formulated by Popper as a methodological principle.¹⁶⁶ In his intellectual autobiography, *Unended Quest*, Popper describes how he came upon the problem of *essentialism*¹⁶⁷:

“I must have been about fifteen. My father had suggested that I should read some of the volumes of Strindberg’s autobiography. I do not remember which of its passages prompted me, in a conversation with my father, to criticize what

¹⁶⁵ This idea is not to be confused with any probabilistic standard but is rather focused on the increasing of empirical content, the class of possible falsifiers, and explanatory power of theories. (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962), Ch 10

¹⁶⁶ “*This problem, over which a major battle raged during the Middle Ages, is rooted in the philosophies of Plato and Aristotle. It is usually interpreted as a purely metaphysical problem; but like most metaphysical problems it can be re-formulated so as to become a problem of scientific method.*”(Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002), Ch. 10

¹⁶⁷ Here one must distinguish between philosophical/metaphysical essentialist theories like those of Heraclitus, Plato and Aristotle that were conceived as solutions to the problem of change and rest, on the one hand, and the methodological essentialism, which in the Middle Ages was referred to as Platonic realism, as opposed to the methodological nominalism that Popper insists is the proper method of both the natural and the social sciences

*I felt was an obscurantist attitude of Strindberg's: his attempt to extract something important from the "true" meanings of certain words"*¹⁶⁸

Upon taking up the issue with his father, the young Popper found, to his great surprise, that his father did not understand his son's problem with the author at all. Karl was later to discover that this fixation on the "essences" or concepts, on the "true definitions" of words, was almost universal among intellectuals and writers. He was convinced that it was a mistaken doctrine and developed its opposite, *anti-essentialist* position, *methodological nominalism*¹⁶⁹, into a cornerstone of his philosophy.

The reason Popper rejects methodological essentialism is rather simple; it has to do with the phenomenon of infinite regress.

The attempt to establish a true or final definition breaks down because the defining formula is also composed of words that themselves have to be defined by words that also need to be defined in turn, etc. until infinity. Plato's metaphysical essentialism, aimed at explaining "change and rest"¹⁷⁰, tried to get around this metaphysical/methodological problem by means of his mystical theory of ideas. There was for him a perfect form or "idea" behind all observed phenomena in a super-sensory world of perfect ideas. Every physical object or instantiated attribute like bravery or wisdom was only an imperfect copy of its eternal and immaterial form or idea that could only be grasped by those with sufficient insight. Aristotle is thought to have overcome this mysticism, but in fact he only secularized it somewhat by putting the "essences" in the things themselves. Hence science for Aristotle consisted of the compiling of an

¹⁶⁸ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 13

¹⁶⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, *New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 11

¹⁷⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, *New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 4

extensive taxonomy of true definitions of things, something akin to a modern lexicon. Popper rejected this idea altogether:

“The development of thought since Aristotle could, I think, be summed up by saying that every discipline, as long as it used the Aristotelian method of definition, has remained arrested in a state of empty verbiage and barren scholasticism, and that the degree to which the various sciences have been able to make any progress depended on the degree to which they have been able to get rid of this essentialist method”¹⁷¹

For Popper the proper method of the sciences is *methodological nominalism*; words are merely useful placeholders that are employed by scientists in critical discussions. Language itself is merely an *imperfect*, though effective, epistemological tool for communication. Moreover, science itself is about understanding the world as it is. The physical world consists of processes; hence science is about understanding how objects behave, about describing processes, not grasping mystical “essences”:

“Instead of aiming at finding out what a thing really is, and at defining its true nature, methodological nominalism aims at describing how a thing behaves in various circumstances, and especially, whether there are any regularities in its behavior. In other words, methodological nominalism sees the aim of science in the description of the things and events of our experience, and in an ‘explanation’ of these events, i.e., their description with the help of universal laws. And it sees in our language, and especially in those of its rules which distinguish properly constructed sentences and inferences from a mere heap of words, the great instrument of scientific description; words it considers rather as subsidiary tools for this task, and not as names of essences.”¹⁷²

Popper was known to call out during discussions, often loudly, with his famous words of frustration “‘What is’ questions are useless!”. Indeed, for Popper

¹⁷¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 226

¹⁷² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 30

scientists should be *talking about the world* and not bickering fruitlessly about the terms used to describe it, which are at best only imperfect tools of description anyway.

The fruitless obsession with the meanings of terms was a constant point of Popper's criticism toward the Vienna Circle, an obsession that he attributed to Wittgenstein and his *Tractatus*¹⁷³, which had, in Popper's opinion, a bewitching effect on the Circle.

*"...we may criticize a doctrine like that of Wittgenstein, who holds that while science investigates matters of fact, it is the business of philosophy to clarify the meaning of terms, thereby purging our language, and eliminating puzzles. It is characteristic of the views of this school that they do not lead to any chain of argument that could be rationally criticized; the school therefore addresses its subtle analyses exclusively to the small esoteric circle of the initiated. This seems to suggest that any preoccupation with meaning tends to lead to that result which is so typical of Aristotelianism: scholasticism and mysticism"*¹⁷⁴

This scholasticism has severe consequences in Popper's view. He says that Aristotelian essentialism is *"the most important source of...all that verbal and empty scholasticism that haunts not only the Middle Ages, but our own contemporary philosophy; for even a philosophy as recent as that of L. Wittgenstein suffers, as we shall see, from this influence"*¹⁷⁵

An important consequence of Wittgenstein and Schick's attempt to introduce a meaning criterion to solve the problem of demarcation instead of Popper's falsifiability criterion has been the Wittgensteinian dogma of dismissing metaphysical statements as meaningless gibberish. As a result of this extreme

¹⁷³ *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Ludwig Wittgenstein, 1921

¹⁷⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 236

¹⁷⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 226

form of Humean empiricism or sensualism advocated by the Circle, of casting metaphysical statements “into the flames”—which of course flourished on fertile ground in empiricist England—meant that they were not able, as was Popper, to reinterpret the metaphysical/philosophical problems of the three ancient philosophers in methodological terms so as to make these problems solvable. The doctrine that comes out of this is a kind of dogmatic empiricism that tends to lead to vulgar materialism and behaviorism. In the philosophy of science this has led to “naturalistic” approaches to science i.e., to a doctrine aimed at replacing the philosophy of science with the sociology of science.¹⁷⁶

Later in his autobiography Popper comments on the downfall of the Vienna Circle:

*“I may perhaps say here that what I regard as the ultimate cause of the dissolution of the Vienna Circle and of Logical Positivism is not its various grave mistakes of doctrine (many of which I had pointed out) but a decline of interest in the great problems: the concentration upon minutiae (upon “puzzles”) and especially upon the meanings of words; in brief, its scholasticism. This was inherited by its successors, in England and in the United States”*¹⁷⁷

Popper’s doctrine of restating metaphysical problems in methodological terms so as to make them solvable might have offered the Circle a lifeline out of this dead and empty scholasticism; it was a lifeline that was famously answered by Wittgenstein himself with a fireplace poker.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁶ (Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934-35/1958), pp. 30-31, See also (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, *New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 23 “The Sociology of Knowledge”.

¹⁷⁷ (Popper, *Unended Quest*, 1974/2002) p. 101

¹⁷⁸ Reference is made here to the notorious incident during a debate on the 25th of October 1946 at The Cambridge Moral Sciences Club during a heated debate concerning the paper Popper presented, „Are there Philosophical Problems? “. Wittgenstein, according to some reports, threatened Popper with a fireplace poker.

Anti-essentialism and the notion of infinite regress is also related to Popper's profoundly anti-authoritarian attitude toward knowledge sometimes referred to as *non-justificationism*¹⁷⁹. Part of the reason for his rejection of certainty in favor of truth is because of the fact that, for logical reasons already discussed above related to the analytic/synthetic dichotomy, nothing *in empirical science* can be proven definitively on the basis of logical inference alone.¹⁸⁰ Even if a logical conclusion is necessarily true according to valid rational inference, there is no way of proving the premise of the argument. Thus, an infinite regress of proofs occurs backwards along the lines of logical inference to the premise. In classical rationalism apriorism has been invoked as a way of avoiding this infinite regress. Science in this view must proceed as a logical derivation from one given truth that is taken to be self-evident, but this self-evident axiom, regardless how it is established, be it inductively, intuitively or by means of Kant's or Mises' failed efforts at establishing a synthetic a priori, it cannot establish an indubitable starting point outside of math and logic and hence cannot prove anything about empirical reality.¹⁸¹

This classical rationalist procedure of *apriorism*; the attempt to find some form of synthetic a priori or intuitive knowledge that simply can't be doubted attempts to establish an axiom intended to function as the starting point of the argument, the fundamental axiom, that is to say the place where the infinite regress stops. But what is the indubitable source of knowledge for this axiom? Is it the authority of some author, Biblical or otherwise? Well, who did the

¹⁷⁹ (Miller, 1987)

¹⁸⁰ See the previous discussion of Kant's antinomies and Einstein's statement on mathematics and reality in section 2.1

¹⁸¹ See sections 2.1 and 5.2.1

author get that knowledge from? And where did that person get it from? Is it some intuition in the head of the philosopher? Cannot even our most heartfelt intuitions, like the Sun's orbit around the Earth¹⁸², be grossly mistaken? Some have attempted to derive the a priori axiom from some innate "immutability of the logical structure of the human mind"¹⁸³. However, our brain, its physical and chemical structures, both those that are inborn and those wired by experience, are structures that are obviously in flux. These structures along with our very sense organs are the products of imperfect evolutionary adaptation and hence change over time. There is no way for apriorism to avoid what Popper and Frege condemned as psychologism,¹⁸⁴ the invocation of some kind of alleged human nature or genetic/psychological a-priori which cannot hold up given the fluidity of human cognitive structures and their dependence on the institutional factors that influence the evolution of their adaptive behavior.¹⁸⁵ There simply is no indubitable starting point for such an axiomatic system when it comes to empirical science; just like there is no essence upon which to base a "true" definition. Thus, self-evidence, essentialism and apriorism break down because of infinite regress:

"Since Aristotle, it has become widely known that one cannot prove all statements, and that an attempt to do so would break down because it would lead only to an infinite regression of proofs. But neither he nor, apparently, a great many modern writers seem to realize that the analogous attempt to define

¹⁸² This was a mistake that even Francis Bacon, the prophet of modern science and industry, made, insisting that the geocentric world view was "self-evident" (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)pp. 83-84

¹⁸³ (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics*, fourth edition, 1949/1996) p. 4

¹⁸⁴ (Notturmo M. , 1985) See also section 4.2 "Anti-Psychologism and the Autonomy of Sociology"

¹⁸⁵ This must not be taken as a refutation of Popper's rationalism or his embracing of the principle of the "rational unity of mankind". Both his rationality principle and his rationalism are empirical postulates we can freely choose. Even the decision to accept rationalism or reasonableness cannot be proven by rational argument. It is therefore a choice. See: (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 435-437 and (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) pp. 2-3

the meaning of all our terms must, in the same way, lead to an infinite regression of definitions”¹⁸⁶

On top of this, it can be argued that even the logical inferences starting after the a priori axiom is dubious because of *petitio principii*¹⁸⁷

Thus together, through anti-essentialism and the acknowledgement of infinite regress, all authoritarian justificationalist sources of knowledge, arbitrary taxonomies, mystical intuition, and apriorism are rejected as fruitless verbalism, as scholasticism, the philosophy of the Middle Ages.¹⁸⁸

The rejection of taxonomies is also significant for *the unity of scientific method*, because the establishment of highly specific and arcane jargon is a tendency in the sciences that leads to narrow specialization, a kind of *apartheid of the sciences*, such that each field is trapped in its own illusory rational construct based on arbitrarily established “true definitions” and its practitioners are incapable of seeing the larger picture outside of their framework. Interdisciplinary intersubjective communication with scientists from other fields is made increasingly impossible. For Popper this is highly destructive to science, which employs methodological nominalism such that definitions are read from right to left so as to answer the question “what do we (provisionally) choose to call x?” The term functions as an informal place holder for the sake of intersubjective critical discussion. Universals and their definitions are themselves a form of theory, and are as such only provisionally true or rather in this case provisionally useful for methodological purposes. This is methodological nominalism which, in contrast to the “scholastic” doctrine of

¹⁸⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)pp. 232-233

¹⁸⁷ (Miller, 1987) The principle of *petitio principii* holds that logical inference *always* relies on the existence of the conclusion in some form already in the previous premise and it is therefore incapable of establishing new knowledge and is, in a way similar to purely analytical statements, essentially tautological.

¹⁸⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 225

essentialism, is the proper the method of the natural sciences¹⁸⁹ and, for Popper, also applicable to the social sciences.¹⁹⁰ Science is not about asking “what is...?” questions or establishing a taxonomy of true definitions and constructing arcane specializations to analyze these arbitrary fictions; *science is about solving problems*.

These factors: the rejection of apriorism, of essentialism, of justificationism and advocating the principle of the *unity of scientific method* will become important later when we discuss the social sciences and especially *economic theory*.

3. Chapter 3: Popper’s Moral and Social Philosophy

The explication just given in chapter two incorporates, as the dates of the works cited indicate, a perspective on Popper’s philosophy of science as it developed over many years *after* its initial formulation in the 1930’s. This level of analysis is only possible from a retrospective position that takes its implications into account as they developed over the years. This is a perspective Popper could not have had at the beginning of his work. His earliest studies and writings up to WWII were in psychology, education, mathematics, geometry, physics, quantum mechanics, and epistemology¹⁹¹ which culminated in 1934/1935 in his groundbreaking work on scientific method, *Logik der Froschung*.¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 11

¹⁹⁰ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) Ch. 10 “Essentialism vs. Nominalism”

¹⁹¹ (Popper, *Frühe Schriften* , 2006)

¹⁹² Published much later in English (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002)

In order for the social implications of his discoveries to emerge, the tragic fate of civilization, the rise of totalitarianism in Europe, had to compel him to turn from the natural sciences to the social sciences.

3.1 *The Open Society and Its Enemies*

It was during the war years that he wrote his two major works on social science, *The Poverty of Historicism* and his magnum opus, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*.¹⁹³ The latter is by far his most widely read work. His 1934-35 *Logik der Forschung* (Logic of Scientific Discovery, 1934-35/1958) is certainly his most important early work in the philosophy of science. *The Open Society*, however, because it is more widely read and because it *applies* Popper's philosophy of science to social theory, has been more influential. The causal loop of his philosophy, that is to say the relationship between his philosophy of science and his social philosophy, is completed by the fact that this Open Society that he champions is also the only one in which the free scientific speculation and rationality he had called for, the prerequisites for human progress, can flourish. Thus, as outlined above, *science and progress, reason and freedom, individualism and altruism, democracy and truth* are all interdependent and united into a coherent whole in Popper's philosophy¹⁹⁴.

¹⁹³ One could add to these two an important lecture that served as a preliminary study for both of these books, "What is Dialectic" (1937) See section 4.4.2.1 below "Karl Popper's Distillation of Karl Marx".

¹⁹⁴ This is, of course, not to suggest that Popper developed anything like a "system", because he was consciously hostile to such constructions. It is only my own interpretation of how, what John Watkins called "The Unity of Popper's Thought" can be conceived. It is my conjectural interpretation regarding how the implications of his thought in various areas might be linked both causally and ethically.

Both *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and its Enemies* deal, in large part, with the pernicious effects of *Historicism*, a destructive doctrine with its roots in religion that was further developed by Hegel and his followers. It started as “one of the attempts to make history understandable by a theistic interpretation, i.e., by recognizing God as the author of the play performed on the Historical Stage.”¹⁹⁵ Historicism is exemplified in the ideas of the three main philosophers critiqued in *The Open Society*: Plato, Hegel and Marx. Historicist philosophers and social scientists, of which there were many in the 19th and early 20th century,¹⁹⁶ take “An approach to the social sciences which assumes that *historical prediction* is their primary aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns,' the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history”¹⁹⁷. Popper insists that “such sweeping historical prophecies are entirely beyond the scope of scientific method”¹⁹⁸ and that the popularity of historicism explains “the typical backwardness of the social sciences of our time”¹⁹⁹. Popper’s thesis is that a combination of this “backwardness” of the Social Sciences and the obscurantism of the German idealist philosophy that formed them contributed in great measure to the rise of totalitarianism, the very totalitarianism that drove Popper out of his native Vienna in 1937.

The Poverty of Historicism was the first of his major works in social science, the writing of which was a gradual process that began in Austria continued

¹⁹⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 8

¹⁹⁶ To Hegel and Marx and their followers can be added Leopold von Ranke, Wilhelm Dilthey, Oswald Spengler, Othmar Spann

¹⁹⁷ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002)p. 3

¹⁹⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)xliii

¹⁹⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 459

during his lecturing and writing in New Zealand during the writing of *The Open Society*. After the *Anschluss* of 1938 in which Austrian socialists had lost the battle with fascism, Austrian socialism had demonstrated the weakness of its orthodox doctrines, particularly its historicist doctrines of the “inevitable triumph” of socialism: “according to the infallible scientific socialism of Marx fascism was definitely the last stand of capitalism before its impending collapse”²⁰⁰ With regard to the Clero-fascist takeover of 1934, Hacothen explains that in Popper’s view historicism had weakened the workers resolve: “they lost their faith in their leadership. Too late, the leaders recognized their mistake. The Viennese workers had offered a heroic, but badly organized resistance to the fascist dictatorship and were crushed.”²⁰¹ Given its final defeat by Nazism in 1938, Popper did not have to worry about weakening the cause of Austrian socialism by criticizing it. *The Poverty of Historicism* (1944-45) was his first effort to apply his scientific method to a social question, the problem of finding a scientific method for the social sciences and finding the reasons for their failure to deal with totalitarianism. It is something of a theoretical precursor to *The Open Society and its Enemies*.

The first volume of the *Open Society* is dedicated to a critique of Plato and the second to a critique of Hegel and Marx. If one were to give a ballpark moral assessment of these three philosophers from Popper’s view, it would be something like this:

Plato was brilliant but his sociology, particularly his totalitarian ideas about society as articulated in *The Republic* and *The Laws*, are pure poison. According

²⁰⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 354

²⁰¹ (Hacothen, 2000) p. 328

to Popper, although almost everything we know about Socrates we know from Plato, Plato did not always faithfully represent Socrates' views and in large part he consciously perverted the rational egalitarian humanism of Socrates into his own views, which are reactionary and totalitarian.²⁰² *Aristotle* is treated only briefly and is criticized for his essentialism (see section 2.2 above).

Marx, however, is treated differently. Contrary to the impressions given by many conservative or Marxist (*mis*)interpreters of Popper, Marx is *highly praised in the book* for his rational humanitarianism and for his contributions to sociology. He is praised, among other things, for his opposition to “psychologism” in social theory,²⁰³ which is an important aspect of Popper's philosophy of science and his social theory. However, as a result of his widespread popularity among the social reformers of Popper's day, Marx's remaining Hegelian prejudices, greatly augmented by later Marxists, by “penetrating dividing and confusing the humanitarian camp”,²⁰⁴ had made Marxism the most dangerous form of historicism.

Hegel is the only one of the three philosophers that is portrayed as being utterly irredeemable, as morally and intellectually depraved. Plato was pernicious, but sincere, Marx was a rational humanitarian, but his philosophy was flawed. Hegel, on the other hand, was, according to Popper, deliberately deceptive and opportunist as well as pernicious. Popper quotes extensively from Hegel's contemporary, Schopenhauer, who describes him as “a flat-headed, insipid, nauseating, illiterate charlatan” whose “extensive field of spiritual influence... furnished by those in power has enabled him to achieve the intellectual

²⁰² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 141

²⁰³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 299

²⁰⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 294

corruption of a whole generation”²⁰⁵ Popper himself insists that “Nearly all the more important ideas of modern totalitarianism are directly inherited from Hegel”²⁰⁶ Popper’s critique of Hegel is controversial, but nonetheless illuminating; he does not only analyze Hegel’s overtly political ideas but attacks his “dialectical logic” as generating nothing but “*reinforced dogmatism*”²⁰⁷

Popper shows the relationship between the doctrines of these three philosophers, Plato, Hegel and Marx, and 20th century totalitarianism. I will show how certain aspects of these philosophers’ ideas still exercise a pernicious influence on intellectual life and continue to place obstacles in the way of developing a more scientific, rational and effective approach to social science and to humanity’s problems.²⁰⁸

3.2 Popper’s Moral Philosophy

Social philosophy, it can be argued, begins with moral philosophy, i.e., with ethics.²⁰⁹ *Ethics* deals with the question of how we should live and what the difference is between good and evil. Applying these standards to the human community is the business of the corollary or related branch of philosophy we call social or *political philosophy*. The scientific study of society that examines, in addition to its descriptive function, the extent to which our normative ethical

²⁰⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p.247

²⁰⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 273

²⁰⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 254

²⁰⁸ See Ch. 6 on the “Critical Theory” of the *Frankfurter Schule*.

²⁰⁹ Philosophy Who Needs It? In her famous 1974 speech Ayn Rand argues that Politics is a corollary of ethics in that it is the application of ethical precepts to society. Much of her moral philosophy, as is the case with many others, is derived from her very particular, and largely unsubstantiated assertions about “human nature”. Thus, her ethics and social theory are faulty in part because they proceed from the “methodological myth” of “psychologism” as criticized by Popper. (See section 4.2 below).

and political standards can be practically applied we call *social science*. I will examine all three of these, ethics, political philosophy and social science from a Popperian point of view.

3.2.1 Eschewing of Metaethics

The relationship between ethics and politics is pretty straightforward; our precepts of good and evil, or justice and injustice applied to society as a whole lead us inexorably to political philosophy. However, the first step, ethics, establishing a convincing and coherent set of moral standards, has seldom been achieved by either philosophers or theologians, at least not in a way that avoids arbitrariness and dogmatism. Popper was aware of the deficiencies of such discourse. As such his way of expressing his moral philosophy is much more indirect than that of others.

Karl Popper took a dim view of moral proselytizing. The rejection of this practice was something he found admirable in Marx:

“Marx, I believe, avoided an explicit moral theory, because he hated preaching. Deeply distrustful of the moralist, who usually preaches water and drinks wine, Marx was reluctant to formulate his ethical convictions explicitly. The principles of humanity and decency were for him matters that needed no discussion, matters to be taken for granted.”²¹⁰

In response to an inquiry regarding his lack of systematization with regard to moral philosophy Popper once answered as follows:

²¹⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 406

*“I did not want to be drawn into a discussion of meta ethics. Almost all philosophic discussions in those days were of meta ethics and they seemed to me endless and not profitable.”*²¹¹

This attitude here can be seen as an outgrowth of his philosophy of science. From his non-justificationist and anti-essentialist approach to knowledge it follows that any axiomatic meta ethical theory would be arbitrary, and its alleged axioms and essentialist definitions would dissolve into an infinite regress.²¹²

This raises a problem, a problem we could call *the problem of Critical Rationalist ethics*.

As we know from Popper himself, *“science begins with problems”*²¹³. So how are we to derive a coherent ethical doctrine from a philosopher who rejects system building and shies away from expressing it explicitly?

The answer is that we do indeed get a clear understanding of his moral teaching when we look at his writing as a whole, when we contemplate certain tendencies and connections.

For example, we get negative affirmations of his ethics when contemplating the things that he condemns as well as positive affirmations when contemplating the things that he praises. The Closed Society, which is evil, represents primitive tribalism and the modern totalitarian revivals thereof. It is a society in which all change and all social mobility is permanently arrested, free discussion and

²¹¹ (Shearmur, “Critical Rationalism and Ethics”, 2009)

²¹² See the discussion of anti-essentialism and non-justification in Ch. 2.

²¹³ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 95

inquiry and hence science are impossible, and a small group of rulers exercises total control. The Open Society, on the other hand, is good; it represents the opposite; it is free, democratic and egalitarian. It is characterized by change and so offers upward mobility and it is the society in which free inquiry and hence science and progress are possible. It seems more than reasonable to infer relatively explicit moral principles from this dichotomy.

As mentioned above, Popper warns us against essentialism, reminding us not to pay too much attention to words,²¹⁴ but to rather examine the actual phenomena we are investigating instead. It is clear, however, that he is in large part concerned with the versions of these two societies that were confronting one another during his lifetime. For the first we would use the term *fascism*²¹⁵ and for the second *democracy*. It is in large part his firsthand experience of the conflict between these two in all its inner detail in Vienna combined with his independent learning from a young age that affords Popper's such deep insight into questions of these political realities and their relationship to the history of ideas.

After developing his philosophy of science as the loyal opposition to the Vienna Circle and debating political questions with his socialist friends, Popper found himself in 1938 in exile in New Zealand. With the murderous destruction of his

²¹⁴ Rather than give a traditional essentialist definition of the Open Society, Popper posits instead a kind of objective criteria for it: "*governments of which we can get rid without bloodshed—for example, by way of general elections; that is to say, the social institutions provide means by which the rulers may be dismissed by the ruled, and the social traditions ensure that these institutions will not easily be destroyed by those who are in power.*" (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 118

²¹⁵ It is indeed true that Popper's understanding of "The Closed Society" came to include the totalitarian forms of "socialism" such as Stalinism and Maoism, his ideas in this direction were still being formed. (See the discussion of utopian social engineering in section 4.4.1) The behemoth that he was facing as an Austrian was first Austrian Clero-fascism and then Naziism and this is reflected in his ideas in the *Open Society*.

late enlightenment Vienna, not to mention the physical murder of many of his relatives going on in the back of his mind, he began to work on his “war effort” through research, writing and through lectures that he held at Christchurch and elsewhere. As Ian Jarvie had suggested²¹⁶, Popper’s application of his methodological ideas in his first two books²¹⁷ as applied to social theory is what yielded his “social turn” in the philosophy of science and in a new way to understand social theory. One important facet of this was this dichotomy between the Closed Society and the Open Society.

Popper’s anti-essentialism, his insistence that reality matters and terminology does not, reminds us that we must analyze these divergent societies from a methodological nominalist, that is to say, from a scientific, point of view. We must not allow ourselves to be misled by mere terms like “fascism”, “socialism”, “liberalism”, “democracy”, not because they are meaningless, but because there is no way of coming up with a “true definition” of any of them and it is an illusion to think that some arbitrary definition is going to make anything clearer about them.²¹⁸

Therefore, he embarks on his thorough and profound investigation into the origins of the opposing doctrines in Antiquity in volume one and then into their modern forms in volume two. Thus, his analysis relies on a genuine understanding of philosophical doctrines and their implications and not on an empty rhetorical juggling of terms, and certainly not on the kind of flippantly

²¹⁶ (Jarvie, 2001)

²¹⁷ (Popper, *The Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*, 2009/2012) and (Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934-35/1958) Note how late these works were published. The first only in German 1934-35 but not in English until 1958, the other not at all until 1979 in German and 2009 in English

²¹⁸ See the discussion in Ch. 2 on methodological nominalism and anti-essentialism. Also, Ch. 11 of *The Open Society*

cast jingoistic vilifications so common today.²¹⁹ We, his readers, actively partake of the discourse as it unfolds and we come up with our own *rational* moral judgement, one that, in my case at least, almost invariably conforms to Popper's own.

In a later lecture Popper likened his approach to “the *Exemplar Theory of History*: the theory that history is of educational value, especially for the political education of the statesman or general.”, and comments directly below that this approach was viewed by the Stoics as “a means of moral education”.²²⁰

When Popper describes the ideas antecedent to fascism as they exist in Pindar, Heraclitus, Plato and Hegel, it seems clear enough that the reader does not need much prodding to figure out that these doctrines and the society that results from them are to be despised as immoral, and it is likewise clear that we are to favor and *do favor* the ideas antecedent to the Open Society, both in the modern age and in their ancient forms as articulated by the “Great Generation of Socrates and Pericles”²²¹ and later by the philosophers of the enlightenment. Popper's aim is to clarify and to preserve the ethos of the Open Society, a society which “has been so often betrayed by so many of the intellectual leaders of mankind”²²²

²¹⁹ Some have argued, even Hacoen, that Popper's treatment of Hegel is unnecessarily hostile and vilifying. However, if you accept Popper's analysis of Hegel's influence even a little, that is his role in providing the philosophical basis of modern totalitarianism, you must come to the conclusion that Popper's attack is more than justified.

²²⁰ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 137

²²¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) pp. 184-185

²²² (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013), xli

As was the case with Marx above, for Popper and for his generation, active in Vienna's Social Democratic Movement and in the Viennese Late Enlightenment, many principles of basic morality, "principles of humanity and decency", are to be "taken for granted". These principles also receive an explicit though matter of fact expression that even further emphasizes the level to which he views them as universal and virtually self-evident. While discussing social norms, which are human creations though not arbitrary²²³, he writes the following:

*"Man has created new worlds—of language, of music, of poetry, of science; and the most important of these is the world of the moral demands, for equality, for freedom, and for helping the weak."*²²⁴

As will become clear later on, it is significant that totalitarianism, both in its Platonic and its modern forms, *explicitly* rejects all three of these values or "moral demands", and hence a moral repugnance of totalitarianism and its associated doctrines is assumed on the part of the reader.²²⁵

Moreover, Popper views rational humanitarianism, combining freedom, individualism and equality not just as one of many possible ways of basing morality, but rather as foundational to our civilization. In criticizing Plato's

²²³ See Ch. 5 O.S. Popper, on the one hand contrasts natural laws to human conventions pointing out that only the latter are a matter of choice, but that the choice made is not merely arbitrary and is based on knowledge and rational discussion and an understanding of "sociological laws", because in the social universe natural laws and conventions are intertwined. The social science he describes as most developed in this contest is that of "modern economics".

²²⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 62

²²⁵ See O.S. p. 77 on Plato's eugenics (an ancient precursor to Nazi racialist ideology) or p. 66 on Pindar's fascistic biological naturalism.

equating of individualism with egoism²²⁶, Popper opposes this doctrine to the rational altruistic individualism of the “generation of Pericles”:

*“This individualism, united with altruism, has become the basis of our western civilization. It is the central doctrine of Christianity (‘love your neighbor’, say the Scriptures, not ‘love your tribe’); and it is the core of all ethical doctrines which have grown from our civilization and stimulated it. It is also, for instance, Kant’s central practical doctrine (‘always recognize that human individuals are ends, and do not use them as mere means to your ends’). There is no other thought which has been so powerful in the moral development of man.”*²²⁷

Unlike Kant, who he here invokes, Popper tends to stick to his conscious rejection of philosophical system building. However, as I have already indicated, a coherent understanding of his moral philosophy can be derived from his approach. It emerges out of the interplay between his philosophy of science, i.e., fallibilism, his Social Democratic moral sentiments and his sophisticated understanding of rationality.²²⁸ Popper’s deep-felt sense of *egalitarianism* rests in large part on his conviction that the true rationalist humanitarian must be a fallibilist, must accept his or her own limitations, and this means realizing that there is no such thing as an ultimate source of certainty and that when addressing a problem or making an argument, anyone and everyone, no matter their intellectual gifts or education, will have something of value to say:

“The fact that the rationalist attitude considers the argument rather than the person arguing is of far-reaching importance. It leads to the view that we must recognize everybody with whom we communicate as a potential source of

²²⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 481

²²⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 98 (See section 1.2.1 regarding the incident in the Hörlgasse in 1919)

²²⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 431 (See also my own: “Rationality and Open Society: a brief outline of Popperian Rationality” [Rationalism and the Open Society \(Part I\) – The Vienna Symposium \(vienna-symposium.com\)](http://www.vienna-symposium.com))

*argument and of reasonable information; it thus establishes what may be described as the 'rational unity of mankind'.*²²⁹

Thus, we see that Popper's fallibilism, modeled in part on the intellectual modesty of Socrates, which he views as the essence of science, is also linked to his belief in the unity of mankind through reason. This thoroughgoing egalitarianism and humanism is something he shares with the tradition of 20th Century Social Democracy²³⁰ and with the philosophy of Socrates. The latter was perverted into its opposite by Plato. With Plato the egalitarian rationalism of Pericles and Socrates was turned into the pseudo-rational arrogance and duplicity of the master race of philosopher kings of *The Republic*. Through the propaganda of "noble lies", through the strict control of all intellectual life, and through selective breeding these "guardians" were to establish a hierarchical totalitarian rule of "natural masters" over "natural slaves".²³¹ This model became a reality in the feudal tripartite society of the *Ancian Regime*, which started when the Neo-Platonist Catholic Church seized totalitarian control of society during The Dark Ages.²³²

In chapter 5 and in my conclusion below we will see that some important aspects of Popper's basic values, especially egalitarianism and democracy, are rejected not only by Plato and the fascists but are also rejected by a group of social scientists that Popper is often associated with, those laissez-faire economists of The Austrian School, particularly by Ludwig von Mises and the "libertarians" in North America who follow his teachings. Up until "The Fatal Split",

²²⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 431-432

²³⁰ (See Ch. 1 and Popper's comments on Marx's humanism in sections 3.2.1 and 4.4.2.1)

²³¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 433

²³² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 239 and p. 663, Note 58

consummated in 1947 by the founding of the Mont Pelerin Society, the unity of egalitarianism and freedom was the consensus among *classical liberals*. Its logical postulate is the *equality of opportunity*. This principle seems to have been largely abandoned by *Neo-liberals*. I will explore this development more explicitly in chapter 5.

We have seen that although Popper is a philosopher with very strong moral sentiments, he refrains from trying to *prove* that his moral underpinnings are somehow objectively true and founded on objective facts. He in fact rejects on principle the very notion of basing moral decisions on facts. His non-justificationism and rejection of dogmatism leads to Popper's central ethical doctrine, a principle he calls *critical dualism*.

3.2.2 Critical Dualism or The Autonomy of Ethics

Popper's most systematic discussion of moral philosophy and ethical positions in *The Open Society* is in the chapter entitled "Nature and Convention", chapter five. Here Popper draws a fundamental distinction between *nature*, i.e., natural laws, and *convention*, i.e., manmade laws.²³³ It is only in the primitive tribal society and in the minds of those who cling to it that this essential distinction is not recognized and a "naïve monism" prevails²³⁴. People in tribal societies, Popper writes,

²³³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 57

²³⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p.58

*“...live in a charmed circle of unchanging taboos, of laws and customs which are felt to be as inevitable as the rising of the sun.”*²³⁵

The tribal, totalitarian, or closed society, whether of ancient or modern origin, is one in which the distinction between nature and convention is not made and the laws of both society and of nature are equally unbreakable and unalterable. The inalterability of societal norms characteristic of The Closed Society is based on ethical doctrines that attempt to *base norms on facts*, facts of either natural or divine origin.

It has long been a point of contention among philosophers as to what extent, if at all, a moral philosophy can be somehow “proven” to be objectively true or correct on the basis of our knowledge of the natural world and or of what we can allegedly know about “human nature”, which is construed to be either a naturally determined physiological fact or spiritually ordained psychological fact. In Hume’s diction this is the question as to whether or not we can draw a logical inference from an “is” statement to formulate an “ought” statement.²³⁶ More broadly it is the question of whether facts in themselves can be used to justify ethical decisions.

Hume’s and Popper’s clear answer here is “no”, we cannot. There is no way of bridging this “fact/value dichotomy”. The position he insists on is what he calls “*critical dualism* (or *critical conventionalism*)” Scientific investigation may reveal many facts about the world but whatever these facts are it is always we who decide how we should respond to them. This doctrine of the “autonomy of

²³⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 55

²³⁶ (Hume, 1739)

ethics”²³⁷ is a principle that is vigorously assaulted by historicism and other forms of determinism. Popper’s doctrine of critical dualism insists,

*“...that the responsibility for our ethical decisions is entirely ours and cannot be shifted to anybody else; neither to God, nor to nature, nor to society, nor to history.”*²³⁸

As free individuals we must decide between right and wrong on the basis of our individual consciences, alone or in the course of rational intersubjective discussion with others.²³⁹ No matter what the circumstances it is *we* who must make the moral decision to take a particular action or to establish a norm, and we are the ones responsible for the predictable results of our decisions, which we are morally obliged to consider in making our decision.

For Popper all deterministic approaches to ethics,

*“...attempt to find somebody, or perhaps some argument, to take the burden from us. But we cannot shirk this responsibility. Whatever authority we may accept, it is we who accept it. We only deceive ourselves if we do not realize this simple point.”*²⁴⁰

Thus, the recognition of the distinction between nature and convention implies a distinction between facts and norms or between “*facts and decisions*” and is the final and most evolved position which “is characteristic of the ‘open society’”²⁴¹

²³⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 64

²³⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 70

²³⁹ (Shearmur, “Critical Rationalism and Ethics”, 2009)

²⁴¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*). p. 57

Critical dualism, the autonomy of ethics, is antithetical to The Closed Society and foundational to The Open Society for several reasons. First it rejects the determinism of historicism; there are no such things as laws of history that enable us to predict the future and hence there is no such thing as an inevitable destiny of mankind or of civilizations, etc. that can justify our moral decisions. Historicist theories are deterministic and collectivist; *they reject the moral autonomy of the individual* and view the moral imperatives of The State or the collective to be paramount. They posit the myth of inescapable destiny and or some essential “human nature”. This supposed human nature is usually based on some theistic myth about “The Fall of Man”²⁴² or on some misanthropic or racist naturalism. The Open Society, on the other hand, is one that respects the individual, values human reason and recognizes that there can be no true morality without individualism. Rationality and morality can exist only within and among individuals, free individuals trying to solve problems, guided by their conscience and by reason, engaged in *genuine critical discussion*, which only The Open Society allows. We will see below how *the autonomy of ethics* becomes an essential component of Popper’s political philosophy and of his social science methodology.

But what of the resistance to the adoption of critical dualism Popper speaks of? As stated above it is, in part, a desire to escape the responsibility of autonomous moral decisions, but it is also driven by a genuine fear of what Popper termed “the strain of civilization”²⁴³ This is a byproduct of the transition from the closed to the open society. A transition in which old power structures are broken up by the advancement and successes of newer or previously oppressed groups. This

²⁴² (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013), 77

²⁴³ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 188

strain was felt intensely in Greece in the fifth century B.C. as the rise of the middle class and the movement toward Periclean democracy was in the process of overthrowing the aristocratic and authoritarian order that had preceded it. It was felt again with great intensity in Europe during the 19th early 20th century as the liberal and industrial revolutions were bringing the middle and working classes into positions of increasing political power and just as was the case with The Thirty Tyrants during their reign of terror in Athens,²⁴⁴ European aristocrats did not shrink from mass murder in defense of what they saw as their privileges.²⁴⁵ The totalitarian doctrines Popper criticizes in Plato and later in Hegel are the ideological handmaidens of Reaction in their respective eras.²⁴⁶

Chapter 5 is toward the beginning of volume 1 and it deals with ethical positions that were debated among some of the ancient Greek philosophers, who, like the Philosophers of the 19th Century, bore “witness to the tremendous and undoubtedly somewhat terrifying impression made by a changing social environment”²⁴⁷ Popper describes various ethical positions that they discussed which he describes as lying between the “naïve monism”²⁴⁸ of tribal society and the critical dualism of the Open Society. They are (1) *biological naturalism* (2) *ethical or juridical positivism* and (3) *psychological or spiritual naturalism*.

²⁴⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 182

²⁴⁵ The violent repression of the Revolutions of 1848 by Europe’s military aristocracy, Prussian militarism. Nationalistic Romanticism, and the Fascist movement of Popper’s lifetime can all be viewed as reactionary tendencies provoked by the “strain of civilization”

²⁴⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 162-163

²⁴⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 419

²⁴⁸ „Naive Monism “is the doctrine that holds that there is no distinction between natural laws and social laws; they are all ordained by some mythical god or gods and enforced by the tribal theocracy.

These positions are all in opposition to critical dualism, first advocated by Protagoras and Socrates²⁴⁹, in that they all try to find a moral foundation based on facts. It is also important to note that they can all serve to *justify completely opposite ethical standards* “more especially, for defending the worship of power, and for defending the rights of the weak.”²⁵⁰

As the term suggests, *biological naturalism*, is an attempt to base ethics on the “facts” of human biology. The poet Pindar and the sophist Thrasymachus represent, what Popper later refers to as ethical nihilism²⁵¹, both view man as *naturally unequal* so that it is a law of both nature and society that the strong must subjugate the weak.²⁵²

The orator Antiphon and the sophist Hippias, on the other hand, were egalitarian humanists and viewed man as *naturally equal*. Quoting Hippias Popper writes:

“Gentlemen, I believe that we are all kinsmen and friends and fellow-citizens; if not by conventional law, then by nature. For by nature, likeness is an expression of kinship; but conventional law, the tyrant of mankind, compels us to do much that is against nature.”²⁵³

One can see a similar pessimistic/optimistic dichotomy regarding “human nature” between the modern social contract theorists Hobbes and Rousseau. I will explore the relationship between such speculative anthropology and social contract theory when I examine Popper’s social science methodology in chapter

²⁴⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013), p. 64

²⁵⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 64

²⁵¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 112

²⁵² The similarity between this doctrine and the fascist ideology of Mussolini and Hitler will become obvious later on.

²⁵³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 66-67

4. For now, it is sufficient to point out that the assumptions about “human nature” made by the various philosophers have been, as here, wholly arbitrary as are, by extension, their moral conclusions therefrom. Hence the social theories thus derived have been quite useless.

The other egalitarians Popper invokes as opponents of Plato’s doctrines are Alcidas and Lycophon, the latter of which Popper quotes as follows:

*“The splendor of noble birth is imaginary, and its prerogatives are based upon a mere word.”*²⁵⁴

Again, it is quite clear by context that Popper’s sympathies lie with the two humanists, in spite of his rejection of their flawed doctrine of ethical naturalism.

The next position Popper discusses is *ethical or juridical positivism*. This doctrine holds that what is *posited*, that is to say, the existing norms and laws are the “facts” upon which morality is based. Popper points out that it is an inherently amoral if not immoral position that holds that “might is right” and that historically it “has usually been conservative, or even authoritarian; and it has often invoked the authority of God”²⁵⁵

However, Popper points out that in the modern era, under the influence of Hegel’s Aristotelian essentialist version of historicism, which is based on the idea of inner essential potentialities rather than fixed Platonic ideas²⁵⁶, “the

²⁵⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 67

²⁵⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 68

²⁵⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*), Ch. 11 “The Aristotelean Roots of Hegelianism” pp. 219-223

History of the World is the World's court of justice.”²⁵⁷. Rather than arresting history in accordance with the Platonic “idea” that is its tribalist original, Hegel’s historicism accepts change as inevitable and views *whatever* results from it as *necessary* and *good*, no matter what those results are. Thus, for Hegel and Marx positivism can become “*moral futurism*”²⁵⁸.

*“Now the historicist moral theory we are considering is nothing but another form of moral positivism. For it holds that coming might is right”*²⁵⁹

Popper viewed Marx to be a rationalist and a humanitarian but criticized the historicist elements in his philosophy, which are largely based on Hegel. Thus, the same immorality as that just mentioned holds true for doctrinaire Marxists who, as Popper points out, treat Marxism like a historicist religion. As we will see Popper appreciated much of what Marx wrote, but saw that Marxism in his time had become a pseudo-science that was guilty of “penetrating, dividing and confusing the humanitarian camp” and as such had become “the most developed and the most dangerous form of historicism”²⁶⁰, not least of all because of its own irrational doctrines of historicism and the “impotence of politics”²⁶¹, and because of what Popper refers to as “Engels’ ambiguous tactical doctrine”²⁶², which made the social democratic leadership utterly incapable of dealing with the rise of fascism, which it both provoked and accepted, believing

²⁵⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 277 Popper quoting Hegel’s *Elements of the Philosophy of Right, 1820*

²⁵⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 412

²⁵⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)

²⁶⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 293

²⁶¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 327-329 See also section 3.4 below. This doctrine, which was somewhat understandable given the narrow franchise of European parliaments at the time, was that political activity by the working class aimed at changing laws would be of no meaningful and that the social revolution would have to precede the political revolution.

²⁶² (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 371

it to be the last gasp of capitalism before the “*inevitable*” coming of socialism.²⁶³

With regard to ethics as such, the replacing of the “dictatorship of the bourgeoisie” with “the dictatorship of the proletariat” *in actual practice* is a position that can only be taken by a thoroughgoing ethical positivist who believes that future might makes future right.²⁶⁴ Lenin and Mao have given ample demonstrations of this. There will be more on them when we discuss the “canvas-cleaning” of “utopian social engineering”²⁶⁵.

The third position opposed to critical dualism that Popper examines is the one held by Plato: *psychological or spiritual naturalism*. It is in a way similar to biological naturalism, the position that tries to establish ethics on the basis of human nature. However, human nature is here described as something spiritual or psychological rather than merely biological.

Popper describes this position as an attempt to combine the first two and relieve them of their “one-sidedness”, and indeed there are close affinities between it and the other two positions. The affinity to ethical positivism is its tendency,

²⁶³. (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 355-358

²⁶⁴ This was especially true in Soviet Russia. Marx’s notion of “the dictatorship of the proletariat” took for granted that a socialist revolution would only take place in an advanced capitalist society in which the proletariat makes up upwards of 85% of the population. In Russia in 1917 only about 6% of the population were workers and the “revolution”, from its very beginning, took the form of a brutal dictatorship and the repression of rival socialist parties and the elimination of workers councils. Besides the practical problem of not having enough workers to run the workers state, the rule of the 94% by the 6% is certainly not what Marx had imagined. From the start it was a dictatorship of the Party *over the workers* and that dictatorship over everyone else.

²⁶⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013), pp. 154-155, see also p. 21 What Plato refers to as cleaning the canvas is the wiping out of previous traditions and institutions so as to “paint” the new order on a clean canvas. His form of it in *The Republic* was to exile all the adults of the city so as to have complete control over the children. Totalitarians like Robespierre, Lenin, Mussolini, Hitler, and Mao augment the process by augmenting exile with mass murder.

presumably by those in a position of some privilege within the existing social order, to give ethical positivism a “justification” based on “human nature”, i.e., the existing laws are indeed a matter of convention, but this is because these conventions grow out of specific aspects of human nature and are therefore correct. On the other hand, here it also dovetails with the naturalists’ emphasis on our human nature, but it differs in that it stresses our “spiritual nature”.²⁶⁶

With its emphasis on human beings’ spiritual or psychological nature, it is very close to *psychologism*, a flawed doctrine in the social sciences that Popper criticized in some detail, which we shall examine in chapter 4. As Popper points out here and later, *spiritual naturalism* is utterly fruitless because this position is so vague that it can be used to “prove” any ethical point, from the humanitarian enlightenment “natural right” philosophy of Kant, Paine and Jefferson²⁶⁷ to the “natural superiority” of the “master race” according to

²⁶⁶ Ibid, p. 69. In my reading Popper here reveals a touch of his own personal spiritual or residual religious feelings in that he assumes that Socrates’ reference to “the soul” represents an “appeal to our sentiments” that is “very much stronger than that of the other two positions”. Our rejection of positivism should be assumed, but the same does not seem to hold for biological naturalism. His other comments about naturalism like that on p. 67 about its “beastliness” suggest that this could be an interesting starting point for an investigation of Popper’s opposition to physicalism and to materialism as a whole.

²⁶⁷ Jefferson’s famous diction, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal” was the result of an interchange with Franklin. Jefferson’s earlier draft contained instead of “self-evident” “sacred and undeniable truths”. Franklin’s comment reportedly was “It smacks of the pulpit” and he suggested the more secular and, in the 18th century quite common notion of self-evidence, thus avoiding the theistic and theocratic implications of the draft version. This intuitionism of this doctrine of self-evidence as well as the, in this context, related essentialist doctrine of natural right would seem to present a problem for the methodological nominalist/anti-essentialist. However, there is no problem here because of the doctrine of *critical dualism*. The untenable declaration self-evidence here is simply replaced by a *conscious decision*. We simply decide to make the *moral decision* of viewing everyone as equal at birth, just like we make the moral decision to adopt rationality. see (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013), pp 58-59 and p. 436

Plato²⁶⁸, Mussolini²⁶⁹ and Hitler.²⁷⁰ As history has shown the doctrines of the latter formed the basis of the most appalling version of Platonic canvass-cleaning²⁷¹ of them all, the Holocaust. The Nazi's were not *amoral*; they were *scrupulous* followers of an *immoral* doctrine.

Thus, we are left with only one choice and that is critical dualism; all other positions that attempt to base ethics on facts, in Popper's view, fail precisely in their very attempt to place ethics on a more stable foundation of facts; they are capable of "*justifying*" any moral position whatever and have often been used to justify the deepest depravity. As we have seen in chapter 2 with Popper's philosophy of science, knowledge and theories can never be justified but only falsified. In the moral sphere this justification fails like any other kind of justificationism.

The upshot of this is that morality must be based on individual conscience and rational humanitarianism, nurtured in an Open Society that celebrates the tradition of free discussion. It is through critical discussions that rational decisions in the fields of both ethics and science are reached. The relationship between these principles and his political philosophy will be seen presently.

²⁶⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013), pp. 76-78

²⁶⁹ "*Fascism denies that the majority, by the simple fact that it is a majority, can direct human society; it denies that numbers alone can govern by means of a periodical consultation, and it affirms the immutable, beneficial, and fruitful inequality of mankind*", Benito Mussolini, "What is Fascism", 1932 Modern History Sourcebook, [Internet History Sourcebooks \(fordham.edu\)](http://InternetHistorySourcebooks(fordham.edu)), cited 16 Aug. 2021

²⁷⁰ "*The earth continues to go round, whether it's the man who kills the tiger or the tiger who eats the man. The stronger asserts his will, it's the law of nature.*" Hitler quote from. *Hitler's Table Talk*, by H.R. Trevor-Roper, London, Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 1953

²⁷¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 154-157

3.3 Popper's Political Philosophy

It is important to stress here that while Popper insists that morality can only be based on individual conscience, he was neither an intuitionist nor a moral relativist. His fallibilistic yet realist view of scientific theories as discussed above is analogous to his view of social institutions and traditions and by extension to his moral and social theories (more on this in section 3.2 below). In its 1961 edition he added an addendum to the *Open Society* entitled “Facts, Standards and Truth: A Further Criticism of Relativism” in which he posits a form of *moral realism* similar to his fallibilistic approach to natural science,

*“We may take the idea of absolute truth—of correspondence to the facts—as a kind of model for the realm of standards, in order to make it clear to ourselves that, just as we may seek for absolutely true propositions in the realm of facts or at least for propositions which come nearer to the truth, so we may seek for absolutely right or valid proposals in the realm of standards... As in the realm of facts, we can make discoveries. That cruelty is always ‘bad’; that it should always be avoided where possible; that the golden rule is a good standard which can perhaps even be improved by doing unto others, wherever possible, as they want to be done by: these are elementary and extremely important examples of **discoveries** in the realm of standards.”²⁷²*

The key principle here is the *discovery* of moral standards as an analogous process to scientific discovery. He also takes pains to point out that even though there is a dichotomy between nature and convention, as discussed above, it is a profound misconception if one takes this to mean that all conventions are arbitrary. What this means is that because the social world is about human behavior and humans are part of nature themselves, in the social realm nature and convention are intertwined. There are, therefore, discoverable *sociological*

²⁷² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 501 (My **bold type**)

laws.²⁷³ As with the search for scientific truths, the search for moral truths in the social realm, which is the product of *institutional structures* and not “human nature”²⁷⁴, must come by means of critical discussion and, to whatever extent possible, the resulting theories must be subjected to empirical tests.

However, as simple as this scheme may be, it has been the sorry lot of humanity that, at the hands of some of its greatest thinkers, much confusion has been sown in the realm of ethics and social philosophy. In 1940, while in New Zealand forming his ideas for *The Open Society*, Popper had occasion to give a lecture on ethics from which much of his later political philosophy can be traced. Here Popper’s explication is not merely about ethics but rather bears directly on the *very essence of political philosophy*, namely *the relationship between the individual and the State*.

3.3.1 Individualist Altruism vs. Collectivist Egoism

The speaker who preceded him at that lecture was the Reverend Merlin Davies and the title of his and Popper’s lecture was the same and was borrowed from a book of the same title by Reinhold Niebuhr: *Moral Man and Immoral Society*. Popper’s appreciation for the humanism of Christianity in its early uncorrupted form meant that there was considerable agreement between the two speakers. Popper’s lecture, however, was, in a way similar to his later work, completely free of the “Original Sin” doctrine evoked by the previous speaker. Popper

²⁷³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 60

²⁷⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) see Ch. 14 “The Autonomy of Sociology” pp. 301-310

rather takes aim at the pernicious influence of the philosophers who were later to be his primary targets, Plato, Aristotle and Hegel.

In his lecture Popper elucidates some basic moral positions with a simple chart in order to illustrate the ways in which these philosophers have sabotaged moral discourse.

(a) Individualism	(As opposed to)	(a') Collectivism
(b) Egoism	(As opposed to)	(b') Altruism

Popper points out that, because they would combine logical opposites, there are two combinations that are not possible, namely (a) with (a') and (b) with (b'); all other combinations are possible, for example, *egoism with individualism*. One could argue that this is the position of North American “libertarians”. Or one could, like Plato, Hegel and the modern totalitarians combine *egoism with collectivism*. It is this position that Popper, in 1940, in the dismal throws of WWII, feels is most pernicious. Here and later in more detail in *The Open Society* he points out that Plato and Hegel and other collectivists have tricked humanity into thinking that individualism is, by necessity, a form of egoism:

“It is very important to realize that there are four positions here from which we have to choose one. Plato, and with him most collectivists, always tried to obscure this fact. They spoke as if there were only two possibilities, individualism and collectivism. And they always identified individualism with egoism, neglecting the positions (a) (b'), and extolling collectivism as the only altruistic and therefore moral attitude. But what they had in mind was...egoistic

collectivism...In this way they distorted our moral impulse towards altruism...for their group egoistic purposes"²⁷⁵

In chapter 6 of *The Open Society* Popper develops the argument in more detail to show that, like his perversion of the term *justice*²⁷⁶, Plato's equating of individualism with egoism is key to his propaganda against the Open Society. The combination of egoism with collectivism is the basis of all totalitarianism. It is a device for promoting the collective interests of the "philosopher kings", the Communist Party, the ruling class, the master race, the Nation (at war with all others), in short of the State, which is to be an object of worship and for which one is to sacrifice oneself.

The combination of egoism and collectivism is poignantly illustrated in the "Oceania" of Orwell's *1984*, in which the ultra-totalitarian ideology is called "Oligarchical Collectivism"²⁷⁷. Twisting our altruistic impulses into a device for the collective rule of an entrenched ruling minority is at the root of totalitarianism, militarism and of the wars waged throughout history, particularly the two world wars that Popper lived through, which were driven by the collectivist egoism of nationalism fostered in large part by the obscurantist philosophy of Hegel, in his propaganda services to the Prussian State²⁷⁸

²⁷⁵ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p. 66

²⁷⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch 6 Here Popper shows that in ancient Greece the common meaning of the terms "Justice" was very much like our own modern meaning of equal treatment regardless of class and ethnicity. It was Plato who, through clever manipulations within the dialogues of *The Republic*, perverted the term into its opposite, its Platonic meaning, of knowing one's proper place in an unequal society and of maintaining a ridged caste system for the sake of the city.

²⁷⁷ (Orwell, 1984, 1949/2003) p. 212

²⁷⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 242-288

The position Popper advocates along with the equalitarian humanists of The Great Generation and of the Enlightenment is *altruistic individualism*, which “leads to the demand that the *State is to exist for the sake of the individuals* and not (as Plato demanded, in common with the fascists) *the individual for the sake of the State*”²⁷⁹

3.3.2 Protectionism

Another important element of both Popper’s philosophy of science and his political philosophy revealed in this lecture is his anti-essentialism²⁸⁰, more specifically *institutional anti-essentialism*, that is to say anti-essentialism as applied to institutions. Just as in natural science we should also here refrain from asking “what is” questions. Instead of asking “what is the state?”, “what are its origins?”, what we ought to be doing is *formulating demands*, “our wishes, our moral demands for the State.”²⁸¹ “Otherwise endless discussions of a merely verbal character are unavoidable”²⁸²

This reasoning leads him to articulate the idea of *protectionism*, a fundamental idea of his political philosophy, which, we will later see, sets him apart from neo-liberals and places him squarely in the tradition of the classical liberalism of Smith, Locke, Kant, Humboldt and the Social Democrats. He points out that his use of this word has nothing in common with the protectionism of industry from foreign competition, as the term is used by classical economists, but rather as follows:

²⁷⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p.66

²⁸⁰ See section 2.2 above.

²⁸¹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p.67

²⁸² (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p.68

*“...although it is fundamentally a liberal theory, I think that the name may be used to indicate that, though liberal, it has nothing to do with the policy of laissez faire. Liberalism and state interference are not opposed to each other. On the contrary, any kind of freedom is clearly impossible unless guaranteed by the State.”*²⁸³

Much of this lecture appears in chapter 6 of the *Open Society* but the idea of protectionism is expanded in a later chapter in terms along the lines of “the paradox of freedom”. This is the idea that an excess of freedom destroys itself because it would lead to the freedom on the part of the strong to commit violence against the weak. Popper extends the idea of physical violence to the violence of economic exploitation.

*“Even if the state protects its citizens from being bullied by physical violence (as it does, in principle, under the system of unrestrained capitalism), it may defeat our ends by its failure to protect them from the misuse of economic power. In such a state, the economically strong is still free to bully one who is economically weak, and to rob him of his freedom...We must demand that unrestrained capitalism give way to an economic interventionism”*²⁸⁴

As we will see below, this topic of interventionism remains a substantive point of disagreement between Popper and the neo-liberals like Hayek and Mises with whom he is often associated.

3.3.3 Negative Utilitarianism

Another important paper in which Popper develops his ideas regarding the individual and the state is entitled “Public and Private Values”. The text, which is dated somewhere between 1944 and 1946, is from the Popper archives and

²⁸³ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p. 68-69

²⁸⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 333

has only been published recently. It is speculated that it was to appear in a planned volume of essays²⁸⁵

Here, again, his anti-essentialism comes to bear:

*“I do not hold that a problem like ours—the demarcation of the **agenda** of **public policy**—can be solved by arguments about the nature of the state or of politics or about the essential difference between privacy and publicity.”²⁸⁶*

His approach, again, is anti-essentialist; it rejects the analysis of the mystical “immutable essences” of concepts and advocates rather the articulating of “a political demand”. His demand here stems from the principle of “negative utility” that he formulates quite simply as follows:

*“My thesis is that, **while misery is a matter of public policy, happiness is not**”²⁸⁷*

That is to say, the state should focus on avoiding unnecessary suffering and not on making people happy. His reasons here are both logical and moral, on the one hand, and technical and practical, on the other. First off, the goods that constitute happiness are “less definite and concrete than evils”²⁸⁸ Secondly, our aesthetic conceptions about enjoyment are personal and subjective, whereas concrete evils: suffering, injustice, exploitation, misery are obvious. It is also dangerous for the State to formulate some ultimate goal of happiness and to force it on people.

²⁸⁵ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2012) p. 442

²⁸⁶ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p.123

²⁸⁷ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 118

²⁸⁸ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2012)p.119

*“If a man falls in the street and breaks his leg, it is, I do not doubt, the duty of everybody who happens to be in the spot to help. But it is neither my duty to ensure that my neighbor should enjoy his glass of beer, nor is it my duty to convince him that there are better things than beer”*²⁸⁹

He argues that notions about happiness belong to the personal sphere, where friends may make recommendations to each other that can be listened to or ignored but such subjective notions of “the good” are dangerous if they become part of public policy, i.e., “the benevolent tyrant is more dangerous than the malevolent tyrant”. Forcing an official state sponsored conception of happiness upon people must be rejected; it would be tantamount to a theocracy, regardless of its secularity. Preventing avoidable suffering, however, *should* be a matter of public policy.

The technical or practical aspect of *negative utilitarianism* (the minimization of suffering rather than the maximization of happiness) is that the suffering or evils are clear and people with different moral conceptions can agree on what they are and even, perhaps, what to do about them. This makes the policy also practical in light of Popper’s heartfelt desire to find a way of “uniting the camp of the humanitarians”²⁹⁰, that is to say, the two groups that fought in central Europe and elsewhere against the rise of totalitarianism, the *socialists* and the *liberals*. This will be the theme of chapter 5.

4. Critical Rationalism and Social Science Methodology

One of the striking features of Popper’s philosophy that makes him so fascinating to those who study him seriously is the interconnectedness of his

²⁸⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p. 121

²⁹⁰ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 113

ideas. There is a strong and much discussed connection between his philosophy of science and his social philosophy²⁹¹. In spite of his many disagreements with Otto Neurath, Popper did share Neurath's conviction, "that the theory of knowledge was important for an understanding of history and of political problems"²⁹² Popper did not believe in the "unity of science" in Neurath's positivist encyclopedic version but, he did believe in "the unity of scientific method".

Thus, despite his firm conviction that moral questions cannot be reduced to facts,²⁹³ Popper's philosophy of science is fundamental to his approach to political questions and even more so to questions of social science methodology. These connections are at times explicit²⁹⁴, and at other times they become apparent upon examination of the arguments he uses in *The Open Society* and in his other lectures regarding the foundations of the social sciences. This chapter will first deal with some of the most significant connections and will then apply them to the social sciences in an effort to address their "typical backwardness"²⁹⁵

To do this I must show the *bridgebuilding* Popper's philosophy enables between the various branches of philosophy. If we take a typical scheme, similar to that of Aristotle, we might have 5 branches of philosophy: Metaphysics, Epistemology, Ethics, Politics, and Aesthetics. As explained in section 3.2, there

²⁹¹ (Magee, 1973/1982)pp.74-75

²⁹² (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)"Memories of Otto Neurath", p. 30

²⁹³ See section 2.2.2. Critical Dualism above

²⁹⁴ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) See the arguments against essentialism and for the unity of scientific method pp. 23-30 and pp. 132-136 respectively

²⁹⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 459 It is my assertion in this thesis that this "backwardness" applies just as well if not better to our social sciences today.

is a clear connection between political philosophy and ethics; the former is merely an application of the latter to social groups. But how are we to apply scientific knowledge and scientific method—elements of metaphysics/physics and epistemology—to ethics and then to social theory? In other words, how is a modern philosophy of science adequate to the natural sciences going to apply its methodology to social questions? How are we to achieve something like the objectivity of the natural sciences in the field of social science?

As suggested above, I hold this intrinsic connection between ethics and politics inherent in the philosophical approach to politics to be of crucial importance. As much as it is common to talk of “political science” as something separate from political philosophy, I find the notion of studying a field like politics that involves the lives of billions of people, indeed the fate of the entire species, without maintaining a deep connection to ethics, utterly absurd. If the fate of the entire species is not a question to be dealt with in ethical terms, then nothing else is. As we will see below, it was the determinism of historicist ethics, the amoral approach of “Scientific Socialism”, that hastened the degradation of Marx’s otherwise rational humanist philosophy. The determinism implicit in the reactionary historicism of Hegel, Spengler, Othmar Spann, and Hitler is just as amoral.

As pointed out in section 3.2.2, Popper’s moral philosophy rejects any form of determinism in favor of critical dualism, the dualism of facts and decisions. We also saw in chapter 3 of this thesis and chapter 5 of the *Open Society* that the ethical positivism of “might makes right”, a version of so-called “*Realpolitik*”, which is the hallmark of that kind of political science that tries to emancipate itself from the deeper questions of ethics, is in principle amoral and in practice immoral. It is a form of the ethical positivism mentioned above. If the only

standard of morality is the narrow interests of the State as such, the collective egoism of state worship will lead to repression and war. Furthermore, all determinist constructs, such as historicist prophecies or essentialist arguments about “human nature”, etc. are only highly elaborate ways of shirking the responsibility entailed in critical dualism.²⁹⁶ Thus, we can avoid these problems if we adopt the methodological postulate of *the identity of political philosophy and political “science”*; that is to say we view them, for all intents and purposes, as one in the same.

However, we still need to address the problem of finding a basis for the ethical aspects of social theory. As we saw in section 3.2.1, citing chapter 5 of the *Open Society*, we cannot justify our ethical decisions with facts, although we must take facts into account. However, we also saw that Popper was not a relativist but rather an ethical realist, that is he maintained that, just as in natural science we can compare theories and decide through critical discussion and tests which of them comes closer to the truth, we can also make “discoveries” that bring us closer to the truths of ethics.²⁹⁷

These discoveries are, of course, like all theories, only provisionally true and always subject to rational scrutiny and critical discussion. That is to say that, in the same way that the theories of natural sciences are never completely true and are only attempts to get closer to the truth, ethical theories are also subject to critical discussions and attempts to find their shortcomings. This intersubjective friendly competitive process among scientists is an important factor for the

²⁹⁶ See section 3.2.2 above

²⁹⁷ See section 3.3 above.

“social turn” in the philosophy of science that Ian Jarvie describes²⁹⁸ and it applies to ethical theories as much as it does to scientific ones.

This social aspect of scientific inquiry is aimed at subjecting theories to severe tests, to strong rational attempts to falsify them and argue in favor of other theories. This requires a diversity of views and paradigms. As we will see theoretical diversity in the realm of ethics is provided, just as in the realm of scientific theories, by the divergent theoretical frameworks. These frameworks are constituted by the various sets of implicit assumptions inherent in our divergent scientific and cultural paradigms. Popper’s approach to the rationality of science and his humanism based on the “rational unity of mankind” lead to the principle that the relativist incommensurability thesis is a myth. It is not only *possible* to communicate across divergent theoretical and cultural frameworks; it is precisely here where a critical discussion can be most fruitful, fruitful in our effort to get closer to the truth.²⁹⁹

But on what basis and in what sense or context are we to discuss ethics in the first place? What are we *actually* talking about when we discuss ethics? Ethics is after all not about right and wrong as pertains to physics; in physics there is no right or wrong in the moral sense. Right or wrong can only exist in a realm where a conscious decision is possible.³⁰⁰ A conscious decision on issues as complex as ethics³⁰¹ seems to be only possible for homo sapiens. Thus, it is with

²⁹⁸ (Jarvie, 2001)

²⁹⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)Ch. 2

³⁰⁰ As the term “critical rationalism” indicates, Popper and those who choose to adopt his philosophy are rationalists and as such the existence of free will and of human consciousness is fundamental. Popper’s defense of free will, which involves some rather complex physics, would be enough for another master’s thesis, so it will have to be taken as a given for now.

³⁰¹ It must be admitted that, although they function on a more instinctive, imprinted and emotional level than humans, the higher animals seem to indeed be capable of mental processes that would classify as conscious decision making. Popper conjectures that the pronounced difference between the adaptive

the question of what is right or wrong for *human beings* that we are concerned. But what are these human beings that we are studying?

It was Kant who made this question, the question of *anthropology*, the central questions of his philosophy. Because of the fact that ethics is about human beings, the study of human beings, anthropology, is crucial to it. Thus, anthropology as an empirical science builds a bridge between the theoretical branches of philosophy, metaphysics/physics and epistemology on the one hand, and the practical or *applied philosophy* of ethics and politics on the other. Kant made this question “What is man?” (*Was ist der Mensch?*) into the *question par excellence* (*Die Königsfrage*) of philosophy. It was the central question among his four fundamental questions.³⁰² It was the central question for Kant, as it should be for us, because it holds the key to all other questions.³⁰³

I am of course not using the term in the narrow sense of the scientific practice of anthropologists,³⁰⁴ nor as any form of psychologism³⁰⁵, but rather in the study of human society as such, that is to say the social and historical sciences, the humanities, in the broadest sense. As we shall discover in section 4.2, “Anti-psychologism and the Autonomy of Sociology”, it is important to stress that the problem indicated with the question “What is man?” or, better formulated in the

behavior of humans and animals has to do primarily with the existence of human language and the greatly increased behavioral repertoire this implies. (See Ch 1 of *The Myth of the Framework*)

³⁰² What can I know? What should I do? What may I hope for?, and **What is man?** /*Was kann ich wissen? Was soll ich tun? Was darf ich hoffen? und Was ist der Mensch?*

³⁰³ This should not be taken to that philosophy and or sociology should be reduced to the doctrine that “Man is the measure of all things”. Such a view, if it is allowed to engulf physics and epistemology, can lead to psychologism, a mistaken doctrine that will be dealt with below.

³⁰⁴ The academic field typified by the activity of observing the behavior of human communities, prehistoric or modern.

³⁰⁵ Psychologism is the faulty doctrine of basing social theory on human psychology. (See section 4.2)

plural, “What are human beings” cannot be reduced to psychology, but must rather be analyzed on the institutional level, that is in terms of the logic of social situations.³⁰⁶ It is precisely this institutional turn as the culmination of the social turn that forms the basis of the Popperian approach to social science.³⁰⁷

As we see in section 3.2.2 and in 4.2 in more detail, the common and highly flawed *psychologistic* approach to social science of many philosophers has been to simply posit some notion of so-called “human nature” and try to justify ethical and political conclusions using this arbitrary precept. This is a line of reasoning akin to the *biological or spiritual naturalism* Popper criticized (see section 3.2.2).³⁰⁸ What the resulting “backwardness of the social sciences of our time”³⁰⁹ and the enormous complexity of contemporary cognitive science seem to indicate is that Kant’s *Königsfrage* presents us with a problem that is much deeper and more difficult than the social contract theorists ever imagined. We have seen the fruitlessness of these arbitrary theories; theories that are so facile they can only degrade into ideologies.³¹⁰ Their fruitlessness is not only caused by their arbitrariness; their very line of argument betrays a glaring fallacy, the fallacy of an *essential and immutable* “human nature”.³¹¹

³⁰⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 8 “Models Instruments and Truth”

³⁰⁷ See section 4.3 “The Analogy of Theory and Tradition”

³⁰⁸ See note 181 Also Ch. 5 of *The Open Society*

³⁰⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and It’s Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 459

³¹⁰ See the discussion of Ch. 5 of *The Open Society* above, particularly the point that Popper makes regarding the fact that this “biological and spiritual naturalism” is capable of justifying totally opposite and mutually exclusive ethical conclusions.

³¹¹ (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics*, fourth edition, 1949/1996) In *Human Action*, for example, Ludwig von Mises insists, rather indignantly, that a certain “nihilism” has set in in modern philosophy because of the abandonment of the doctrine of the “immutable structure of the human mind” p. 4 upon which he basis his theory. “*All the praxeological categories are eternal and unchangeable as they are uniquely determined by the logical structure of the human mind*” p. 198

The structure of the human mind is not static, but rather it is wired or programmed to a significant degree by experience, especially that of early childhood during which phase synaptic connections are either reinforced or allowed to decay. Over longer periods of time human adaptive behavior is in a constant state of flux, as we adapt to the challenges of an ever-changing world and an ever-changing institutional framework.³¹²

As we shall see in the next section (4.1) Popper's comprehensive cosmological view of all life as problem solving presents an evolutionary view of the growth of scientific knowledge that unifies the natural and the social sciences. "Human nature" reveals itself as a form of adaptive behavior that evolves in a way analogous to the evolution of DNA and the evolution of adaptive behavior in animals. The crowning achievement of adaptive behavior is that of the ever-advancing evolution of scientific knowledge through the rational selection of better and better theories. This knowledge "without a knowing subject"³¹³ lies within the realm of "World 3", that is in the storehouse of our scientific theories and problems as they have evolved over time and are embodied in exosomatic artefacts like books, articles, and other storage devices. This "three worlds hypothesis"³¹⁴ resolves much of the tension and paradoxes between idealism and materialism, and serves to lend historical materialism a rational, dualistic basis conducive to a genuine understanding of and appreciation of Marx's significant contributions to social theory. It is an exercise, as we shall see, of distilling that which is useful, rational and humanitarian in Marx by systematically purging him of his Hegelian mysticism. In combination with the

³¹² (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 1

³¹³ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) pp. 106-150

³¹⁴ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) pp. 106-152

other factors mentioned here, this approach provides a solid basis for an enlightened rational approach to social theory.

4.1 Evolutionary Cosmology and The Unity of Scientific Method

One of the most revolutionary elements of Popper's entire contribution to science is his breaking down of the barrier between the natural sciences and the social sciences by means of his doctrine of the unity of scientific method. What is at stake here is the objectivity of science. If there is to be any positive use for the social sciences for humankind, it is clear that they must be genuine empirical sciences. Science must always be clearly distinguished from ideology, and ideology is especially apt to cloud the objectivity of the social sciences. An ideology, in great contrast to a science, is not aimed at getting closer to the truth but of strengthening itself through constant verifications, the kind of verifications that an ideology will suck up like a vacuum cleaner from the floor while maintaining a studied blindness to its mistakes. An ideology is something very much like a pseudo-science (see section 1.2.2.1). An ideology, which is in essence a theory that has abandoned the quest for truth, will employ immunizing strategies; it will consciously avoid falsification and criticism when it should be seeking them out. It will do battle with other theories rather than learn from them. And it will lead to dogmatism and fanaticism. A society that allows itself to be driven on by such ideologies will become blind to its own problems, to its own institutional dysfunction. A civilization that ignores the degradation of its institutions will soon fall. There will be more on this problem when we discuss the Austrian School of Economics and later in the conclusion.

This makes clear the pressing need to improve “the typical backwardness of the social sciences of our time.”³¹⁵ Although the time Popper speaks of here is the 1940’s, it will unfortunately become clear in later chapters that many of the negative trends Popper spoke of then are still with us. That is to say the conflation of ideology and science has only gotten worse.³¹⁶ The social sciences must become genuine sciences, using genuine scientific method³¹⁷.

Popper’s position, defended in various works throughout his career, is that the methods of the natural sciences and the methods of the social sciences are essentially the same, and that those who insist that they are vastly different only do so because they assume, falsely, that the natural sciences are inductivist and justificationist:

“...my thesis has been for many years: all those historians and philosophers of history who insist on the gulf between history and the natural sciences have a radically mistaken idea of the natural sciences.”³¹⁸

This mistaken attitude is based, in part, on what Popper called “the Baconian myth”³¹⁹, namely the mistaken doctrine that science “starts from observation and then slowly and cautiously proceeds to theories.” Francis Bacon (1561-1626) was the founder of what Popper describes as a “mighty rationalist religion”. Bacon was not, according to Popper, a genuine scientist, but rather

³¹⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 459

³¹⁶ Examples can be drawn from the Frankfurter Schule, from some schools of the “sociology of scientific knowledge”, from post-modernist approaches to knowledge, and also from some of the more orthodox schools of economics (see Ch. 5).

³¹⁷ Genuine scientific method here means the method proposed by Popper, for all the reasons argued for in this thesis. The word scientism is used to designate an aping of the natural sciences, or rather, from the point of view of Popper and later even Hayek, scientism is a problem of aping *inductivist methods*.

³¹⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “A Pluralist Approach to the Philosophy of History” p. 140

³¹⁹ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) “Back to the Pre-Socratics” p. 137

something of a prophet of the technological application of science and a Renaissance propagandist of the coming mechanical revolution, the cult of science and of man's "mastery of nature". Popper points out that Bacon's doctrine of "manifest truth"³²⁰, the notion that all we need to do is to free our minds of all prejudices, or all "idols",³²¹ in order to freely "read the book of nature" is both mistaken and dangerous.³²²

Popper explains that it was rather the approach of the Pre-Socratics and later of Kepler and Galileo that had been at the heart of science. This is the tradition of problem solving by bold speculation and by the rational criticism of earlier theories and comparing them with newer ones. Science does not consist of the mindless collection of random data. Bacon's own application of his *observationist* approach even led him to insist on the manifest and self-evident truth that "the Sun moves and that the Earth is at rest"³²³.

Bacon was the father of Anglo-Saxon empiricism, a tendency that was to distinguish British thought from the rationalism of the continent on into the 20th century. Empiricism was certainly an important corrective to the scholasticism of the Middle Ages, however, ever since Kant, it has been clear that the observer is much more actively involved in the perceptual processes and knowledge acquisition than any classical empiricism would suggest. Every observation is theory impregnated, that is to say that there is a *theory* or expectation involved even in the simplest act of observation. The raw data of our senses is

³²⁰ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) "On the Sources of Knowledge and of Ignorance"

³²¹ (Stanford, First published Mon Dec 29, 2003; substantive revision Fri Dec 7, 2012)

³²² If one believes that truth is manifest one will be convinced that there is one truth and that one, has it. Then one will tend to blame the existence of all other opinions on the manipulation of some Church or ideological enemy. Popper argues that this attitude contributed to the wars of religion that followed after Bacon's time. (See Ch. 9 *The Myth of the Framework*)

³²³ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch 4. Pp. 84-85

meaningless without a conceptual scheme of categories by which to make sense of it. This interpretative apparatus exists across a whole range of conscious, unconscious, and physiological structures. From the more complex structure of the conscious mind to the lower level of the visual and auditory cortex down to the sense organs themselves³²⁴, which are also based on the theories, conjectures or “tentative trials” implicit in their evolutionary adaptation³²⁵, there is an active process on the part of the subject in the acquisition of knowledge that is nothing like a “tabula rasa” passively absorbing the book of nature.

Here the Baconian myth breaks down and with it all forms of naïve inductivism. Popper’s approach to science, both natural and social, is based not on inductive methods of observing the world and coming up with content enlarging and truth preserving inferences. (See section 2.2) but rather on the method of conjectures and refutations, of proposing bold theories as attempts to solve specific problems, problems that arise when a previous theory breaks down as a result of a critical test or when it fails to explain or to predict a certain phenomenon.

The new theory must be formulated in a logical form such that it can be refuted by observation, thus, assuring the empirical content of the theory. The next step is to criticize the theory among colleagues in consideration of the facts and any empirical tests to eliminate errors and to compare the theory with other theories to see which one is closest to the truth³²⁶ In order to be accepted “a new theory, however revolutionary, must always be able to explain fully the success of its

³²⁴ “I have stressed before (in section II) that theories are like sense organs. Now I wish to stress that our sense organs are like theories.” (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 1 p. 8

³²⁵ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 1 p. 3

³²⁶ “The Truth” is unknown to us but the verisimilitude or truth-likeness of a theory can be ascertained relative to other theories by means of critical discussion and tests.

predecessor”³²⁷, and be able to explain other phenomena that the previous theory failed to explain. The new theory will also point to new problems of a greater depth than previous ones that will call forth new tentative theories aimed at solving the new problem, and so forth, etc.

The whole process can be illustrated by what Popper calls “the tetradic schema”³²⁸

$$P1 \rightarrow TT \rightarrow CD \rightarrow P2$$

For Popper “*science always begins and ends with problems*”³²⁹ Thus, we have P1, an initial problem. P1 could be a problem in the natural sciences like explaining or predicting a lunar eclipse or a problem in the social sciences like explaining or predicting a rise in unemployment. “TT” stands for the “tentative theory”, of course all theories are tentative theories, even those that have passed severe tests. “CD” stands for “critical discussion”³³⁰ There are always a variety of theories being discussed so there may be a TT1, TT2, etc.³³¹

³²⁷ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 12

³²⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “A Pluralist Approach to the Philosophy of History” pp. 140-141

³²⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “Models, Instruments and Truth” p. 155

³³⁰ Elsewhere Popper uses the acronym “EE” which stands for error elimination, but both in the natural and the social sciences the error elimination or critical discussion has the same purpose and modus operandi. The theory is criticized and compared with others using rational arguments aimed at falsifying it, which are based on logic and evidence, which also includes severe tests. The tests in the natural sciences could be lab experiments when applicable or for a complex indeterminant phenomenon like climate change, or virology by prediction and retrodiction. Being that these phenomena are similar in complexity and indeterminacy to phenomena in the social sciences, like economics, it is clear that laboratory experiments are mostly excluded in favor of the other two empirical methods. The key point here is that for any complex and indeterminate phenomena there is no need at all to make a distinction between the natural and the social sciences.

³³¹ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) p. 243

It is important to point out and to emphasize that there is nothing in this scheme that is not just as valid for the social sciences as for the natural sciences. The paradigm that Popper often uses to explain the rationality of science is the cosmology of the solar system and the stars as explored by the Ionian School Cosmology³³² of the Pre-Socratics in ancient Greece. It's quest for an explanation for the movements of the stars was carried on from Anaximander and Aristarchus to Ptolemy through Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, and Einstein. The distinguishing characteristic of the Ionian school, as Popper points out, is that in contrast to the other schools of Ancient Greece that were focused on preserving the teachings of the founder as a kind of religious creed, the Ionian school was based on rational criticism of all theories and on the preservation of the theories of all previous thinkers³³³, so they could be recalled and used for comparison to newer theories. The activity of the school was neither to simply jettisoned old theories in favor of new ones nor to immunize and verify the theory of the founder. For Popper this school represents the primogenitor of "the critical tradition", that is to say the foundation of science itself.

As explained above Popper's defends fallibilism. However, it is unlike any kind of relativist position like that of Thomas Kuhn that maintains the incommensurability thesis between paradigms³³⁴, and thus sees scientific revolutions as violent leaps of faith or irrational conversions. Popper's conception of the "Rationality of Scientific Revolutions"³³⁵ sees the various theories as telescoping into each other so that the latest theory, which like all

³³² (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 2 p. 41

³³³ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) "Back to the Pre-Socratics" p.151

³³⁴ (Kuhn, 1962/2012)

³³⁵ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 1 "The Rationality of Scientific Revolutions"

theories is false, is nonetheless a further development of the previous theory. It “must always be able to explain fully the success of its predecessor.”³³⁶ That means it can, like Einstein’s theory, explain everything the previous theory, Newton’s theory, can explain plus other things it cannot and is thus a better approximation of the truth than the previous theory. Rather than progressing by means of a leap of faith from one “normal science” paradigm to another, it is possible to *rationally* decide between theories ³³⁷ such that the growth of scientific knowledge will progress rationally.

An objection could be raised by an “anti-positivist”³³⁸ social scientist that would go something like this. “The solar system like every other part of the natural world is a completely different entity than the social world, that is to say that the natural world is simple and deterministic and can be understood merely in terms of the laws of motion and certain initial conditions³³⁹ The human sciences on the other hand, they would maintain, deal with entities like communities, markets, institution, which are of far greater complexity and are inherently indeterminate given the free will of human action”.³⁴⁰

Popper’s answer is that the entire natural world is indeterminate as well, not just the social world. Science is about the natural world and man is part of the natural world. The issue of indeterminacy and determinacy can be understood as a contrast made between clouds and clocks respectively. We can imagine

³³⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 12

³³⁷ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 1

³³⁸ There has been much confusion about the word “positivism” from the highly mistaken references to Popper as a positivist in the so-called *Positivism Streit in Deutschen Soziologie* (See section 6.1 below) to the general attitude like that of Peter Winch (see his contribution to *The Philosophy of Karl Popper* in the Schilpp volume) that *any* attempt to apply the objective methods of science to social theory is view as “positivism”.

³³⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 8

³⁴⁰ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) pp. 38-39

such an arrangement. There is a high level of determinacy represented by a precise clock on the right side and high levels of *indeterminacy* as represented by a disordered cloud on the left. Physical systems will range in determinism and predictability from the highly accurate clock on the right, that is, of course also not perfect, and move on towards the left where there is progressively greater indeterminacy ending in the disordered cloud. Popper's order as suggested from right to left is as follows: precise clock, the solar system, automobiles in order of their various levels of precision, plants, adult animals, young animals, disordered clouds.³⁴¹ Thus, from a scientific point of view, with regard to complexity and indeterminacy, there is no difference in kind between humans and animals, or for that matter between the solar system and the economy, but only a difference in degree.

*“What we need for understanding rational human behavior -and indeed, animal behavior-is something intermediate in character between perfect chance and perfect determinism, something intermediate between perfect clouds and perfect clocks.”*³⁴²

What emerges from this schema is the image of a world of problem-solving agents of various degrees of complexity “from the amoeba to Einstein” that are engaged in an evolutionary trial and error process under a hierarchical structure of “plastic controls”, of “clouds controlled by clouds”.³⁴³

The point here is this: both the human organism and human society function along this scale of determinacy and indeterminacy and are therefore to be studied by the same methods as any other physical phenomena. This is,

³⁴¹ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) Ch. 6 “Of Clouds and Clocks” pp. 206-255

³⁴² (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) p. 228

³⁴³ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) p. 245

however, not a formula for reductive materialism, precisely because it is the essential physical indeterminacy of the natural world, an outgrowth of quantum mechanics, which makes deterministic and behavioristic explanations of human choice untenable.³⁴⁴

He develops this cosmology further in another lecture where he describes the advance of science in terms of evolutionary adaptation, a process that is the same on several levels:

*“On all three levels – genetic adaptation, adaptive behavior, and scientific discovery – the mechanism of adaptation is fundamentally the same.”*³⁴⁵

The mechanism is one of *trials* from within the structure and *selection* from without. It follows the tetradic scheme from above with the “CD”, critical discussion, reserved for the highest form of adaptive behavior: scientific discovery.

Given this key point of departure of life as problem solving “from the amoeba to Einstein”, and the conviction that we study problems and not sciences, not taxonomies of jargon, “language games”³⁴⁶ or insignificant minutia, it becomes clear that there is no justification for making any categorical demarcation between the natural and the human sciences. We shall see that this decidedly unPopperian approach that I have called the *apartheid of the sciences*, the tendency towards specialization and towards an arcane internal logic based on specialist jargon, is detrimental to the growth of science.

³⁴⁴ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) Ch. 6 “Of Clouds and Clocks” pp. 206-255

³⁴⁵ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 3

³⁴⁶ (Wittgenstein, 1953)

The indeterminacy of the climate and the indeterminacy of a social aggregate like a national economy are both like clouds. They change constantly like the river that one cannot step into twice. They do not present us with clear cut deterministic universal laws and their behavior cannot be predicted with precision. They are both phenomena that do not lend themselves to traditional laboratory experiments and involve innumerable variables in constant motion.³⁴⁷ They are, therefore, best studied using models.³⁴⁸ Also both the climate and the economy have a recorded history so that retrodiction, like the examination of ice cores in climate science or economic data in historical archives in economics, can be used to test theories.

These illustrations make it clear that the methods here outlined are just as applicable to the social sciences as they are to the natural sciences. By employing a critical rationalist approach to science in the social sciences, they will become more objective and less ideological and may therefore become useful in improving society rather than harmful to it.

In order for the social sciences to become more scientific, however, not only these considerations must be observed, but there is also another central error that is all too common to the social sciences, the error of psychologism. Popper gives the credit for the depychologizing of social theory to Karl Marx and explains why psychologism is destructive to the social sciences.

³⁴⁷ There have, of course, been advances in computer technology such that climate models and economic models can be tested virtually, but these are, like all models, only vast oversimplifications of reality.

³⁴⁸ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) Ch. 29 “The Unity of Method” pp. 120-132

4.2 Anti-Psychologism and The Autonomy of Sociology

One of the letters Popper wrote to colleagues in England in his effort to get *The Open Society* published was to the Marxist professor Hyman Levy. In it Popper writes the following:

*“Since you are particularly interested in Marx, I may perhaps mention that the book criticizes Marx’s historical method; it is, however, anything but a hostile criticism. On the contrary, the tremendous importance of his thoughts is strongly emphasized, and especially their moral importance.”*³⁴⁹

It is indeed the case that, of the three main targets of Popper’s criticism in the *Open Society*, it is only Marx who is not only forgiven his shortcomings but is even *highly praised* for making fundamental and immanently significant contributions to social theory. The contrast between this treatment and Popper’s *contemptuous, loathing revulsion* of Hegel is quite telling, for it is the residual Hegelian essentialism, historicism, and “dialectic” mystification³⁵⁰, that Popper wishes to exorcize from Marx. Where the rational humanist Marx had erred it was on this basis, and it is the total misunderstanding of Marx’s thought resulting from this Hegelian obscurantism that has, once again, enabled Hegel “to achieve the intellectual corruption of a whole generation”³⁵¹ I am here referring to a host of doctrines stemming from the Hegelianism of the Frankfurter Schule and there contemporary iterations in the form of “Critical Theory” that, in Popper’s view, have had a negative effect on the social sciences. What was the utopianism of the revolutionary students of 1968 is today what falls under the umbrella term of “wokeness”. We will see below that, although

³⁴⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) see (1) Popper to Hyman Levy, 22 July 1943, p. 112

³⁵⁰ There is a detailed treatment in Ch. 11 & 12 of *The Open Society*, Popper’s lecture “What is Dialectic” (see note 166) in section 3.4 below of this paper.

³⁵¹ See note 19 in section 2.1 of this thesis

they partially identify as Marxists and contemporary reactionaries love to label them as such³⁵², there is seemingly *nobody* among the “Woke” or among their right-wing detractors who understands Karl Marx *at all*. I will examine the reasons and the consequences of this regrettable state of affairs, but first I would like to show one of the important reasons why a rationalist humanist and lover of freedom like Karl Popper praises Karl Marx so highly.

One of Marx’s principal achievements, in Popper’s understanding of him, is the fact that he *depsychologized* social theory. Through Popper’s reworking of Marx, we learn of the appalling extent to which the social sciences have been hobbled, in large part, by the “methodological myth” of *psychologism*, which is the “doctrine that all laws of social life must be ultimately reducible to the psychological laws of ‘human nature’”³⁵³

Popper starts chapter 14 of *The Open Society*, which is entitled “The Autonomy of Sociology”, by invoking Marx’s well-known epigram from his *Contribution to a Critique of Political Economy*:

“*It is not the consciousness of man that determines his existence—rather, it is his social existence that determines his consciousness.*”³⁵⁴

Although Marx’s book was written as a critique of Hegel’s idealism, Popper develops Marx’s principle into a powerful critique of the “*psychologistic school of sociology*” of J.S. Mill. Popper admits that some of Mill’s psychologistic insights are valuable. He emphasizes, for example, Mill’s “praiseworthy” and

³⁵² Chief among these would be the popular youtuber and psychology professor, Jordan Peterson, though there are many more.

³⁵³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 301

³⁵⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 301 quoting from *The German Ideology*, by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, first published in 1932

“sane opposition to collectivism and holism”³⁵⁵ in favor of a more individualist approach. However, Mill’s psychologism is inadequate; aggregate results cannot be derived from individual psychology. The proper method in the social sciences, according to Popper, is the one advocated by the founder of the Austrian School of Economics, Carl Menger. It is the principle of “methodological individualism”, which, like the approach of Marx, depsychologises social theory by introducing the principle of situational logic, which allows for an institutionalist approach to social science³⁵⁶ Psychology is indeed an important branch of social science, but it is neither necessary for methodological individualism, nor adequate as a basis for the other social sciences.

*“Mill, we can now say, believed in psychologism. But Marx challenged it. ‘Legal relationships’, he asserted, ‘and the various political structures cannot ... be explained by ... what has been called the general “progressiveness of the human mind”.’ To have questioned psychologism is perhaps the greatest achievement of Marx as a sociologist.”*³⁵⁷

Popper’s argument in this direction is twofold. First off, he points out that even seemingly universal human forms of behavior like exogamy can be shown to be learned and not inborn. He also shows that those who try to reduce social theory to human psychology are forced into an indefensible position; they must employ

³⁵⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 303

³⁵⁶ A *methodological individualist* like Popper or Carl Menger explains human institutions as “the unintended results of the interplay of intended human action”. Individuals act independently and intentionally according to situational logic, however, as a result of their interaction with one another under institutional constraints the cumulative effect of all these individuals’ actions is such that the outcomes are unintended and perhaps even unwanted. This position is opposed to the collectivist or holist view that individuals and their actions are subsumed into collectives whereby they become one super individual and that human action can be explained by invoking disembodied forces like “The General Will” or “The World Spirit”, to quote Rousseau and Hegel respectively.

³⁵⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 299-300

the historical and “methodological myth” of the “psychologistic version of the ‘social contract’”³⁵⁸

*“...the stress on the psychological origin of social rules or institutions can only mean that they can be traced back to a state when their introduction was dependent solely upon psychological factors, or more precisely, when it was independent of any established social institutions. Psychologism is thus forced, whether it likes it or not, to operate with the idea of a beginning of society, and with the idea of a human nature and a human psychology as they existed prior to society.”*³⁵⁹

The reason why such an approach “can hardly be seriously discussed”³⁶⁰ is because, for the species we know as Homo Sapiens Sapiens, there simply *never* was a point in time during which “man” was “in a state of nature”. There was no time during which his psychology existed before society did, during which his immutable “human nature” created a social order appropriate to itself as the social contract theorists like Grotius, Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau, Mill etc. all maintained:

*“...we have every reason to believe that man or rather his ancestor was social prior to being human (considering, for example, that language presupposes society). But this implies that social institutions, and with them, typical social regularities or sociological laws, must have existed prior to what some people are pleased to call ‘human nature’”*³⁶¹

Thus, it is clear that society, or “the social contract”, did not emerge from psychology but rather the other way round; our “human nature” was conditioned by our interaction within groups, within the institutional framework of our culture and traditions and must have evolved with them all along. It is especially

³⁵⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 305

³⁵⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 304

³⁶⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 305

³⁶¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 305

the case in prehistoric or tribal societies that institutions came about without anyone designing them but as the *unintended* results of interplay of *intended* action.

This has implications for the many prominent social theories grouping themselves together as “social contract” theories, all of which invoke the mythical original state of “man in a state of nature”. Whether their far reaching moral and political conclusions are based on the misanthropic secularized version of the “Original Sin” myth of Hobbes’ “Homo homini lupus”, and Plato’s “Fall of Man”³⁶², or on the Romantic collectivist utopianism of Rousseau’s uncorrupted “Homme Sauvage”, is of no consequence. These prevalent modern social contract theories are extrapolated from completely arbitrary anthropological assumptions and are utterly useless to social science.³⁶³

Thus, the only profitable way to conduct the social sciences is to approach them *institutionally*. The social scientist, political economist, or social technologist will study society in terms of methodological individualism, that is in terms of the *unintended* and often unwanted results of the interplay of intended action. This action both forms institutions and leads to their, often unintended, outcomes. This study must be done, not on the basis of psychology, but rather on the basis of an *autonomous sociology* that examines behavior in terms of the *situational logic* in which human actors find themselves.

³⁶² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 142-143

³⁶³ Social contract theorists typically start with an assumption about what humans were like “in a state of nature” and base their political theories on their assumptions therein. For Hobbes man in a state of nature is like a violent acquisitive and ferocious wolf “lupus”; Man is born evil but brought under control by society. For Rousseau, who tried to refute Hobbes, man in a state of nature is a “noble savage”, “Homme Sauvage”; Man is born good but ruined by society. See Hobbes *Leviathan*, 1651 and Rousseau *Discourse on Inequality*, 1755

The epigram Popper evokes above establishes a key sociological principle discovered by Marx; it forms not only the basis of his refutation of idealism, and, through Popper, of psychologism, it forms the basis for Marx's *historical materialism*, which, as Popper points out in detail, is not to be understood along the "vulgar Marxist" lines of classical materialism, but is rather dualistic in that it allows for a reciprocal causation between mind and matter, between autonomous human thought and the material basis of society at each particular stage of technical, historical development. This development of "the material forces of production" is itself in part *also a product of human thought*. It is the product of the rational scientific thought of the empirical sciences which, along with the tinkering of inventors, provides the basis for the growth of technology that provides the machinery of industry, which, together with the juridical/managerial structures, provides an ever-evolving material basis for the production of human life. The greater sophistication in the division of labor and in the productive process facilitates an evolution in the institutional superstructure and in turn the further growth of human knowledge, which allows for further technical advancement, and so on.³⁶⁴ Thus, the roll of autonomous human thought, Popper insists, was not ignored by Marx as it often is by vulgar Marxists.

*"The often-repeated claim that Marx does not recognize anything beyond the 'lower' or 'material' aspects of human life is an especially ridiculous distortion."*³⁶⁵

Popper then quotes some passages from *Capital* so as to point out that,

³⁶⁴ (Marx, 1932/1976)

³⁶⁵ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 313

*“...these passages do not exhibit a radical form of materialism; rather, they indicate a certain leaning towards a dualism of body and mind. It is, so to speak, a practical dualism”*³⁶⁶

Popper acknowledges that Marx’s historicism, his “oracular philosophy”, is an aspect of his historical materialism that must be dropped, but that his “economism”, the doctrine that the “material conditions of production” should be considered in sociological and historical theory is quite valuable. *However*, he also points out that it is very often taken far too literally, as if the material conditions were themselves the principal agent of change and thought were insignificant.

“There is an interaction between economic conditions and ideas, and not simply a unilateral dependence of the latter on the former.”

Later Popper enriched the conceptualization of historical materialism and relieved it of some of its one-sidedness by advocating, rather than dualism, pluralism: his three worlds model.³⁶⁷ Humans change their environment and “inhabit new environmental niches”³⁶⁸ in a similar way as do animals. Beavers, for examples, are known for building elaborate dams to regulate the flow of small rivers and occupy new environmental niches. The striking difference between humans and beavers is that with beavers it is roughly speaking the same kind of dam down on through all the generations of beavers; there is no point when a generation of beavers begins pouring cement to build Hoover Dam. This difference is largely attributable to human language.

“The conjecture that our decoding of what the senses tell us depends on our behavioral repertoire may explain part of the gulf that lies between animals and

³⁶⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013)p. 313

³⁶⁷ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) pp. 106-152

³⁶⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 2

man. For through the evolution of human language our repertoire has become almost unlimited”³⁶⁹

In order for human language to play its epistemological role across generations, the knowledge has to be stored and passed on to future generations. It was passed on first by oral tradition and then in books, especially efficiently in the cradle of science, in Ancient Greece, which had the advantage of an alphabet and of relatively wide spread of literacy. The storehouse of human knowledge, art and scientific problems in libraries and other forms of storage is what Popper calls World 3. It is through the interaction of World 3 with World 2 (conscious thought) within those who study the artefacts of World 3 that allows the scientific and technical knowledge to influence World 1 (the physical world) as human beings adapt it to their needs.³⁷⁰

In the aftermath of the scientific and technical revolutions of the 18th and 19th century and the accompanying downfall of authoritarian religion, a plethora of social theories were formulated and discussed as philosophers and social scientists scrambled to understand society and respond to “the strain of civilization”. Karl Marx’s historical materialism, as laid out here and understood by Popper, should have been, in Popper’s time, and I believe *should be* in our own time, fairly uncontroversial. It is not only imminently plausible; it has significant advantages over the other social theories attempting to explain social phenomena. It avoids the flawed psychologistic theories, as explained above and allows for an institutionalist approach. It is completely devoid of the mysticism of theism and idealism, as well as the racialism and ultra-Nationalism of fascism. Once exorcized of its residual Hegelianism, it becomes a theory that is in keeping with the ideals of classical enlightenment liberalism. It accepts the

³⁶⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 24 note 9

³⁷⁰ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) pp. 106-152

equality of human beings and their potential for spiritual and intellectual improvement. It also accepts the equality of all nations and ethnic groups, for the differing levels of advancement between nations are viewed as the product of geographical, economic as well as institutional advantages that are independent of any individual's or nation's innate "psychology" "essential spirit" or "racial superiority". When properly understood historical materialism in its enlightened dualistic or pluralist form is unabashedly rational, humanist and universalist.³⁷¹

The misunderstanding of Marx's theory on the part of "vulgar Marxists" and anti-Marxists stems from taking its materialism too literally, as explained above, and the mistake of applying psychologism to the problem situation that Marx was dealing with.

*"The average Vulgar Marxist believes that Marxism lays bare the sinister secrets of social life by revealing the hidden motives of greed and lust for material gain which actuate the powers behind the scenes of history"*³⁷²

Someone who actually understands Marx would not fixate on these psychological factors and realize that Marx's approach is institutional; individuals are trapped in a situational logic that leads them to act intentionally in ways that, in the aggregate, leads to unintended consequences. A good example would be the fact that a factory owner is compelled by the institutional framework of unregulated capitalism to pay his or her employees as little as possible, even if this is not what he or she wants to do. Starvation wages are

³⁷¹ (Marx, 1932/1976) pp. 40-98

³⁷² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 311 This is very prevalent among some progressives who want to "smash capitalism". They cannot distinguish between capitalism, without which modern industrial society seems hardly possible, and the corruption, inequality, poverty and authoritarianism caused by the Neo-liberal approach to economic policy and jurisprudence.

made necessary by the market conditions characterized by strict price competition that compel each capitalist to lower labor costs to the bare minimum. Furthermore, even though the cumulative effect, the *unintended* result is the impoverishment of the workers and hence the destruction of the consumer market that the capitalist needs, the capitalist has *no choice* but to behave in this way if the firm is to avoid bankruptcy.³⁷³ Marx does not deny that psychology can play a role; what he crucially insists is that psychology cannot explain sociological phenomena or history:

*“It must be admitted that he [Marx] sometimes speaks of such psychological phenomena as greed and the profit motive, etc., but never in order to explain history. He interpreted them, rather, as symptoms of the corrupting influence of the social system, i.e., of a system of institutions developed during the course of history; as effects rather than causes of corruption; as repercussions rather than moving forces of history”*³⁷⁴

Thus, psychological phenomena such as greed, hatred, violence, exploitation, etc. are not essential defining aspects of “human nature” driving history and social constructions, but rather the effects of those constructions in an institutional framework. These negative outcomes are the *unintended* results of the interplay of intended action. By rejecting Marx’s methodological collectivism, while in favor Mill’s individualism and rejecting Mill’s psychologism in favor of Marx’s institutional approach, Popper shows how Marx can be reinterpreted as proposing a form of methodological individualism, one that explains historical and social phenomena by examining the aggregate results of individual actions within an institutional framework., what Popper

³⁷³ Of course, there *can* be exceptions to this. Henry Ford is credited with instituting cost saving mass production and as a result was able to pay his workers more than his competition did, precisely in a conscious effort to counter act the tendency described above. The point, however, is that under normal circumstances an unregulated market and institutional constraints like it in general lead individuals to engage in intended action that has unintended and often unwanted results.

³⁷⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p.312

calls situational logic.³⁷⁵ If human behavior is conditioned by institutions in this way, both desirable and undesirably human acts through history, from the greatest acts of moral courage and creative genius to the most depraved acts of cruelty and destruction, are not part of any essential “human nature”, but rather the outcome of the interplay of intentional human action under institutional constraints. Arguments based on so-called “human nature” can never provide a rational basis for social theory.

Individual human psychology is not an explanation for aggregate human action but rather the other way round. Aggregate action in turn is subject to institutional constraints. These constraints limit the field of action of both individuals and groups within and without the institutions. This is why Anti-psychologism and the autonomy of sociology also refutes what Popper called “*the conspiracy theory of society*”³⁷⁶. In chapter 15 of *The Open Society* Popper distinguishes Marx’s philosophy from the “vulgar Marxist conspiracy theory” that invokes it.

*“Rightly or wrongly, he [Marx] saw in such phenomena as war, depression, unemployment, and hunger in the midst of plenty, not the result of a cunning conspiracy on the part of ‘big business’ or of ‘imperialist war-mongers’, but the unwanted social consequences of actions, directed towards different results, by agents who are caught in the network of the social system.... This doctrine of Marx’s has been abandoned by most of his followers— perhaps for propagandist reasons, perhaps because they did not understand him—and a Vulgar Marxist Conspiracy Theory has very largely replaced the ingenious and highly original Marxian doctrine. It is a sad intellectual come-down, this come-down from the level of **Capital** to that of **The Myth of the 20th Century**.”*³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994), Ch. 8 “Models, Instruments and Truth”

³⁷⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 306

³⁷⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 312, The second title mentioned at the end of the quote is the virulently anti-Semitic book by Nazi ideologue, Alfred Rosenberg.

The “‘*conspiracy theory of society*’”³⁷⁸, which Popper considers “the very opposite of the aim of the social sciences”, is so untenable because it ignores the inevitability of unintended results. The “conspirators” would never be able to control the complex chain of events and all its consequences even if they did manage to organize a largescale conspiracy behind our backs. In recent years, 2020-2022, in the throes of the Covid-19 pandemic, the wildest conspiracy theories of both the far left and the far right have taken on an alarming life of their own. As in Popper’s time the consequences of the various faulty or one-sided interpretations of Marx have contributed to the “unsatisfactory state of some of the social sciences”³⁷⁹ The proper approach to the social sciences, in Popper’s view, is an institutional approach, one that attempts to gradually improve our understanding of the unintended consequences of the interplay of intended action.³⁸⁰ The insights achieved by such a science allow for a rational approach to understanding institutions and traditions so that they can be improved by piecemeal means.

4.3 The Analogy³⁸¹ of Theory and Tradition

One of the most enduring problems of social theory is *the problem of traditions and institutions*. On the one hand there is the fact that they provide a necessary set of implicit assumptions upon which members of society can base their

³⁷⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 306

³⁷⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) xlii

³⁸⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)pp. 305-306

³⁸¹ It is important to stress here the use of the *scientific* term “analogy”, which is quite distinct from the *rhetorical* term “metaphor”. As important as anti-essentialism is, I must briefly reconstruct the history of the term, much the way Popper reconstructed the history of “justice” from Socrates to Plato’s extremely different sense of the word. Analogy, is a relation taken from Euclidian geometry and is derived from the Greek “logos” or the Latin “ratio”, hence connected to logic and rationality. Thus, it is, as with Euclid, a real, mathematical, or geometrical relation. I use the term to underscore the ontological nature of the relation between theory and tradition in Popper’s scheme. It is to be understood as a *real* relation rather than a merely figurative one as in the case of a metaphor.

rational decisions, which is to say they provide a theoretical basis for rational behavior in a particular society. On the other hand, there are many instances when a tradition or institution can lock individuals in a society into a situational logic in which the individual actants experience aggregate outcomes that vary widely from their own individual intentions. In other words, there are institutions and traditions that can be highly ingrained in a society that are nonetheless *irrational* and therefore objectively speaking harmful to their participants. Popper's approach to social theory in this area is based on the principle that traditions and institutions can function very much in the same way that theories function in science, they can be criticized and compared and rationally evaluated and reformed.

Chapter 4 of *Conjectures and Refutations* is a lecture entitled "Toward a Rational Theory of Tradition", originally published in 1949. In it, Popper develops an analogy between theories and traditions that is a perfect example of how critical rationalism can be applied both to the natural and to the social sciences.

Popper introduces the lecture by telling his audience he is "a rationalist of sorts" and explains that his study of the methods of the natural sciences led him to study the methods of the social sciences, which deal with problems like the one addressed in this lecture, "the problem of tradition".³⁸²

Popper begins to sketch the long standing "traditional hostility between rationalism and traditionalism"³⁸³ He lays out three ways of dealing with the problem of tradition. One is that of the *anti-rationalist traditionalist*:

³⁸² (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 120

³⁸³ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 120

*“The anti-rationalists in the field of politics, social theory, and so on, usually suggest that this problem cannot be tackled by any kind of rational theory. Their attitude is to accept tradition as something just given. You have to take it; you cannot rationalize it; it plays an important role in society, and you can only understand its significance and accept it.”*³⁸⁴

The figure he associates with this antirationalist traditionalist position is Edmund Burke (1729-1797), who is widely regarded as the founder of European conservatism and whose famous book *Reflections on the Revolution in France* was the movement’s manifesto.

The second position regarding tradition is that of *the pseudo-rationalist* who insists on theorizing about society as it “really is” or “could be”, independent of any existing traditions. The pseudo-rationalist wants “to judge everything on its own merits”³⁸⁵, and if necessary, “clean the canvas” and construct society on a blank slate.

The third position is that of *critical rationalism*, which Popper develops systematically in the lecture as a response to Burke who, Popper insists, “has never been properly answered by rationalists”. This lecture is Popper’s effort to “take up the challenge.”³⁸⁶ I will explain below how Popper makes his argument in the form of an analogy between scientific theories and social traditions.

First, it is important to examine the wider significance of this challenge and of the conservatism that is founded upon this anti-rationalist traditionalism. Burke’s book was published in 1790 and hence was a critique of the *liberal* phase of the French Revolution and *not* of the *Reign of Terror* of 1792-1794. Later events naturally strengthened Burke’s message and arguments, which on

³⁸⁴ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 120

³⁸⁵ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 120-121

³⁸⁶ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) 120-121

the continent provided the justification for continued conservatism and monarchism. European conservatism or *Reaction* against the French Revolution was systematized at the Congress of Vienna of 1815 and later maintained by the workings of the “congress system”. The key principles of this regime were *legitimacy*, and *solidarity*. Legitimacy meant returning all lands to their “legitimate” noble rulers, i.e., a reaffirmation of *divine right* and solidarity meant the “solidarity” between the ruling houses of Europe under the auspices of the *Holy Alliance* of the Russian, Prussian, and Austrian empires. The Holy Alliance was initiated by Czar Alexander I of Russia and its stated goal was “to promote Christian social values and traditional monarchy”, that is to say, to ensure the continued rule of Absolut Monarchy and its philosophical handmaiden, authoritarian religion.

For the next 33 years The Holly Alliance, this reassertion of medieval theocracy, worked through the “congress system” to prevent any liberal constitutional reforms on the continent either by censorship, secret police, repression, and when that failed, by coordinated military action. When the wave of revolutions finally became so widespread that liberal revolutionaries and parliaments took over virtually every European metropolis in 1848, the ruling houses of Europe used the power of their military aristocracy to crush all of them. So it was that the absurd anachronism of Absolute Monarchy did not meet its final demise in these three Empires until the catastrophe of The Great War lay all three dynasties bare and prostrate at the feet of their own subjects, who then toppled them in three separate revolutions 1917-1918.³⁸⁷

It must remain an open question what Burke’s attitude towards the repression of the Holy Alliance would have been, for he died before the rise and fall of

³⁸⁷ (Russell, 1934/2001)pp. 13-66

Napoleon and hence before the Alliance was established. It is clear, however, that he valued traditional monarchy and viewed England's *Glorious Revolution* of 1688 as a *preservation* of traditional monarchy and not as its *replacement* by constitutional monarchy as it is seen by later historians. John Locke, who is so intrinsically connected to 1688 by historians, is not even mentioned once by Burke. There is nothing of Locke's rational humanism, natural rights and popular sovereignty in Burke. On top of that one finds in this work a touch of Plato's notion of natural inequality as part of the immutable social order. The progressive egalitarianism³⁸⁸ of the philosophes he calls a "monstrous fiction". Burke launches a bitter critique of the French revolutionaries and of his own contemporaries in "certain societies in London", who were supporting the French Revolution. He rebukes them for "inspiring false ideas and vain expectations into men destined to travel in the obscure walk of laborious life". According to Burke these gentlemen should have the wisdom to accept the natural inequality "which the order of civil life establishes as much for the benefit of those whom it must leave in a humble state, as those whom it is able to exalt."³⁸⁹ Burke embraces an essentialist view of institutions as unchangeable as well as a view of society as a corporate body characterized by the eternal inequalities envisioned in the medieval Neoplatonic "Great Chain of Being".³⁹⁰

Given Popper's humanism, his belief in the *Open Society*, and his personal history in the battle for its defense, it is important to see the Burkean challenge in light of this history

³⁸⁸Here is meant the egalitarianism of power, status, and opportunity, as opposed to Burke's notion of naturally given equality of moral worth under conditions of pronounced inequality of the first kind.

³⁸⁹ (Burke, 1790/2004)p. 124

³⁹⁰ (Burke, 1790/2004)

It seems clear that this conservative traditionalism, the view that traditions and institutions are sacrosanct and must not be altered, a kind of *institutional essentialism*, is closely connected with maintaining the status quo and as such will lend itself to moral positivism³⁹¹. There are relativist implications as well. The traditions of a particular country are specific to that country alone in many cases. A rigid and unconditional adherence to them is essentially relativist³⁹², for if all the social institutions are to be accepted as sacrosanct, then the mentality of each nation becomes epistemically and morally incommensurate with any other; the “Myth of the Framework” is created.³⁹³ That is to say, as is the case with tribal society, in which individuals live in a charmed circle of taboos, if institutions and traditions are viewed as utterly unquestionable, people who belong to different societies cannot fruitfully communicate or rationally solve problems with each other.³⁹⁴ The irrationalists reject the rational unity of mankind, so important to Popper’s rational humanism, and replace it with cultural relativism.³⁹⁵

³⁹¹ See section 2.2.2. above.

³⁹² A thoroughgoing institutional essentialism or traditionalism forms the basis of all forms of fundamentalism, including the modern fascist theocracies in the Muslim world, such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and now even Turkey, as well as the Clero-fascist leanings of many evangelical Trump supporters and the Neo-liberal proponents of so-called *textualism* in American constitutional law. It is a formula for tribalism and for a relativist approach to both truth and morals. In the endless excuses they make for the fascist theocracies of the middle east and Third World ultra-nationalism, many people who think of themselves as being on “the left” unwittingly accept this reactionary ideology too and have enlisted themselves as enablers of fascism on the part of Third World dictators and in the mentalities of immigrants.

³⁹³ Delivered in German „der Mythos von intellektuellem Standort“ from „Über den Relativismus: Der Mythos von intellektuellem Standort“: Karl Popper, Lecture for German radio, Ca. 1990.

³⁹⁴ From the above-mentioned lecture, note 125: „*Es ist unmöglich, ein Problem rational und fruchtbar zu diskutieren, wenn die Teilnehmer nicht auf einem gemeinsamen Boden von Grundannahmen stehen oder wenn sie nicht wenigstens der Diskussion zuliebe einen solchen gemeinsamen intellektuellen Standort provisorisch akzeptieren*“.

³⁹⁵ Cultural and epistemic relativism plays a central role for both the far left and the far right. It is a mainstay of “Post-Colonial Studies” and “Critical Race Theory” on the one hand, and, as pointed out by Johannes Steizinger, was an important foundation of Nazi ideology on the other. *The Emergence of Relativism*,

Because of its anti-egalitarianism, its Platonizing worship of The State³⁹⁶, its relativism, and because of the danger of irrationalism Popper saw in his own time, it is clear that he must reject Burke's position. However, he does admit that some anti-rationalists, like Burke, by helping to expose pseudo-rationalism³⁹⁷ (which they did not distinguish from rationalism), "have earned the gratitude of all true rationalists"³⁹⁸

Popper goes on to develop his approach to solving the problem of tradition, but not before cleaning house with his own rationalists, for there are certain doctrines and dogmas, those of "cocksure" pseudo-rationalism³⁹⁹, that Popper insists, they must give up. One doctrine that is to be given up is *determinism*. Popper's rejection of the doctrine is, in part, an outgrowth of Popper's understanding of quantum theory⁴⁰⁰ and of course of his opposition to historicism, the illusory notion that one can predict the course of history. The second doctrine rationalists must give up is *observationalism*, i.e., the "Baconian myth" that truth reveals itself if one only reads "the book of nature" without prejudice⁴⁰¹ (see section 4.1 above). This obscures the importance of theories in science and leads to intolerance⁴⁰². The third is the aforementioned

Ch. 14 "National Socialism and the Problem of Relativism", by Johannes Steizinger, Routledge Taylor and Friends Group, London, 2019

³⁹⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 107

³⁹⁷ For Popper pseudo-rationalism is the kind of cocksure rationalism that dogmatically resists criticism and dogmatically overestimates its own powers. (See ch.24 of *The Open Society*) p. 435

³⁹⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)

³⁹⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 433

⁴⁰⁰ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) "Of Clouds and Clocks" pp. 206-255

⁴⁰¹ In place of this doctrine Popper insists, as did Kant, on the principle of the theory laden nature of observation. All observation, even the conceptual structure of our language and categories of thought, are a conditioned on a theoretical structure that exists before the observation occurs.

⁴⁰² (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 7. Popper's argument is that rationalists who succumb to the myth that truth is manifest in nature become convinced that those who disagree with them *must* be either deluded or nefarious.

“conspiracy theory of society”, which is the bane of pseudo-rationalist social science, because it deludes the holder of the theory into a theist myth that is nothing more than a replacement for the belief in the Homeric gods of old⁴⁰³, and deprives him or her of the opportunity of addressing the real tasks of social science in methodological individualist terms.⁴⁰⁴

*“It is the task of social theory to explain how the unintended consequences of our intentions and actions arise, and what kind of consequences arise if people do this that or the other in a certain social situation. And it is, especially, the task of the social sciences to analyze in this way the existence and the functioning of institutions ... and of social collectives.”*⁴⁰⁵

Although people act in groups, the results of group action are often contrary to the intentions of the individuals within the group, thus the negative outcome can be and often is in fact not the result of any plan (conspiracy), but just of the interaction of individuals within a particular situational logic. This situational logic is conditioned by certain constraints. Some of these constraints will be of a purely physical nature, that is they will be things like access to vital necessities like food and water, that will explain, for example, the tendency of a starving population to engage in acts of violence. The availability of vital necessities, however, is a product of the economy of a country which means that other kinds of manmade constraints come into play. That is because the economy depends on a legal framework, and on the technology and on the infrastructure of that country and this depends on the level of technical education, and government administration as well as on the political system.

⁴⁰³ The delusion consists in the person thinking a question like “Why does this social phenomenon happen?” can be answered simply by finding “Who would want it to happen”, instead of a serious investigation into the unintended consequences of interplay of intended action, which is the proper method.

⁴⁰⁴ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 122-124

⁴⁰⁵ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 125

All along this complex chain of interdependencies there are *institutions*, from the family, to the Church, to the schools, universities and think tanks, up to the level of police departments, hospitals, corporations, law firms, parliaments, law courts and the executive branch of government. Through the interactions between individuals acting according to the situational logic *created by these institutions*, the, often, unintended results of the interplay of intended action are produced. Thus, the positive purpose of the social sciences is to understand these institutional mechanisms and to recommend ways of improving their outcomes.

So where does this leave the rationalist, traditionalist debate?

As I mentioned above Popper's argument hinges on an analogy between scientific theories and social traditions:

*"My main purpose will be to draw a parallel between, on the one side, the theories which, after submitting them to scientific tests, we hold as a result of the rational or critical attitude--in the main, that is, scientific hypotheses--and the way they help us to orientate ourselves in this world; and, on the other side, beliefs, attitudes, and traditions in general, and the way they may help us to orientate ourselves, especially in the social world."*⁴⁰⁶

He goes on to examine the origins of science in Ancient Greece and to explain the way that science gradually replaced mythology by means of the innovation of *critical discussion*. The pre-Socratics developed their theories of cosmology as alternatives to the theistic explanations of the natural world provided by mythology, but first as alternative myths to the old ones.⁴⁰⁷ The difference was that, in contrast to the earlier myths that had to be accepted as sacrosanct, these new myths were open to rational discussion and facilitated the development of "systematic observation" that only became possible when there were theories to

⁴⁰⁶ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 127

⁴⁰⁷ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) See also "Back to the Pre-Socratics", pp. 136-152

guide it.⁴⁰⁸ These theories were discussed, revised and alternative theories were proposed. This was the beginning of scientific reasoning and speculation, which is itself a *tradition*, a “second-order tradition”⁴⁰⁹. This is the tradition at the core of Western Civilization, the critical tradition so central both to Popper’s science and his morality.

This attitude toward critical myth making and rational comparison of theories, of course, corresponds to Popper’s fallibilism and his acceptance of metaphysics as a legitimate category of discussion (see Ch. 1)⁴¹⁰. By the analogy between theory and tradition his fallibilism also applies to human traditions and institutions. Thus, the analogy of theory and tradition constitutes a method by which the rationality of Popper’s theories in the natural sciences is transferred to the social sciences.

4.4 Piecemeal Social Engineering and Interventionism

Traditions, like scientific theories, must be open for critical discussion, and, if possible, should be improved. However, there are very compelling reasons why

⁴⁰⁸ This is part and parcel of what Popper called the “searchlight” model of knowledge growth rather than the “bucket theory of the mind” of the Baconian myth. Without an initial theory no systematic observation can take place and no useful application of the raw information conceived or constructively discussed.

⁴⁰⁹ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 127

⁴¹⁰ By this I mean Popper’s insistence that metaphysical theories, while not falsifiable, are nonetheless useful for making rational decisions in choosing between two or more unfalsified theories. It is the consideration of the subsequent “severe tests” (see Ch. 10 of C&R) aimed at falsifying theories that maintains his external realism and “keeps relativism in check”. It is precisely the legitimacy of metaphysical discussions that distinguishes Popper from the positivists and it is his fallibilism that maintains objectivity. Thus, the analogy of theory and tradition constitutes a method by which the objectivity of Popper’s theories in the natural sciences are transferred to the social sciences. (as above)

this improvement of traditions and institutions must be achieved by *piecemeal* methods only, that is to say by means of *piecemeal social engineering*⁴¹¹

4.4.1 The Distinction between Piecemeal and Utopian Social Engineering

One point of misunderstanding between Popper and other more traditionalist social scientists, including Hayek, is his use of the term “social engineering”. The term itself seems to have warranted considerable consternation by Hayek’s Austrian School mentor, Ludwig von Mises:

*“It is customary nowadays to speak of “social engineering.” Like planning, this term is a synonym for dictatorship and totalitarian tyranny. The idea is to treat human beings in the same way in which the engineer treats the stuff out of which he builds bridges, roads, and machines. The social engineer’s will is to be substituted for the will of the various people he plans to use for the construction of his utopia.”*⁴¹²

As Mark Notturmo points out in his study of their correspondence, Popper and Hayek continued to disagree about the use of this term, to which Popper doggedly stuck despite his anti-essentialist tendency to disregard the importance of terminology.⁴¹³

Hayek and other laissez-faire advocates never seemed to grasp the truly *radical distinction* Popper made between piecemeal social engineering on the one hand and utopian social engineering on the other.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 340-342

⁴¹² (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics, fourth edition*, 1949/1996)p. 113

⁴¹³ (Notturmo M. A., 2015) pp. 18-27

⁴¹⁴ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) pp. 40-41

The reason why Popper emphasizes piecemeal means *again* has to do with the “problem of tradition” that we have just examined:

*“It is not possible for you to act rationally in the world if you have no idea how it will respond to your actions. Every rational action assumes a certain system of reference which responds in a predictable or partly predictable way. Just as the invention of myths or theories in the field of natural science has a function--that of helping us to bring order into the events of nature--so has the creation of traditions in the field of society.”*⁴¹⁵

Popper emphasizes that in both cases “we must stand on the shoulders of our predecessors”⁴¹⁶. Just as it is the case that the scientist cannot go back to a prehistoric state of knowledge and needs previous theories to work with, so too in the field of social science, for traditions are like scientific theories:

*“Similarly, traditions have the important double function of not only creating a certain order or something like a social structure, but also giving us something upon which we can operate; something that we can criticize and change.”*⁴¹⁷

The problem is that some utopian rationalists choose to overlook this fact and would like to “clean the canvas, as Plato called it.”⁴¹⁸ That is to say, they wish to follow the impossible and disastrous plan of wiping out all previous institutions and traditions so as to “paint” the new society on a blank canvas like uncompromising aesthetic painters of society. This approach can never work; first of all, because the utopian engineers are part of some previous tradition and must therefore wipe out themselves. Also, the new tradition or institutional framework will have its problems too. First and foremost, the problem will be

⁴¹⁵ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 131

⁴¹⁶ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 129

⁴¹⁷ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 131

⁴¹⁸ Plato’s form of “canvas cleaning” as advocated in *The Republic* consisted of removing all the adults from the city so as to have complete control over their offspring, a principle that was to be instituted in the running of the ideal state as well, by taking children away from their parents at birth so as to be educated by the state.

establishing it. As soon as the canvas cleaner is done and has wiped out all existing institutions and traditions and the citizens are deprived of the “system of regularities” that were necessary for “rational action”, the utopian canvas cleaners will hope to make them accept the new system, an entire society, in its fully orchestrated totality. They hope that the population will have become a malleable “social stuff” for them to mold. However, there will always be dissenters to this new order who will resist because their interests and values are tied to the old order.

The method for dealing with this problem has always been quite clear; it is called *mass murder*. Upon the victory of the October Revolution of 1917 the members of the Petrograd Soviet abolished the death penalty; Lenin’s famous rebuke thereof was “How can you make a revolution without executions!?”⁴¹⁹. The death penalty was reinstated a few months later and, by Lenin’s direct order, employed in the mass public hangings of wealthier peasants, the so-called “Kulaks”.⁴²⁰

Even if the utopian does justify mass executions as “necessary evils”, the new institutional framework will also have its unavoidable consequences, only these will take a long time to analyze and to correct, so in the end the reformer will have to start all over, after having caused great pain and suffering along the way. This is the way of irrational utopianism and mystical holism⁴²¹.

⁴¹⁹ (Lenin, Quotes History AOS2 1917)

⁴²⁰ (<https://alphahistory.com/russianrevolution/vladimir-lenin/>, 2022) In his cable Lenin was insistent enough to add: “*This needs to be accomplished in such a way that people for hundreds of miles around will see, tremble, know and scream out: let’s choke and strangle those blood-sucking kulaks. Telegraph us acknowledging receipt and **execution** of this.*”
Lenin P.S. Use your toughest people!

⁴²¹ Holism in this case refers both to the idea that only a solution that changes *the entire structure* of society can work, as well as to *Methodological Holism*. This is the tendency, in part derived from Rousseau and

*“Even with the best intentions of making heaven on earth it only succeeds in making it a hell— that hell which man alone prepares for his fellow-men.”*⁴²²

The Red Terror of Robespierre, Lenin and Mao are good examples of this phenomenon. As Popper points out, in the case of the second example, Lenin, as early as 1921, was already forced to give up the canvas cleaning of “war communism” and institute his “New Economic Policy” or NEP, which was a return to the market system, the very institution that the Bolsheviks had abolished with much destruction in 1917.⁴²³ The Chinese also reintroduced market capitalism under Deng Xiaoping in the 1980’s, but not until the “Great Leap Forward”(1958-60) and the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976) had brutally erased the previously existing cultural institutions and killed *millions* of people. The long-term result of this process is today’s ultra-nationalist neo-Maoist regime of Xi Jinping, an expansionist totalitarian replay of Nazi Germany in the world’s second largest economy.⁴²⁴

This “Utopian Social Engineering” is *radically different* from Popper’s “Piecemeal Social Engineering” which is a rational process applied to individual institutions one at a time:

“Just as the main task of the physical engineer is to design machines and to remodel and service them, the task of the piecemeal social engineer is to design social institutions, and to reconstruct and run those already in existence...as a technologist or engineer he will look upon them from a ‘functional’ or ‘instrumental’ point of view. He will see them as means to certain ends, or as

Hegel, to analyze social phenomena as if groups of people and their actions as individuals can be *entirely subsumed* into singular collective entities like Bourgeoisie, Proletariat, The Nation, the “General Will”, etc. It conceives of these groups as representing one coherent singular intentionality. It is the opposite of *Methodological Individualism* as explained above

⁴²² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*)p. 157

⁴²³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013*) p. 156

⁴²⁴ (Singh-Cheema, 2019)

convertible to the service of certain ends; as machines rather than as organisms”⁴²⁵

These new constructions or reforms are necessary because of what Popper calls “*the ambivalence of social institutions*” that is “the fact that a social institution may, in certain circumstances, function in a way which strikingly contrasts with its prima facie or 'proper' function.”⁴²⁶ However, as mentioned above, Popper viewed the proper method of analysis in the social sciences and in social engineering to be that of methodological individualism and not pseudo-rationalist utopian holism, and thus it requires a completely different procedure than that of utopian social engineering:

*“The piecemeal engineer knows, like Socrates, how little he knows. He knows that we can learn only from our mistakes. Accordingly, he will make his way, step by step, carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved, and always on the look-out for the unavoidable unwanted consequences of any reform; and he will avoid undertaking reforms of a complexity and scope which make it impossible for him to disentangle cause and effects, and to know what he is really doing.”*⁴²⁷

Part of the blame for the fallacy of holism in this regard is to be placed on orthodox Marxism⁴²⁸, particularly on Marx’s doctrine of the “impotence of politics”⁴²⁹ which is a consequence of his over emphasis on “economism”⁴³⁰ According to this doctrine, small scale reforms based on a democratic or

⁴²⁵ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) pp. 59-60

⁴²⁶ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962)p. 133

⁴²⁷ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002) p. 61

⁴²⁸ Fascism, in its Clero-fascist, corporatist and racialist forms, is, of course, also a form of holism, one that is more explicitly mystical than that of the pseudo-rationalist version of the left. Both, however, are *profoundly* irrational in Popper’s sense of rationality.

⁴²⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 338

⁴³⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013)p. 318 “Economism” is the notion that economic factors are more decisive for society than any institutional, political or ideological considerations.

parliamentarian consensus could never make any material difference for the working class, because, as he insisted in chapter 1 of *The Communist Manifesto* in 1848, “The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie.”⁴³¹ Thus, without a full-scale social revolution that fundamentally alters the relations of production, all political change would just be cosmetic, the exchanging of one master for another and all social reform would be trivial.⁴³² As we have seen in chapter 1 of this thesis, the reforms achieved by the Social Democrats brought universal male suffrage in 1907 and labor legislation meant that in the long run the “law of increasing misery”⁴³³ does not hold. In Popper’s lifetime, the living conditions and political power of workers had improved dramatically from what they were in Marx’s era of unregulated capitalism.⁴³⁴

These considerations concerning the principle of regulating the market system by piecemeal individualist and democratic means rather than utopian methods, brings us to the subject of interventionism.

4.4.2 The Necessity of Interventionism

The one issue that most clearly distinguishes Popper’s liberalism from that of the “libertarianism” associated with the Austrian School is his recognition of

⁴³¹ In all fairness it must be admitted that this was a fairly accurate description of government in Marx’s day. Even the partial institution of parliaments in Germany and Austria that came later were marginal in this respect due to their highly restrictive system of suffrage which meant that only a small fraction of the population, the wealthiest, could actually vote. As we saw in Ch. 1, universal male suffrage was brought about by massive pressure from the Social Democrats and was not introduced until 1907. Women received it in 1918.

⁴³² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 334

⁴³³ This is the theory, posited by Marx, during the brutal beginnings of industrialization, that workers, because of the constant presence of “the reserve army of unemployed” and the complete control of the state by the bourgeoisie, the workers would never be able to achieve any material improvement in their lives and thus their increasing misery would inevitably lead to a revolution.

⁴³⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 330-338

and continued insistence on the necessity of interventionism as an integral aspect of the Open Society.

4.4.2.1 Karl Popper's Purification of Karl Marx

In order to properly deal with the subject of interventionism, we must go even further into Karl Marx, to whom Popper devotes *ten chapters* in *The Open Society*. In order to understand Popper's devastating critique, and simultaneous veneration, of Karl Marx, which had some similarities to the attitude of Karl Renner⁴³⁵, one has to realize that Popper did not see his mission as the elimination of Marx but rather as a purification of him. Popper systematically strips Marx's philosophy of its mistaken doctrines in order to distil and crystalize its profound significance for social science and for the advance of freedom. In volume II Popper ends his lengthy treatment of Marx with the following final assessment:

*“‘Scientific’ Marxism is dead. Its feeling of social responsibility and its love for freedom must survive.”*⁴³⁶

This, for Popper, is the result of his critical engagement with Marxism and with the social democracy of his day. Marx's theory is one born of its time and place, in the Germany of the mid-19th century, a country plagued by three great evils:

1) the cruel inhuman exploitation of early industrialization

⁴³⁵ (Leser, 1968)pp. 100-101 *“So stellt sich die Gesellschaftslehre und politische Theorie Renners trotz aller Anleihen bei der Methodik und den Einsichten des Marxismus als eine im Laufe seiner Denkwentwicklung fortschreitende evolutionistische dar, für die die marxistischen Kategorien des kapitalistischen Zusammenbruchs, der Revolution, der Diktatur des Proletariats jeden Sinn verlieren...”*,

(In spite of all of its reliance on the methods and perspectives of Marxism in the course of his intellectual development, Renner's sociology and political theory presents itself as an evolutionary one, for which the Marxist categories of the breakdown of capitalism, the revolution, the dictatorship of the proletariat lose all their meaning)

⁴³⁶ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 416

- 2) the militarist Absolutism of the Prussian state, and
- 3) the sycophantic servant of that Prussian state: the “intelligence destroying” obscurantism of Hegelianism.

The theory Marx conceived as an antidote to the first two evils is stultified and tragically flawed by the third.

Although Marx did replace the idealism of the Hegel and the young Hegelians with materialism, turning Hegel from his head onto his feet, he did so while maintaining the *anti*-logic of Hegelian “dialectics”:

*“There is a well-known passage in Capital, where Marx says that ‘in Hegel’s writing, **dialectics** stands on its head; one must turn it the right way up again”*⁴³⁷

However, elsewhere we find Popper, invoking a quote from *Capital*, that reveals Marx’s suspicion of the Hegelian dialectics with regard to its negative effect on the intellectual development of German philosophy:

*“In Germany, many social scientists are brought up as Hegelians, and this is a tradition destructive of intelligence and critical thought. It is one of the points where I agree with Karl Marx who wrote: ‘In its mystifying form the Dialectic became the ruling fashion in Germany’. It is the German fashion still.”*⁴³⁸

Popper shows definitively in his treatment of Hegel in *The Open Society*⁴³⁹ and in his 1937 Lecture, “What is Dialectic” that what Hegel and Marx, or better said later Marxists, refer to as “dialectic logic” is actually an anti-logic, a

⁴³⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p.313 (My **bold text**)

⁴³⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “Reason or Revolution”, p. 70

⁴³⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) see Ch. 11&12

methodological mystification that turns any theory that employs it into “reinforced dogmatism”⁴⁴⁰.

In *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781 Kant had shown that when one engages in purely rational argumentation devoid of empirical content, even if one starts with the same premise, one can consistently proceed by valid logical inference and arrive at equally valid conclusions that are opposites and mutually exclusive. He called these *antinomies*.⁴⁴¹ On the basis of fundamental logic, *the law of contradiction*, we know that one of the conclusions *must* be false.

*“It is always possible to argue, with similar apparent reasonableness, in favor of a number of different theories, and even of opposite theories. Thus, if we get no help from experience, if we cannot make experiments or observations which at least tell us to eliminate certain theories--namely those which although they may seem quite reasonable, are contrary to the observed facts -- then we have no hope of ever settling the claims of competing theories.”*⁴⁴²

Hegel’s immunizing strategy, the basis for his “reinforced dogmatism”, is his so-called “*philosophy of identity*”, the doctrine that reality and reason are identical, such that every idea, every “real” entity, contains its opposite, its “antithesis”, within itself. Contradictions do not matter; they are just part of the world which can be “explained” by Hegel’s new superior “dialectical logic”.

“...on the basis of the philosophy of the identity of reason and reality, it is asserted that facts can contradict each other since ideas can contradict each

⁴⁴⁰ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) pp. 253-254

⁴⁴¹ (Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, 1781/1998) p. 467-469 (see sections 1.2.2.1 and 2.2 above)

⁴⁴² (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 327 of Ch. 15 “What is Dialectic?” pp. 312-335 What is Dialectic? Originally [Lecture, Canterbury University College, Christchurch, New Zealand, 1937.], then an article in *Mind*. N. S. Vol. 49 (1940), LATER EDITED as: What is Dialectic? In: C&R [1-7]; Ch.15

other and that facts develop through contradictions, just as ideas do; so that the law of contradiction has to be abandoned."⁴⁴³

A theory that can brush off any contradiction discovered by a critic with this pseudo-logic can only lead to sheer dogmatism, because it can be refuted *neither* by empirical evidence *nor* by rational argument. In fact, such a theory could be used to argue virtually *any conclusion whatsoever*. By transferring this "logic" to Marx's materialism, i.e., by turning it into "*dialectical materialism*", the Marxists preserved this Hegelian obscurantism, this "reinforced dogmatism", in their own theories.

*"Marx's anti-dogmatic attitude exists only in the theory and not in the practice of orthodox Marxism, ... Thanks to dialectic the anti-dogmatic attitude has disappeared, and Marxism has established itself as a dogmatism which is elastic enough, by using its dialectic method, to evade any further attack."*⁴⁴⁴

Contrary to what many of Popper's conservative, neo-liberal *fans*⁴⁴⁵ and leftist, neo-Marxist *detractors*⁴⁴⁶ would like to believe, the "death" that Popper proclaims in *The Open Society* is *not* the death of Karl Marx, the Philosopher, but merely of the Hegelianism that forms the basis of "scientific Marxism", or better said, the death of the pseudo-science of orthodox Marxism (see section 1.2.2). The faulty doctrines that Marxism inherited from Hegel I have discussed above. They are indeed numerous and pernicious: *verification bias*, *holism*, *essentialism*⁴⁴⁷, historical determinism or *historicism*, and the immunizing reinforced dogmatism of "*dialectics*".

⁴⁴³ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 329

⁴⁴⁴ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) p. 334

⁴⁴⁵ Most prominent among these would have to be Margaret Thatcher, but they also include some of the so-called "libertarians" in North America.

⁴⁴⁶ Two examples here would be Jürgen Habermas and Herbert Marcuse

⁴⁴⁷ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 328 "*Instead of making his [Marx's] demands or proposals concerning the functions which he wants the state, the legal*

Once these are eliminated, what is left is Karl Marx the rational humanist. Popper insists, “Marx’s faith, I believe, was fundamentally a faith in the Open Society.”⁴⁴⁸ This belief is something like a religion, but a secular faith and for Popper “the only possible faith”.⁴⁴⁹ What Popper preserves of Marx is his “moral importance” as he expressed it to Hayman Levy⁴⁵⁰ It is Marxism’s “feeling of social responsibility and its love for freedom [that] must survive” For Popper Marx provides a definitive critique of the evils of unregulated capitalism, evils that do not stem from the fact that it produced wealth. The production of wealth, that is to say, the advancement in the means of production by the “revolutionary class” of the bourgeoisie, is, in fact, praised by Marx quite explicitly.⁴⁵¹ It is rather the oligarchical nature of unregulated Capitalism that he wished to fight against:

*“Marx did not combat wealth, nor did he praise poverty. He hated capitalism, not for its accumulation of wealth, but for its oligarchical character; he hated it because in this system wealth means political power in the sense of power over other men”*⁴⁵²

The problem is not wealth or technical advance, but rather it is this concentration of illegitimate power made possible by the completely changed power structure created by industrial capitalism, of which the American Founding Fathers had no idea because it came long after they wrote the US Constitution. This is a reality of American life to which the “libertarians” of North America remain stubbornly and ignorantly blind. Their hysterical vilification of Karl Marx has

institutions or the government to perform, he asks, ‘What is the state?’; that is to say, he tries to discover the essential function of legal institutions”

⁴⁴⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 406

⁴⁴⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 175

⁴⁵⁰ See Ch. 3.2 above

⁴⁵¹ See Ch 1 of *The Communist Manifesto*

⁴⁵² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 405

made them blind to the very real scientific aspects of his sociology, especially to the effects of the radical change in the material forces of production as elucidated by historical materialism on social relations and class structure.

4.4.2.2 Interventionism and the “The Kingdom of Freedom”

Hence, we come here to the crux of the matter, to the reason why, on the basis of Marx's analysis and his own, Popper comes to the conclusion that non-interventionism is untenable. As discussed in section 3.3.2 above Popper explains that the *paradox of freedom* leads to the rational conclusion that some form of *protectionism* must prevail, but not only to protect citizens from direct physical violence, but also *from exploitation*, that is to protect them from being turned into virtual slaves, the status that they clearly did have in the 19th century (see section 1.2.2).

Marx's historical materialist conception of history had made it clear to Popper⁴⁵³, and to the Social Democrats of Popper's time, that the advent of machine production had ushered in an entirely new situation, a situation unprecedented in human history. In his 2013 book, *Carbon Democracy*, Timothy Mitchel has analyzed the transition in terms of a change in energy regimes. With the advent of industrialization an energy regime based on the highly concentrated energy of fossil fuels rather than on highly dispersed solar energy gathered through agriculture, meant that for the first time in history an advanced, yet truly egalitarian society had become possible. Until the industrial revolution and the use of fossil fuels, all energy was solar energy, which had to be gathered by agricultural workers spread across vast areas.

⁴⁵³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 316 Popper cites Engels in this context

This collected solar energy in food stuffs was used to propel human and animal labor power.⁴⁵⁴ Thus, the exploitation of primarily agricultural workers had served as the necessary material basis for advanced cultural life. All the philosophy, music, literature, science, monumental buildings, aqueducts, and Cathedrals were made possible by a servile class, which made up the vast majority of the population, and had to work in the fields as slaves or serfs. As Orwell put it “Inequality was the price of civilization” but “as early as the beginning of the twentieth century, human equality had become technically possible.”⁴⁵⁵ In 1920 H.G. Wells was even more explicit:

*“What could be done mechanically by a human being could be done faster and better by a machine. The human being was needed now only where choice and intelligence had to be exercised. Human beings were wanted only as human beings. The drudge, on whom all the previous civilizations had rested, the creature of mere obedience, the man whose brains were superfluous, had become unnecessary to the welfare of mankind”*⁴⁵⁶

This spirit of progressive humanism was immanently palpable in the values, ideas and in the social achievements of Austria’s Social Democrats in Red Vienna.⁴⁵⁷ Social Democracy is based on liberal enlightenment humanism and progressivism and in the 1920’s and 30’s it stood against the fascist tide that was drawing middle class and workers alike into a tribalist revolt against progress. In a critique of the reactionary romantic yearning for the Middle Ages Popper makes a similar point to the one made by H.G. Wells:

“...the only practical hope lies, not in a return to slavery and serfdom, but in an attempt to make machinery take over this mechanical drudgery. Marx was

⁴⁵⁴ (Mitchel, 2013)

⁴⁵⁵ (Orwell, 1984, 1949/2003) p. 233

⁴⁵⁶ (Wells, 1920/1971) p. 806

⁴⁵⁷ See Ch. 1

right in insisting that increased productivity is the only reasonable hope of humanizing labor, and of further shortening the labor day."⁴⁵⁸

Both Marx and Popper see this as a great opportunity for humankind to finally escape from “the Kingdom of necessity” to something closer to “the Kingdom of Freedom”. Using a quote from *Capital* Popper writes:

*“The kingdom of freedom actually begins only where drudgery, enforced by hardship and by external purposes, ends; it thus lies, quite naturally, beyond the sphere of proper material production.’ And he [Marx] ends the whole passage by drawing a practical conclusion which clearly shows that it was his sole aim to open the way into that non-materialist kingdom of freedom for all men alike: ‘The shortening of the labor day is the fundamental prerequisite.’”*⁴⁵⁹

Automation has since made this process even more technically feasible such that, from the perspective of a progressive humanist, the “immutable, beneficial, and fruitful inequality of mankind” Mussolini reiterates from Plato, Aristotle and Burke *could* be made a thing of the past if only society were run more rationally, that is to say if the accumulation of capital did not allow one class to reap all the benefits from technical advance. This Social Democratic principle insists that the machine be used to liberate all of mankind, not to enslave one class for the benefit of another.⁴⁶⁰

The extent to which this is possible or not depends, in the end, on the institutional framework, on the rules that govern the relationship between employer and employee, which can either allow the unlimited accumulation of capital and economic power in the hands of an ever numerically shrinking elite

⁴⁵⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 446

⁴⁵⁹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 314

⁴⁶⁰ Again, this is a description of the laissez-faire, unregulated capitalism of the 19th Century, not the Social Democratic mixed economy (see ch.1)

or allow for more bargaining power and legal recourse for employees to direct more of the material advantages of technological innovation and capitalist production to themselves, raising themselves out of the Kingdom of Necessity into the Kingdom of Freedom. For over 120 years it has been the aim of Social Democracy to achieve this end by peaceful democratic means (see Ch. 1).

In Marx's day it seemed reasonable to view the juridical superstructure as a mere outgrowth of the relations of production and ownership, that is to adopt the view that "The executive of the modern state is nothing but a committee for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie."⁴⁶¹ During the early phase of industrialization when organized labor, if it existed, had no political power at all, when only the upper classes could participate in the legislative process, this was a pretty accurate picture. But as I pointed out above, through the expanding power of organized labor, and the political efforts of the Social Democrats which finally brought universal male suffrage and the eight-hour day, things had become quite different in Popper's day. It was the Social Democratic labor movement itself, through its strategic control of coalmines and railroads, that was able to force the Neo-absolutist regimes of Germany and Austria to grant universal manhood suffrage, in 1871 and 1896 respectively.⁴⁶² Later, the democratic participation in legislation meant the passing of laws that tipped the balance of power toward the majority, and towards greater political and economic equality. As we shall see below, it was not until Reagan and Thatcher's neo-liberal "revolution" of the 1980's that the pendulum began to swing back in the other direction, towards a legal

⁴⁶¹ See notes 174-176 as well as Ch. 1 *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*, 1848

⁴⁶² (Mitchel, 2013)

framework and tax regime more conducive to narrow capital accumulation and the monopoly on power of the a financial aristocracy of oligarchs.

4.4.2.3 The Lost Mixed Economy and Polarization

The constitutional order, or legal framework, forms the institutional structure in which the “situational logic” within which individuals and groups self-actualize. Like all institutions or system of institutions it is also open to rational criticism and reform by means of piecemeal social engineering, especially if the aggregate outcomes of individual action within the framework differ radically from the intentions and desires of the individuals involved. Thus, it is the fundamental approach of Social Democracy not to obliterate capitalism but to reform it through reforming its institutions and legal framework through the workings of popular sovereignty. This is what enabled the working class to overcome Marx’s hurdle of the “impotence of politics”.

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Piecemeal social engineering as opposed to utopian social engineering is the method Popper advocates. It consists of a carefully and methodically reform of the institutional framework of the market society. In the scientific spirit of the Viennese Late Enlightenment, in a way not too unlike that of the Vienna Circle “Popper... thought that it is our task to progressively rationalize the irrational.”⁴⁶⁴

The *ambivalence of institutions* implies that an institution can be thought of as being irrational if it functions in a way “which strikingly contrasts with its prima facie or 'proper' function”.⁴⁶⁵ *Methodological individualism* implies that

⁴⁶³ (Popper, *The Open Society and It's Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) pp. 328-329

⁴⁶⁴ (Notturmo M. A., 2015), p. 29

⁴⁶⁵ See note 159

such institutional dysfunction, if it progresses indefinitely, will create a divergence between the intended action of the individuals involved and the unintended consequences of the interplay of these actions that will render the continued existence of the institution in its present form increasingly intolerable.

His program of piecemeal social engineering, which not only adjusts existing institutions but does not shy away from creating new ones, is much like the program of Austrian Social Democracy as described in Chapter 1, a movement that, as detailed above, has been able to achieve universal male suffrage 1896 and then female suffrage 1918, and later on universal health and pension insurance, workers participation in management, collective contracts⁴⁶⁶, liberal vacation and parental leave, equitable rent and housing policies, and the far reaching institutionalized social infrastructure known as the *Sozialpartnerschaft* (Social Partnership)⁴⁶⁷. These institutional innovations are, for the most part, *still* in force today. This legal framework is one of the principal reasons why the City of Vienna, still “red” after 100 years, remains, according to *The Economist*, the top-rated city in quality of life in the world.⁴⁶⁸

The methodological principles examined in this chapter form the basis for an individualistic and rational approach to social reform that is intimately associated with what we today call the *mixed economy*, which has often been mistakenly dubbed “the welfare state”.

⁴⁶⁶ A collective contract is negotiated at the national level between the representatives of labor and of industry such that the individual employer cannot force an unfair contract onto an employee. It stipulates minimum salary, five weeks paid vacation, as a rule, health and pension insurance, generous parental leave, as well as protections against arbitrary dismissal and severance pay.

⁴⁶⁷ (Austrian Press Service, 2021)

⁴⁶⁸ (Baker, 2022)

The expression “welfare state” is a misnomer, because when it is used in English, particularly in American English, it takes on the connotation of charity, of welfare payments, or handouts. One has the image of maintaining thousands if not millions of more or less permanently unemployed people as consumer demand engines. This is far from the truth of the matter. The mixed economy of Austria and other European countries is simply a regime under which the duly elected “government of the people by the people and for the people”⁴⁶⁹ is responsible *to* the people, i.e., the majority. Hence, without giving too much of a free lunch to those who do not need it, laws are made that prevent the corporate sector and wealthy private interests from acquiring a monopoly on power.

This protection is achieved by the passing of laws, like those described above, that spell out rules that prevent the wealthy from turning their wealth into political power and dominating and oppressing those below them. People work and work hard in a mixed economy, but under conditions that are spelled out by a system of labor legislation and collective contracts that allows them to have, for example, five weeks of paid vacation automatically, protection from arbitrary dismissal, official representation in the management of their workplaces, pension and health insurance, etc. It is a social system, partially embedded in the framework of the EU itself, that has *so far* managed to hold up against many if not most of the neo-liberal pressures exerted on it.⁴⁷⁰

These facts and principles that I have thus far outlined from the beginning of this paper till now seem to form a powerful refutation of the dogmatic and

⁴⁶⁹ A well-known and often invoked phrase from Lincoln’s “Gettysburg Address” of 1863, which was meant to capture the essence of American democracy, which “shall not perish from the earth”, the cause that was deserving of continued bloodshed and sacrifice at the time of the address, during the high point of the Civil War.

⁴⁷⁰ (ILP-Abogados, 2019)

highly flawed doctrine, held by so many North American “libertarians” and market fundamentalists of all stripes, that any form of government intervention in the economy, *whatsoever*, represents a “slippery slope” into Statism and tyranny.⁴⁷¹ In the United States the fear of the mere word “socialism” has become visceral, hysterical and almost completely irrational. The “S-word”, as we might call it, functions as a polarizing trigger word for people who call themselves “conservatives”; it seems to stand for Socialism, Stalinism, Fascism, Naziism and Satan simultaneously.⁴⁷²

For many Americans this “slippery slope” black and white thinking about state intervention has, by means of prolonged propaganda, become an article of faith, an article of faith in a country in which a large section of the population, through evangelical Christianity, has been methodically indoctrinated to adopt a faith-based mentality. Their flocking to Donald Trump and acceptance of virtually anything he says as true⁴⁷³ is a clear indication of their tendency to authoritarianism. In the United States of America, the dogmatic laissez-faire economics of Neo-liberalism has, over the past 40 years, provided the material

⁴⁷¹ Examples of this abound. One could point to the Koch Brothers support of the so-called “Tea Party”, the “AstroTurf” movement that they funded and their violent disruptive attacks on townhall meetings of members of congress with their constituents explaining the proposed Affordable Care Act, full of rhetoric about Nazi Germany. Similar narratives from Glenn Beck on Fox New about Obama instituting communism. Such statements about national healthcare having been seeded by Ronald Reagan much earlier, claiming that national health insurance was an important tactic used by the Nazis to seize power. One could also point to the anti-tax pledge monger Grover Norquist, who once remarked “*I don't want to abolish government. I simply want to reduce it to the size where I can drag it into the bathroom and drown it in the bathtub*”.

⁴⁷² A short time spent perusing the pronouncements of a Fox News commentator, a Trump speech, an interview with a MAGA fan, or even the mainstream media coverage of Democratic Socialist Bernie Sanders should convince anyone with an actual knowledge of history the extent to which this term has been twisted into a Boogie Man by American ideologues.

⁴⁷³ See for example the “big lie” of the election of 2020 during which Trump was able to convince roughly 46% of Republicans that the election was stolen from him, and a militant minority followed his call to Washington to attack the US Capitol on January 6th 2021. The presence of religious symbols and imagery including the actual carrying of a life-size cross up to the Capitol bear witness to the theocratic nature of his movement.

for what can be seen as a diabolical fusion of market fundamentalism and religious fundamentalism, a hybrid ideology that at times seems to take on the frightening tone of Clerical Fascism⁴⁷⁴. The result is the reactionary Tea Party authoritarianism and Q-anon conspiracy mania of Donald Trump's January 6th insurrection.⁴⁷⁵ On the other side there is the irrationalism and neo-tribalism of the *regressive left*, the disappointed utopians, wallowing in their own form of mysticism, what Raymond Aron called "the opium of the intellectuals": a mind dissolving cocktail of "discourse theory" and the previously mentioned pseudo-sciences: vulgar Marxism, psychoanalysis, and Hegelianism, injected into young university students through the academic syringe of "Critical Theory", "post-modernism" and "Post-Colonial Studies".⁴⁷⁶

Before we go any further in this direction, in the direction of examining the extremes of the left and right that *once again* threaten to destroy the Open Society, it is important to analyze the sources of the ideological antagonisms among the champions of the Open Society that solidified immediately after World War II. Already in 1945, in a letter to F.A. Hayek Popper called this internal war "*The Fatal Split*"⁴⁷⁷.

⁴⁷⁴ Consider the activities and statements made by Donald Trump's evangelical "base". Not only are there "Dominionist Christian" televangelists, like Lance Wallnau, who proclaim Trump to be "God's Chaos Candidate" prophesied in the Bible, but popular commentators and documentaries like "Agenda: Grinding America Down" that depict the battle against what they call "Marxism" that they conflate with Naziism in explicitly nationalist/theological terms.

⁴⁷⁵ (Mangan, 2021)

⁴⁷⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch 3 "Reason or Revolution"

⁴⁷⁷ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) pp. 114-115

5. The “Fatal Split” Popper and the Austrian School of Economics

Ever since Karl Popper read F.A. Hayek’s *The Road to Serfdom*, 1944 and said it could be the third volume of *The Open Society* there has been an affinity between Popper and the Austrian School of Economics. Even more so given Hayek’s role in first getting the *Open Society* published, then getting Popper his university post at the London School of Economics and their life-long friendship. However, Popper’s Social Democratic ethical foundation and his approach to science were to present points of significant difference between him and the laissez-faire Austrian School, particularly between him and Hayek’s mentor, Ludwig von Mises.

5.1 A Preliminary Discourse on the Problem of “Equality”

Before going into the differences between Popper and the Austrian School in detail, I must clear the air by addressing one issue that has been hanging over this paper so far. That is the problem of egalitarianism, as an ideal in both theory and practice. By equality Popper does not mean *equality of outcomes*, meaning economic equality in the literal sense of every citizen having the same level of material wealth and status. Any state that attempted to impose this would, of course, enjoy a level of intrusive power in the daily lives of its citizens that would be intolerable. Besides the fact that, as F.A. Hayek put it, in an authoritarian society that attempts to equalize all outcomes “even the striving for equality by means of a directed economy can only result in an officially enforced inequality”⁴⁷⁸ That is to say, once the state is powerful enough to eliminate the inequality, a new inequality will take its place. All the communists

⁴⁷⁸ (Hayek, 1944/2006) p. 158

had managed to do is to replace a fluid and surmountable inequality, surmountable at least in principle by individual effort and talent, with an institutionalized and *permanent* inequality, surmountable only by birth, political patronage and hypocrisy, i.e., the aristocracy of *The Party*. Or as Orwell famously put it “Oligarchical Collectivism”.⁴⁷⁹ Another word for it is *state capitalism*, a good example of this is presented by Xi Jinping’s China.

So, we are all well advised to dismiss the idea of imposing complete material equality on the population. This is certainly not to say that humans can *never* live a life of such equality. There are two situations I can readily think of in which total material equality does subsist. The first is that of a small stone age tribal society; the other is among a revolutionary population united in the desperate cause of fighting a common enemy. Orwell was profoundly smitten with the experience of such egalitarianism while he fought in Spain on the Republican side as a member of the P.O.U.M., an anarchist brigade among whose ranks he fought against Franco’s fascists. He writes “Many of the normal motives –snobbishness, money-grubbing, fear of the boss, etc.—had simply ceased to exist...no one owned anyone else as his master.” He is, however, quick to add. “Of course, such a state of affairs could not last.”⁴⁸⁰ Nonetheless, these few brief months of the Spanish Civil war and Revolution continue to haunt the imagination of libertarian socialists⁴⁸¹ till this day.

⁴⁷⁹ See note 84 and section 2.3.1. above.

⁴⁸⁰ (Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 1952/1980) p. 104

⁴⁸¹ I will tend to write the word “libertarian” in quotation marks. First because it is commonly used for an ideology that is, in its end effects, authoritarian, and because the word has been appropriated away from the left. It was originally used by socialists. Libertarian socialism refers to the socialist/anarchist tradition of Bakunin, Krapotkin, and the anarcho-syndicalists. It is characterized by a general suspicion of state power and views socialism as an inherently grassroots, decentralized movement aiming at workers ownership of the means of production and direct democracy. Before Marx got the upper hand at the Second International, it was the dominant school of thought among socialists. Besides the two Russians that I mentioned there are other famous figures like Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, Emma Goldberg, Bertrand

As much as might be said in favor of this ethos of equality, which is reminiscent of the warm feeling of oneness experienced by our tribal ancestors, in the long term, in an advanced technological society during conditions of peace it seems neither plausible, nor necessary nor very important for everyone in society to enjoy the exact same level of material wealth. What is important is what Orwell writes above, that no one is “owned” by a master, that is to say that, first and foremost, everyone, unless he has given ample reason to do otherwise, must be afforded the same basic respect, legal status and impartiality, i.e., there must at the very least be equality before the law.

Though this is an important starting point for a just society and a non-negotiable minimum level of equality, it can be seen as a sham equality under a purely laissez-faire system that merely “grants to rich and poor alike the freedom of sleeping on park benches”⁴⁸².

A genuine sense of justice implies that we should progress toward the *equality of opportunity*. Popper, in fact, in “Public and Private Values” assumes this to be the consensus among the moderate socialists *and the liberals* of his day:

Russell, George Orwell, Rudolf Rocker, Buenaventura Durruti, Noam Chomsky and one could argue Rosa Luxemburg. Their biggest organization in the USA was the IWW, International Workers of the World. The reason why this tradition has almost completely sunk into the sands of time is that it was the enemy of both the communist USSR and the capitalist USA, the two superpowers, who together shouted it into obscurity with their cacophonous Cold War rhetoric. This is also the way the S-word, socialism, has come to mean something very different and much more sinister than workers control and direct democracy. The Soviets called their system socialism even though it was actually state capitalism. Hoping to inspire revolutions they basked in the prestige the word “socialism” had for the working class of the world. The US, on the other hand, used the word in the same way, that is to refer to the Soviet Union, but did so to scare people *away from* socialism. See *Anarcho-syndicalism*, by Rudolf Rocker, Pluto Press, London, 1938/1989. Also, Noam Chomsky, *What Uncle Sam Really Wants*, “How the Cold War Worked”, Odeon Press, 1994 pp. 78-81

⁴⁸² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, New One-Volume Edition, 1945/2013) p. 332

*“These liberals and socialists have, of course, quite a lot in common. Both cherish political freedom, that is to say, free elections, and free press, freedom of association, etc. ...and both wish to see **equality of opportunity**”*⁴⁸³

With regard to congenital inequalities and disabilities Popper goes even further. In a passage from *The Open Society* criticizing Marx’s doctrine of the impotence of politics and the necessity of intervention, Popper writes the following:

*“...he never understood the function which state power could and should perform, in the service of freedom and humanity. (Yet this view of Marx stands witness to the fact that he was, ultimately, an individualist, in spite of his collectivist appeal to class consciousness.) In this way, the Marxian view is analogous to the liberal belief that all we need is ‘equality of opportunity’. We certainly need this. But it is not enough. It does not protect those who are less gifted, or less ruthless, or less lucky, from becoming objects of exploitation for those who are more gifted, or ruthless, or lucky.”*⁴⁸⁴

It is the very point of Popper’s rational piecemeal approach to social engineering that it aims at this kind of social justice, a movement towards equality of opportunity—and in the case of disability, towards public charity—and not equality of outcomes. The piecemeal approach does so in ways that avoid the dangers of holism and utopianism.⁴⁸⁵

When the problem of equality is considered rationally, it becomes crystal clear that the hysterical gloom and doom, black and white dogmatism of the “libertarians” who choose to view any form of state intervention aimed at equalizing opportunity as a threat to freedom are not only exaggerating; they

⁴⁸³ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) “Public and Private Values” p. 122 (my **bold text**)

⁴⁸⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 335

⁴⁸⁵ See section 3.4.1. above.

are simply wrong.⁴⁸⁶ As I will show below it is in fact *this very lack of equality of opportunity itself* that in our own day and age is posing perhaps the greatest threat to the preservation of freedom.

5.2 The “Fatal Split in the Humanitarian Camp”

“The Fatal Split” refers to a development immediately after WWII during which two specific tendencies within the classical liberal tradition started that suicidal family feud, intensified since 1980, that is now, 40 years later, bearing the bitter fruit of civilizational collapse. It has been a slow burning civil war that is in the process of bursting into flames. It is my contention that much of the present crises that are plaguing the world’s leading democracy, the USA, and to a lesser extent the UK and Europe, can be explained by this split. I am referring to the split, that Popper tried desperately to prevent, between liberals and socialists in the late 40’s. The term was, as it were, coined in a letter Popper wrote to his close friend and colleague, F.A. Hayek. Popper urged Hayek to reconsider his very strong rejection of interventionism in favor of Popper’s suggestion to create a “conscious liberal humanitarian” form thereof. He argued along lines similar to those associated with the *paradox of freedom*⁴⁸⁷ that abolishing all government intervention in the economy is untenable:

“...we can develop an interventionism which protects the free market, within the limits necessary if we want to protect the economically weak, etc. *if we say this, then, there is a hope of getting over the fatal split in the humanitarian camp and of uniting the vast majority of liberals and socialists...to work for this union is today the main task of us all, without exaggeration.*”⁴⁸⁸

⁴⁸⁶ If anything like this were true then Social Democracies like those of the Scandinavian countries and other western European countries like Austria, Germany, etc. would have become dictatorships a long time ago, instead they are among the freest countries in the world

⁴⁸⁷ See sections 3.3.2 and 4.4.2.2 above

⁴⁸⁸ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 115

Popper believed strongly that this split threatened the unity of “the camp of freedom” and that it would weaken the Open Society and make it vulnerable against the authoritarian threats from without and within.⁴⁸⁹

This “union” “in the humanitarian camp” was, in spite of Popper’s best efforts, not achieved⁴⁹⁰

The split was consummated by the establishment of Hayek’s Mont Pelerin Society in 1947. As Malachi Haim Hacoheh put it in his monumental Popper biography:

*“Mises and Hayek’s libertarianism was unprecedented. They did not continue a liberal antisocialist tradition; they created it.”*⁴⁹¹

I am going to deal with the problem of Popper and the Austrian School on two levels: the *scientific level* and the *programmatically level*. In the present analysis I will focus on the work of Ludwig von Mises. *The scientific level* concerns the implications of the Popperian versus the Misesian approach to social science methodology. The *programmatically level* will address practical matters concerning the present state of liberal democracy as it has evolved out of the above-mentioned “fatal split”.

5.2.1 The Scientific Level of the Problem

By examining Mises’ and Popper’s divergent approaches to political philosophy and social science methodology one can infer that social science and economics

⁴⁸⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) pp. 113-131

⁴⁹⁰ It was not only the free-market liberals that were the problem here; the obstructionism of the Frankfurter Schule in the course of the so-called *Positivismusstreit* and the totally unjustified vilification of Popper from others on the left are also factors in this split. More on this in Ch. 6

⁴⁹¹ (Hacoheh 2000) p. 477

in general and the Austrian School in particular, would profit a great deal if it adopted Karl Popper's approach to social science as a corrective to that of Mises. My reason for focusing on Mises and not Hayek is that I believe Hayek represents something of a middle position between Mises and Popper and so I wish to compare Popper's fallibilism to the more radical apriorism and market fundamentalism of Mises.

When Hayek set up the Mont Pelerin society, Popper tried, unsuccessfully, to convince him to include democratic socialists in its ranks and suggested, among others, George Orwell, and Bertrand Russell⁴⁹² Mises, on the other hand, famously stormed out of the first meeting shouting to the laissez-faire economists on hand, "You are all a bunch of socialists"⁴⁹³. We could say, in a nutshell, that Mises and Popper were both strident defenders of freedom, but that they had different ideas on how to preserve it. In spite of their divergent approaches to liberal democracy, there are, both in the realm of philosophy of science and in the realm of political philosophy, many striking points of agreement. Francesco Di Iorio has identified several of them.⁴⁹⁴

However, in the course of his investigation into "The Reconciliation of Apriorism and Fallibilism"⁴⁹⁵ Di Iorio has crystalized at least three theoretical points on which Popper and Mises disagree: 1) "the relationship between theory

⁴⁹² (Shearmur, *The Political Thought of Karl Popper*, 1996)p. 30

⁴⁹³ Rockwell Jr, [Llewellyn H.](#) Keynote Address, Ludwig von Mises Institute, Auburn Alabama, September 15th 1998

⁴⁹⁴ (Iorio, 2015) p. 151 They both reject: historicism, holism, logical positivism, polylogism and, I would add, their shared doctrines like the acknowledgement of the theory laden nature of observation as well as the dualism of mind and body

⁴⁹⁵ (Iorio, 2015)p. 151

and experience” 2) “the nature of the rationality principle” and 3) “the foundations of methodological individualism”.⁴⁹⁶

I will tackle these issues in this. I will endeavor to show the foundations of these differences as well as their significance for the methodology of the theoretical social sciences.

5.2.1.1 The Relationship between Theory and Experience: Fallibilism vs. Apriorism

As I indicated in Chapter 1, Popper showed that many problems in philosophy had their roots in the two “fundamental problems” of the theory of knowledge, namely in the problems of induction and demarcation. This was the problem of resolving the conflicting goals of empirical science to establish laws that are both strictly universal *and* empirical, two goals that seem to conflict.⁴⁹⁷ Popper’s solution was critical rationalism and fallibilism whereas Mises’ approach was praxeology and apriorism. Popper’s solution was to overcome the problem of induction by removing it as the basis for theory formation on the one hand and maintaining the empirical content by means of critical testing of theories on the other⁴⁹⁸. Mises’ approach was to establish one self-evident primary axiom, “man acts”, and to build up his theory from there through ratiocination on the basis of logical inference⁴⁹⁹.

⁴⁹⁶ (Iroio, 2015)pp. 151-176 It would be preferable to avoid the word “foundations” here. We are talking about a method of investigation, not a justification for knowledge.

⁴⁹⁷ See Ch. 2

⁴⁹⁸ (Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934-35/1958)

⁴⁹⁹ (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics*, fourth edition, 1949/1996)

As mentioned in chapter 2, in his study of Popper and Frege, Mark Notturmo proposes the idea of a paradigm shift in the philosophy of science from an “EP1” epistemology to an “EP2” epistemology. The first is the traditional rationalist program of establishing certain and proven, necessarily true theories and the other is a fallibilist approach that classifies all theories as only provisionally true or provisionally false.⁵⁰⁰

It is my contention that Mises remains largely stuck in the first paradigm, in the quest for certainty, and that as a result his apriorism conflates logic and reality. It is as if Mises simply took one of the lines of argument in Kant’s paired antinomies⁵⁰¹, decided on the conclusion he wanted and simply argued it to be the truth. It is an attempt to impart the apodictic certainty of logic and mathematics onto a desired view of the real world.

Popper and Einstein, on the other hand, were philosophers who had fully embraced the shift to EP2, that is to fallibilism. The latter famously wrote:

“As far as the laws of mathematics refer to reality, they are not certain; and as far as they are certain, they do not refer to reality”

Mises even admits the truth of Einstein’s point above with regard to the *natural* sciences but insists “the sciences of human action differ radically from the natural sciences”⁵⁰². But Mises insists that he is a realist and that “praxeology

⁵⁰⁰ (Notturmo M. , 1985) pp. 2-5 (see also Ch. 2 above) For Popper there is no ultimate verification and no ultimate falsification. The elimination of theories is a rational process that takes place during intersubjective critical discussion; it is a rational decision, not an automatic process.

⁵⁰¹ see section 4.4.2.1 above

⁵⁰² (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics, fourth edition*, 1949/1996)p. 39

conveys exact and precise knowledge of real things”⁵⁰³ What “real” things does Mises refer to if they are not to be found in the real world that can be measured, investigated and in which theories can be falsified? He attempts to add empirical content to his model through what he calls “thymology”, that is the information regarding the historical actions of individuals.⁵⁰⁴ However, his methods are psychologistic throughout and are based on introspection, which can only pose vague hypotheses. Given its lack of empirical testing, is there not the danger that such a purely rationalist approach would simply degrade into an ideological construct? Is it really true that the social sciences are so fundamentally different than the natural sciences?

Two of the many reasons for Mises’ insisting on this strict demarcation between the natural and the social sciences rest on two *views of natural science* that Popper firmly rejects: 1) Mises’ belief that the natural sciences are based on induction and 2) his radically determinist conception of the natural world:

*“Whatever happens in the universe is the necessary evolution of forces, powers, and qualities which were already present in the initial stage of the X out of which all things stem.”*⁵⁰⁵

Mises’ strict demarcation of praxeology from empirical science is predicated, in part, on his assumption of an *essential* qualitative distinction between human beings and all other biological systems that, as we have seen in section 4.1, is unfounded. Popper’s solution to the problem of free will as derived in “On Clouds and Clocks”, that is as an outgrowth of the ontological indeterminacy of the natural world, eliminates the need for a separate “human science” based on

⁵⁰³ (Tokumaru, 2009)p. 170

⁵⁰⁴ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) pp 46-51

⁵⁰⁵ (Tokumaru, 2009) p. 169, Quoting from Mises *Theory and History* p. 74

a construct like Mises' action axiom to accommodate free will. He states that human action is a "final cause" outside the purview of natural science.

*"It is a gratuitous pastime to apply to the description of the behavior of man the same methods the natural sciences apply in dealing with the behavior of mice or of iron. The same external events produce in different men and in the same men at different times different reactions. The natural sciences are helpless in face of this "irregularity." Their methods can deal only with events that are governed by a regular pattern."*⁵⁰⁶

This demarcation does not hold. The same stimuli will certainly produce different reactions in different mice and indeterminacy, the lack of regularities, is not a valid argument either. As we saw in section 4.1, Popper's birds eye view provided by his evolutionary epistemology and cosmology combined with his metaphysical indeterminism solves the problem of free will or "human action" without abandoning the unity of science.⁵⁰⁷ I would argue the Misesian scheme of demarcations that construct a separate "science" that is distinct from all others with its own essentialist taxonomy and jargon expressions like praxeology and thymology that stipulate an internal logic alien to other sciences and contributes further to the *apartheid of the sciences* is in and of itself an elaborate immunizing strategy. As Popper insists, we are students of problems not of particular sciences and their jargon and demarcation schemes.⁵⁰⁸

Popper certainly admits that the social sciences pose different epistemological problems than do the natural sciences, but he insists that the methods of the

⁵⁰⁶ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) p. 46

⁵⁰⁷ (Popper, *Objective Knowledge: an evolutionary approach*, 1972) See "Of Clouds and Clocks"

⁵⁰⁸ Mises' demarcation scheme is quite fragmented and arbitrary in my view. For him "the science of human action" stands outside the purview of other sciences. First off it stands between but separate from the logical sciences (math and logic) and the natural or empirical sciences; it is something intrinsically distinct from these two. The scheme seems to be conceived with one consideration in mind: making sure that no empirical science can ever refute or even come in contact with his theory.

natural and social sciences are essentially the same and that the belief that they are not is based on common misconceptions regarding the natural sciences.⁵⁰⁹ When science is approached along critical rationalist lines, there is no need for the kind of barrier that Mises puts up between the natural and the social sciences.⁵¹⁰ Moreover, the rationality and objectivity of the natural sciences can, within certain limits, be transferred to the social sciences. The truth claims of CR provide a much better basis for a realist understanding of the social world than apriorism, because experience is maintained as the critical standard according to which theories can fall short and can be falsified.⁵¹¹

Attempts to defend the truth claims of apriorism fail because they are based on an attempt to bridge the analytic synthetic dichotomy which is impossible⁵¹². Attempts to interpret Mises as a fallibilist⁵¹³ by combining apriorism with fallibilism seem on the surface untenable on logical grounds and on the grounds of multiple statements by Mises himself against fallibilism and in favor of the unassailable and apodictic necessity of his theories⁵¹⁴. Other attempts to construe him as a conventionalist⁵¹⁵ are also problematic in two ways. First, they likewise conflict with Mises' own statements regarding the "realism" of his a priori method and second, even with Linsbichler's interesting approach of doing a kind of conventionalist overhaul of praxeology, it remains unclear how a

⁵⁰⁹ (Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, 1957/2002)

⁵¹⁰ See section 3.1 The Unity of Scientific Method

⁵¹¹ (Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1962) Ch. 10

⁵¹² (Tokumaru, 2009)

⁵¹³ (Iroio, 2015)

⁵¹⁴ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962)p. 69-70 (Mises, *Human Action*, a Treatise on Economics, fourth edition, 1949/1996)p. 39

⁵¹⁵ (Linsbichler, *Austrian economics without extreme apriorism: construing the primary Axiom of Praxeology as Analytic*, 2021)

system of implicit definitions can maintain the all-important criteria of falsifiability and hence the realism of the theory⁵¹⁶. Popper criticized the immunizing strategies employed by conventionalists to defend their theories. As Natsuka Tokumaru put it in her comparison of Popper and Mises:

*“The falsity of [Mises’ theory] can be avoided through the introduction of adequate rules that exclude experience as a critical standard, of which the theories of praxeology may fall short. Many such rules can be introduced in principle since it is always possible to find verifications for a theory. One can always restrict the domain for which a theory claims validity by reducing that domain by sufficiently strong ad hoc assumptions”*⁵¹⁷

Such attempts to avoid falsification by “keeping Swans white”, by tinkering with definitions to defend one’s theory at all costs can only lead to dogmatism and the stagnation of scientific progress.⁵¹⁸

Whether you view Mises as an extreme apriorist or conventionalist, it is clear that his conception of truth is quite different from that of Popper. In *Objective Knowledge* Popper posits three distinct versions of truth theory: 1) correspondence 2) coherence and 3) pragmatism⁵¹⁹Mises as an apriorist could represent 2) or as a conventionalist represent 3) but only Popper can represent 1), the notion of truth as correspondence to the facts. This theory is based on Popper’s acceptance of Tarski’s correspondence theory of truth and represents, I would contend, much more faithfully the idea of *external realism*, of verisimilitude, and objective truth.⁵²⁰

⁵¹⁶ (Popper, *The Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*, 2009/2012) pp. 188-237 See also the objections to conventionalism pp. 391-413

⁵¹⁷ (Tokumaru, 2009) p. 171

⁵¹⁸ (Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 1934-35/1958)pp 57-65

⁵¹⁹ Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford at the Clarion Press, 1972, p. 308

⁵²⁰ Karl Popper, *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford at the Clarion Press, 1972

Nonetheless, the conventionalist construal could open up more room for dialogue between Austrians, Monetarists, Keynesians and, assuming the resolution of the above-mentioned problems, even with Popperians and Marxists. This would be a schema in which Mises's praxeology would take the role of doing the only thing that it or any other theory can do, that is to suggest provisional theories that would then be subject to critical discussion aimed at refuting the theory by the members of these other schools. The critical discussion would have to include severe tests by means of prediction and retrodiction (see section 4.1 above) and a rational choice would then be made about which theory has the best explanation for the phenomenon in question. However, this is an approach to economic theory that Mises and other Austrian Economists tend to reject.⁵²¹ Mises apriorism that aims to impart apodictic truth to contingent reality, his open hostility to what he calls "positivism" and the "chimera of unified science"⁵²² only reinforce this dogmatism.

5.2.1.2 The nature of the rationality principle: Objective vs. Subjective

Rationality

In a footnote to his lecture "Models, Instruments and Truth" that he delivered to a group of Harvard economists in 1963 Popper remarks, "I was particularly impressed with Hayek's formulation that economics is the 'logic of choice'"⁵²³ Indeed this formulation and Popper's focus on economics as the central discipline of the social sciences comes out in many of his lectures and publications. In 1961 Popper gave the opening address at a symposium

⁵²¹ One can think of the way in which Keynes was so summarily dismissed by Hayek and implicated, falsely in my view, for the stagflation of the 1970's even though experts agree that it was the Arab oil embargo, an exogenous shock, and not an endogenous Keynesian credit or monetary policy within the western economies.

⁵²² (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) pp.38-41

⁵²³ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 181

of German sociologists in Tübingen that became somewhat notorious as the beginning of the so-called Positivism Dispute (*Der Positivismusstreit*) that involved Theodor Adorno, Jürgen Habermas and others (see Ch. 6 Conclusion below). The paper was entitled “The Logic of the Social Sciences” and it “consisted of 26 sharply formulate theses”⁵²⁴. In it Popper emphasized the importance of economics as the central discipline of the social sciences and of anti-psychologism. Thesis 25 runs as follows:

“Twenty-fifth thesis: *The logical investigation of economics culminates in a result which can be applied to all social sciences. This result shows that there exists a purely objective method in the social sciences which may well be called the method of objective understanding, or situational logic. A social science orientated towards objective understanding or situational logic can be developed independently of all subjective or psychological ideas.*”⁵²⁵

Popper maintains that Mises’ approach is not only psychologistic but is “subjective” rather than objective as is his own.⁵²⁶

Mises’ posits his fundamental axiom “man acts” as an a priori valid, self-evident foundation of his economics. He insists that a phrase like “rational action” is “pleonastic” because, according to him all human action is ipso facto rational by dint of the fact that it is the choice of the individual on the basis of his or her own intentions and beliefs.⁵²⁷

⁵²⁴ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 3 “Reason or Revolution” p. 65

⁵²⁵ (Popper, *In Search for a Better World: lectures and essays from 30 years*, 1995) p. 102

⁵²⁶ Karl Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, edited by Mark Notturmo, Routledge London and New York, 1994, pp. 154-208

⁵²⁷ (Mises, *Human Action, a Treatise on Economics*, fourth edition, 1949/1996)p. 19

Natsuka Tokumaru has done a detailed analysis of Mises' prime axiom using Popper's ideas from the *Logic of Scientific Discover* and *The Two Fundamental Problems of the Theory of Knowledge*:

*"Given his argument, I suggest that the 'category of action' may be interpreted in four different ways; as (1) an observational statement or a statement describing experiences from introspection; (2) a proposition about the basic ontological form of the social universe, describing its essential characteristics; (3) a definition, adopted as a convention; (4) a methodological principle, of the kind required by methodological individualism. However, under no interpretation can Mises justify the social sciences as a priori disciplines"*⁵²⁸

On the basis of the impossibility of synthetic statements that are a priori valid, Mises explicitly stated position regarding his axiom, we are forced to dismiss it and consider the other four. Number 1) would make his axiom/rationality principle into an empirical conjecture, clearly something Misesians would reject because it would be falsifiable. We have already dismissed number 2 by discussing indeterminacy and Popper's cosmology.⁵²⁹ Number 4 is tenable, but it would yield a form of instrumentalism on its own and not realism. Number 3 would represent the conventionalist turn mentioned above, but this would have to be rejected on similar grounds to the apriorism, not because it is impossible to establish an arbitrary definition, but because this would have the same effect as an a priori axiom; it puts all the empirical content of the model into the initial conditions because the theory itself simply cannot be wrong; it is true by definition. Thus, it would likewise tend towards an immunizing strategy in which the data would be blamed instead of the falsity of *the theory itself*. It would in essence be making the same arbitrary psychologistic

⁵²⁸ (Tokumaru, 2009)

⁵²⁹ See section 4.1

pronouncement about human nature that Mises attempted to do on the basis of “the immutable structure of the human mind”, that is to say by the use of a “genetic or psychological a priori”.

From a Popperian point of view this psychologistic approach is subjective and methodologically flawed. Like the faulty social contract theories discussed above, this conception of rationality relies on an arbitrary assumption about human nature. In a speech given to commemorate Hayek Popper admitted his extreme deference to Mises and that in spite of their differences regarding method he “never criticized his views even to Hayek”⁵³⁰ However, in an informal interview with Hannes H. Gissurarson in 1985 Popper was more frank:

“Popper said that he had reservations about Ludwig von Mises. ‘He was a very competent economist, but I was less impressed with him as a philosopher of science. He thought that the principles of economics could be deduced from human nature, whereas I hold that scientific theories have to be subjected to relentless tests. I also found him a bit dogmatic in politics and therefore unconvincing.’”⁵³¹

Psychologism of this kind leads not only to ineffective social theory but also to dogmatism and the pernicious conflation of ideology and science.

I would also argue that this subjective rationality does not provide a suitable basis for methodological individualism when it is applied, as it must be, to an analysis of the unintended results of the interplay of intended human action on an aggregate or institutional level. As opposed to this subjective rationality Popper proposes his *objective* rationality that is based on

⁵³⁰ Karl Popper, *After the Open Society*, edited by Jeremy Shearmur and Piers Norris Turner, Routledge London and New York, 2008, pp. 402-410

⁵³¹ (Gissurarson, 2020) p. 265

situational logic.⁵³² For Popper the rationality principle is merely a postulate, that agents act “appropriate to the situation”. It is not only *not* self-evident, for a critical rationalist ***nothing about the real world ever can be self-evident, but*** is in fact demonstrably *false*. People do not in fact always act appropriately to the situation and hence do not always act rationally. With regard to the situational logic Popper delineates three senses of rationality and hence of the rationality principle. Agents act according to (1) the situation as it actually was, (2) the situation as the agent saw it, and between these two (3) “*the situation as the agent could (within the objective situation) have seen it, and perhaps ought to have seen it*”⁵³³ Mises rationality principle, “man acts”, which he imagines to be a synthetic a priori statement⁵³⁴ is doggedly fixed to *only number 2 above*, because it views all human action as ipso facto rational.

Popper’s rationality principle, which he views as a useful though rather empty empirical conjecture such that it allows for consideration of number 1 and 3 above is objective rather than subjective and allows for the possibility of irrational action.⁵³⁵ The impediments to the agents access to proper accurate information or to effective rational methods of assessment are a product of the objective situation, that is to say of the institutional framework, and must as such be incorporated into the model used to analyze the agent’s behavior.⁵³⁶

⁵³² (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 8 “Models, Instruments and Truth”.

⁵³³ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994), p. 183

⁵³⁴ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) p. 5

⁵³⁵ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 8

⁵³⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch 7 “A Pluralist Approach to the Philosophy of History” pp. 148-150

Popper's objective rationality principle founded on the idea "of acting appropriately to the situation"⁵³⁷ and considered in the three distinct senses described above, provides a much richer and more fruitful basis for methodological individualism. It reveals the problem situation on a more institutional level, that is to say in terms of the constraints out of which "the logic of the situation" is formed. Thus, it allows for an analysis of irrationalism, of failure, and institutional dysfunction. As Di Iorio points out it "allows us to distinguish between science and ideology in history".⁵³⁸ Both Popper and Hayek favored a "non-atomistic methodological individualism"⁵³⁹ Hence Popper's approach allows us to engage more productively in what both Hayek and Popper acknowledged as the true aim of the social sciences:

*"The characteristic problems of the social sciences arise only out of our wish to know the **unintended consequences**, and more especially the **unwanted consequences** which may arise if we do certain things."*⁵⁴⁰

Mises' rationality principle, the identity of action and rationality, with its fixation on individual intentionality rather than institutional constraints, is an atomistic version of methodological individualism that does not fulfill this task as well as Popper's objective rationality does.⁵⁴¹

⁵³⁷ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) Ch. 8 "Models, Instruments and Truth". p. 169

⁵³⁸ Di Iorio, p. 173

⁵³⁹ Di Iorio, p. xv

⁵⁴⁰ Popper, C&R, "Toward a Rational Theory of Tradition", p. 124, See also regarding Hayek, Di Iorio, p. 3

⁵⁴¹ Popper's scheme is a better method for analyzing irrational action and irrationality in the structure of institutions, because it does not assume that all action is rational. In reference to the three senses of rationality above Popper wrote the following: "*It is further clear that the difference between (1) and the two other versions of the rationality principle will play a part in our understanding of action, especially in the historian's attempt to explain failure, and that the difference between (2) and (3), will play a similar part...Moreover, if there is a clash between (2) and (3) then we may well say that the agent did not act rationally*".

5.2.2 The Programmatic Level of the Problem

At this point I will address the programmatic aspect of the fatal split namely the unprecedented level of polarization within the camp of freedom, that is to say within the liberal democracies, particularly within its largest strategically essential state, the USA.

Popper was right to fear this split between socialists and liberals. In light of the current polarization between the extremes of “the left” and “the right”, Popper’s goal of “unifying the camp of humanitarianism”⁵⁴² is more important than ever. Given the fact that there was literally zero engagement between Popper and Mises⁵⁴³, it is up to Popperians and Misesians to work out these issues and to heal the fatal split that threatens the destruction of western civilization.⁵⁴⁴

I am focused here primarily, but not exclusively, on developments in the United States. First, because it is the world’s leading democracy both economically and strategically, second because it is the country from which many trends, both

This added depth makes it easier to analyze the institutional dysfunction that prevents the agent from being properly informed about the logic of his or her situation, that is to say the rationality of their beliefs and goals. This includes the dysfunction of those institutions, like schools, Churches and the media, that would otherwise be expected to propagate rational beliefs but have failed to do so. This way we can understand the interaction of the individuals under such institutional constraints that cause the dysfunction.

⁵⁴² (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 113-118

⁵⁴³ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 404 Popper remarks that Mises was very suspicious of him as a “dangerous opponent” although he never criticized Mises’ views “even to Hayek” and that “he never really opened a discussion by direct criticism”

⁵⁴⁴ This pronouncement sounds extreme at first, but when one examines what is virtually a civil war going on in the world’s most powerful democracy, and considers the growth of authoritarianism worldwide it is not exaggerated.

positive and negative, first arise and third because it is the country where the Misesian branch of Austrian Economics is strongest.

Economic theory is translated by policy makers into economic practice such that the truth or falsehood of our theories is not a merely academic question; these theories affect the lives of millions of people. Economics therefore *must* be an empirical science, that is to say, it must be about the real world and not about an immunized rational construct. The enemies of the Open Society that both Popper and the Austrian School were committed to fight are today on the rise both inside and outside of those free societies that still exist. The USA, the world's largest and most powerful democracy, is plagued by an unprecedented level of political polarization and fanaticism that resembles a slow burning civil war. Like in the 1930's there is a radicalism of the extreme right and the extreme left. On the right it has taken the form of clerical fascist, Q-anon conspiracy MAGA fans storming the US Capitol to reverse an election they *still* refuse to accept and on the left it takes the form of the utopian "canvass cleaning" Red Guard violence of BLM⁵⁴⁵ rioters and woke campus PC enforcers.

At the core of this division lies the problem of interventionism. Popper insisted that an irrational dogmatic rejection of interventionism is just as untenable as the irrational dogmatic statism of the communists. A way must be found for us to combat the "pet enemies" that both sides *rightly fear*: the *tyranny of the state power* that liberals fear and the *tyranny of accumulated private capital* that the socialists fear.

In a letter to Rudolf Carnap in 1947 Popper writes the following:

⁵⁴⁵ Black Lives Matter

*“I believe that the political philosophies of socialism and liberalism which we have inherited from the 19th century are both just a little too simple and too naïve. I fully share ...the conviction of the liberals that freedom is the most important thing in the political field. But I am convinced that freedom cannot be saved without improving distributive justice, i.e., without increasing economic equality”*⁵⁴⁶

It is important to understand that Popper does *not* advocate anything like a state enforced *equality of outcomes*, but he does advocate something *more* than equality before the law.⁵⁴⁷ (see the discourse on equality, section 5.1 above) He advocates careful and *rational* state intervention, “piecemeal social engineering”⁵⁴⁸, to “prevent avoidable suffering” and to achieve a tolerable degree of *equality of opportunity*. This equality, he insists, is something that classical liberals believed in strongly⁵⁴⁹. I would argue, however, that those North Americans most influenced by the market fundamentalist tendencies of Misesian “libertarianism” have either abandoned equality of opportunity altogether, or simply believe, *falsely*, that it is equivalent to equality before the law. Either way, it is clear that ever since the Reagan/Thatcher “revolution” of the 1980’s, this principle has largely faded away, and that inequality has reached the levels of the gilded age.⁵⁵⁰ This issue is not a question of “envy” towards those who have “worked hard” or were more talented, but rather a recognition that desperation, injustice and corruption will force people into collectivism and into radicalism.

Popper wrote to Hayek about this problem in 1944:

⁵⁴⁶ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008)p. 108

⁵⁴⁷ See section 4.1 A Preliminary Discourse on Equality

⁵⁴⁸ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch 9

⁵⁴⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) p. 122

⁵⁵⁰ (Beer, 2020), „The top 1% of US Households hold 15 times more wealth than the bottom 50% Combined”

*“Marx, I believe, was right in saying that laissez faire destroys itself by way of class- struggle...This is why an explicit recognition of the need for some interventionism is not only necessary in the interest of clarity, but also in the interest of that union in the camp of freedom which is necessary if collectivism is to be avoided”*⁵⁵¹

The “deregulation” inaugurated in the 1980’s and continued under the Clinton administration has stoked the fires of speculation and volatility on financial markets, causing asset bubbles like the great crash of 2008⁵⁵², and in the field of telecommunications, it has contributed greatly to the downfall of objective independent news coverage⁵⁵³ that has helped to create our current “post fact” environment. The unlimited accumulation of wealth into ever fewer hands facilitated by successive rounds of tax cuts has led to a situation in which *political corruption* under the cover of so-called “lobbying” has made what is left of American democracy a farce of growing absurdity. The *social engineering* of the right that is embodied in “deregulation”, tax cuts and union busting has been augmented in this regard by a legal framework, created by judges supplied by the “libertarian” Federalist Society that now allows billionaires to pump *unlimited* amounts of money into politics and to do so *anonymously*.⁵⁵⁴

⁵⁵¹ (Notturmo M. A., 2015)p. 26

⁵⁵² (Born, 2011) “Foreword: Deregulation: A Major Cause of the Financial Crisis”

⁵⁵³ (Jolly, 2007)Media ownership deregulation in the United States and Australia: in the public interest?

⁵⁵⁴ See *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, 558 U.S. 310 (2010) Currently 6 of the 9 members of the supreme court are members of the Federalist Society as were the key members who made the 2010 decision. The so-called “textualist” approach of this school of jurisprudence amounts to a kind of fundamentalism not unlike religious fundamentalism It is based on a literal reading of legal texts. They read the constitution the way ISIS reads the Quran, which is also a legal text. ISIS harks back to the time of Muhammad in 7th century tribal society of Arabia and the Federalist Society harks back to the 18th century, to an agrarian preindustrial society with an economy based in large part on indentured servitude and chattel slavery. The Founding Fathers had the right principles, but they were reacting to a problem situation that is completely different than the one facing us today in an industrial or post-industrial society. Most importantly the reactionary doctrine that corporations are people (endowed with the rights that were intended for individuals) and that money is speech (wholesale bribery of politicians is

In his most recent book, *Liberalism and Its Discontents*, Francis Fukuyama, anything but a socialist, points out the many ways that liberalism has degraded into Neo-liberalism:

*“...the neoliberal agenda was pushed to a counterproductive extreme. A valid insight into the superior efficiency of markets evolved into something of a religion, in which state intervention was opposed as a matter of principle.”*⁵⁵⁵

The premise of individualism is certainly important, but formalizing this principle into largely tautological axioms like “man acts” and reducing human beings into mere “rational utility maximizers” following a “spontaneous order” without regard to institutional structures has led to disastrous results.⁵⁵⁶ When economics is not a science but an immunized ideology its simplistic premises and its method that ignores the contingent nature of empirical reality become toxic:

*“The problem with neoliberalism in economics was thus not that it began from false premises. Its premises were often correct; they were simply incomplete and often historically contingent. The doctrine’s defect was to carry those premises to an extreme where property rights and consumer welfare were worshipped, and all aspects of state action and social solidarity denigrated.”*⁵⁵⁷

legitimized as “lobbying”) have led to a situation where the United States of America has undoubtedly “the best government money can buy!” Many politicians are not elected in any meaningful sense; the most radical and obstructionist of them are *appointed* to safe gerrymandered districts by the anonymous financiers of dark money super PACs. Most Americans are only dimly aware of how corrupt their political system is. In other countries people are forced to resign or put in jail for crimes much less severe than what is accepted as legitimate lobbying in the US every day. The closest examples that come to mind are the Ibiza affair for HC Strache and the recent affair that took down Sebastian Kurz.

⁵⁵⁵ (Fukuyama, 2022)p. 22

⁵⁵⁶ Besides the devastation of Chicago School austerity on the third world and downfall of the American working class, the Neo-liberal dogma about the ability of markets to organize human society on their own applied to the former Soviet Union has led to the authoritarian Kleptocratic takeover of Russian society and a Clero-fascist state that is, at this moment, waging a murderous war against liberalism itself.

⁵⁵⁷ (Fukuyama, 2022)p. 45

I would argue that the neo-liberal experiment of the past 40 years has gone on long enough. The lack of upward mobility and genuine democracy have fueled the radicalism of both the left and the right and this polarization is once again eroding the fabric of civilized society just as they did in Popper's youth. It is time to replace dogmatic ideology and division with cooperation and the enlightened rational humanitarianism of Popperian Economics. A full program of Popperian economics, or rather a Popperian approach to social science and Social Democracy, has yet to be developed. I hope that this thesis may contribute to such a development.

6. Conclusion: Karl Popper and the 21st Century

There is a certain problem that has been lingering over this thesis, lurking behind its systematic explication of "Popper the progressive Social Democrat". It is something that is familiar to any Popper scholar or casual observer of his later pronouncements, and that is his undeniable turn to the right.

It is hard to evaluate this turn systematically, partially because it was somewhat uneven. It often had to do with who the audience was. Take, for example, his depiction of unregulated capitalism. In 1956 in a letter of thanks to a conservative, Henry Hazlitt, a founding member of the Mont Pellerin Society, who had taken *The Open Society* into his *Free Man's Library*⁵⁵⁸, Popper bends over backwards to insist that he had corrected his "misguided" use of the term "*laissez-faire* capitalism". Popper's transgression, the one Hazlitt was able to

⁵⁵⁸ A Book written by Hazlitt that is subtitled as "A Descriptive and Critical Bibliography" of books emphasizing libertarian ideas.

“forgive” so as to induct the *Open Society* into the collection, was that “Popper has in his own mind a mere caricature called ‘*laissez-faire* capitalism’, as had Marx.”⁵⁵⁹ In his letter of thanks Popper rather obsequiously relents, “You are quoting a passage from the book which you rightly attack...the old passages (also the next paragraph) were very bad indeed and deserved your censure fully”⁵⁶⁰ He is quick to point out that Hazlitt was quoting from an old edition that had since been edited. Here are the two versions of the passage:

1945 version:

“Marx...was right in asserting that increasing misery tends to be the result of *laissez-faire* capitalism”

Later version:

“Marx...was right in asserting that, in a world of high profits and increasing wealth, starvation wages and a life of misery might be the permanent lot of the workers”

This begs the question as to what, besides the missing term “*laissez-faire*”, constitutes a substantive difference between these two passages that would justify Popper’s overblown apologetics. I would assert that there is no substantive difference. It was a cornerstone of Popper’s philosophy not to place too much emphasis on words, his Neo-liberal associates, however, seem to be quite sensitive to the positive use of a term like “*social engineering*” piecemeal or otherwise and to a negative use of “*laissez-faire*”, which simply means “unregulated capitalism.” Popper’s entire thesis, in fact, is based on the rejection of Marx’s doctrine of the impotence of politics and an acknowledgement of the fact that political action by the working class, first in the form of labor union activism and then through parliamentary means, can lead to precisely the

⁵⁵⁹ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) “On The Free Man’s Library (1956)” p. 196

⁵⁶⁰ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2012) p. 197

regulation of capitalism that Popper consistently advocates and that eventually led to the end of the “starvation wages and a life of misery” characteristic of unregulated *laissez-faire capitalism*. So why all this song and dance about a mere term? Could it be the audience?

In some later writings Popper goes even further in this direction of seeming to deny the horrors of early capitalism. In an address commemorating Hayek written for the American Economics Association in 1992, later published by the right-wing CATO Institute, he calls Marx’s conception of capitalism in which “a few wealthy people are faced by a vast mass of starving proletarians” as “a delusion” and in “A Letter to My Russian Readers” of the same year he writes: “*‘capitalism’, in the sense in which Marx used this term, never existed anywhere on the surface of our beautiful planet earth—no more than Dante’s Hell.*”

Though the phrase “in the sense in which Marx used this term” could be ambiguous⁵⁶¹, these statements are nonetheless puzzling given both the historical facts⁵⁶² and Popper’s own detailed documentation of the brutality of early capitalism of Marx’s time:

*“Using the slogan ‘equal and free competition for all’, the unrestrained capitalism of this period resisted successfully all labor legislation until the year 1833, and its practical execution for many years more. The consequence was a life of desolation and misery which can hardly be imagined in our day. Especially the exploitation of women and children led to incredible suffering”*⁵⁶³

What immediately follows this passage is a detailed historical account of the horrors of child labor and an account of a young female worker being worked

⁵⁶¹ For instance, it could refer to the Marx’s essentialist tendency to fashion a holist disembodied almost conscious entity called “capitalism” that is inherently evil and impossible to reform. His rhetoric shows similar essentialist holist tendencies with his identification of classes, always in the singular.

⁵⁶² See section 1.2.2 Viktor Adler’s expose on the Wienerberger AG.

⁵⁶³ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 331

to death, a coroner being compelled by the court to cover up the cause of death so as not to perturb the factory owner, lest too much scrutiny be given to the case.

How are we to understand this given his later apologetics for early capitalism?

As counter examples we have his letters to Hayek in the 40's⁵⁶⁴ stressing the necessity of intervention and, a letter to Rudolf Carnap around the same time, indicating his strong advocacy for equalizing of incomes and preventing the corruption of democracy by the control of politics by the wealthy.⁵⁶⁵ On top of that, as late as 1974, in a letter to Bryan Magee, a close friend and popular philosopher who had just been elected Labor MP, he even advocates a state takeover of publicly traded companies in which the British government would control 51% of the shares.⁵⁶⁶

How can we understand these inconsistencies; is it really just a question of the target audience and the desired effect of his statements on them?

I think that it cannot be denied that he did change his point of view considerably, but I am convinced that it did not alter any of his moral foundations as nurtured in his youth during the Viennese Late Enlightenment. He was and remained a rational liberal humanitarian and an egalitarian, just like the Social Democrats of his native Vienna. He was someone for whom reason, liberty and equality were all part of the same ethos.⁵⁶⁷ It is just a fact, a fact that any rational thinker

⁵⁶⁴ See Ch. 5

⁵⁶⁵ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2008) pp. 103-105

⁵⁶⁶ (Popper, *After the Open Society, Selected Social and Political Writings*, 2012) "A Letter to Bryan Magee" pp. 306-307

⁵⁶⁷ See section 5.1 on equality. The equality of liberalism is an equality in human dignity and status and an equality of opportunity, not equality of outcomes rendered by the now popular misnomer "equity".

had to acknowledge, that the objective problem situation had changed since his writing of the *Open Society*. Besides the minor incidents with the Bolsheviks mentioned, the totalitarianism, the origins of which he so incisively traced, was from the *right*. It was the Clerical Fascism of Dollfuss and his *Christsoziale Partei*. Dollfuss was the chancellor who, in 1934, shut down parliament, banned the Social Democrats and created a Catholic dictatorship in Austria on Mussolini's Corporate Fascist model. The event that triggered Popper's writing of the *Open Society* was the Nazi annexation of Austria in 1938.

As far as left wing totalitarianism was concerned, he knew of the ruthlessness of the Bolsheviks from his socialist mentor, Arthur Arndt (See section 1.2.1), and of their dogmatism from his own early political experiences, but while writing *The Open Society* in the heat of WWII, he was reluctant to criticize the one country, the USSR; that was doing more than any other to defeat Nazism, nor does he seem to have known much about what was going on in Russia during his New Zealand exile⁵⁶⁸.

After the war ended and Europe had been stabilized by the Marshal Plan, the totalitarian threat was now from the *left*. Socialists like Bertrand Russell, Artur Koestler and George Orwell had not only caught on to the dangers of Soviet Communism but had written important books in opposition to it.⁵⁶⁹ However, much of the rest of the left still idolized or were apologists for the Soviet Union.⁵⁷⁰ That is why Popper in 1947 had warned against the "fatal split in the

⁵⁶⁸ He even praises what he sees as a heroic effort "to build up from nothing, the conditions of production" *OS* pp. 318-319 There is no mention of the Cheka or of Stalin's purges.

⁵⁶⁹ Russell: *The Practice and Theory of Bolshevism*, 1921, Koestler *Darkness at Noon*, 1941, Orwell *Animal Farm* 1945 and 1984, 1949

⁵⁷⁰ See, for example, George Orwell's comments regarding pro-Stalinist journalists of the British press reporting on the Spanish Civil war. (Orwell, *Homage to Catalonia*, 1952/1980)

humanitarian camp” and wanted liberals and anti-totalitarian socialists to work together (see chapter 5).

It seems to me that the reason for Popper’s turn to the right was that there was, in fact, a second “Fatal Split”. Between the rational progressive left and the irrational *regressive left*. This conflict reached its climax in the 1960’s during the misleadingly named Positivism Dispute “*Positivismusstreit*”. Popper was invited to open a discussion on “The Logic of the Social Sciences” at a conference of German sociologists in Tübingen in 1961. The other group with whom a debate was supposed to ensue were the members of the *Frankfurter Schule* led by Theodor Adorno. Thus, the confrontation was between critical rationalism and critical theory, the social theory of Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas, and Marcuse.

This conference could have been a positive starting point for a remaking of social theory in a rationalist Popperian vein, but as it turned out Adorno and later Habermas “failed to take up” Popper’s “twenty-seven sharply formed theses”⁵⁷¹, because, as Popper maintained in his response to the book that emerged from the long exchange in 1969⁵⁷²:

*“My opponents literally did not know how to criticize rationally my twenty-seven theses. All they could do was to label me ‘positivist’ (thereby unwittingly giving a highly misleading name to a debate in which not a single ‘positivist’ was involved). And having done so, they drowned my short paper, and the original issue of the debate, in an ocean of words – which I found only partially comprehensible.”*⁵⁷³

⁵⁷¹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “Reason or Revolution” p. 66

⁵⁷² *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie*, Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, München 1969/1993

⁵⁷³ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 68

A systematic analysis of the first confrontation and the successive debates between Jürgen Habermas and Hans Albert—another critical rationalist—could easily provide material for an entire thesis, so I will be brief here. To put it in a nutshell, the theories of the *Frankfurter Schule* are the product of their combining of the two pseudo-sciences, Hegelian Marxism and Freudian psychoanalysis, the resistance against which provided the point of departure for Popper’s philosophy of science (see end of section 1.2.2). As a result, their theories are doubly unfalsifiable, dogmatic and incoherent. Their influence on the “New Left”, however, especially in the case of Marcuse, was significant. Popper writes the following about his view of the school in 1961:

*“I was not even aware of the political influence of this school. Although today I would not hesitate to describe this influence by such terms as ‘irrationalist’ and ‘intelligence-destroying’”*⁵⁷⁴

Popper goes on in “Reason or Revolution” to give examples of this “intelligence destroying” Hegelian language by translating the “high sounding verbiage” into normal language to show the emptiness and triviality of its content

It is difficult to filter out of all this what was really at stake in this dispute. Evelyn Gröbl-Steinbach has done a good systematic analysis. The dispute was a question of each side accusing the other of employing a form of rationality that would make social science into the servant of political interests and would “mask the structures of domination”:

*“It was a fight that critical theory lost. The criticism offered by critical rationalism was certainly decisive for its failure”*⁵⁷⁵

⁵⁷⁴ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 66

⁵⁷⁵ (Gröbl-Steinbach, 2006) p. 165 „Es war ein Streit, den die kritische Theorie verloren hat. Für ihr scheitern ist die Kritik des kritischen Rationalismus durchaus maßgeblich gewesen”

I will mention only two points that are decisive for this assessment. One is the newly minted sense of “*positivism*” which formed the basis of the misleading title of the episode and book. Popper, of course, had been a critic of positivism in the sense of the logical positivism of the Vienna Circle all his professional life (see chapter 2). By this Popper means two things primarily 1) that he rejects verification and induction and 2) that he accepts the importance of metaphysics. What *Habermas* meant, however, by calling Popper a positivist is the fact that Popper argues for the unity of scientific method between the natural sciences and the social sciences⁵⁷⁶ (see section 4.1).

Here we find an interesting parallel between Mises’ praxeology and Critical Theory; both reject the application of the methods of the natural sciences to the social sciences and both condemn Popper as a “positivist”⁵⁷⁷ for doing so. I would argue they do so for the same reasons. As I have tried to stress over and over, for Popper, the failure to apply genuine scientific method to the social sciences is precisely the reason for their “typical backwardness”. Those theorists who reject the use of the logic of the natural sciences in the social sciences are rejecting objectivity, external realism, and are, to varying degrees, trying to immunize their theories from the refutations of reality. They are conflating science with ideology, trying to replace reality with their ideological *wish*.

Critical theory, however, is worse in this regard, in my opinion. Mises insists on realism and is ostensibly making an effort to get at the truth; he is merely using either apriorism, or as has been suggested, a form of conventionalism to immunize his theory from empirical refutation, clinging to an EP1 epistemology

⁵⁷⁶ (Gröbl-Steinbach, 2006)

⁵⁷⁷ (Mises, *The Ultimate Foundations of Economic Science*, 1962) p. 70

(see Ch. 5). Critical theory, on the other hand, through its so-called “unity of theory and practice” explicitly *rejects scientific objectivity altogether*. It views truth to be relative, as something inextricably bound to the so-called “*societal totality*”.

*“The critical theories attached to identity politics in the United States have produced a critique not just of liberal principles, but of the modes of discourse associated with it. It is in this realm that they are producing their most evident effect. In its more extreme versions, this critique denies the possibility of the liberal ideal of rational discourse altogether.”*⁵⁷⁸

Popper had warned explicitly against this aspect of Hegelianism as early as 1965 in “The Myth of the Framework”.⁵⁷⁹

For critical theorists, social scientists are supposed to be revolutionaries, fundamentally hostile to “bourgeois society”, so if they can change this “*societal totality*”, then anything can be true, hence the totalitarian urge to “clean the canvas” (see section 4.4.1). Their Hegelian thinking is mystical, holist and oracular, so they conflate thought and reality; they do not recognize truth as a critical standard. For idealists, truth is something constructed in the mind and particularly in the *collective* mind of the “*societal totality*”⁵⁸⁰ so if they can reproduce their thoughts in the collective mind of this totality, they can change reality itself. This is the kind of totalitarian thinking characteristic of Hegelians, of both *communist left Hegelians* and of *fascist right Hegelians*.

⁵⁷⁸ (Fukuyama, 2022)p. 85

⁵⁷⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) (The first version of this paper was written in 1965) See note on p. 33 of the book.

⁵⁸⁰ After “dialectic procedure”, *dialektisches Verfahren*, this concept “*societal totality*”, *gesellschaftliche Totalität*, in number 2 on Hans Alberts revealing hitlist in which he points out the vacuity of these terms (Gröbl-Steinbach, 2006) p. 169

The critical theorists fail to realize that the social sciences are about the unintended results of the interplay of intended action. They are not capable of thinking outside their “vulgar Marxist conspiracy theory”⁵⁸¹ and their rejection of external realism makes them mental slaves to their theories. In short, they have plunged themselves and their disciples down the delusional rabbit hole of Hegelian relativism of identity politics and the so-called “sociology of knowledge”⁵⁸² that Popper refuted in the *Open Society* in 1945, much of the same thinking also characterizes the extreme right both past and present.⁵⁸³

With “the left” spewing such objectively poisonous drivel into the minds of the young, with their refusal to recognize the Soviet Union for what it was and with such obstinate ideologues purposely misunderstanding and misrepresenting his views while constantly painting him as a reactionary, how could Popper *not* reject the left and gravitate toward his conservative colleagues? After all, they may have some reactionary tendencies, but at least they are capable of rational discourse. Flocking so long with these birds of a feather, with no rational left to engage with⁵⁸⁴, his thinking drifted to the right. I may have missed something important about Popper’s later life, his years of relative isolation living in rural England perhaps, but it seems to me his understandable disappointment in the left could very well be an explanation for his movement to the right.

⁵⁸¹ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 312

⁵⁸² (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) Ch. 23 “The Sociology of Knowledge”

⁵⁸³ (Steizinger, 2019)

⁵⁸⁴ There was some engagement between Popper and the German Social Democrats in the 1970’s, but critical rationalism does not seem to have caught on. The *Frankfurter Schule*, especially with Habermas and Marcuse, and various forms of post-modernism have had much more influence on the left.

However, were Popper alive today in the early 21st century, I have *no doubt* he would be appalled at how far the pendulum has swung in the other direction, that is to say in the direction of that “unregulated capitalism” that he and Marx had condemned. As we have seen from the situation described in chapter 5, the problem situation has *once again* changed. Within the West the resurgence of laissez-faire, coupled with wholesale corruption, has indeed led to desperation and hence to collectivism on the far left and the far right just as Popper had predicted (see letter to Hayek in section 5.2.2). Internationally the post-cold war “peace dividend” and the “End of History”⁵⁸⁵ hopefulness of Popper’s final years has given way to the “War on Terror”, and the “Clash of Civilizations”⁵⁸⁶.

The two forces that Popper saw as threats to civilization, irrationalism and relativism, are back with a vengeance and they are running rampant both on the far left and the far right. In left wing academia they take the form of critical theory, the sociology of knowledge, post-modernism and related schools of relativism and identity politics.⁵⁸⁷ Like the pseudo-sciences and historicism that Popper fought against in his youth, these backward relativistic ideologies are *once again* weakening the left, wasting our energies in the fruitless distractions of identity politics and puritanical woke virtue signaling. While energetic “activists” are worrying about how to smoke out the next supposedly transphobic celebrity to deplatform, the real danger rises unabated, and is even provoked to ever greater extremes by the far left’s nihilistic cultural

⁵⁸⁵ This is a reference to the famous book by Francis Fukuyama where he prophesied that the fall of the iron curtain would lead to the unchallenged dominance of liberal democracy and hence peace and prosperity across the globe.

⁵⁸⁶ This is a reference to the famous book by Fukuyama’s professor at Harvard, Samuel Huntington, who maintained the opposite thesis to that of Fukuyama, namely that the fall of the iron curtain would reveal the conflicts of incommensurate cultural frameworks, or distinct civilizations that had been concealed by the bipolar world order of the cold war.

⁵⁸⁷ (Fukuyama, 2022)pp. 85-98 “The Critique of Rationality”

deconstruction and attempted “canvas cleaning”. The relativist identity politics of the left that subdivide the working class into antagonistic racial, cultural and sexual categories only serves the divide and conquer tactics of reactionaries⁵⁸⁸, while they are imported into the far right directly; black identity politics triggers white identity politics and vice versa. Sometimes the relativism of western academia is even taken over directly by the far right to justify their own post-fact ideology.⁵⁸⁹

With the left self-destructing in its woke identity politics madness, today the clear and present danger that has arisen unopposed is again from the *right*. It takes the form of Clerical Fascism. I mean Vladimir Putin’s Orthodox Clerical Fascism⁵⁹⁰ and Donald Trump’s Evangelical Clerical Fascism.⁵⁹¹

Trump, fortunately, lost reelection in 2020 and was forced to leave office, but not before he showed his own and his followers’ true colors on January 6th, 2021 in an attempted coup to keep himself in office. Unfortunately, even this ultimate act of treason and criminal incitement was not enough for the Republican majority in the Senate to ban him from holding office, so he and his movement,

⁵⁸⁸ Note the common union busting tactics of using African American or foreign replacement workers so as to play the animosities of the white working class against them.

⁵⁸⁹ The „alternative facts” of Trump’s first White House spokesperson, Kelly Anne Conway and the invocations of relativism, post-modernism and Wittgenstein by Russian Fascist Eurasianist activist Alexander Dugin. See BBC interview [\(46\) Aleksandr Dugin: 'We have our special Russian truth' - BBC Newsnight - YouTube](#)

⁵⁹⁰ (Schneider, 2018)

⁵⁹¹ Many parts of the Muslim world, Saudi Arabia, Iran, and now Turkey, have already fallen to this evil, though you would find it hard to get someone on “the left” to acknowledge this palpable fact This is yet another effect of the cultural relativism that has robbed so many of their rational faculties. Simply acknowledging that men like Ayatollah Khamenei or Recep Tayyip Erdogan are fascists, can bring on the accusation of so-called “Islamophobia”.

which has been many years in the making⁵⁹², will continue to devastate the body politic for the near future. This too is a byproduct of Neo-liberalism.⁵⁹³

One of the most striking things Trump had in common with his Russian counterpart is their overt hostility to the EU and their desire to break it up.⁵⁹⁴ Putin supported Brexit and has been supporting right wing separatist European parties for years.⁵⁹⁵ In 2016 after the Brexit vote Trump greeted UKIP leader and EU arch enemy Nigel Farage like a conquering hero and even had him speak at his election rallies⁵⁹⁶. During his presidency he had his chief strategist, Steve Banon, crisscross Europe trying to coordinate Europe's far right parties and his ambassador to Germany made a career out of attacking Europe's unacknowledged leader, Angelika Merkel, while praising the far right AfD.⁵⁹⁷ This anti-European policy was utterly unprecedented for an American President. Which begs the question, "why?". Why would both Trump and Putin be such enemies of the EU and want to see it broken up into tiny nation states?

I believe the reasons are both practical and ideological. On the ideological side it is a question of both men sharing an anti-universalist nationalism; they both belong to the so-called "anti-globalists" movement, which is another name for the regressive and tribalist *reaction to the "strain of civilization"* Popper speaks of that is otherwise known as *fascism*.

⁵⁹² It was rather conspicuous how as soon as Trump became President, the words "Tea Party", the name of that Koch Brothers funded "Astroturf" movement that had established its own caucus of extremists after the 2010 Citizens United ruling, suddenly vanished from public discourse. It seems obviously looking at the personnel, the Tea Party simply became the executive branch of MAGA:

⁵⁹³ (Fukuyama, 2022) p. 29

⁵⁹⁴ (Glaser, 2018)

⁵⁹⁵ (Wesslau, 2016)

⁵⁹⁶ (Teague, 2016)

⁵⁹⁷ (Crowley, 2017)

On the practical side one must realize that both men represent the interests of oligarchy. If Europe were to break up into smaller states, the individual countries, which at present maintain some variant of Social Democracy, would be forced to compete with each other over investment capital and would thus be forced to abandon the last remnants of labor and environmental legislation (see section 4.4.2.3). If Europe stands as one community of common laws and values, those multinational corporations and investors who want to do business in Europe have to accept the legal framework that has so far held off the Neo-liberal onslaught. If Europe is fragmented into nation states, these states will be played off against each other and the European system of mixed economy will be strangled to death. This alternative model to unregulated laissez-faire capitalism will be placed on the ash heap of history. The motto of both Trump and Putin is “Oligarchs of the world Unite!” This would represent the transition to Viktor Orban’s “illiberal democracy”⁵⁹⁸, to an authoritarian post democratic West, of increasing inequality, a closed society of natural masters over natural slaves.

On the 24th of February 2022 the hammer of Russian fascism fell; as of this writing Russian tanks and artillery have spent four months destroying Ukrainian cities and have killed thousands of civilians. The open pronouncements given by Putin and his strategists, like Alexander Dugin⁵⁹⁹, have framed this campaign as a trial by combat between their own so-called “Eurasian Civilization” and

⁵⁹⁸ (Serhan, 2020)

⁵⁹⁹ Alexander Dugin is a Russian state sponsored public intellectual and fascist ideologue. He is a former member of the now banned National Bolshevik Party and now the leader of the Eurasian Party. His tremendous influence in Russian military and strategic circles has earned him the title “Putin’s Brain”. He was subject to sanctions in 2014 for his direct involvement in the Russian annexation of the Crimea.

western liberal democracy.⁶⁰⁰ The Eurasianist ideology is the product of some exile intellectuals in the 20th Century and Dugan's Post-Soviet Eurasian Party. Here is a statement of its principles:

*"The new Eurasian empire will be constructed on the fundamental principle of the common enemy: the rejection of Atlanticism, strategic control of the USA, and the refusal to allow liberal values to dominate us. This common civilizational impulse will be the basis of a political and strategic union"*⁶⁰¹

The borders of this proposed empire extend far beyond the boundaries of the The Russian Federation, according to some sources, from Vladivostok to Lisbon.⁶⁰²

We are lucky that the first blow, the invasion of the Ukraine 2022, is happening under the presidency of a pro-Europe US President, Joe Biden. From all indications Trump would not have hesitated to give up Ukraine and possibly even eastern Europe for an alliance with his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin. We have heard from their own mouths as pro-Trump commentators have suggested that the US side with Russia in the conflict⁶⁰³.

So, what is to be done?

Every crisis has the potential to be an opportunity for regeneration. Now that COVID seems to be waning and the economy is coming back there is the opportunity to reorganize and reform our institutions in the West and employ *piecemeal engineering* to do so. America and Europe need to work together and grow closer to each other, which means a sharing of the burdens of defense and

⁶⁰⁰ (Riebel, 2022)

⁶⁰¹ Alexander Dugin, *The Foundations of Geopolitics*, 1994

⁶⁰² (Schneider, 2018)

⁶⁰³ (Baker, 2022)

an improvement in America's broken and degenerated democracy (See Ch.5). Europeans used to look up to America as a land of opportunity and freedom, but since 2001 it has become a place where they look in fear, a land ruled by an ironfisted social Darwinism, in Popper's words ruled by "an uncontrolled gangsterism of wealth".⁶⁰⁴ In order to regenerate itself America needs to return to the days of its mixed economy of the 60's and 70's, the America that built the middle class, not the one strangling it. We also need to get rid of the corruption that has exploded since Steve Banon's "Citizens United" case. Europe needs to reform its institutions too. They need to be made more democratic; only then can the EU acquire the legitimacy needed for a renewal. In the USA the voting and campaign financing regime have to be changed. The same goes for reforming the obstructionism of the Senate, reforming the corruption of the media by bringing back the traditional role of the FCC and reestablishing net neutrality, the rebuilding of infrastructure, education, green energy and many many more things that are simply objectively necessary. The majority is also for substantial tax reform and for raising the minimum wage. Upward mobility must be restored, for *everyone*. This means rediscovering and renewing the principles of Social Democracy as outlined in its Popperian form in this thesis.

The United States must also embrace its inexorable identity as a country of eternal immigration. People from all over the world must be able to immigrate to the USA to share in a common human identity, a universal tribe, united in their love of freedom. The nativist delusions of the MAGAS must be exposed and refuted. If universal human reason, human rights and the sanctity of individual liberty are America's creed, then it must live by it. America must again be *OF* the world if it is to hope to lead the world again. Only if the often

⁶⁰⁴ (Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies, New One-Volume Edition*, 1945/2013) p. 336

eulogized yet systematically dismembered *American dream* is rebuilt from the bottom up will the West be saved.

Globally there needs to be greater cooperation and communication between different cultural frameworks; the world is globalized by technology that cannot be uninvented. Capital will be globalized as always. The only way to counter it is to globalize the citizens as well. That means we cannot accept the building of hostile blocks. Countries need to remain open, otherwise communication, cooperation and understanding are impossible and without it we will most certainly annihilate each other. Globalization needs to be a two-way street, with every nation and every culture an Open Society, including the West, Russia, and China. We need to abandon the monologue where the United States dictates to the world in exchange for “A Dialogue Among Civilizations” like that initiated by moderate Iranian president Ayatollah Khatami initiated in 1998, a deliberate counter suggestion to Huntington’s *The Clash of Civilizations*. In his UN speech of 2001 Khatami expressed solidarity with the United States after the attacks of September 11th and reiterated his call for the “Dialogue”. It was a call to action that George W. Bush was too deaf, dumb and blind to take up.⁶⁰⁵

Popper’s defense of truth and objectivity against the rising tide of irrationalism and relativism is one of his most significant contributions. Instead of Alexander Dugin’s and Samuel Huntington’s relativist “Clash of Civilizations” program of a multipolar world with three or more hermetically sealed and incommensurable

⁶⁰⁵ In an infamous State of the Union speech on January 29th 2002 George W. Bush claimed that Iraq, Iran and North Korea “constitute an axis of evil, arming to threaten the peace of the world.” The logic of this equation was altogether flawed. Iran and Iraq had been arch enemies for many years and neither had the slightest thing to do with North Korea and on top of that 15 of the 19 hijackers of September 11th were from Saudi Arabia and all of them were Suni Muslims, and hence had nothing to do with Iran. Experts agree that this speech was a decisive factor in the downfall of Iran’s moderate opposition and the rise of hardliners like president Mahmud Ahmadinejad. See (Heradstveit & Bonham, 2007)

power blocks or “civilizations”, we need a multipolarity of 7 billion blocks, blocks that consist of each and every individual on the planet, each person given the access to the global community, the possibility of upward mobility and the right to change their country of residence. This is a one world, free world, scenario, like the one advocated by Karl Renner and Karl Popper. This, of course, cannot become a reality for a long time, but we must work towards it; it is the only way to lasting peace and progress. It is only in such a world that nuclear war, and environmental catastrophe, the two doomsday scenarios hanging over the species, can be effectively dealt with. They threaten the whole species, and they must be overcome by the *whole* species. As long as there is war, hot and cold, big and small, none of the major powers feels safe going through the rapid green revolution we need; they would be unilaterally disarming, while the other blocks are building for the final trial by combat. The world is beginning more and more to resemble Orwell’s tripartite world of Oceania, Eurasia and East Asia, characterized by constant war and enmity. This scenario cannot be allowed to materialize, the catastrophe that will destroy either civilized life as we know it or life altogether would be inevitable.

But how can we possibly achieve such things when even Republicans and Democrats *at the center of the West itself* cannot even talk to each other?

Here Popper also has the answers. We must first and foremost overcome relativism, A.K.A. “the myth of the framework”:

*“The myth of the framework can be stated in one sentence, as follows. A rational and fruitful discussion is impossible unless the participants share a common framework of basic assumptions”*⁶⁰⁶

⁶⁰⁶ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 34

These frameworks of implicit assumptions are embedded in culture and in scientific theories, what Kuhn would call paradigms.⁶⁰⁷ The myth of the framework as stated above, if true, would make all communication between frameworks impossible.

*“...it is not only a false statement, but also a vicious statement which, if widely believed, must undermine the unity of mankind, and so must greatly increase the likelihood of violence and of war.”*⁶⁰⁸

Popper’s point is not that fruitful communication between conflicting frameworks is easy, but that “if common goodwill and a lot of effort are put into it, then very far-reaching understanding is possible.” Not only that but it is precisely between divergent frameworks that a critical discussion can be *most fruitful*, because, as Popper happily declares:

*“Although I am an admirer of tradition, and conscious of its importance, I am, at the same time, an almost orthodox adherent of unorthodoxy: I hold that orthodoxy is the death of knowledge, since the growth of knowledge depends entirely on the existence of disagreement.”*⁶⁰⁹

Thus, it is exactly the person you disagree with the most who has the most to teach you, provided the conditions of good will and a desire to get nearer to the truth are present on both sides. People can often have similar foundational moral principles, but because these were formed in very different linguistic and cultural surroundings built up on different implicit assumptions, they are very difficult to communicate and discuss. The various cultural and linguistic groups in different countries and in the same country are examples, as are the differences between urban culture and rural culture within the same country and

⁶⁰⁷ (Kuhn, 1962/2012)

⁶⁰⁸ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994)

⁶⁰⁹ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) p. 34 (See also the discussion of tradition in Section 4.3)

language. It is generally best to start by discussing facts and the points of agreement first and then move on to points of increasing disagreement.

If America is to be saved, and by extension, The West, those in the camp of humanitarianism (see Ch. 5) the philosopher's, social scientists, politicians and opinion leaders working in the opposing frameworks of Social Democracy and Libertarianism need to come together in critical intersubjective discussion in order to start solving the above-mentioned problems. These fault-lines between frameworks exist even between *critical rationalists*, even though they share Popper as a common framework. If there are any thinkers on the cusp of this divide who can break the myth of the framework, then it is the Popperians who should be the ones to do it.

But that just covers the problems of America. The same principle, however, holds true for all cultural divides, no matter how profound. Between America and Europe and even, someday, between Russia, The West, China, Iran, etc.

To do this we must reject the myth of the framework, embrace the “rational unity of mankind” and replace relativism with fallibilism. We must realize that all our theories, even the ones embedded in our language and our sense organs, are merely imperfect attempts to get at the truth:

“...although we can judge theories only ‘relatively’ in the sense that we compare them with each other (and not with the truth, which we do not know), this does not mean that we are relativists (in the sense of the famous phrase that ‘truth is relative’). On the contrary, in comparing them, we try to find the one which we judge comes nearest to the (unknown) truth.”⁶¹⁰

⁶¹⁰ (Popper, *The Myth of the Framework: in defense of science and rationality*, 1994) “Models, Instruments and Truth” p. 161

As human beings trying to understand the world we live in and solve its problems we can only get nearer to this truth together, and to do so we must transcend the “prison” of our frameworks, trust in the rational unity of mankind and *everywhere* defend our right to think and to speak critically with one another, that is to say we must defend with all our might the only society that makes this possible: **The Open Society**.

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