

THE CONCEPT OF RIGHT ACTION IN KARL POPPER

THE CONCEPT OF RIGHT ACTION IN KARL POPPER

By

SUBUHI MEHDI, B.A.

A Thesis

Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies

in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements

for the Degree

Master of Arts

McMaster University

May 1982

MASTER OF ARTS (1982)

McMASTER UNIVERSITY

(Religious Studies)

Hamilton, Ontario

TITLE: The Concept of Right Action in Karl Popper

AUTHOR: Subuhi Mehdi, B.A. (McMaster University)

SUPERVISOR: Professor L. Greenspan

NUMBER OF PAGES: x + 86

## ABSTRACT

This thesis seeks to examine the Concept of Right Action in Karl Popper's social and moral philosophy. This is attempted through the study of his theory of rationality. Through the examination of his theory of 'critical rationalism', it has been established that a right action is a rational action, that is, an action based on a critical assessment of its possible consequences. His theory of falsifiability, which is fundamental to his theory of critical rationalization and which advocates that falsification as opposed to verification, is a true test of a theory, is also examined, in order to see whether and how it can be applied to social and moral problems. In this context it has been established that in social and political realms also, one works through theories, ideas and hypotheses which can be tested. This method is considered to be a rational and scientific method and is advocated as an alternative to authoritarian and totalitarian methods. In order to determine the viability of K. Popper's proposals, his critique of historicism is also examined. Through the study of these critiques, it has been established that historicist modes of thought and action tend to lead to totalitarian and authoritarian political and social systems, and the consequent violence. A system based on critical rationalism is considered to be the only alternative. In examining these critiques we also raised the question whether religion and tradition have any place in Popper's system. It has been shown that the critical understanding and use of tradition is fundamental and necessary. We have also shown that Popper is not

anti-religion and that religion and rationality are not incompatible, when we consider that religion is not merely a metaphysical system but also a social system, i.e., a body of ethics and a way of life. A rational and a secular attitude and a religious attitude are not mutually exclusive.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to acknowledge my gratitude to my committee members, Dr. Greenspan and Dr. Robertson. I also wish to express my gratitude to McMaster University for providing me with financial support during the period in which this thesis was written. My thanks to S. for various kinds of encouragement.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
PREFACE . . . . .	v
CHAPTER I . . . . .	1
CHAPTER II . . . . .	19
CHAPTER III . . . . .	57
REFERENCES . . . . .	81
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	86

## PREFACE

Karl Popper is mainly a philosopher of science and to some extent a social philosopher. He has not written anything directly connected with the questions and problems of religion. Therefore, it is important that I justify my reasons for writing a thesis on Karl Popper in the department of religious studies.

I do not consider religion as a mere metaphysical system. It is also a way of life and a body of ethics. It is generally considered that in order to claim one's adherence to a certain religion, one has to accept its metaphysics and especially its certain concept of God. The ontological and theological aspect of religion is regarded as of primary importance. However, the historical, social, cultural, and ethical aspects of religion are of significantly practical importance because, in practical terms, religion is a way of life. Religion, morality, law, and society are forms of human activity for which man himself is responsible. Man is a being of volitional consciousness who cannot avoid the necessity of making choices and the responsibility for his choices, decisions, and actions. It is by virtue of his reason that man is a being of volitional consciousness. I believe that this is the central view of man in the major western religions. Man's rationality and his freedom are, however, undermined when religious systems attempt to give certainty regarding the ultimate outcome of human history and proclaim that man's destiny is preordained. The consequence of this view is that morality becomes a matter of commandment.



Morality cannot be dictated or commanded. Morality is the consequence of reasoning. Man can claim to be moral when he understands and chooses rather than when he is forced or merely obeys. Morality is a process of reason and of constant choice to the question: right or wrong?

In my attempt to study and understand religion, I found a constant conflict in most religions. On the one hand, man is exhorted to be moral and, on the other hand, he is regarded as a being whose role and destiny are preordained. Another intriguing aspect is the fact that most religions profess the brotherhood of mankind and yet lead to divisions, inquisitions, religious wars, etc. Rationality and morality on the one hand, and force and violence, on the other, are opposites. Morality ends where force begins. To use force and violence is to denounce and negate man's capacity as a thinking, rational being. To use force is to make man act against his judgment. The worst form of human abasement is the attempt to subordinate another's mind by means of any form of force.

These problems and contradictions led me to the question: Can man be both religious and rational? Can religion and rationality be reconciled?

I chose to study Karl Popper because it seemed to me that he is one of the most important contemporary thinkers who has attempted to show that rationality can be and should be applied to every phase of human life and activity. Reason, according to Popper, is the only alternative to force and violence. The unity and brotherhood of man-

kind can be established only by means of 'rational unity of mankind'. As will be seen in the main body of this dissertation, Popper's theory of rationality presupposes the doctrine of autonomy. Autonomy implies volitional consciousness and responsibility. Popper, by referring to the early spirit of Christianity, has attempted to show that religion and rationality can be reconciled.

I wish to stress here that in his attempt to show the compatibility of religion and rationality, Popper is not at all concerned with metaphysical and ontological questions. His concern is with religion as a body of ethics, or as a system which inspires and suggests certain moral laws. According to Popper, ethics is autonomous and, therefore, independent of the problem of religion. It is, however, compatible with and even necessary for any religion which respects individual conscience (OSI 166). Moral or ethical standards are man's creation and can be thus judged and decided upon. They are a matter of deliberation, decision and choice. They can be improved upon. This approach fits Popper's notion of fallibilism or of dynamic scepticism.

In this dissertation, I have not limited myself only to the problem of relation between rationality and religion. I have also dealt with Popper's critique of historicism and authoritarianism in order to articulate his theory of rationality and to show the incompatibility of rationality and authoritarianism.

The dissertation is divided into three chapters. Chapter I introduces Popper's concept of rationality and deals with his general critique of historicism and utopianism. Chapter II deals with his critique of Plato and Marxism. Chapter III further articulates his

theory of rationality and his alternative approach to social problems. It also establishes how in Popper's view religion and rationality can be reconciled. Finally, it establishes that Popper is a systematic philosopher, and that his theory of rationality gives power, substance, and a comprehensive perspective to his philosophy.

6

## CHAPTER I

Karl Popper states that ours is a period which, more than any other in history, demands the practical application of rational methods to social problems.<sup>1</sup> Such a statement is not a surprising one in the age of nuclear power. It is not difficult to visualize the possibility of destroying the entire civilization in the event of violent confrontation between super-powers. The possible use of violence can be checked and perhaps be eliminated only through the use of reason and a rational approach to social problems. Karl Popper as a rationalist regards the work of eliminating violence and force as the task confronting rational beings. His firm belief in reason leads him to see in the attitude of reasonableness, the only alternative to violence. The choice is simple: violence versus rationality.

Karl Popper's writings in the social and political realm can be best understood on the basis of his fundamental attitude towards the problem of violence. His main concern in these writings is with the role of political violence and, as an alternative to it, he proposes rational action. The development of his moral philosophy and his social theory are to a large extent determined by this concern. His historical studies of Plato, Hegel and Marx are thus mainly occasions to set forth his own philosophy.

The purpose of this thesis is to determine Popper's concept of right rational action. This will be attempted through an analysis of

his critique of historicism in general and his critiques of Plato and Marx in particular. In analyzing these critiques, it is not my intention to directly assess Popper's accuracy regarding the negative criticisms of the two philosophers and the several "isms". The analysis of these critiques will be undertaken because Popper has argued for rationality and because his alternate approach to the solution of social problems is developed through his criticisms of historicism, in general, and the historicist philosophies of Plato and Marx, in particular.

I intend to establish through this analysis that Popper's main thrust regarding right rational action is Kantian. Popper's concept of rationality presupposes the doctrine of autonomy. Both the concepts imply a critical method of rationality or critical rationalism. They assert the autonomy of the will of a rational being. The main thrust is that freedom and autonomy consist in self-determination. To be rational and to be free is to be able to critically confront and assess problems and questions, independently of all external constraints in order to reach a conclusion or a decision regarding their meaning and possible solution. The only constraint in this process is the recognition of a self-imposed rational law which treats every individual as an end in himself and not as the means to any end of others.

In addition to the doctrine of autonomy, Popper's concept of rationality presupposes a certain amount of intellectual humility. An attitude of reasonableness is an attitude of give and take. Rational argument is central to this attitude. One must be willing to not only convince others by rational argument, but also be willing to be con-

vinced by them. It is willingness to admit one's mistakes and correct them. This attitude is born out of the realization that we cannot claim to be the final authority on what is truth, that we cannot be absolutely certain about the truth of our opinions since we owe most of our knowledge to others. In our search for truth and knowledge, we are interdependent. Rational argument is possible only through our recognition of the rationality of others.

Thus, the recognition of the doctrine of autonomy and the necessity of interdependence in our quest for knowledge and solution to practical problems, is the most important method to eliminate violence and to promote peaceful competition. Popper's theory of rationality is one of the most central theories of his philosophical system and it makes his philosophy a unified system. His theory of rationality combined with his dynamic scepticism is the basis of his criticism of historicism and authoritarian modes of thought and action and of his defense of the liberal mode of thought and action. His view of dynamic scepticism can best be summed up in the following quote: "Science is not a system of certain, or well-established statements...our science is not knowledge (episteme): it can never claim to have attained truth, or even a substitute for it, such as probability...We do not know: we can only guess."<sup>2</sup> In Popper's work, we find one of the most comprehensive critiques of the quest for certainty. Popper's concept of right action can be constructed through his theory of rationality and of dynamic scepticism. In constructing such a concept, it would appear at first sight that Popper is advocating an approach to the solution of social problems that would uphold rationality only by adopting a strictly

secular mode of thought and action which would render all forms of religions or traditions useless and possibly dangerous.

Here the question might be posed regarding the effect of Popperian way of thinking, i.e., critical scepticism on questions of theology. Are the questions of theology or religion remote from Popper's philosophy? The theological believe that we have found the truth and are looking for its manifestation is entirely anti-Popperian. Furthermore, certain aspects of religion such as the idea of Providence, the concept of chosen people, the belief in a definite end such as the establishment of an ideal community or the kingdom of God are completely incompatible with his philosophy. It would be misleading, however, to think that Popper was anti-religion. His belief in the doctrine of the autonomy of ethics and of individual is not an attack on religion *per se* but on certain forms of religious beliefs such as belief in blind authority, in magic and tabooism, etc. In insiting on autonomy, Popper does not imply that one must deny help and inspiration from faith, tradition and great examples, he simply rejects the adoption of certain moral laws and prescriptions on the basis of divine authority; rather one must rely on one's own conviction in matters of moral deliberation. Only by accepting the doctrine of autonomy can we build on a strong basis.<sup>3</sup> According to Popper such a view or an attitude is not at all opposed to a religious attitude: "The doctrine of the autonomy of ethics is independent of the problem of religion, but compatible with, or perhaps even necessary for, any religion which respects individual conscience."<sup>4</sup>

In order to understand Popper's stand regarding the place of

religion in our lives and in society, it is important to note that Popper advocates modest rationalism as opposed to comprehensive rationalism. According to the latter, all beliefs should be open to criticism, i.e., all beliefs should be 'criticizable'. Such a position would exclude all such metaphysical beliefs that do not lend themselves to be criticized. Popper does not advocate this. His position is that one should be able to deal with the criticisms one encounters and should be open to and look for such encounters. In my opinion, in the realm of religion or theology, Popper's position would be hard on authoritarianism, bigotry, fundamentalism, etc., since they do not allow room for critical reflection and individual responsibility. Furthermore, they undermine man's capacity as a rational being and man's faith in reason. This cannot contribute towards an improvement of human affairs, towards the establishment of brotherhood of man or peace. Instead it leads towards the division of mankind and intolerance.

Popper's position would also be hard on the claim of religions that they possess the final truth. According to Popper's epistemology such a claim cannot be possible because we cannot attain any kind of certain knowledge. There is no final or ultimate foundation or source of any knowledge. All knowledge is guesswork. Therefore, the important task of any epistemology is not to look for ultimate foundations or try to justify and define them but rather to investigate the process by which progress in the field of knowledge and science may be made possible. In the realm of science and empirical knowledge, Popper advocates the method of falsifiability. According to this method, verification is not the test of a theory since it is very easy to verify



or confirm anything that happens. The test of a scientifically true theory is its refutability. Any theory which is irrefutable by any conceivable event is non-scientific. Thus, the testability of a theory is its falsifiability. Only after a theory has been put to rigorous tests and is thus not falsified or refuted, can it be accepted tentatively as better than its competitors. Thus the test of a theory is an attempt to falsify it or refute it. A theory's falsifiability, refutability or testability is the criterion of the scientific status of a theory.<sup>5</sup> This method, however, indicates the line of a demarcation between science and pseudo-science and, thus, cannot possibly be applied to ethics.

It is my contention that in the latter realm, the important thing is to recognize that all knowledge is human and that truth is beyond human capacity. All we can do is search for truth even if it is beyond our reach. Certainty in knowledge cannot be attained. Therefore, the important thing is to be conscious of one's point of view and be critical, i.e., be open to criticism and not show an uncritical bias.

Popper differentiates between theistic historicism or those religions in which historicism is held to be a necessary element and the religions which he identifies as religions of conscience and responsibility. Here his intention is to show that religion *per se* need not be historicist and authoritarian. Religions become historicist when they hold the dogma that God reveals Himself in history, that the meaning of history is the purpose of God. The main idea behind this theistic historicism is the belief that history is a play written by

God and human beings perform as actors in the play. Popper regards this as pure idolatry and superstition. He contends that there is hardly anything to support this view in the New Testament.<sup>6</sup> One of the dangers of theistic historicism is that it leads to utopianism and moral futurism. It leads to utopianism because you want to establish the kingdom of God on earth, or the ideal community of chosen people, etc. This attempt leads readily to division, hatred, and violence. I contend that it, furthermore, leads to moral futurism because of its belief that God reveals Himself in history where worldly success is the ultimate judge of actions. History or God's judgment becomes the justification of our actions rather than our own moral convictions and conscience. We thus abdicate our moral responsibility.

To show that religion need not necessarily be historicist, utopian and irrational, Popper refers to the religious spirit of the early Christianity and of certain contemporary Christians like Karl Barth and Kierkegaard.<sup>7</sup> Both of these emphasized that the final outcome of one's actions depends upon one's moral decision for which one is held responsible. Popper does not discuss the other worldly character of Christianity but he asserts that according to Christian teaching, the only way to prove one's faith is by rendering worldly and practical help to those who need it. Also by doing one's best and further one's aims and ends for their own sake and not for the sake of one's justification by history. In this sense Christianity and historicism are incompatible whereas autonomy and religion are reconcilable. According to Popper, the early Christians believed that conscience should judge power and not the other way around. He uses

Kierkegaard's phrase to point out that it's not the historical deeds of the powerful Roman conquerors that matters to Christianity but 'what a few fishermen have given the world.' In the same context, he quotes Barth 'Jesus *suffers*: therefore, He does not conquer. He does not triumph. He has no success. He achieved nothing except...His crucifixion. The same could be said of His relationship to His people and to His disciples.' Popper's intention is to show that the spirit of the early Christians did not lead them to seek justification in terms of worldly success. The early Christian had no worldly encouragement of this kind. Their actions were undertaken for the sake of those actions themselves and not for the sake of worldly success or justification by history. Thus, Popper believes that the true spirit of Christianity is incorporated more purely in the church of the martyrs and not in the victorious Church of the Inquisition. According to Popper, we do not need the ethical doctrine or the morality of fame and success. Such a morality cannot be just. Therefore, it cannot be the morality of those who favour justice and equalitarianism. Historical fame can be attained only by a few and a countless many who are just as worthy human beings get forgotten. Popper asserts that we need an ethics which defies success and reward, which teaches us to find justification in our work, to make sacrifice for the sake of our work, and not for praise or avoidance of blame. Popper feels that this ethic is not new but has been taught by early Christianity.

Popper further asserts that historicism is in "conflict with any religion that teaches the importance of conscience. For such a religion must agree with the rationalist attitude...in its emphasis on our

supreme responsibility for our actions....True, we need hope; to act, to live without hope goes beyond our strength. But we do not need more, and we must not be given more. We do not need certainty. Religion, in particular, should not be a substitute for dreams and wish fulfillment; it should resemble neither the holding of a ticket in a lottery, nor the holding of a policy in an insurance company. The historicist element in religion is an element of idolatry, of superstition."<sup>8</sup> Here it can be seen that Popper does not turn against all forms of religion. Although he rejects historicism and religion, he holds that religion and autonomy are reconcilable since the latter leaves room for individual conscience. Rejecting religious intolerance and recognizing the freedom to hold religious beliefs, Popper believes that the most important way of proving one's faith is by rendering worldly and practical help to those who need it. According to this philosophy, one can be of secular mode of thought without necessarily being anti-religion. There is nothing in his writings to suggest that secular, liberal ideas must lead to religious intolerance. The most important thing in holding religious beliefs, or any form of ethics or morality is to recognize the centrality of the doctrine of autonomy. One's mind and one's conscience should be the guide and not an external authority. Man's dignity lies in the fact of his reasoning mind, and a reasoning mind has to be autonomous. This idea is central to both Popper and those religions that stress man's dignity.

If Popper attacks any religious doctrines, they are those that undermine man's rationality and that stress intuitionism, authoritarianism, bigotry and fundamentalism. In fact, Popper is against all those systems

and philosophies that promote authoritarianism and substitute certainty for hope and claim the final authority to truth. Popper's criticism of all historicist systems arises from the fact that they attempt to substitute certainty for hope and promote authoritarianism. If Popper feels compelled to provide a critique of such systems it is because he finds that violence is germane to all those philosophies and systems which claim certainty of knowledge regarding the course of history and workings of a society. Such social philosophies, according to Popper, hold that history has a plot and an inevitable end. By discovering the laws of historical development and by thus unravelling the plot, one can hold the key to the future. Popper groups these various social philosophies under the heading of historicism.

#### HISTORICISM

There are many forms of historicism but for the purpose of this thesis, we will deal only with or consider Popper's understanding of the term "historicism". In a general sense, the word historicism means that the history of something is a sufficient explanation of it. According to such a view, the value of anything depends upon its history or historical situation and can be accounted for through the discovery of its origins. It further holds that the nature of a thing can be entirely determined or comprehended in its development. In other words, it holds that the properties of anything can be accounted for by an exhaustive description of its development from its origin or history. Popper, on the other hand, does not merely mean the above, i.e., historical relativism by the term historicism. For Popper, any philosophy which

holds that history has a plot and an end, is a historicist philosophy. In this light, it is surprising that Popper counts Plato among historicists. We will see in the section on Plato that Popper's attack on Plato is mainly for his utopianism, although Popper does show a strain of historicism in Plato's philosophy which stresses the law of inevitable degeneration.

According to Popper, historicism is the belief that the evolution of history has a rhythm, a plot, and that there are patterns, laws and trends in the historical development, by the discovery of which the future development can be predicted and the political action determined. From this general definition, Popper divides the historicist doctrine into two parts: First, there is the historicist doctrine of the social sciences, according to which the task of the social sciences is the same as that of the natural sciences, namely, to make predictions about the social and political development of mankind. Thus, the principal task of the social sciences is historical prediction: Secondly, there is the historicist doctrine of politics, according to which once the predictions about the social and political development have been made, the task of politics can be determined. The main task of politics, according to this doctrine, is to lessen the "birthpangs" connected with the impending political developments.<sup>9</sup>

Popper's main criticism of historicism is that it is a dangerous moral philosophy. In attacking historicism, Popper attacks its historical determinism and its alleged connection with political totalitarianism. He further attacks historicism for its abdication of moral responsibility and encouraging moral futurism. Thus, Popper's criticism of historicism is

not merely a logical one but to a large extent a moral one. This thesis will deal mainly with the moral criticism because Popper's theory of knowledge and of society that results from this criticism has strong ethical implications.

According to Popper, historicism is methodological totalitarianism. It regards entities such as the state, society or the nation as totalities which are over and above its component parts that form a mere sum-total. Such totalities are governed by 'holist' notions and are regarded as omnipotent. Popper believes that a notion of totality implies totalitarian control over its component parts and therefore, over all forms of individual relationships. He, thus, sees a definite connection between methodological totalitarianism which is historicist and holistic in character and political and social totalitarianism. The former seems to provide a philosophical and logical justification for the latter. Popper claims that historicism leads to a particular approach to political reform which he identifies as utopianism and 'total engineering'. Such an approach is inevitable because of historicism's wider philosophical belief which leads it to claim that only such reforms are efficacious which fit in with and help among impending changes. These reforms would, furthermore, be efficacious only if they would work to change the entire condition or structure of society. According to Popper, such a 'holistic' idea of social change is logically untenable and leads to utopianism.

In the following pages, we shall consider Popper's criticism of historicism first as a form of utopianism and then, in the later chapters, as a philosophy which leads to moral futurism and to abdication

of one's moral responsibility.

Before proceeding any further, it must be borne in mind that Popper's critique of utopianism is important in two ways. Firstly, Popper believes that its analysis is of practical importance from the point of view of rational social engineering. Secondly, Popper sees a strong connection between utopianism and the possibility of violence. The above two points are inter-connected. From the practical or political point of view, the implications of Popper's critique of historicism are centered on the notion of holism. For it is the latter that leads to utopianism and the possibility of violence.

According to Popper, utopianism is generated by an excessive and misplaced form of rationalism. According to the utopian approach, any rational action must have a certain ultimate end or aim. An action is rational if it pursues the given end and makes the best use of available means to pursue that end. Therefore, the first step is to determine an ultimate end and to distinguish it from the intermediate and partial ends which are only the means to the realization of the ultimate end. In the realm of political activity, that action is considered rational and non-selfish which demands that an ultimate political end or the ideal state be determined before any practical action is taken. Thus, the practical action must be based upon a blueprint of the ultimate end and upon a blueprint of the historical path that leads towards the ultimate end or goal.<sup>10</sup> This, according to Popper, is the methodological approach of utopian, total engineering.

Popper asserts that the utopian method is self-defeating for two simple reasons. Firstly, it is not possible to reason about the blue-



print of an ideal society because of our lack of adequate knowledge and experience. Social life is too complicated to be predictable. Hence, it is very difficult to judge a blueprint for social engineering on such a grand scale. This first point leads to the second one that it is impossible to determine ultimate ends scientifically. There is no scientific way of choosing between two ends. A quarrel between two ends cannot be solved by means of scientific or rational methods. Although argument can be extremely helpful in reaching a decision about aims or ends, there are no purely scientific or rational means by which decision about aims can be established.

From the above, it follows that decisions about aims are basically judgments of value. As such they cannot be empirical statements but proposals. They are not a result of a scientific method but of autonomous acts of mind. Therefore, our choice of ends is not a matter of science or of scientific decision but of morals, i.e., moral decision. It would seem that according to utopian and historicist mode of thought, aims and ends are not a matter of choice or of moral decision but that they can be scientifically determined by knowledge of history and its movement. Popper asserts that facts about history and its supposed course cannot provide us with logically and rationally sufficient bases for our choice of ends.

The above argument for Popper is not merely a logical one but one which stems from his fundamental belief in the doctrine of autonomy, that an individual is a free, rational being. However, this autonomy in decision making is not arbitrary. Popper is a firm advocate of the critical method and open discussion. For him, scientific thinking

requires a critical evaluation of things. Self-criticism should be the method. According to Popper, there is no source of knowledge that has an authority. Thus, everything is open to criticism. The critical method or critical rationalism, according to Popper, seeks to avoid extremes of absolutism, relativism and irrationalism. Popper attempts to find a medium way by asserting that one should neither expect too much from any "method" or "source" nor despair of rational argument and open discussion even though they might fail to provide an absolute or final justification for any fundamental decision. The implication of the above is that although argument may prove helpful in reaching a decision about aims, decision itself is our moral responsibility. It restores to man his moral autonomy.

However, Popper's main argument against utopianism seems to be that it inevitably leads to authoritarianism and consequently to suppression and violence. Utopianism which uses a blueprint of society as a whole demands a 'strong, centralized rule of a few' which is likely to lead to a dictatorship. Since it is impossible to determine ultimate ends of political action and the means to their realization scientifically and rationally, differences of opinions regarding the ends and means cannot always be worked out by the rational method of argument. This is likely to lead to lack of tolerance and hence to violence, especially because the differences of opinions are somewhat like religious differences. The utopianist must either win over or crush the opposing utopianist religions and those who are opposed to his utopian religion. This crackdown and elimination of opposing or heretical views and all forms of criticism becomes inevitable because the ultimate aim or aims are the basis of 'rational political action'. Furthermore, such action

seems possible only if the ultimate aim is definitely decided upon. The reconstruction of a society as a whole is an immense enterprise which requires a long span of time, causes inconvenience for many. Moreover, in order to achieve the desired end, all forms of criticism, reasonable and unreasonable, have to be suppressed. This, however, leads to a further difficulty because, due to such suppression, complaints or grievances against the measures undertaken cannot be heard. Without such a check, it becomes impossible to determine whether the measures undertaken achieve the desired end.

Furthermore, since the utopian undertaking is of such tremendous sweep, it is not possible to realize in the life time of one social engineer or a group of them. The utopian approach can be of practical value only if it can be assumed that the original blueprint will be the basis of the work until it is completed. However, considering the long span of time required to accomplish the ultimate end, it is more than likely that the ideas and the ideals will change. Especially so if the time or period of utopian undertaking is one of social change. Consequently, what had appeared to be the ideal state to the originators of the blueprint may not appear so to their successors. Subsequently, the whole undertaking is liable to break down and the suffering of the people for the sake of the ideal may have been in vain. Thus, granting the possibility that the aim may change considerably during the process of its realization, the whole method of first determining a distant ultimate end and then moving towards its realization seem to become circular and futile. If the ideal is very distant, it becomes difficult to know whether the steps taken towards its realization are towards

or away from it. If it turns out that they are away from the new aim and a change of direction is required to meet the new aim, then the risk remains the same.

There are only two ways open to avoid such changes of aims and means. One is the use of violence which includes propaganda, the suppression of criticism and the annihilation of all opposition. This is not a desirable way because apart from causing suffering to an innumerable people, it curbs one's freedom to determine what kind of reforms one would like to be implemented. It implies that one person or a small handful of persons decide what is good for all. Use of force negates self-determination.

The other way to save the utopian approach is to assume in accordance with the Platonic belief that there can be one absolute and unchanging ideal, and that there are rational methods of determining such an ideal and the best means of its realization. We shall deal with the weakness and danger of this belief in the following chapter.

Thus far we have dealt with Popper's general criticism of utopianism and his attempt to show how the utopian approach or total engineering is circular and, therefore, unpractical. In fact, total engineering is considered utopian since it seems to be in contradiction with reality, that is, the impossibility of applying it in real situations. An attempt to do this inevitably leads to violence and suppression and then eventually it must resort to the use of smaller steps. Total engineering is utopian because it is futile.

In the following chapter we shall see how Platonic belief fails to save the utopian approach. In the same chapter we shall also deal

with Popper's criticism of historicism which he regards as a poor moral philosophy.

## CHAPTER II

### Introduction

In the previous chapter, we dealt with Popper's general criticism of utopianism. We noted there that utopian approach leads to authoritarianism and consequent violence. In this chapter, we shall be dealing with his critiques of Plato and Marxism in order to examine how he furthers his argument against historicism and utopian approach.

The present chapter will be divided into two sections. The first section will examine Popper's critique of Plato and the second one that of Marxism. In both of these critiques, Popper's main purpose is to attack historicism and its alleged connection with authoritarianism and totalitarianism. Popper's arguments regarding the futility of the historicist and utopian approach will also be examined.

It should be noted at the outset that Popper objects to historicism on both moral and methodological grounds. This thesis will examine both grounds, although the former will be emphasized. Both facts of Popper's objection follow from his theory of rationality and it seems that Popper is mainly concerned with the moral aspect of the conflict between rationalism and irrationalism. His defence of liberal democratic principles, however, is based on broadly methodological grounds. It is Popper's contention that rational social action cannot be directed to ultimate, utopian ends because of our lack of the kind of social knowledge that is required for the overall construction or reconstruction of society.

## Section I: Plato

In the previous chapter it was noted that one way to save the utopian approach is to assume, in accordance with the Platonic belief, that there can be one absolute and unchanging ideal, and that there are rational methods of determining such an ideal and the best means of its realization.

Popper contends that even Plato and the most ardent Platonists would agree with him, that there are no rational methods to determine such an ideal or the ultimate aim. At best there can only be some kind of intuition. In the absence of rational methods, any difference of opinion between the utopian engineers must lead to the use of power. Stated another way, it means relying on violence instead of reason.<sup>1</sup>

Popper further contends that the Platonic belief in the one unchanging and absolute ideal not only fails to save the utopian approach but is inherently fraught with another danger. It leads to uncompromising 'radicalism'. That is, it leads to the belief that one must get to the root of social evil and its complete eradication without leaving a stone unturned in order to make the existing society a copy of the original, perfect state. Popper holds that this Platonic belief arises out of Plato's central philosophical doctrine of Forms or Ideas. It is on the basis of his interpretation of this doctrine that Popper seems to charge Plato with historicism.

According to this doctrine, a Form or Idea is immutable, timeless, and one over many. It is the origin for all development in space and time, especially human history. It is the stable, sustaining principle in 'virtue' of which things exist. In virtue of its stability, it is a

perfect thing and does not perish. Things in flux or 'sensible' things change and degenerate which means they are imperfect. Change is a sign of imperfection because it means the degradation of reality, a fall from the original purity of oneness which was a condition of rest and immobility. Only that which preserves is good.

According to Popper, Plato's theory of society is based on this idealist theory of forms. This theory of unchanging and absolute forms is used to evaluate the general trend and main direction of all changes in the world of flux. If Forms are perfect, good and unperishable, then change can only be in the direction of imperfect, evil and corruption. Therefore, all change is evil except the change of an evil thing. Things generate by participating in the Form and decay by losing the Form. This general law of generation and degeneration, according to Popper, implies that corruptibility of all things must continually increase. This does not, however, exclude the possibility of exceptional development in another direction. Plato applies this theory of change and decay to human society and to its history. Thus, Plato's political programme corresponds to his idealist theory of perfect Forms and that of generation and degeneration of things in flux. This political philosophy implies that there is an original, perfect state and that existing societies and states are weaker copies of this original, ideal state. In such a philosophy all existing states are debased forms of Perfect State. What is being advocated is a return to an ideal state and the arrest of all political change by making the state an exact copy of its original. Accordingly, the fundamental task is to determine the origin, or the essence of human society or the State. The question, 'what is the origin of the state or society',



becomes the most important question. According to Plato, the original state was founded in accordance with human nature; a theory which could be termed 'spiritual naturalism'. The origin of a society or a state is a social contract or natural convention based upon the social nature of man which has its origin in the imperfection of the human individual. Man cannot be self-sufficient because of the limitations inherent in human nature. Thus, even those few who approach perfection must depend upon society and state. It is only through and in State that man can attempt to reach perfection. It is the perfect State, that provides a proper 'social habitat'. Only the State can be self-sufficient and able to make good the imperfection inherent in the individual. Thus, the state must be placed higher than the individual. In this theory of the self-sufficiency of the perfect State, the State is conceived of as a perfect individual and human individual as an imperfect copy of the State. The State is perceived as a kind of superorganism. This assumes the 'oneness', the wholeness or the individuality of the state and, at the same time implies that individuals are created for the sake of the whole and not vice versa. Within this whole, all different individuals and groups of individuals with their natural inequalities must serve the whole or the State. A further implication of spiritual naturalism is that men are created unequal and must serve the State according to their nature. The wise and strong should rule while the ignorant and weak should obey, follow and be ruled. This leads to the doctrine of the body of the elect, a doctrine which supports the notion that there are those elite few who know the truth and are wise. Such a doctrine has far-reaching consequences because it generates a division between the rulers and the

ruled based upon the natural inequality of masters and slaves, wise and ignorant. This strict class division based on the natural inequalities of man is bound to lead to a totalitarian political programme. The political equilibrium and stability according to Plato's idealist philosophy, can best be established or realized in such a perfect state. Plato believes that the change and flux can be arrested by establishing a perfect ideal state which does not participate in the general trend of historical development, i.e., of generation and degeneration. Plato's whole political programme thus, seems to be based upon his historicist belief in eternal and inevitable degeneration of things and his utopianism seems to consist in his belief or rather his dream that the whole social world can be revolutionized or transfigured to become a perfect or ideal society or state.<sup>2</sup>

Popper believes that the uncompromising radicalism of this Platonic approach, which would render the canvas clean before building the ideal, perfect society, is connected with his aestheticism. According to Popper, Plato is mainly an artist with the dreams of perfection and with the desire to build a world of pure beauty free from all ugliness. He wants to construct a really beautiful world based on a model of 'divine original'. Thus, there is a close relationship between Plato's utter radicalism, his demand for sweeping measures and his aestheticism. Among the sweeping demands made by Plato are those calling for the eradication of all existing institutions and traditions. Yet this view that society should be beautiful like a piece of art leads only too easily to violent measures and to authoritarianism.

Popper further believes that such aesthetic radicalism is

utopian and futile. It is not possible to replace one 'social system' by a completely new 'system'. One of the greatest difficulties is that those who are going to wipe out one social system in order to implement a completely new one, cannot escape the fact that their dreams and plans as well as their standards of morality and decency, exist in the very social system they wish to eradicate. In order to clean the canvas, they have to destroy themselves along with their utopian plans. This is hardly likely to lead to the ideal state. It is irrational or unreasonable to assume that a reconstruction of the whole system would lead at once to a workable system. The irrationalism that is inherent in such radicalism makes it dangerous and futile. The reconstruction of a society as a whole involves very sweeping measures whose practical consequences cannot be calculated easily because of our limited experiences. Since our factual knowledge is very limited, it is an improbable task to claim that we can plan rationally for the whole of society. Knowledge of facts, according to Popper, is based upon experience and since our practical experience is quite insufficient in this kind of planning, we cannot possess the factual knowledge necessary for such a reconstruction. According to Popper, the sociological knowledge required for such an approach is non-existent at present. It follows from this that the realistic approach is to realize that hardly any social action produces exactly the results expected. It is important to take into account the unintended consequences of any social action in order to make it realistic and rational. Uncompromising radicalism fails to do this. Therefore, the attitude of uncompromising radicalism involving the vision of an apocalyptic revolution which will transform radically the whole social world, is essentially a naive one.

The important point to remember while looking at Popper's critique of utopianism is that, in criticizing utopianism, Popper does not criticize all ideals as unrealizable. Such a criticism, according to Popper, would not be valid for he does not object to ideals as such. What Popper criticizes under the name of utopianism is the idea of the reconstruction of society as a whole. He rejects the possibility of having a programme with sweeping changes whose practical consequences cannot be easily calculated because of our limited experiences. He criticizes the distant abstract ideal which attempts to build a society that is wholly good. It is not possible to know the ideal good or goods in a concrete way. We can know of such good only through our inspirations and dreams and those of poets and prophets. Such an ideal good cannot be rationally discussed but only proclaimed. Therefore, their appeal is mainly to our emotions rather than to our reason. Popper is not against large-scale social reforms as such. Those reforms which attempt to deal with concrete evils like poverty, disease, etc., are realizable if dealt with in a direct way. It is possible to reach an agreement regarding the elimination of concrete evils and miseries and the most urgent social reforms that are needed. These evils should be fought directly rather than indirectly by aiming at establishing a distant ideal, wholly good society. Since utopianism appeals mainly to emotions rather than reason, it cannot properly be called reasonable. Although utopianism often appears in a rationalist disguise, it is no more than a pseudo-rationalism.<sup>3</sup>

A further point to remember is that Popper does not deny the claim that the rationality of an action can be judged only in relation

to some ends or aims. What he denies is that the rationality of a political action be judged in relation to an historical end. To judge the rationality of an action in relation to some end does not mean that every social and political situation be considered from the point of view of some preconceived historical ideal, or from the point of view of some alleged ultimate aim of historical development.<sup>4</sup> We are bound to judge our actions not only in terms of their effects on some distant future but in terms of their immediate effects also. Every situation and every generation is transient and one situation or generation cannot be made the means to achieve a distant end for some distant generation. It is morally wrong to balance one's misery with another's happiness. Thus, it is not rational to claim that the rationality of an action can be judged only in relation to some distant historical ideal.

The view that the rationality or rightness of an action can be judged in relation to a historical ideal is another aspect of historicism. Historicism attempts to tell us where we are going, it attempts to show or lay bare the direction in which history is moving. It further attempts to tell us that the direction or goal towards which history is moving is a morally desirable direction or goal because history is moving in that direction. Therefore, it further seeks to derive moral imperatives from its claim that history is moving towards a certain goal.<sup>5</sup> This view gives rise to moral futurism or ethical positivism, i.e., to an abdication of moral responsibility. Accepting the view that history authenticates our actions means accepting the idea that the rightness or justness of one's action is vindicated when it can be shown

that it is certain to prevail. This, however, tends to relieve the individual from the responsibility for his ethical decisions and actions. For Popper, one who holds the view that history will justify our actions and that we cannot alter the course or direction of history, is acknowledging the belief that might is right. Popper, however, insists that whatever authority we accept, it is *we* who accept it. He believes in the Kantian doctrine that we cannot accept the command of any authority, however exalted it may be, as the ultimate basis of ethics. An authority may command us, but it is our responsibility to judge whether the command is morally right or wrong. The authority may have the power to enforce it on us and may make us powerless to resist, but as long as we are free to choose, the responsibility remains ours. It is our decision to obey and accept an authority.<sup>6</sup>

Popper seems to assert that ethical positivism or moral futurism is inherent in all forms of historicism because of its claim that history unfolds itself according to its inexorable laws. Plato's historicism consists in his belief in the inevitable degeneration of things and therefore, the necessity to act against this tendency and regress to nature. For this reason, spiritual naturalism in order to realize the ideal state. One's action is rational and right only if it's directed towards this end. In Marxist historicism, which will be discussed in the next section, the situation is reversed since it promotes a belief in the inevitable betterment of things. It accepts the notion of the inexorable laws of society in which there is the inevitable movement of history towards socialism. One should act in accordance with this historical law in order to hasten the impending changes and the advent

of the ideal end.

Before moving on to the next section, we must pose the question whether Popper has shown Plato to be a historicist and a totalitarian?

It seems that Popper has succeeded in showing that there is a historicist strain in Plato through his law or doctrine of inevitable degeneration. Although Plato's ideal state is supposed to be static and immutable, and a rigid aristocracy of power and intellect, it doesn't seem to be totalitarian. Although the ruled are without any political power, they are not terrorized and are left to their own devices.<sup>7</sup> Plato's ideal state is authoritarian without being completely totalitarian. What seems to be of importance in Popper's critique of Plato and his brand of historicism and utopianism is that it seems to curb the individual autonomy. Plato's authoritarian state seems to curb the essential freedom to make and be responsible for one's own moral choices or decisions. Popper's criticism of historicism is to a large extent an ethical one and therefore, by showing that it leaves no place for individual moral autonomy, he furthers his argument against historicism and utopian modes of thought and action. This criticism of historicism is the central one.

## Section II: Marx

We noted in the above section that, according to Popper, ethical positivism or moral futurism is inherent in all forms of historicism. In this section, we shall be dealing with Popper's critique of Marxism. This critique intends to show how Marxism is not a scientific method; how its holist notions tend to be utopian

and authoritarian and its tendency to lead towards moral futurism. Through these critiques, Popper attempts to establish the importance of rational social action and of his theory of critical rationalism.

Popper describes Marxism as "the purest, the most developed and the most dangerous form of historicism."<sup>8</sup> He describes it as such because, according to him, Marxism is a purely historical theory which aims at predicting the future course of economic and political developments, especially of revolutions. Marx was thus a prophet of the course of history. He was a radical historicist who condemned all social engineering. Marx denounces social engineering or rational planning of social institutions as unrealistic and utopian because of his belief that society must grow according to the laws of history and not according to our rational plans. Marxism is a historicist method because of its belief in a general law of the historical development and the possibility of unravelling this law and substantiating it through social and historical inquiry. The next stage of social development can be prophesied with such laws and the rational and correct political action can be determined with this prophecy. According to this belief, only that action is rational which is appropriate to the inevitable next stage of history. One of the central tasks of politics seems to be to lessen the "birthpangs" unavoidably connected with the impending political developments.<sup>9</sup>

Furthermore, Marx's determinism was inherent in his belief that great revolutions are not planned and staged by human reason but are determined by and are effects of the fundamental causes inherent in a social situation. Such causes can be revealed by a sufficient insight



into the social situation. Thus, the task of the social sciences is to lay bare the laws of the motion of society. This is the task he assigned himself in writing *Das Kapital*. Once the social scientists have accomplished this task and have laid bare the impending course of development, the task of politics is to remove the worst obstacles in the path of that development. For Marx, the real task of scientific socialism was to enunciate the impending socialist millenium. Thus the task of the scientific socialist teaching is to contribute to bringing about this impending socialist world. Popper traces the purity of Marx's historicist views to his views of the relation between socialist theory and practice. The course of historical development cannot be changed. Therefore, by means of historical prophecy, one cannot only foresee the impending developments and remove the worst obstacles in its path, one is also able to lessen the birthpangs connected with the impending political developments.

Popper holds that this belief in scientific foretelling is based not only on determinism but also on the failure to distinguish between *scientific predictions* and *historical prophecy*. The latter merely foretells in broad lines the general tendencies in the development of society, whereas the former are conditional and assert that certain changes are accompanied by other changes (if X then Y). Popper does not deny the existence of trends or tendencies in social situations and social change. In fact, he thinks it is useful to assume the existence of trends as a statistical device. For Popper, however, there is a distinction between trends and laws. This distinction historicism fails to recognize. Trends are not laws. A statement that asserts the existence of a trend

is existential, not universal.<sup>10</sup> A universal law does not assert existence; it asserts the impossibility of something or other. A natural or universal law asserts that such and such a thing cannot happen. A statement that asserts the existence of a trend at a particular time and place, according to Popper, would be a singular historical statement and not a universal law. The practical significance of this distinction is that while scientific predictions can be based on laws, they cannot be based on the existence of trends. Trends may change very rapidly even if they have existed for hundreds and thousands of years. Thus Popper feels that it is important to recognize that the laws and trends are two radically different things. Popper agrees that trends to exist but their existence depends on the persistence of certain specific initial conditions. However, historians tend to overlook the dependence of trends on conditions which prevailed at the time of their emergence.<sup>11</sup> They treat trends as if they were unconditional. The central mistake of historicism is that it treats its laws of development as absolute trends and does not take into account the fact that these laws depend on previous conditions but only holds that development carries us irresistably in a certain historical direction. Such absolute trends become the basis of the historicist's unconditional *prophecies*, as opposed to scientific conditional *predictions*.<sup>12</sup> As noted above, trends may change rapidly along with the conditions on which their persistence depends. It is important, therefore, to try to imagine the conditions under which the trend may disappear. That is, one has to see how trends are dependent upon changeable conditions. Moreover, it is important to find these condi-

tions and to formulate them explicitly. As Passmore<sup>13</sup> has pointed out, empirically based prophecies about what must happen would be plausible only if human societies were Leibnizian monads. On any other hypothesis, there is always the possibility of something preventing them from developing in a certain way or direction. According to Popper, historicists do not or cannot see this possibility. By firmly believing in the "inexorable laws of history", or by holding that his favorite trend will prevail, a historicist is hardly disposed to see the conditions under which the trend would disappear. The poverty of historicism, according to Popper, consists in its failure to see that conditions change. In other words, it consists in the poverty of imagination. It is this habit of confusing trends with laws that inspires the central doctrines of historicism, doctrines which assert belief in inexorable laws and the irreversible laws of motion of society.

Marxian historicism and determinism consist in the belief that history or society would inevitably move in a particular direction or towards a definite goal, namely towards socialism, and that human beings are bound to a social system by historical forces over which they have no control. Unlike Plato who was a pessimistic utopian who, believing in the eternal inevitable degeneration of things and who advocated the arrest of all change, Marx was an optimist who believed in eventual betterment of things and tried to further his utopian ideal of society. He believed that the social system which binds us all is set in a 'kingdom of necessity' and eventually this system would be destroyed and replaced by the 'kingdom of freedom'. Although Marx recognized that the material world and its necessities are fundamental, he

cherished the idea of the kingdom of freedom. As Popper asserts, Marx saw that the aim of historical development was to move towards the realm of freedom. This was the realm of man's mental life. Marx knew that full freedom could not be achieved. Because human beings are not purely spiritual beings, they shall never be able to emancipate themselves completely from their metabolism and thus from productive toil. What they can strive for, however, is a reduction in the undignified conditions of labour and drudgery so that all can be free for some part of their lives. The combination of methodological determination with the above view leads to the view that economic conditions or the material world is the fundamental reality and everything else, including thoughts and ideas, can be explained by reducing them to this underlying essential reality. This view leads to an exaggerated emphasis upon economism, which is the view that all social development depends upon that of economic conditions. According to Popper, such a view is palpably false because there is always an interaction between economic conditions and ideas. It is not a simple unilateral dependence of the latter on the former. In fact, Popper goes on to say, certain 'ideas', those which constitute our knowledge, are more fundamental than the more complex material means of production. In certain circumstances ideas may revolutionize the economic conditions of a country rather than being moulded by those conditions. According to Popper, the history of Marxism itself furnishes examples of this kind. Therefore, Marx seems to have underrated the power of the kingdom of freedom and its chances of conquering the kingdom of necessity.<sup>14</sup>

Economic historicism, according to Popper, leads Marx to commit

two mistakes: that of essentialism and holism. Marxist essentialism consists in the belief that by knowing the "essence" or the essential underlying reality, one can know the future developments. Supposedly, the essence of things reveals itself in the inevitable development of history. Thus, historical prophecies must be based on the knowledge of the essential reality or essence. For Marx, the essential reality is the economic structure; institutions, both legal and social, are mere superstructures or juridico-political cloaks of the social or economic reality. This essentialist approach leads Marx to inquire about the nature of the state, instead of leading him to make demands or proposals regarding what functions he wants the state to perform. In other words, he tries to discover the essential function of legal institutions instead of making demands or proposals regarding those functions.

The consequence of such a theory which regards the state as a juridical-political superstructure erected upon and giving expression to the actual productive forces of the economic system, is that it leads to the view that politics is impotent. It assumes that politics cannot decisively alter the economic system. All political development is either seen as superficial or else giving expression to change in the economic background and the social reality constituted by the class situation or the relations between the classes. As such, they have the character of volcanic eruptions which can perhaps be foreseen, but neither suppressed nor caused by political actions. Consequently, the main task of political activity is to see that the alterations in the government or the juridico-political cloak keep pace with the changes in social reality.

The unity of Marx's historicist system of thought derives from the belief that all forms of government are a dictatorship of the ruling class over the ruled and that the proletarian revolution will inevitably lead to a classless society where the state would lose all its function and 'wither away'. The view that economic facts alone are 'real' and that the legal system is a mere superstructure, a cloak for this reality and an instrument of the class domination leads Marx to distinguish between formal (legal) and material freedom. According to Marx, the former freedom is quite insufficient for securing the economic or material freedom which is the real freedom and the aim of the historical development of mankind.

Popper concedes that there is a grain of truth in Marx's analysis because it reflects the latter's keen sociological insight into the conditions of his time and, therefore, provides an enlightening interpretation of the historical period in which Marx lived. Popper views Marx's theory as mistaken, however, because it fails to grasp the significance of the paradox of freedom. Any freedom, formal or material, defeats itself if it is unlimited. Any form of uncontrolled freedom or power becomes dangerous. Mankind needs the intervention of the state and of the institutions for the democratic control of economic power and for its protection from economic exploitation. We shall deal with Popper's theory of the state in later sections; here we confine ourselves to analyzing how Popper evaluates Marxian historicism and determinism as leading to a serious form of political activism and moral futurism.

To analyze the impending changes in our society Marx, according

to Popper, applies the method of economic historicism. According to Marx, every particular social system must destroy itself, simply because it must create the forces which produce the next historical period. This process or struggle must go on til the victory of the proletariat over the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a classless society or a society without exploitation, i.e., socialism. Marx believes that an analysis of one particular period should enable one to detect and predict the most important characteristics of the next historical period. By discovering fundamtnal and essential forces which will transform a system, it is possible to trace their influence upon the existing social system. Therefore, the fundamental aim of Marx's *Das Kapital* is to 'lay bare the economic law of motion of modern society' in order to prophesy its fate. The only inexorable laws of society are its *laws of development*.

The above leads to the belief in the doctrine that it is the task of the social sciences to provide us with historical prophecies or predictions and that such prophecies are needed in order to conduct politics in a rational way. The tenets of historicism or the above doctrine form a very important part of Marxism or 'scientific socialism'. Yet it ceases to be a science and becomes a wider philosophical scheme when, in accord with historicist tenets, it requires the social sciences to furnish us with long-term historical prophecies. We have considered above the distinction that Popper makes between conditional scientific predictions and unconditional historical prophecies. According to this distinction, the historicist doctrine of social science is untenable because it fails to make the important

distinction between 'conditional scientific predictions' and 'unconditional historical prophecies'. Although unconditional scientific predictions can sometimes be derived from the conditional scientific predictions, the historicist does not derive his historical prophecies from conditional scientific predictions. Furthermore, it cannot possibly do so because long-term prophecies can be derived from scientific conditional predictions only if they apply to systems which can be described as well-isolated, stationary and recurrent. Popper asserts that such conditions are very rare in nature and that modern society is certainly not one of them.<sup>15</sup> Society is always changing and developing and this development is mainly not repetitive. The most striking aspects of historical development tend to be non-repetitive. However, historicism fails to recognize this. It holds that by understanding the laws of historical development, politics can be put on a solid basis, and that practical knowledge regarding which political actions are likely to succeed and which are not, can be derived. This view gives rise to the Marxian historicist doctrine of politics. As noted above, according to this doctrine, the correct and rational political action is that which is appropriate to the inevitable future historical development. The assumption of this doctrine is that history is moving in a definite direction and towards a definite goal. The long-term prophecies based on the knowledge of a general law of development attempt to tell us the direction in which we are moving and that the goal or direction is a morally desirable goal because history is moving towards that goal.

It is obvious that the above belief leads to moral futurism or



ethical positivism. We will shortly deal with Popper's explanation of this.

Popper acknowledges that Marx, not being himself a moralist, avoided any explicit moral theory. Thus his ethical ideas can only be arrived at indirectly from his various works. Marx's earlier writings and the early Marxism seem to have laid emphasis on activism. The most clear formulation of this emphasis is the following statement of Marx: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point however is to change it." Popper thus believes that Marx's tendency was to be a maker rather than a mere prophet.

Popper's reading of Marx leads him to believe that the latter's activism or 'activist' tendencies were actually counteracted by his historicism. Popper maintained that under the influence of historicism Marx became mainly a prophet who taught that, at least under capitalism, we must submit to the 'inexorable laws' and just act in order to shorten the "birthpangs" of 'the natural phases of its evolution'. Thus, Popper holds that there is a wide gulf between Marx's activism and historicism which is further widened by his doctrine that we must submit to the forces of history and that any attempt to use our reason to plan for the future is no more than a utopian attempt. Popper holds that there is a theoretical possibility of bridging this gulf. This can be done through Marx's and Engel's historicist moral theory. Although this bridge or theory is not explicitly formulated in either Marx's or Engel's writings, Popper seems to have constructed it from the rough plans found in the writings of Marx and Engels.

According to this theory, all moral categories are dependent

upon the historical situation. The moral ideas such as 'justice' or 'injustice' are mainly the by-products of, or are the reflection of the social and historical circumstances and development. As such they are not an unimportant by-product because they are part of the mechanism by which the development propels itself. All such ideas are at least of two kinds and differ very widely from each other because the idea of justice or of equality held by the ruling class is different from those held by the oppressed class. Therefore, although these ideas are the products of the class situation, at the same time they play an important role in the class struggle itself by providing both sides with their good conscience in order to carry on their fight.<sup>16</sup>

Since, for Marx, all moral categories are either dependent on or are by-products of the social and historical situation, it is claimed that any fundamental decision in favour of or against any moral system, is not a moral decision itself, i.e., it is not based on any moral or sentimental consideration but on a scientific historical prediction. It is viewed as a scientific decision because historicism allows one to predict what is going to happen; what is the inevitable development. For this reason, the fundamental decision in favour of, or against, one of the moral systems in question is said to be based on scientific foresight, and on scientific historical prophecy. It is a scientific and rational decision not to offer vain resistance to the developmental laws of society.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, Marx views socialism as a historical necessity because the socialist aspirations are founded upon a rational economic law of social development rather than being justified on moral grounds. By deciding to adopt the moral system of the future or those

moral sentiments which are necessary weapons in the fight for what is bound to come, two problems are solved. Firstly, the apparent paradox that a more reasonable world will result without being planned by reason will be solved, because according to the moral standards of the coming period, the future world will be better and therefore, more reasonable.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, the gap between activism and historicism is bridged. Although the natural law that determines the movement of society has been discovered, the natural phases of its evolution cannot be shuffled away. Therefore, one can certainly assist actively in shortening and lessening its birthpangs.<sup>19</sup>

According to Popper, the imperative or principle of conduct implied in the fundamental decision of historicist moral theory is: 'adopt the moral system of the future' or 'adopt the moral system held by those whose actions are most useful for bringing about the future.'<sup>20</sup>

Popper holds that the first claim of historicist moral theory is untenable because no amount of foreknowledge or any sociological or psychological law can possibly exclude the variety of possible decisions at which one can arrive. He firmly believes that no fundamental decision can be derived from any knowledge of the future.<sup>21</sup> According to Popper, there is no such thing as definite knowledge. All knowledge is tentative and is guesswork. Since no knowledge is definite and since no source of knowledge has any authority, one cannot claim to know or foresee the future definitely and base one's moral system on it. Popper believes that historicism or the historicist systems lead to moral futurism because of its substitution of certainty for hope. Most of these systems, including Marxism, believe that one of the reasons why their cause is

just is because it is certain to prevail. This belief leads to the abdication of moral responsibility and to the undesirable result of passing the moral buck to the future. Instead of taking the moral responsibility of one's actions and decisions on oneself, the burden of justifying one's conduct is left to history and to future generations because of the belief that the future is on our side and that nothing we can do will change the course of history. According to Popper, the above belief is nothing but an expression of a highly immoral thesis that 'might makes right'. We noted earlier that in Popper's work one finds one of the most comprehensive critiques of the quest for certainty.

As Wilkins<sup>22</sup> has pointed out, the great philosophical difference between Popper and the historicist is the difference between hope and certainty where our future and our knowledge are concerned. The latter substitutes spurious certainty for reasonable hope regarding the future states where the appropriate categories for such future states are hope, decision and effort.<sup>23</sup> According to Popper, the future course of history is an object of hope and not of knowledge. He claims that since we cannot predict the future growth of human knowledge, including scientific knowledge, we cannot predict the future course of history because it is affected by the growth of knowledge. However, Popper does concede that certain social predictions are possible such as those which predict that certain developments will take place under certain conditions. The historicist, on the other hand, believes in the certainty of knowledge and is certain regarding where history is going and that it will actualize those goals which in his judgments are desirable. He further believes that in order to be effective, one should act in accordance

with the dictates of history and that history or posterity will justify one's conduct. Popper, because of his belief in hope rather than certainty and because of his belief in the autonomy of our moral decision-making, holds that one must do one's work for the sake of his work and find justification in one's work and what we are doing ourselves rather than something else such as in the pattern or meaning of history.

As noted above, Popper is a firm believer in the autonomy of our moral decision making. Thus, his insistence upon the "dualism of facts and standards" or of "facts and decisions" which in fact, is an expression of his belief in moral autonomy. Popper considers it very important to distinguish between facts and standards, or between facts and decisions, because he feels that there may be and usually is, a conflict or a gap between them since facts may fall short of right or valid or true standards, especially in the field of social and political facts which consist in the actual acceptance and enforcement of some code of justice.<sup>24</sup> It is important to recognize this dualism because in any political or social development or movement, the question about the acceptance of a programme for the reform of certain standards on which a social or political movement is based, necessarily raises the issue of the gulf between facts and standards. Such a dualism means that the questions of knowledge (of facts) and of what one ought to do and hope for have to be distinguished. It is important because when we are confronted with the question of what one ought to do and may hope for, there are real alternatives or choices open to one in a way in which they are not open to us where questions of scientific and empirical facts are concerned. The gist of dualism of facts and decisions is that we are

not free to accept or reject the laws of nature in the sense in which we are free to accept or reject or select the principles of our conduct and to act upon such principles or standards.<sup>25</sup> According to Popper, decisions and norms are a matter of choice in a way in which facts are not. Popper's moral man is autonomous in deciding both upon his course of action and those principles or standards which will guide his conduct. He believes that no facts in themselves are sufficient to determine either our choice of norms or decisions as to how to act in particular situations.<sup>26</sup> Our choice of ends is our moral decision. The facts about history and its course cannot determine our choice of ends. It cannot tell us what we ought to do. It is *we* who decide what we can and should do for ourselves. Historical facts or the course of history cannot provide a rationally sufficient basis for our choice of ends or moral decisions. As noted above, this is not merely a logical issue but one connected with Popper's conception of man as a rational and autonomous being.

We have thus seen the important reasons for maintaining the dualism of facts and decisions. According to Popper, the monistic position, i.e., "*the philosophy of the identity of facts and standards*"<sup>27</sup> is a dangerous one, because he believes that even if it does not identify standards with existing facts, i.e., present might with right, it necessarily leads to the identification of future might with right. It does so because by attempting to transcend the dualism of facts and standards and by attempting to erect a world of facts only, it denies the possibility of raising the question whether a certain movement for reform is right or wrong. It thus leads to "*the identification of standards*

*either with established might or with future might*"<sup>28</sup> and thus to moral positivism or moral futurism. Such a position leads to the abdication of moral responsibility and passing the buck to the future. Instead of acting autonomously, a historicist who holds such a position acts heteronomously. He does not decide himself upon his course of action and the principles and standards which will guide his conduct. He does not choose his principles or base his decision on what he believes to be right or just. Instead, he acts and decides in view of the particular kind of society in which he *expects* to live eventually.

According to Popper, the question whether we should accept the morality of the future because it is the morality of the future, is in itself a moral problem.<sup>29</sup> A historicist moral theory leaves no room for personal decision or responsibility. Since a coming state of affairs determines the moral standard of things, a moral criticism of the coming state of affairs becomes impossible. According to Popper, one who acts in accordance with the above theory is not a full autonomous person. He does not realize that there is no prophetic social science to help one in selecting a moral system. He does not recognize that the selection of a moral system is one's responsibility and cannot be shifted onto anybody, not even onto 'the future'.<sup>30</sup>

Popper feels that Marx's historicist moral theory is mainly the result of his view of the method of social science, i.e., the result of his sociological determinism. Popper further feels that had Marx considered the implications of such a theory, he would have repudiated it. It is Popper's belief that Marx himself was led to socialism not because of a scientific judgment but on a moral impulse, i.e., the wish to help

the oppressed. Popper feels that the historicist moral theory was partly the result of the fact that Marx hated preaching morality in abstract. Since Marx did not pretend to have any right to preach, it led him to attempt to find in a prophetic social science, a more reliable authority in matters of morality than in himself. Secondly, it was the result of the feeling or the belief that goodness must 'ultimately' triumph over wickedness.<sup>31</sup>

Popper feels an overwhelming sympathy with Marx's humanitarian zeal and with the insistence of Marxists that the social problems of our time are urgent and ought to be faced by seeking to change the world rather than be content in interpreting it. Popper fully recognizes this need and says that one kind of contribution that philosophers and social scientists can make is to bring rational criticism to bear on the problems that face us and on the solutions advocated by various parties.

Although Popper sympathizes with Marxists' humanitarian zeal, he feels that their view of the social sciences and their theory of society is naive. In such a view, the social sciences are to study the behaviour of social wholes such as groups, nations, classes, societies, civilizations, etc. It regards such social wholes as empirical objects and holds that they can be studied in the same way in which biology studies animals or plants. According to Popper, this view overlooks the fact that such social wholes are very largely postulates of popular social theories rather than empirical objects. Names like 'the middle class', etc., stand for a kind of ideal object whose existence depends upon theoretical assumptions. They do not stand for empirical groups. Thus, the belief in the empirical existence of social wholes or collectives



is a naive collectivism. The view that the society must be studied 'as a whole' and the particular 'aspects of social life' be studied only as their development is determined by that of the whole, is the result of a holistic approach. Popper's view regarding the study of the 'wholes' is: if one wishes to study something one has to select certain aspects of it since it is not possible to observe or describe a whole piece of the world, or of nature since all description is selective. For Popper the term 'whole' can be used to denote two different meanings: (a) to denote "the totality of all the properties or aspects of a thing, and especially of all the relations holding between its constituent parts"; and (b) to denote "certain special properties or aspects of the thing in question, namely those which make it appear an organized structure rather than a 'mere heap'".<sup>32</sup> Understood in the latter sense, wholes can be made objects of scientific study because then they are not studied as totalities but rather certain aspects of a thing as the regularities of structure, etc. Understood in the former sense, that is, in terms of totalities, wholes cannot be made the objects of scientific study or for that matter, of any activity, scientific or otherwise. Popper feels that the above point has been overlooked by the holists who, having relied on the precedent established by *Gestalt* psychology, did not see that the point of *Gestalt* perception has nothing to do with wholes in the former sense mentioned above. The holists do not see that all knowledge, whether discursive or intuitive, must be of abstract aspects and that the 'concrete structure of social reality itself' can never be grasped.<sup>33</sup> According to Popper, the holistic approach to or the holistic method of sociology which aims at reconstructing 'the whole process',

remains a mere programme because there cannot be a scientific description of a whole, concrete social situation. It is not possible to do so because there will always be aspects which would be neglected.

Popper goes on to say that yet the holists not only plan to study society as a whole but they also plan to control and reconstruct it 'as a whole'. It is this holistic approach, the belief in the development and reconstruction of society 'as a whole' and not the aspects of social life, that leads Marxism towards utopianism. It was the alliance of historicism and holism which led Marx to the idea of 'blueprint for a new order'. As opposed to Plato, Marx was an optimist and thus his "utopian blueprint was one of a developing or 'dynamic' rather than of an arrested society."<sup>34</sup> It is the above combination which led him to predict and to try to actively further, a development culminating in an ideal utopia.<sup>35</sup> For Marx, such an ideal society would be a society that would know no political or economic coercion. It would mean the realization of real freedom, a society where the state has withered away and each person cooperates freely in accordance with his abilities, and all his needs are satisfied.<sup>36</sup> Such a society would be the result of socialism. Thus, "Marx saw the real task of scientific socialism in the annunciation of the impending socialist millennium."<sup>37</sup>

The historicist and holistic approach of Marxism leads it to insist that in order to reform or reconstruct society and bring about a socialist society, one has to get to the root of the social evils and eradicate the existing system. According to Popper, the core of Marx's teaching in *Das Kapital* is that it is impossible to reform capitalism and thus the prophecy of its violent overthrow. A socialist society is

the aim of Marxists and it can be arrived at only through a social revolution. To establish socialism is what really matters and the essential characteristic of the social revolution is to achieve this end or result. To achieve this end, the possibility of a violent revolution has to be left open. That is, one must resolve not to shrink from violence should that become necessary. Popper believes that from the point of view of practical politics, the prophecy of a possible violent revolution is by far the most dangerous and harmful element in Marxism. The consideration of the possibility of a violent revolution is important because Marx thought that there is no compromise possible and therefore, that capitalism can only be destroyed, not improved.

As noted above, Popper is sympathetic to the humanitarian aims of Marxism and feels that its demand for a complete overthrow, violent if necessary, of the existing exploitative capitalism is partly the result of such humanitarian aims. At the same time he sees that such humanitarian aims as reducing misery and violence and increasing freedom cannot be realized by revolutionary methods or rather by means of violent revolutions.<sup>38</sup>

Popper sees social evils such as injustice, repression, poverty and destitution as part and parcel of all social orders including the western democratic societies. This stems from the conviction that all societies are imperfect and in need of reform. Thus reforms are imperative for all societies, not just the capitalist ones. These reforms are needed in order to combat social evils and not to make man perfect and happy. He believes that of all political ideals, the wish to make man happy and perfect is perhaps the most dangerous ideal since the attempt to realize heaven on earth has invariably produced hell. Such an ideal

invariably leads to intolerance and authoritarianism. It leads to the attempt to impose our scale of "higher" values upon others, in order to make them realize what seems to us of greatest importance for their happiness and for their salvation. The Marxist vision of a perfect society and its final promise is a society of *perfect* equality and harmony. Popper's belief is that societies can be made saner and more rational but not perfect. Popper's position is that it is belief in perfection and beauty which leads one to believe in apocalyptic revolutions to bring about such a perfect and beautiful world. Such a vision of society is compatible with aestheticism but not with empirical reality. Popper holds that the dreams of perfection and the desire to replace the existing society with that of perfect equality and harmony lead only too easily to violent measures and authoritarianism.

Popper is against revolutions or revolutionary overthrow and the establishment of a wholly new system for at least two reasons. Firstly, because of the possibility of the use of violence, and secondly, because of his rational theory of tradition.

For popper, the most harmful element in Marxism is the prophecy of a possible violent revolution. Yet Marxist theory demands the sharpening and intensification of the class struggle because it intends to speed our arrival at socialism. Marxism justifies the sacrifices demanded by the revolution by arguing that capitalism demands more every day than the whole social revolution would ever do. Popper's main question regarding the above view is: can such a calculation be rationally defended?

Popper is an individualist and he believes that it is people, human beings, with their joys and sorrows that really exist. What

matters, therefore, is that justice should exist or prevail between individuals and that concepts such as those of "humanity", "class", etc., are abstractions, perhaps important in some theoretical context but concepts that sometimes can become exceedingly dangerous. Thus, he asks whether it is right to sacrifice concrete individuals for the sake of an abstract humanity. He concedes that there *are* conflicts of interest in any society but he questions whether the intensification of these conflicts would lead to a better society or to a worse one, for example, a fascist society. Even if socialism was to be established after an intensification of the class struggle and the consequent revolution, the question of whether socialism is compatible with freedom remains problematic, considering the fact that a socialist state tends to make the state "clumsy" and unwieldy by giving bureaucrats so much power over the citizens.

Furthermore, after the revolution or once socialism is achieved, it is very possible that any conflict of interest may develop within the proletariat and thus lead to a division. There is all the likelihood that revolutionary leaders along with their staff will form a new class, new aristocracy or bureaucracy, i.e., the new ruling class of the new society. They may use revolutionary ideology both to vindicate their power and as a means of stabilizing it. In short, they may use it as a new "opium for the people". A revolution is liable to replace old masters by new ones. There is no guarantee that the new ones will be any different from the old ones. According to Popper, the theory of revolution tends to overlook the most important aspect of social life--that what we need is not so much good men but good institutions. Marxists do not think in terms of institutions but in terms of classes. However, classes never

rule. The rulers are always certain persons and once they become rulers, they become the ruling class. Once in power, even the best man may be corrupted by it. Thus, the importance of institutions for controlling men. It is important to have institutions which permit the ruled to exert some influence or effective control over the rulers. It is very important, therefore, to design institutions which prevent even bad rulers from causing bad damage.<sup>39</sup>

Popper's attitude to social change is essentially linked to his preference for reason over violence or force. A rational attitude towards social change would mean recognition of the fact that if improvement in the present system or structure is undertaken by small steps then it is possible for society to recover from its adverse effects, if they have any. Large-scale or total revolutions, on the other hand, may prove so destructive that the chances of recovery may be eliminated. Furthermore, for securing the ends of such total revolutions, opposition and consequently violence become indispensable. Authoritarianism becomes the means for securing or realizing and then stabilizing such ends. Popper is opposed to any form of authoritarianism whether social or scientific because it stifles the open criticism which is necessary for any decision making and for the assessment of any proposals or policies. Popper concedes that revolutionaries may have greater sensitivity to social ills than other people. Yet he does not concede that revolution is necessarily the answer. It is important to note that he makes a distinction between the better or worse revolutions, between a peaceful as opposed to a violent overthrow. According to him, Marxism has left this ambiguity unresolved. Yet the question is important because the unintended

consequences of violent revolution is often dictatorship. Revolutionaries often desire a just society. But, according to Popper, most if not all revolutions have produced societies very different from those desired by the revolutionaries. It seems to him then that revolutionary ideals and their supporters almost always fall victim to the revolution. It is precisely because of the impossibility of knowing whether the consequences of a revolution would be better or worse than the conditions that the revolution wants to replace, that makes revolution illegitimate. The most likely outcome that a revolution would produce is loss of freedom to criticize, to furnish opposition. Authoritarian measures become indispensable to suppress any form of opposition. Suppression of opposition and criticism would mean rejection of the open society and the adoption of a philosophy of violence. As noted above, according to Popper, a violent revolution often means dictatorship. The resulting dictatorship, whether of the left or the right, depends partly on chance and is chiefly a difference in nomenclature. It is Popper's opinion that all dictatorships, whether of the left or the right, are essentially the same. Furthermore, there is no guarantee that a revolution would not produce a dictatorship that the revolutionaries themselves do not desire. Therefore, every revolution carries the danger of killing the revolutionaries and of destroying their ideals. Whereas the revolutionary ideals and their leaders are almost invariably destroyed by the revolution itself, non-violent changes enable us to watch for the unintended and undesirable consequences of our social policies and to modify their effects in good time when they become manifest. They thus create an atmosphere in which pertinent public criticism of existing social institutions need not be

forcibly suppressed and create a social framework which affords human scope for humane reforms.<sup>40</sup>

Although revolutionary methods are employed to improve things or to make them better, in fact, they make things worse. It is Popper's conviction that revolutionary methods make things worse because they increase unnecessary suffering, lead to more and more violence and, in the final analysis, destroy freedom. It does so because it destroys the institutional and traditional framework of society. Once the process of revolutionizing society and eradicating its traditions starts, it cannot be stopped if and when you please. According to Popper, a simple and decisive point is that one cannot start afresh whether in science or social matters. One must make use of what people before us have done for us. Progress is possible only when we stand on the shoulders of our predecessors and carry on a certain tradition. It is the institutions and the traditions that give people a clear idea of what to expect and how to proceed. Social life cannot exist in a vacuum. It can exist only if we can know and have confidence that there are things and events which must be so and cannot be otherwise. It is in this context that the part played by tradition in our lives becomes important. There is a need for tradition in social life because the mere existence of regularities is important. Just as scientific theories are instruments which help us to bring some order into the chaos in which we live and enable us to make it rationally predictable, the creation and existence of traditions bring some order and predictability into the social world in which we live. According to Popper, traditions, like scientific myths, have the double function of not only creating a certain order or something like a social



structure, but also giving us something that we can criticize and change. Although Popper insists on the necessity of traditions for the existence and continuance of social life, he does not advocate blind acceptance of traditions but, rather, a rational and a critical evaluation of them. By emphasizing the importance of traditions, Popper is not promoting intolerance or tabooism. In fact, he proposes that the attitude of tabooism be replaced by one that considers existing traditions critically by weighing their merits against their demerits and never forgetting the merit which lies in the fact that they are established traditions. It is very likely that because of a rational and critical attitude towards human traditions, one might ultimately reject certain traditions in order to replace them by better ones. However, one should always remain conscious of the fact that all social criticism, and all social betterment, must refer to a framework of social traditions, of which some are criticized with the help of others, just as all scientific progress must proceed within a framework of scientific theories, some of which are criticized in the light of others.<sup>41</sup> The point that it is in the light of a framework of social traditions that we can criticize and change certain things and traditions is, according to Popper, a decisive and important one for rationalists and social reformers. It is in the light of the above theory of tradition, Popper believes, that the idea of rendering the canvas of the social world clean and starting from scratch with a brand new social world is nonsense and impossible to realize. Popper believes that there is no reason why a society that has destroyed its traditions or its traditional set of values should on its own accord become a better society. A rational approach does not require that one

clean the canvas and start afresh, or overthrow one system completely in order to establish a brand new one, but that small adjustments and corrections be made with a critical attitude. This, in its own way, would correct the course of society, and thus revolutionize it.

### Conclusion

According to Popper, those who hold that there can be "nothing short of a complete eradication of the offending social system" and of the total re-building of a brand new society of justice and harmony are really guided by latent forms of historicism and determinism. Historicism or the historicist revolution is characterized by theistic and authoritarian structure yet it seems to have had little effect on the basically theistic and authoritarian structure of European thought.<sup>42</sup> The earlier naturalistic revolution deified Nature and replaced 'God' by 'nature'. It thus replaced theological determinism by a naturalistic determinism. Later on Hegel and Marx replaced such naturalistic determinism by historical determinism. Instead of nature, history became the most powerful force and thus our judge.

Popper's fight is against such deification of nature or history and the consequent determinism. The fight against such deification is important and necessary in Popper's philosophy because he believes that violence is germane to those theories which believe in the inexorable laws. Furthermore, such deification tends to lead to moral positivism or moral futurism.

Without intending to directly assess the accuracy of Popper's

analysis of Marxism, we must nevertheless ask whether Popper has succeeded in furthering his argument through his critique of Marxism. Popper is especially critical of Marxism on two counts. First, the Marxist doctrine asserts that our opinions are determined by class interest and by the social and historical situation. Popper argues that this tends to destroy the basis of rational discussion and lead to anti-rationalism. Further, the absence of rational discussion leaves the possibility of violence wide open. Anti-rationalism and violence are the opposite of Popper's theory of rationality. Although the connection which Popper attempted to establish between historicism and totalitarianism via Marx is rather tenuous, he seems to have succeeded in showing that Marxian historicism and determinism leave the door open for the possibility of suppression, violence and moral futurism. Secondly, he has attempted to show that historicist and utopian systems cannot lead to a society or a social system which is a free, productive and rational system. This is significant for Popper since he is himself an individualist who values individual freedom, autonomy, and above all, rationality. Only a rational system can demand and reward the best in every man. Whereas a collectivist system tends to curb individual potentiality, the latter does not. According to Popper, authoritarian or collectivist principles are an expression of ethical nihilism, extreme moral scepticism and of a distrust of man and his possibilities. Popper's fight is against these principles in his critique of historicism and of Plato and Marxism.

## CHAPTER III

### Introduction

In the last two chapters, we have shown how Popper sought to establish the fact that the concept of rationality presupposes the principle of autonomy. It was explained how this principle was central in his critiques of historicist and authoritarian modes of thought and action. We also dealt with his critiques of Marxism and Plato in order to see how he furthers his argument against historicism and utopianism and for rational action.

In this chapter it will be our purpose to further articulate his idea of rationality, to articulate his alternative approach to social and political problems and to present an overall summary of his position.

Popper has his own way of understanding history and society, and the concrete issues related to both. He clarifies his position through his critique of historicism, authoritarianism and totalitarian modes of thought and action. As alternatives, Popper recommends a pluralistic, gradualistic and 'piece-meal' approach. It must be noted that he does not regard his alternative approach as a truth but merely as a proposal or a demand. He believes that this approach and the liberal ideals of liberty, democracy and equality are not only desirable but also realizable. He bases his argument for this approach on the principle of utility. However, on the basis of his theory of rational social action, he formu-

lates his principle of utility in a negative way. That is, the aim is to minimize or eliminate suffering rather than maximize happiness. We will see in the body of this chapter, that he argues this from both a methodological and ethical standpoint.

It has always been felt that right human decision and action should be based on some foundation. For Popper, such a foundation is to be found in the theory of rationality or rational principles. Critical rationalism is the method which implies dynamic scepticism and thus requires creativity. It is by dynamic scepticism and creativity that man can make his governmental institutions, law, religion, etc., rational and human. Popper's theory of rationality and his general account of the scientific method are meant to lay the basis for both his criticism of utopian engineering and for the development of his doctrine of piecemeal social engineering.

According to Popper, the scientific method can be applied to both nature and society. Furthermore, it applies in the same way to particular isolable aspects of the whole. For example, social science can discover the laws that can trace the unintended consequences of human action. There can be no laws of the whole system, however. For this reason social reform and social technology must be gradualistic and not total. This stand of Popper can be best summed up in the following quote:

The only course open to the social sciences is to... tackle the problems of our time with the help of the theoretical methods which are fundamentally the same in *all* sciences....*A social technology is needed whose results can be tested by piecemeal social engineering.*

It should be asked here, what does Popper intend when he advocates

the scientific method in the social and political realm? It is important to ask this question because there is a common criticism against Popper that his intention is to advocate the establishment of an ideal and elite scientific community that would control and lead the society. This criticism is unfounded. In *The Poverty of Historicism*,<sup>2</sup> he makes it clear that the application or introduction of scientific method into the study of society and into politics basically means the adoption of a critical attitude. It is an attitude of openness to criticism, of readiness to learn from criticism and from experience. It is a willingness to be corrected when in error and to learn from the mistakes that we may have made. It is the realization that both trial and error are necessary. Therefore, it is important not only to expect mistakes but to consciously search for them. A politician, instead of hiding or ignoring his mistakes or blaming others for them, should learn to look for them, bring them out in the open, analyze them and then learn from them in order to apply this knowledge in order that they may be avoided in the future. A scientific or critical attitude is that which takes into account various possibilities and consequences of a proposed solution. It makes it possible to bring rational criticism to bear on the problems that face us and the various solutions advocated to deal with them. A further implication is the ability to test the results and make an appraisal of the repercussions.

Thus, when Popper advocates the scientific method in the social and political realm, he does not intend to advocate the exact methods of scientific experimentation and quantification. Nor does he advocate the scientific control of society and human nature. He is not advocating a Brave New World or a Skinnarian community, where people would be turned

into experimental models on whom scientists can test out their theories and ideas in order to establish a particular kind of society. An attempt to transform man through scientific control is completely anti-Popperian because it leads to authoritarianism and tyranny which spells the end of freedom and free competition of thought. Rationality and growth of reason depend upon the free competition of thought and individual diversity. Thus, the advocacy of scientific method in politics and social realm simply means adoption of a critical and rational attitude. Popper's intention is not to promote any 'class ideology'. He is not advocating the ideology of the scientific community and is not a representative of a sectional interest.

It should be noted in this connection that Popper does not provide any specific solutions to social problems but only advocates a certain approach towards the solution of such problems. Before proceeding to articulate Popper's theory regarding rational social action, it is also important to note that his attitude towards social change is based on his preference for reason as opposed to violence. Here a few comments regarding his position on the question of rationality and critical rationalism are necessary.

Popper is a rationalist because he believes that a critical attitude is the most important tool for use in the analysis of situations, policies and proposals in the political and social realm. According to Popper, the question of whether we adopt an attitude of reasonableness or of 'critical rationalism' is very important from the practical point of view because it deeply affects our whole attitude towards other men and towards the problems of social life. As noted earlier, the attitude

of reasonableness is a readiness to listen to criticism and to learn from experience. It is an attitude which recognizes that in the search for truth, we need cooperation. This attitude leads us to establish what he describes as the 'rational unity of mankind'. It is this attitude and ability to listen to criticism and argument that enables man to transcend his animal past and the subjectivism and voluntarism of romantic and irrationalist philosophies. According to Popper, it is through rational criticism that man acquires the dignity which makes him intellectually and morally responsible. It enables him not only to act rationally but also to contemplate and discriminate between competing theories and proposals to the solutions of political and social problems. It is the belief in discussion and argument which leads to the possibility and desirability of applying scientific or critical method to the problems in the social field. It is important to ask here what Popper means by 'critical rationalism'. By critical rationalism, Popper means that attitude which leads to the awareness of one's limitations. It is the consciousness of one's narrow limits and the consequent intellectual humility or modesty that makes one realize how often one errs and how much one depends on others even for this knowledge. It is the recognition of the indebtedness to others for all one can know or understand. It is this attitude which leads one to believe in the rational unity of mankind and in the value of every human being. It implies the idea of impartiality and tolerance and rejects every claim to authority. According to Popper, authoritarianism and rationalism are incompatible. They cannot be reconciled because argument and criticism and the ability to listen to criticism are the basis of reasonableness yet are suppressed



by authoritarianism. What Popper advocates is a modest and self-critical rationalism. If Popper advocates the scientific method in the social and political realm it is because the distinguishing characteristic of the scientific method is its self-critical attitude, its openness to criticism. Erroneous theories or hypotheses are eliminated through the critical procedure. Rationalism and not force is employed in the error-elimination procedure. It is this 'critical approach' or openness to criticism which makes Popper's theory of rationality revolutionary. The critical theory of rationality is one of the chief characteristics of Popper's general philosophy. His theory of rationality gives substance to Popper's defence of liberalism and his criticisms of authoritarian modes of thinking and conducting politics. According to Popper, learning occurs among human beings and other problem-solving organisms through error-elimination and it is this concept of learning that makes his theory of rationality in action and thought very important and central. According to Popper's epistemology, growth in human knowledge and understanding presupposes dynamic scepticism or the adoption of the method of criticism. Popper's epistemological position has a strong bearing on his theory of political praxis. We do or should adopt the same method in the social field as we do in science. For, according to him, in the social field too we have ideas and theories. We work out theories for the abolition of social evils, attempt to think out their consequences and accordingly judge the theories.<sup>3</sup> Most importantly, according to Popper, the critical debates and arguments, the method of rational discussion and thus the revolutionary progress of our ideas, theories or hypotheses may replace the violent revolutions as instruments of social progress.

Popper has been criticized by various authors regarding his theory of rationality in political praxis. He has been criticized on the grounds that his belief in reason as an instrument for social progress and solution of problems in social and political realm, embodies a utopian form of rationalism because it attributes to reason an exaggerated measure of political power. This criticism does not hold for two reasons. Firstly, because Popper does not advocate excessive rationalism but rather a modest and a self-critical one. He does not assign authority to anyone. We have to remember that he does not advocate authoritarian intellectualism but rather critical rationalism which is "the realization that we must not expect too much from reason."<sup>4</sup> We use reason not to see clearly but to see more clearly than before. In advocating his theory, Popper is aware that it is not possible for all men to be rational always. Thus, he does not believe in the "Force of Reason" or the "Power of Reason". However, he does believe that our choice is between reason and violence and that reason is the only alternative to violence. Popper's attempt is to strike a balance between complete optimism and complete pessimism. Although he does not believe in the "Force or Power of Reason" he does believe in the rationality of man and the rational unity of mankind and thus the value of individual human beings. Secondly, the above criticism does not seem to hold because it seems to rest on that elitist pessimism regarding the openness to rational persuasion of the majority of men that Popper seems to be fighting.

Finally, Popper's defence of rationalism seems to be based on the fact that he believes that rationalism can be better united with humanitarian attitude than irrationalism with its rejection of equal rights.

He admits that individual human beings are unequal in many respects, but that does not and should not stand in the way of the claim for equality of treatment and for equal rights. According to him, "Equality before the law" is not a fact but a political demand which is based on a moral decision.<sup>5</sup>

Popper's theory of rationality and his conception of the growth of knowledge as a self-critical, error-elimination process gives rise to his view that social engineering can be effective only when there is the possibility and opportunity for constant criticism of its aims and methods. The necessity of such criticism is important because of the unintended and unwanted consequences of all action.

According to Popper, piecemeal social technology along with critical analysis is the main way to practical results in the scientific as well as social field. The technological approach is very important because one of the most characteristic tasks of any technology is *to point out what cannot be achieved*. By thus pointing out what cannot be achieved, it helps us in the fundamental task of selecting problems and submitting the theories to standards of clarity and practical testability. The term piecemeal technology applies generally to the method of critical investigation of the proposals and techniques for social improvement. The term 'piecemeal social engineering' is used to describe the practical application of the results of piecemeal technology.

According to Popper, piecemeal social engineering is different from historicism and is not like physical engineering because it regards the *ends* as beyond the province of technology. The main task of the piecemeal social engineer is to design social institutions and to run and

reconstruct those already in existence. In other words, it seems that the main task of a piecemeal social engineer is to ensure the continuance of the progress and improvement of the existing social institutions through social reform. Thus, the main distinguishing characteristic of a piecemeal social engineer is that he does not believe in the reconstruction or re-modelling of a society as a whole. This does not mean that he does not necessarily cherish some ideals regarding society 'as a whole', for example, its general welfare. Although he may cherish some ideals and may have certain ends, he attempts to achieve them through the method of evolutionary social reform, i.e., by small adjustments and re-adjustments that can be continually improved upon. An ideal piecemeal engineer is aware of how little he knows and also of the fact that we can learn from our mistakes. Thus, he relies on evolutionary social reform to make room for the possibility of carefully comparing the results expected with the results achieved. Such piecemeal reform makes it possible for him to be always on the lookout for the unavoidable and unwanted consequences of any reform. He furthermore avoids undertaking reforms of such complexity and scope which makes it impossible for him to disentangle causes and effects and to know what he is really doing.<sup>6</sup>

Does this mean that Popper rules out any possibility of a bold and ambitious kind of social engineering, i.e., does he limit the scope and scale of a piecemeal approach. In *Poverty of Historicism*, Popper says it clearly that there is no limit to scope and scale. If there is no limit to scope and scale, then the question arises whether there is any important or essential difference between the piecemeal and the holistic approach. Popper does not attempt to draw a clear line of demarcation

between the two approaches. In OSI (158) he says that a piecemeal engineer "*may or may not* have a blueprint of society before his mind, he *may or may not* hope that mankind will one day realize an ideal state, and achieve happiness and perfection of earth." Thus, the essential difference between the two approaches does not necessarily lie in objectives. The difference lies in the fact that a piecemeal engineer is aware that "perfection, if at all attainable, is far distant" and that every generation has a claim not so much to be made happy but not to be made unhappy, where it can be avoided. As far as the difference in the methods of the two approaches is concerned, it is not in the scope and scale as in caution and preparedness for unavoidable surprises in the piecemeal method. Therefore, the real difference is not in the scale of plans but rather in the caution, flexibility and self--critical character of piecemeal method.

The most important and significant difference between the two approaches, however, lies in the fact that the piecemeal engineer as opposed to a holist or utopian engineer, possesses an awareness that perfection is far distant. He realizes that each generation has a claim not to be made unhappy where it is avoidable, and will, accordingly, adopt the method of searching for and fighting against, the most urgent evils of society, rather than searching for and fighting for its ultimate good. The principle of utility in the negative terms is based not only on Popper's theory of rational social action of a gradualist character, but also on ethical grounds. Popper believes that from the ethical point of view, there is no symmetry between suffering and happiness or between pain and pleasure. Popper is of the opinion that human suffering

makes a direct moral appeal, namely the appeal for help, whereas there is no similar call to increase the happiness of someone who is doing well anyway. Popper feels that the formula 'maximize pleasure', assumes a continuous pleasure-pain scale which tends to treat degrees of pain as negative degrees of pleasure. According to Popper, from the moral point of view, pain cannot be outweighed by pleasure. Thus, he feels that instead of demanding greatest happiness for the greatest number, one should demand the least amount of avoidable suffering for all. According to Popper, the negative way of formulating the utilitarian principle is important because it adds to clarity in the field of ethics. Popper sees a kind of analogy between this view of ethics and the scientific methodology. He feels that just as it is helpful to formulate the task of scientific method as the elimination of false theories, rather than the attainment of established truths; in the field of ethics, as pointed out above, it adds clarity to formulate our demands negatively.

Another important aspect of this negative utility principle is that the existence of social evils can be comparatively well established. The concrete evils such as poverty, disease, etc., can be dealt with in a direct way even if it involves large-scale reforms. Thus, Popper is not against large-scale social reforms but is against the attempts to realize distant abstract goods. According to him, it is possible to reach an agreement regarding the concrete evils and the most urgent social reforms that are needed. It is infinitely more difficult to reach an agreement regarding some ideal form of social life. Popper's thesis is that human misery is the most urgent problem of a rational public policy and happiness is not such a problem. Therefore, reforms should be directed towards

eliminating and reducing the pressing present social evils rather than towards enhancing or increasing the happiness of all. For Popper, fighting against suffering and injustice is a duty, whereas caring for the happiness of others is a private enterprise. This does not mean that Popper disapproves of happiness. Happiness can be a standard by which individuals can evaluate various proposals in the private sphere but it does not belong to the realm of public policy. In the realm of public policy, reduction of misery should be one of the standards by which societies should evaluate various proposals.<sup>7</sup> Thus, what Popper seems to be saying is that while happiness is a 'matter of taste', suffering is concrete. He, therefore, proposes that one of the principles of humanitarian and equalitarian ethics should be "the recognition that all moral urgency has its basis in the urgency of suffering or pain."<sup>8</sup> Thus, he believes that a simple formula, 'minimize suffering', "be made one of the fundamental principles (admittedly not the only one) of public policy."<sup>9</sup>

Wilkins<sup>10</sup> points out that Popper's remarks about happiness and suffering show that he is a systematic philosopher since he establishes a connection between various areas that he writes in and thus develops a unified point of view. For example, his treatment of the utilitarian principle reflects his anti-criterion bias, i.e., no matter which principle, whether 'maximize happiness' or 'minimize suffering', we come to prefer we cannot justifiably use it as a criterion. It can at best be used as one among a number of standards for the evaluation of various moral and political proposals. Secondly, as noted above, there is a connection between Popper's negative formulation of the principle of utility and his epistemology and methodology. The analogy between

Popper's views on ethics and scientific method contribute to making Popper's philosophy a unified system. In both areas, Popper stresses the use of critical method. While attainment of truth and establishment of happiness for all are highly problematic, we know how to detect error and suffering. Thus, the negative approach makes the progress in ethics and science possible.

Popper is basically a humanitarian and therefore, furthering of humanitarian aims or demanding the elimination and reduction of avoidable suffering is one of his main aims. Thus, he also defends ideals of classical liberalism such as equality, liberty and democracy not only on rational grounds but also and more importantly on moral grounds. He feels that humanitarian aims can be best furthered and realized in a democracy or an open society because he seems to believe that democratic or open societies seek out evils in order to redress them.

According to Popper, social evils such as injustice, repression, poverty and destitution are part and parcel of all social orders including western democratic societies. Nevertheless, he would argue that democratic societies are the best form of social order ever because they search out and combat these evils. It must be remembered, however, that like all social orders, they are also imperfect and need reform. In fact, such reform is imperative.

According to Popper, a liberal democracy is the only rational form of government because it "provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence and the use of reason in political matters."<sup>11</sup> In a democracy, it is possible to use reason in designing new institutions and adjusting and improving the old ones. This is important because



according to Popper, "all long-term politics are institutional."<sup>12</sup> Furthermore, it is up to us to improve institutions if such an improvement is needed.

For Popper, one of the most important points about democracy is that people can change their rulers without violence. It is a form of government which allows conflicts to be resolved by rational argument rather than violence. Popper is aware of the possible criticism that in practice rational arguments may not play an important role. His reply to such criticism is that even though a democracy does not ensure use of reason, it at least *allows* for it, whereas, authoritarianism or totalitarianism exclude it. In fact, Popper stresses the point that neither liberty nor democracy is an absolute good. To try to formulate absolute political principles is logically paradoxical. For example, if freedom is to be effective, it has to be partially limited. For both political freedom and economic freedom to be effective, there has to be political protectionism and economic interventionism through state intervention.

Popper is further aware of another problem. It is not necessary that policies adopted by a democratic government will always be good or wise. What is important is that it provides for the possibility to develop and protect political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny. Thus, the important point is not the principle that the majority should rule but the presence of the reasonably effective institutional safeguards against tyranny.

Democracy is important because progress is not automatic but depends on us and thus largely on political factors, namely on political institutions that safeguard the free competition of thought.<sup>13</sup> To achieve

this end in political life, it is important to protect the opportunity for criticism of governmental policies.

According to Popper, liberal democracy is the best form of social structure because in such a society there is an opportunity for freedom of thought and criticism. Such a society is viewed as being able to respond with maximal adaptability to problem situations. In Popper's philosophy, a democratic society and an open society are more or less synonymous. The most important characteristics of such a society are the following. Firstly, there is the possibility of free discussion which has influence on politics. This gives rise to the existence of an opposition and the opportunity for free competition of thought regarding political policies and proposals. Secondly, in a democratic society, institutions exist for the protection of freedom and the weak. In this sense political power becomes fundamental since it can and must control economic power through the construction of social institutions that will protect the economically weak from the strong by constructing institutions that would counter exploitation.

Popper recognizes that injustice and inequalities prevail in all social orders. He believes, however, that through social institutions, representative parliamentary democracy is in the best position to protect its weak members from the strong ones.<sup>14</sup>

According to Popper, no social system is foolproof but democratic systems are less imperfect because they are always open to ideas, especially opposing ideas and stand ready to doubt themselves. There is the possibility to seek out evils and redress grievances.

In defending liberal democracy, Popper does not intend to draw an

image of "correct" society. Rather, he only wishes to propose certain rules that must be abided by in social conflicts, and institutional safeguards that must function to protect freedom. The political objectives that are to be aimed at in compliance with those rules are something to be worked out continually and (provisionally) established through critical discussion.<sup>15</sup>

Essentially, democratic societies are open societies with various degrees of openness. There are mature and immature democratic societies and the way to achieve a really open society is by striving for a gradual process. The characteristic that distinguishes a democracy from a dictatorship is that in a democracy there are institutions which make it possible to get rid of the government without violence. It is because of Popper's stand on violence that this point is crucial in his defense of democratic form of governments. He is more than aware that in these contemporary times, mankind can very easily be exterminated through violence. Thus, he demands a more reasonable society in which conflicts can be settled more and more rationally. He believes that such a demand is realistic and not utopian because he realizes that "there is no reasonable society, but there is always one that is more reasonable than the existing one and toward which we should therefore strive."<sup>16</sup>

Popper, as noted before, is a humanitarian and he believes that politics must uphold equalitarian and individualistic principles. According to Popper, the only possible faith for the open society is humanitarianism which is based on faith in reason, freedom and the brotherhood of all men. Thus, Popper believes that democracy is not merely an expression of the principle that 'the people should rule' but that it is

based on faith in reason and humanitarianism. Popper realizes that the road to such a society is a long one but one which is not entirely impossible. According to Popper, humanitarianism, especially individualism united with altruism, is the basis of western civilization. The idea of the autonomy of the individual and the moral responsibility for one's decisions, is the core of all ethical doctrines that have grown from western civilization and has stimulated it. Such individualism is also the central doctrine of Christianity. By accepting this idea of autonomy of the individual, modern society has entered on the road to the open society. According to Popper, the contemporary society is still in transition from the closed to the open society and the tension between them can be felt. It is this which makes us aware of our imperfections and the possibility of doing something about it.

(It is part of the strain that we are becoming more and more painfully aware of the gross imperfections in our life, of personal as well as of institutional imperfection; of avoidable suffering, of waste and of unnecessary ugliness; and at the same time of the fact that it is not impossible for us to do something about all this, but that such improvements would be just as hard to achieve as they are important. This awareness increases the strain of personal responsibility, of carrying the cross of being human).<sup>17</sup>

According to Popper, to flinch from this strain and to shrink from our responsibilities, our reason and our humaneness is to return to the status of beasts. The only way to remain human is by striving for an open society, with a determination to "go on into the unknown, the uncertain and insecure, using what reason we may have to plan as well as we can for both security and freedom."<sup>18</sup>

We are now in a position to conclude that Popper's philosophy of

science or epistemology and his moral and social philosophy are inter-related. His theory of rationality makes his philosophy a unified system. Popper is a liberal who upholds liberal doctrines but what makes his reformulation of liberal doctrine significantly novel is his theory of rationality. He does not promote liberal principles by an appeal to emotions and passions but by an appeal to reason. Rational attitude is that which seeks to solve as many problems as possible by an appeal to reason, i.e., through clear thought and experience. It is through use of reason and by way of criticism that the problems can be seen clearly and an attempt to solve them in a rational way can be made possible. An irrational emphasis upon emotions and passions in dealing with social problems leads ultimately to crime because irrationalism stresses the inequality of men and tends to scorn human reason. It thus leads to an appeal to violence and force as the ultimate arbiter in any dispute. It is because of its stress upon emotions and passions that irrationalism becomes entangled with an attitude that is opposed to equalitarianism. Where the emphasis is on one's emotions, one always tends to divide people into those who are near to us and those who are far from us, that is, into friend and foe, believers and non-believers, etc. Popper concedes that even a rationalist cannot deny that human individuals are unequal in many respects and that this inequality is very important and desirable. He is aware that this fact has no bearing on deciding to treat men equally, especially in political issues and constructing political institutions accordingly. He is aware that "'Equality before the Law' is not a fact but a political demand based upon a moral decision." The rational attitude tends towards impartiality and is closely linked up with tolerance.

Thus, for a rationalist, a morally right attitude is the realization that we owe it to others to treat them and ourselves as rational.

The real core of Popper's point of view is that decisions and actions should be undertaken on the basis of reason and one's inner moral conviction. The whole network of concepts that we have called historicism also cloud the issue. Actions are to be justified by their intrinsic merit. Individuals are called to be responsible for their actions and for what they chose to make of their lives instead of shifting the responsibility onto someone else.

Apart from the historicist element, there is another danger inherent in most religious systems. It is the danger of irrationality. This danger consists in the too great an emphasis on emotions and passions. This emphasis leads to an attitude which is opposed to egalitarianism, impartiality and tolerance. While appealing to best emotions such as love and compassion, many religions tend to divide mankind into different categories, into those who are near to us and those who are far from us, into believers and non-believers, etc. History of religion is full of instances where irrational emphasis upon emotion and passion has led to religious wars, persecutions, inquisition, etc. Religion can become compatible with the rational attitude when it recognizes the reason in man, and thus, the rational unity of mankind. The brotherhood of mankind which many religions profess can be established only through the belief in the rational unity of mankind, by recognizing the worth of each individual as an end in himself. To undermine reason and man's faith in it is to undermine the possibility of establishing the brotherhood of mankind. Popper condemns precisely that element in religion which

undermines man's rationality and his faith in it and which promotes the belief that the unity of mankind can be established only "'within a framework of the unity of the superhuman whole of which Humanity is a part...'"<sup>19</sup>

It is clearly established by now that Popper's theory of rationality gives power, substance and a comprehensive perspective to his philosophy. His theory of rationality not only makes him a systematic philosopher but also leads him into 'manichaenism', i.e., choice between two faiths --either rationalism which means unity of mankind or irrationalism which means division of mankind; and the choice between two alternative forms of government--tyranny or democracy.

This leads to certain difficulties and problems in Popper's philosophy. Firstly, it limits Popper to address only those societies which are already politically advanced and progressive. Is it possible to employ Popper's negative utility principle which is the result of his theory of rationality to those societies where problems like racism and poverty are deeply entrenched? The solution to such problems requires a strong, direct and sometimes an authoritative approach. Such solution cannot be postponed until politicians, philosophers or policy makers "try patiently to convince people that we can get rid of it."<sup>20</sup> Are total democratic methods sufficient to solve the above-mentioned problems? As Gray<sup>21</sup> points out, Popper does not address himself to those societies where the empirically necessary social, economic and cultural conditions of an open society are absent. Gray's criticism of Popper on this aspect is well founded. He quotes from Mill to show that Popper's liberalism does not pronounce on 'those backward states of society in which the race

itself may be considered in its non-age'; in which "the early difficulties in the way of spontaneous progress are so great...a ruler full of the spirit of improvement is warranted in the use of any expedient that will attain an end, perhaps otherwise unattainable"; in which "Despotism is a legitimate mode of government...provided the end be... improvement and the means justified by actually effecting that end."<sup>22</sup> By failing to address himself to those societies where problems such as racism and poverty are foremost, Popper fails to perceive the stark realities of such societies. His liberalism tends to become empty and utopian in relation to such societies.

Secondly, Popper's 'manichaenism' leads him into certain contradictions. On the one hand, Popper asserts that there are no absolutes and no certainty of convictions or opinions; and on the other hand, he speaks in terms of stark alternatives. Popper condemns certainty and yet his belief in rationality is a certain and definite conviction. Rationality appears to be an absolute standard in Popper's philosophy. He categorically states that reason is the *only* alternative to violence. Furthermore, Popper is against imposing one's values on others. Even if he does not explicitly state that he is imposing his values on others, the whole point of his writing is to convince others of the value of rationality and liberalism. In fact, his certain, definite and absolute faith in reason leads him into the position of 'manichaenism'.

This conviction leads him into another contradiction. On the one hand, he wholly condemns violence and on the other hand, he justifies it to overthrow a tyranny and replace it with a democracy.<sup>23</sup> He further justifies violence against those who preach intolerance and



reject reason.<sup>24</sup> Violation of the principle of tolerance is justified if it is necessary for the survival of that principle. It is a contradictory position because it tends to lead Popper into a certain kind of intolerance and authoritarianism.

Finally, there is a problem in Popper's negative formulation of utility in terms of individualism. Individualism's central tenet is that man is an end in himself. It means he has a right to self-determination. His first duty is to himself. The concept of individualism denies the concept of sacrifice since man is an end in himself and not the means to any end of others. Popper's belief in individualism and the denial of the concept of sacrifice, is partially responsible for his criticisms against violent revolutions, utopianism, etc. For these demand that one generation of men sacrifice itself and become the means to the end of achieving benefits for the next generation. The traditional principle of utility--'greatest happiness for the greatest number'--also seems to involve the idea of sacrifice. Thus, individualism does not seem to make room for it. Does it make room for Popper's negative formulation of the principle of utility? Although the latter does not imply the idea of fighting for a distant and vague good; isn't the idea of enhancing happiness for all implicit in the idea of fighting against concrete evil and suffering? If so, then is the negative formulation really different from the traditional principle of utility? It does fit Popper's epistemological position in seeking out errors and combatting them. In terms of social practice, however, is it really different from the traditional principle? When put into practice it does involve the idea of sacrifice. According to Popper, human suffering makes a

direct moral appeal, the appeal for help. It is difficult to visualize how it is possible to help human suffering and fight against such pressing social evils as poverty without some sacrifice involved on somebody's part. To overcome this difficulty, Popper combines individualism with altruism. Is it possible to be both individualist and altruist in the true sense of the terms? While one denies the idea of sacrifice, the other implies it.

There are difficulties and weaknesses present in Popper's thought. They do not, however, undermine the importance of his theory of rationality. His theory of the nature of human knowledge and of rationality lead him to observe that a perfect society without problems and conflicts is not possible. To think or believe in its possibility is to indulge in romanticism and utopianism. This awareness makes him suspicious of those philosophies and systems that promise a perfect society free from conflicts and problems. Any system or philosophy that emphasizes the harmonizing doctrine of salvation or perfect society tends to be dogmatic because, in order to promote such a doctrine, it must assert that it alone is in possession of truth and all other beliefs must be false. Such dogmatism ought to lead to authoritarianism and consequently to suppression of all forms of criticism and to violence. Freedom can be found only where the ideas can be voiced and where conflict, criticism and freedom of expression can prevail as an accepted part of social and political life. Real freedom and peace can be established only when we realize the importance of the idea of freedom as opposed to that of power and of domination or of the supposed right to rule over other peoples whether by means of a government, a philosophy, a tradition, or

a religion. Various philosophies, traditions, religious and other institutions can guide us and function as helpful instruments but they cannot dictate to us. The right to self-determination lies with each individual. Popper's attempt is to restore to man his rightful dignity. We can claim this dignity by recognizing that the question of the moral meaning of life and history is a self-referential one which reminds us it is *we* who give meaning to life and history and are responsible for whatever meaning we decide or choose to give. Each individual should have a right and power to choose. The necessity of choice cannot be denied. The power of choice comes from reason. To abdicate or deny the necessity of choice is to abdicate and deny reason and responsibility and consequently, the dignity and the status of man.

## REFERENCES

### Chapter I

- <sup>1</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1966), p. 256.
- <sup>2</sup>Popper, K. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*. (Hutchinson of London: London, 1972), p. 278.
- <sup>3</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I, op.cit., p. 66.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 66.
- <sup>5</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1972), p. 37.
- <sup>6</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 271.
- <sup>7</sup>Ibid., pp. 271-274.
- <sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 279.
- <sup>9</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 338.
- <sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 358.

### Chapter II

- <sup>1</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I, op.cit., p. 161.
- <sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 164.
- <sup>3</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 362.
- <sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 362.
- <sup>5</sup>Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* (Cornell University Press: New York, 1978), p. 22.

- <sup>6</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., pp. 181-182.
- <sup>7</sup>Quinton, A. "Karl Popper: Politics Without Essences", eds. Anthony de Crespigny and Minogue, K., *Contemporary Political Philosophers* (Methuen and Co.: London, 1976), p. 153.
- <sup>8</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 81.
- <sup>9</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 338.
- <sup>10</sup>Popper, K. *The Poverty of Historicism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1969), p. 115.
- <sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 128.
- <sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 128.
- <sup>13</sup>Passmore, J. "The Poverty of Historicism Revisited", p. 45.
- <sup>14</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 108.
- <sup>15</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 339.
- <sup>16</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II, op.cit., p. 202.
- <sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 204.
- <sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 204.
- <sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 204.
- <sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 205.
- <sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 206.
- <sup>22</sup>Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* op.cit., p. 187.
- <sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 175.
- <sup>24</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 392.
- <sup>25</sup>Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* op.cit., p. 174-175.

- <sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 203.
- <sup>27</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 393.
- <sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 393.
- <sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 206.
- <sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 208.
- <sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 207.
- <sup>32</sup>Popper, K. *The Poverty of Historicism*, op.cit., p. 76.
- <sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 78.
- <sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 73.
- <sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 74.
- <sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 74.
- <sup>37</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 168.
- <sup>38</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, p. 343.
- <sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 345.
- <sup>40</sup>Popper, K. "On Reason and the Open Society", A Conversation, *Encounter* 39 (May 1972), p. 8.
- <sup>41</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 132.
- <sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

### Chapter III

- <sup>1</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 222.
- <sup>2</sup>Popper, K. *The Poverty of Historicism*, op.cit., pp. 87-88.

- <sup>3</sup>*Revolution or Reform*, ed. Ferguson, A.T.; translators, Aylward, M., Ferguson, A.T. (New University Press Inc.: Chicago, 1976), p. 98.
- <sup>4</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. II, op.cit., p. 227.
- <sup>5</sup>*Revolution or Reform*, op.cit., p. 100.
- <sup>6</sup>Popper, K. *The Poverty of Historicism*, op.cit., pp. 66-67.
- <sup>7</sup>Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* op.cit., p. 215.
- <sup>8</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I, op.cit., p. 235.
- <sup>9</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 235.
- <sup>10</sup>Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* op.cit., p. 218.
- <sup>11</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I, op.cit., p. 4.
- <sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 126.
- <sup>13</sup>Popper, K. *The Poverty of Historicism*, op.cit., pp. 154-155.
- <sup>14</sup>*Revolution or Reform*, op.cit., p. 107.
- <sup>15</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 109.
- <sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 87.
- <sup>17</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Vol. I, op.cit., p. 200.
- <sup>18</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 201.
- <sup>19</sup>*Ibid.*, Vol. II, p. 258.
- <sup>20</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 361.
- <sup>21</sup>Gray, J.N. "The Liberalism of Karl Popper", *Government and Opposition* 11 (Summer 1976), p. 353.
- <sup>22</sup>*Ibid.*, p. 353.

<sup>23</sup>Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. II, op.cit., p. 151.

<sup>24</sup>Popper, K. *Conjectures and Refutations*, op.cit., p. 357 and Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vol. I, op.cit., p. 265.



## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Popper, K. *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, Vols. I and II (Princeton University Press: Princeton, 1966).
- *Conjectures and Refutations* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1972).
- *The Poverty of Historicism* (Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, 1969).
- "On Reason and the Open Society", A Conversation, *Encounter* 39 (May 1972), pp.13-18.
- Popper, K. and Marcuse, H. *Revolution or Reform: A Confrontation*, ed. Ferguson; translators, Aylward M., Ferguson, A.T. (New University Press Inc.: Chicago, 1976).
- Ackermann, R.J. *The Philosophy of Karl Popper* (University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1976).
- Freeman, M. "Sociology and Utopia: Some Reflections on the Social Philosophy of Karl Popper", *British Journal of Sociology* 26 (March 1975), pp. 20-34.
- Gray, J.N. "The Liberalism of Karl Popper", *Government and Opposition* 11 (Summer, 1976), pp. 337-355.
- Magee, B. *Popper* (Fontana Modern Masters, 1973).
- Marcuse, H. "The Problem of Historical Laws" in *Partisan Review*, Vol. 36, no. 1 (1959).
- Price, R. "Holistic and Piecemeal Social Engineering", *Political Science* 12 (September 1960), pp. 15-17.
- Quinton, A. "Karl Popper: Politics Without Essences", eds. Anthony de Crespigny and Minogue, K., *Contemporary Political Philosophers* (Methuen and Co.: London, 1976).
- Wilkins, B.T. *Has History Any Meaning?* (Cornell University Press: New York, 1978).