

## POPPER'S CONTINUING RELEVANCE

Ian Jarvie

*York University, Toronto*

The gloss on the *Rethinking Popper* web-page refers to reviewing and evaluating **Popper's philosophy** for its relevance to **current philosophical debates** and to **today's world**. None of these terms is unambiguous. **Popper's philosophy** is not a single or a simple entity.<sup>1</sup> Both the terms **current philosophical debates** and **today's world** are names for contested territory. And while we are urged to take the measure of **Popper's philosophy** from them, it may be equally or more fruitful to use **Popper's philosophy** to take the measure of **current philosophical debates** and certain aspects of **today's world**. This is because **current philosophical debates** continue to be relentlessly justificationist whilst offering no rebuttal to Popper's devastating objections. And **today's world** seems to me hostage to historicism in ways that make it seem as though his swingeing critique has been forgotten.

My aim is to look at Popper's relation to **current philosophical debates** and at **today's world** in a critical rather than a justificationist manner. I do not seek to vindicate Popper but to learn from him, especially from his mistakes. I will claim that he is as relevant as ever he was.

That justificationism in general and its historicist variant in particular continue to flourish may have many explanations, but at least part of the story has to do with mistakes made by Popper in the transmission and propagation of his ideas. These were mistakes of practice that conflicted with his ideas. They were also mistakes that he did not make consistently, for sometimes his practice did align with his ideas. Popper's actions sometimes leave the impression that if you have great ideas and publish them then you have done all that you can. We can and must learn from this mistake.

Consider Popper's critique of historicism. I find it interesting to contrast the reception of Popper on historicism, and on the conspiracy theory of society. The first was a major theme trying to counter a major intellectual liability. The second was introduced as part of a critique of psychologistic views of society, noting that the conspiracy theory was an Ur-version of historicism. Nowadays the phrase *conspiracy*

---

<sup>1</sup> . My arguments are set out in *The Republic of Science*, Amsterdam: Rodopi 2002. Our global label **Popper's philosophy** needs to be problematised. Beginning with Agassi there has been four decades of discussion about whether Popper was the author of a single, seamless package of ideas that he developed and refined over time, or whether there were inconsistencies in his views that required choices; whether there were changes not just of emphasis but of mind; whether there were errors discovered that led to course corrections. Such considerations call into question the unity of his philosophy. At a minimum we might distinguish a **pre-critical Popper**, as it were, whose work is collected by Hansen in the volume *Frühe Schriften* (1925-1936), from a **critical or classical Popper** of the years 1935-1945. Finally there is a **late Popper** beginning with the *Postscript* and the many and diverse essays and monographs of his middle and old age. I deplore the practice of referring to Popper's philosophy as a monolith and citing texts from all periods on single topics. It is uncritical. Popper often commented upon or recalled his own ideas, i.e. acted as his own interpreter. By his own account, such historical descriptions are controlled by overall interpretations that can be debated, but not tested and refuted. Thus an author may be a privileged interpreter but he is not necessarily reliable, infallible, the last word, or anything like that.

*theory of society* is widely used. Politicians mouthe it without a second thought. It seems Popper exposed a flawed way of thinking about society and that people have learned from him. It may seem so, but it is not so. Popper's point was not that there are no political conspiracies. His point was one of sociological method. There are far more conspiracies than there are successful conspiracies. Therefore, the existence of conspiracy, even the suspicion of one, explains nothing at all. What needs explaining is how this or that conspiracy succeeded, given that most fail. Such an explanation would not attribute automatic causal efficacy to a particular conspiratorial group. The weight of explanation would be on the social set up that the conspiracy was able to use to its advantage and on the unintended outcomes of intentional action, including that of conspirators, successful and unsuccessful. The *name* Popper invented circulates; his principal point does not.

What about historicism? If the conspiracy theory of society went to the heart of vulgar Marxism, historicism went to the heart of Marxism *tout court* and Fascism, and quite a few other political creeds. Historicism, you will remember, is the belief in inexorable laws of human destiny.<sup>2</sup> My own estimate is that, despite the defeat of Fascism and the fall of the major bastions of Marxism-Leninism, historicism and historicist thinking are as pervasive, all-inclusive, and uncritical as ever they were. From the constant claims of journalists that decades have a profile ("the Sixties" etc.), a spirit, an atmosphere, to the scholarly fashion for Foucault and his *epistemes* and *coupures*, there is it seems no end of historicism. George Bush the Elder, I recall, said he didn't know about this "vision thing". It was one of the few things he said that I liked.<sup>3</sup> Visions are given to prophets, and prophets more often than not offer us historicism. However, George Bush senior eventually led to George Bush Jr and the complete triumph of historicism. Bush junior is a religious historicist, quite unabashed at believing in prophecy, including the self-fulfilling prophecy that God wanted him to be President. His minions tell us that we have entered a new era, with a new *Zeitgeist*, the war on terror *Zeitgeist*. It is a demanding *Zeitgeist*, one that demands reckless wars, the undermining of civil liberties and the interpretative rewriting of laws and treaties so as to give the Executive a free hand to act for our own good. The world hegemon is in the grip of historicists.

So, despite Popper's diagnosis and criticism of historicism it continues to flourish, as does the conspiracy version of it. When historicism is fused with power rational politics becomes next to impossible. Popper writes:

We want to know how our troubles are related to the past, and we want to see the line along which we may progress towards the solution of what we feel, and what we choose, to be our main tasks. It is this need which, if not answered by rational and fair means, produces historicist interpretations. Under its pressure the historicist substitutes for a rational question: 'What are we to choose as our most urgent problems, how did they arise, and along what roads may we proceed to solve them?' the irrational and apparently factual question: 'Which

---

<sup>2</sup> . Scholars chided Popper for using the term "historicism" which had limited circulation but was used to capture a different idea. This may have been an excuse. Ryle relabelled it "the Juggernaut theory of history" and was able to discuss the issue without such pedantry. See Gilbert Ryle, review of *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, *Mind*, NS 56(222; April 1947):167-72

<sup>3</sup> . One of the others was his picking up and running with the phrase "voodoo economics".

way are we going? What, in essence, is the part that history has destined us to play?' (*OS* vol II ch. 25, section III).

Nothing could be more relevant and important than the question of political rationality.

I turn now to Popper's relations to **current philosophical debates**. This is a tricky matter. Let us glance backwards. What was Popper's attitude to current philosophical debates in his lifetime? His early publications and his classics are dense with footnotes to the work of his contemporaries. His later publications seldom refer to his British or American colleagues. As some of you know his attitude to the latter was, to say the least, detached. He found most of their work to be of little interest, some of it trivial or verbal, some of it clinging defensively to indefensible philosophical systems, some, like the industry around the later Wittgenstein, just plain ununderstandable.

Between the 1920s when Popper started out, and the 1950s when he had a legacy of his own, philosophy had become thoroughly professionalised. He had a well worked out critique of professional academic philosophy.<sup>4</sup> He found it fundamentally unserious in outlook and with a built-in institutional tendency to scholasticism. Not unlike Wittgenstein, he sometimes discouraged students from entering philosophy. He deplored how much of it was pursued in ignorance of science. He also subjected it to ideology critique. From Plato to Hegel and beyond he found overt or covert inhumanity and reactionary tendencies in the classics. He was not impressed by the tendency of scholars to be advocates and apologists for these philosophers, obscuring their deficiencies. He expected greater candour about Great Men. He did not think academic intellectuals took their responsibilities seriously enough and he thought they were easily seduced by power. Think how easily the Bush administration, seeking legal justifications for torture, was able to find academic lawyers willing to prostitute their intellectual skills to that end. The Popper of *The Open Society and Its Enemies* had already warned us about this.

Popper's deepest critique of professional academic philosophy was over its view of knowledge. "Academic" for him signified the world of text books, of syllabuses, of a view of knowledge as a justified body of ideas systematically divisible for teaching and research. This is a model that retains its grip in all academies and on all academics. By contrast Popper's view was that knowledge existed only in relation to problems, that problems were no respecters of academic divisions, and that much of what we called knowledge was the story of errors and failures on the way to deepening our appreciation of problems.

So in rethinking Popper and the relevance of his philosophy to current philosophical debates it seems to me that we must be selective. Some current philosophical debates are no better than those from which Popper detached himself. Some tendencies that he deplored have worsened. Rethinking Popper in order to reconcile or evaluate his philosophy in terms of the current preoccupations of philosophical academe can only do violence both to its letter and to its spirit. If there *are* shared aims between Popper and current philosophical debates then they should interact more than they do. But if there are *no* shared aims then one cannot avoid the question, which philosophical approach is more fruitful?

---

<sup>4</sup> It is my recollection that he resisted having a philosophy honours programme at LSE until he gave way to his colleagues Wisdom and Watkins. He took pride in the fact that he was not a Professor of Philosophy but of Logic and Scientific Method.

Popper did not legitimate his concerns by reference to current academic fashion hence I would say it behooves us not to try to do so. To the extent that he was enmeshed in the philosophical debates going on when he was a young man it was because he took a small selection of them to be serious. There were thrilling new developments in logic and in physics, and both created intellectual crises, i.e. a cascade of consequences and new problems. Popper was pulled in to the discussion by the intellectual excitement and not by an interest in an academic career. This had fortunate effects for his independence and intellectual autonomy. He could legitimate his concerns not by reference to the rest of the philosophical world but solely by reference to the intellectual situation as he saw it. Where he saw no such relevance, as in the growth of the Heidegger industry in the 1930s or the later Wittgenstein industry in the 1950s, he ignored them. He was never a team player; always a boat rocker. Most academics are bureaucrats and organisation men.<sup>5</sup> The boat-rocker needs a sinecure, but these are few and far between. Popper had a sinecure at the LSE, but, alas, as time went on he used it partly as a redoubt.

He could and did point to role-models. Above all to Socrates – or, at least, Socrates as reconstructed in his own rather partial reading of the historical evidence - to loners like Einstein, Schroedinger, and so on.<sup>6</sup> And though he had philosophical friends, he did not develop a reciprocal network. His colleagues sent him students, but he not infrequently welcomed them with a cold shower. He put lots of energy into writing and teaching. He did not put much into the construction of networks and reciprocity, institutions and centres. Or rather, should I say that he did a lot of that in New Zealand, and some of it in early years in London – for example he was active in founding the British Society for the Philosophy of Science and its journal *The British Journal for the Philosophy of Science*. But soon he dropped out of the academic game – something vividly exposed by the rapid rise of Imre Lakatos, who, in a few short years of intrepid academic game-playing, set up an amazing world-wide range of contacts that included critics and opponents as well as students and disciples – of Lakatos, not of Popper. Lakatos reassured the powerful that Popper was old hat. LSE provides concrete evidence of his success: it has a Lakatos building, but not a Popper building.

In Popper's defence, it cannot be denied that institution and network building has costs. You have to suffer fools, even knaves. You have to develop small talk and master the joking relationship. You sometimes have to suit means to ends. Time may be taken away from the pure pursuit of scholarship. My critique is not personal. I say that Popper made a scientific, a sociological mistake. In the scholarly world the propagation of ideas does not take care of itself. It needs the building of institutions and networks and if that is neglected or slighted then knowledge suffers. If one wants one's ideas criticised, as Popper's philosophy mandated, and if intellectual endeavour is a friendly-hostile social cooperation, as he put it, then the forging of reciprocal links with colleagues at home and abroad is the best policy.

Another cost, more difficult to articulate, is that you have to accept the realities of power, not only the reality of those who have it, but the reality that you have it, may need

---

<sup>5</sup> I am alluding to that classic of 1950s sociology, William H. Whyte's *The Organization Man*, New York: Simon and Schuster 1956.

<sup>6</sup> . See Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies*, New York: Cambridge University Press 1994; Debra Nails, *Agora, Academy and the Conduct of Philosophy*, Dordrecht: Kluwer 1995.

more of it, and must utilise it judiciously and responsibly, not squander it. I cannot quite make up my mind about Popper's attitude to his own power.

Wait a minute, you might say, let's be fair: Popper worked night and day on his manuscripts to make them as clear as he possibly could. That was his own rationale, his own account of the responsibility he felt towards his problems. By his own view of science, however, institution and network building is necessary, not optional. The process goes like this. You read me, I read you. Your students study my stuff, my students study yours. You hire one of my PhDs I hire one of yours. Ideas diffuse through this network and back through it filters criticism. To *seek* criticism and to answer it is to treat the critic with respect. To ignore critics and criticism is to treat them with something other than respect. Networks are networks of respect and mutual regard, even towards those one is sure are mistaken (or worse).

It is true that the grasp of one's ideas amongst one's colleagues and critics may be deficient. But it is from the critical discussion of misunderstanding, of oversimplification, that better understanding and representation emerge. Only in this way will better criticism be generated. To work away at one's manuscripts in isolation, without specifying and reviewing the many criticisms, especially those that people are beginning to say are telling, is misdirected effort, deficient intellectual sociology. You may respond: What does public opinion matter? Why should one attend to criticisms that others think are telling but you think miss the mark? The answers come from Popper's philosophy and from his sociology. He argued that criticism and its assessment are cooperative endeavours and the inner dialogue of an isolated writer can become stale – remember his argument in *The Open Society* about the Robinson Crusoe scientist figure cast away on an island who eventually loses his bearings for ongoing scientific research. Here is what Popper wrote:

...there is nobody but himself to check his results; nobody but himself to correct those prejudices which are the unavoidable consequence of his peculiar mental history; nobody to help him get rid of that strange blindness concerning the inherent possibilities of our own results which is a consequence of the fact that most of them are reached through comparatively irrelevant approaches. And concerning his scientific papers, it is only in attempts to explain his work to *somebody who has not done it* that he can acquire the discipline of clear and reasoned communication which too is part of scientific method...

Popper concludes his discussion of Crusoe thus:

To sum up these considerations, it may be said that what we call 'scientific objectivity' is not a product of the individual scientist's impartiality, but a product of the social or public character of scientific method; and the individual scientist's impartiality is, so far as it exists, not the source but rather the result of this socially or institutionally organized objectivity of science. (*OS* ch 23).

Although these passages are from his discussion of the objectivity of *science* I see no reason not to apply them to Popper's own tendencies towards being a Robinson Crusoe in philosophy. Especially given that, in the broad picture, Popper took science to be part of philosophy. It is not just responsibility to one's ideas that enjoin institution and

network building, it is also the sociological argument that you need to be in social contact with your colleagues and critics so as to get their feedback. However hard Crusoe tries to check himself, Popper argues, in the end his lack of sociality means the end of his work being scientific. What he lacks is a framework of institutions that embraces a critical audience. Only in that framework can he make a scientific contribution.

For rhetorical emphasis I have exaggerated Popper's sociological deficiencies. He did *some* networking. He gave *many* public lectures. He did some popular broadcasting. He wrote in various genres, popular and less popular. He carried out a voluminous correspondence. He gave lots of time to students and to other visitors who wanted to discuss things and who brought him news of criticisms. Nonetheless, I think he remains recognisable under the exaggerations.

Another exaggeration I correct by reiterating that he *did* engage his critics. He replied in various ways to critics of *The Open Society*. His *Postscript* was an attempt to expound and defend, as well as to withdraw and correct, some features of his logic of research. He expended considerable effort on his "Replies to Critics" in the Schilpp volume. What then did he not do? He avoided accumulating academic power at the LSE or the University of London. He did not regularly attend learned society meetings after the early 1950s. When he was invited to speak he tried to keep the socialising before and after to a minimum, often pleading health concerns. He declined to be an academic entrepreneur. Yet both in business and in academe the entrepreneur is a creator of wealth, economic or intellectual as the case may be. Increase in the wealth of discussion is an increase in the general wealth. So sociologically Popper made mistakes, however good his own reasons seemed to him.

Despite his self-imposed isolation the force of Popper's ideas was such that they were widely read and discussed when newly published. *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* made a much bigger splash than *Logik der Forschung* ever did, though neither touched the threshold established by *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Notably, all his works are still in print in English. His main detractors are professional academic philosophers and those publicists taught by them. Something can be said for their view. Kuhn, Lakatos, Salmon, Grunbaum and others claim to have decisively criticised central theses of Popper and theirs has become the received view in the profession. The received view is the establishment view and of course therefore includes disincentives to invest intellectual effort in challenging it. Nonetheless, the establishment view needs to be challenged and one needs channels to the establishment to be heard.

If Popper did not seek legitimation from his professional colleagues whence did he seek it? The legitimation Popper sought was intellectual, namely, the problem, the history of discussion around the problem, and its proposed solutions, the cul de sacs of error from which learning springs. But the problem, the discussions of it, and the discovery error are all achieved only in public interchange, in mutual articulations, misunderstandings, and corrections.

Popper did not seek justification and he most certainly did not seek it in the opinion or practices of his colleagues. I once heard him ruefully predict that he would be forgotten after his death. He was mistaken about that, but it shows some awareness of his predicament. Bartley once wrote that if Popper was correct in the major planks of his philosophy then most academic philosophers were wasting their careers. I would have phrased it, "wasting their time and ours". You can change careers, but you cannot

retrieve lost time. How do you forge friendly-hostile social relations with peers who are quite capable of working it out that if you are right they are wasting their time? I do not know the answer to that.<sup>7</sup> Still, I think the alienation from contemporary philosophical debates is to be regretted and it sits ill with Popper's view of knowledge coming from cooperation and dialogue. Or perhaps his model of cooperation and dialogue is wanting, in particular regarding politics.

On the whole I think Popper was a very good social scientist and we still have much to learn from him. But his faulty sociology of academe shows up vividly in his faulty sociology of science. In particular he made some errors, or at least questionable assertions, about science and about democracy. What he said about the sociology of science, suggestive as it was, bore little resemblance to the facts. He said almost nothing of the politics of science, itself an error of oversight. Yet he used his sociology of science to draw up a model for democracy, democracy as a kind of Socratic debating society. This reminds me of no-one more than Rousseau who saw the ideal political unit as one where all the citizens could gather under the spreading branches of one big oak tree; sheltering there they could debate and decide issues, be effectively self-governing.<sup>8</sup>

Speaking in sociological and political terms, neither science nor mass democracy is remotely like a Socratic seminar or a Rousseauvian town meeting, although intellectually there may be some faint resemblance. That resemblance lies in that science and mass democracy have problems to meliorate and solutions to debate and the best model of debate extant is critical rationalism. Within both science and mass democracy there are institutional sectors where a critical rationalist model makes sense. The seminars conducted by academics in this audience, for example. James Watson describes Cambridge's Cavendish labs in the early nineteen fifties as such. Some political debates are like that, in party meetings, in committees, and in plenary bodies. But let us not go too far. In *The Open Society and Its Enemies* Popper hoped that we could forge political institutions that would foster the identification of error, admission of it, and corrections made as a result.

Let us go back to the relatively microquestions of the sociology and politics of science. You will recall that Popper once asserted that Thomas Kuhn's description of the sociology of science was by and large correct. The main feature of that description was a distinction between mundane or normal science, which constituted the vast bulk of the work of the majority of scientists, and revolutionary science, which was rare and always of uncertain status. Popper added that it was a sociological situation he deplored because only the heroic revolutionaries were engaged in intellectually interesting science. This was a bit grudging, a bit partial, and rather romantic. It also neglected politics, one of the engines of debate. Most striking also is the ready admission that science progresses *despite* its institutions.

There was, if you will permit me to say it, some lack of sociological seriousness here. Every scientist cannot be an heroic revolutionary any more than every businessman can be a titan billionaire. This is not for lack of wishing: it is systemic. The giant leaps sometimes stem from the quiet chipping away. It is not enough that we treat normal

---

<sup>7</sup> . I am not sure an answer is necessary, anyway. People often tell other people that they are wasting their time. For one thing, that is just your opinion. For another, people should be free to waste their time if they wish and can even reasonably demand to be left alone.

<sup>8</sup> . See Book IV.1 of *The Social Contract*.

science with respect. On Popper's own sociological account of science as a collective activity, one needs to acknowledge its necessity. If normal science, if stability is necessary to the achievement of theoretical change, or of paradigm shift, then its role needs to be considered. Popper need not have endorsed Kuhn's account. There are critical institutions in science, even in normal science.

Kuhn's account was that once a theoretical system, or paradigm, was in place, there was much useful work to be done on its details, its applications, and its technology. This was institutionalised as normal science. Any theoretical system will have its flaws, some known right away, others will only become apparent in the work of normal science. But these flaws do not in themselves constitute reasons for upsetting the theoretical/institutional bandwagon. If all paradigms have flaws then flaws are not reason enough to replace a paradigm. What is reason enough? In a curiously opaque account Kuhn struggles to reconcile the absurdity of *counting* flaws, or anomalies, with the historical fact that theoretical crisis crops up in idiosyncratic ways. Kuhn stresses turning points in expert public opinion and, like Polanyi, endorses the scorn expert public opinion directs at premature renegades. He thus substitutes social psychology for an institutional account. It would have to be an institutional account that includes politics and treats them as part and parcel of rationality.

Take the institution of critical reasoning. Kuhn has almost no role for it. Yet scientific training is not just about facts, it is about theories and theoretical structures, about promising lines of inquiry and less promising ones. Sometimes this knowledge is described as scientific intuition. We can we give a critical rationalist account of scientific intuition. Part of scientific intuition is simply logical and mathematical intuition, sensing quickly hidden inconsistencies or what will compute. Part if it is also a sense of the hierarchical structure of the science, what are the most basic, i.e. most general laws and corollaries, and what are of much narrower scope. A sense of this hierarchy can lead one to see whether an anomaly, a puzzle, or, to speak more plainly, a recalcitrant fact, bodes trouble for only a localised part of the theoretical system, easily unplugged and replaced, or whether it threatens to go deep and call some of the fundamental laws into question. It seems to me that in the sea of anomalies it is quite rational not to venture a revolution when anomalies seem localised; it is irrational to shove aside anomalies that go deep. Critical rationalism as institution clarifies the situation. Both stability and change can be rationally explained.

My metaphors of depth, locality and so on may be crude, but they are I hope pointing to something you all know. Change only makes sense against a background of stability. It is, as Popper says, breaches in the horizon of expectations that leap to our attention. Hence there needs be an horizon of expectations. Such an horizon is theoretical. The horizon is the theoretical background, the paradigm, the innovations that once were novel and now are sedimented. Anomalies that seem to go deep are ignored at our intellectual peril. If we equate intuition with training, with grasp of the theoretical background, the way is open for rational debate. The question of the seriousness and range of a refutation is hardly subject to algorithmic calculation. Hence it is a matter of conjecture. Those with different intuitions about it, different conjectures, seek to be heard and to be debated. Kuhn's tendency to defer to the leadership speaks correctly to the power politics of science, where leaders and grant givers are kings. Yet any historian of science, including Kuhn, knows of cases where the leadership was part of the problem,



not the vanguard towards a solution. What has Kuhn to offer? A curious, almost Hobbesian model of consensus. Hobbes thought that no revolt against the sovereign was to be commended except the one that succeeded – the success of the revolt only went to show that the sovereign was ineffective. Kuhn pours cold water on the idea that there are rational revolts against the sovereign, only with less cogency than Hobbes. What Popper's critical rationalism has to offer is a way to make rational sense of, rationally to reconstruct, scientific moments that Kuhn following Polanyi gives over to irrationalism.

How rational is the politics of science? Training produces intuition and training includes getting familiar with the institutional structures of critical reasoning, language, and basic theory. Ideas are social institutions. Locke, Berkeley, and Hume thought of ideas as mental entities, as in the head. The problem of connecting the subjective to the objective world became notorious. Popper argued that what is in the head is not strictly speaking of intellectual interest, beliefs are not interesting and are neither necessary nor sufficient for knowledge, or vice versa. Knowledge emerges with articulation, i.e. when thought is spoken or written in language. Language is thus the first or the presupposed social institution of knowledge in general and of science in particular. Cooperation is the second such institution with the complication that it is probably cooperation or the aim of cooperation that enables the development of language.

Institutional cooperation takes many forms. There are forms of storage and retrieval, and these are connected to forms of presentation and circulation. Forms of interacting include teaching, debating, presenting, illustrating, popularizing. Groups include societies, clubs, sessions, seminars, academies, invisible colleges, workshops, breeze shooting by the water cooler. All such groups and institutions have politics if we take politics to be no more than that individuals, groups, and institutions include or are taken to include diverse interests and hence aims that sometimes clash.

Politics is the use of coalition and compromise to prevent worse. The centre of scientific politics is differences over which lines of debate to pursue, which to neglect. If this is not the centre then it should be, and if it is not then we need to subject the training institutions of science to criticism. Polanyi and Kuhn endorse the political slogan "follow the leader" or "follow the leadership". This is repugnant in politics in general, why should it be the best we can come up with in science? Both Polanyi and Kuhn gave as their reason efficiency in the deployment of resources. Efficiency considerations seem to assume there is some time pressure in science, some need not to waste effort. This is bogus: rationale not rationality. No doubt there are times when military, ecological, or medical necessity creates urgency. More frequently deadlines come from grantors and are bureaucratic. The stakes in science are the highest: getting it right. There is no substitute. Whenever getting it right *tout court* is at stake that must trump efficiency and pleas for haste. After all, the costs of haste, especially hurtful mistakes and malpractice, should not be left out of efficiency calculations. In light of this it seems to me that the slogan "follow the leadership" is imprudent as well as irrational. There must needs be institutional support and resource allocation sufficiently loose that those who argue that the leadership is part of the problem are not silenced. What is true of science is true of society in general. The institutions for error detection are part of the politics. We need to free ourselves of Plato and Rousseau's disdain for politics and to push for its improved rationality.<sup>9</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> . See Bernard Crick, *In Defence of Politics*, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson 1962.

Institutions and their politics can be criticised and improved but they cannot be done away with. The follies of historicism and justificationism do much damage. Historicism preempts rational politics; justificationism seeks to preempt criticism, i.e. rationality itself. Popper's ideas on science and rationality provide a crucial component of the explanation of their persistence. In fact, Popper's view of the open society is that all of its deficiencies, including attempts to overthrow it, are quite endemic and require ceaseless institutional innovation and vigilance. It seems we have a long way to go to grasp and implement his message and to push back two very serious forms of irrationalism.

In conclusion, then. Part of the problem of the relation of Popper's ideas to current philosophical debates is that Popper did not set up enough institutions and networks to convey his ideas, to keep them plugged into the feedback loops. Hence the fate of his ideas is subject to the vagaries of *ad hoc* interest. They lack institutional support in academe.

Now I do not know if this lack of institutional support, their not being plugged into enough feedback networks, explains the persistence of justificationism in general and of historicism in particular. I think it is part of the story. If the failure is not to be repeated in the next generation the broadcasting and critique of Popper's ideas should embrace institutions and networks to channel critical feedback and also build political alliances with others, supporters and critics alike. Popperians need to learn from Lakatos and to devise institutions and networks and to engage in politics. The stakes are high. Popper's relevance could not be clearer.