

Al-Hikmat: A Journal of Philosophy
Volume 43 (2023) pp 01-22

Karl Popper's Open Society and the Neoliberal Challenge

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Abstract: To evaluate Jeremy Shearmur and Piers Norris Turner's edited volume, *Karl Popper: After the Open Society: Selected Social and Political Writings* (2008), I seek to examine what Katrina Forrester saw as Popper's "later" views, and how this would deflect the central idea of liberalism expressed by Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. Forrester's assertion suggests that the views expressed by Popper in *After the Open Society* appear more towards neoliberalism, and that Popper's membership of the Mont Pèlerin Society alongside Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman in promoting free market, openness, and individual freedom, set him comfortably within the framework of classical liberalism and market fundamentalism. To appreciate Popper's liberal political philosophy, one only needs to come to a high level of understanding and a good appreciation of the values inherent in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism* by evaluating his liberal worldview in the context of Popper's critical rationalism. The primary goal of this essay is to show that Forrester's categorization of the 'later' Popper as a neoliberal is incorrect. Popper's ideas were strictly liberal, but they impacted the development of neoliberal ideas. In placing Popper properly within the realm of liberals, what is required is to understand that Popper's liberal concepts as articulated in all five versions of *The Open Society and its Enemies*, and the two editions of *The Poverty of Historicism* serve quite well his liberal outlooks.

Keywords: Liberalism, neoliberalism, free market, open society, liberal-communitarianism, social reforms.

Introduction

Karl Popper's important contributions to numerous subjects in philosophy, including philosophy of science, epistemology, and political philosophy, have had a huge influence on the development of those fields in modern times. Popper's political philosophy, as stated in his most important books, such as *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism*, is centred essentially on safeguarding and promoting the values of an open society. What Popper defends are liberal concepts in his attempts to designate all totalitarian societies, such as communism and fascism as enemies of the open society, while advocating for individual freedom, and the protection of democracy. Essentially, the political philosophy of Popper is firmly rooted in his epistemological framework, namely his idea of the open society. Popper claimed that civilisations should be built on the ideas of critical rationalism and fallibilism, emphasising the value of free discussion, tolerance, and respect for individual freedom (Afisi 2017, 51). He felt that rather than dogma or authority, knowledge, and progress are best gained through the process of conjecture and refutation.

Some themes are fundamental to Popper's political philosophy. The topics are acknowledged as fundamental concepts in Popper's liberalism, such as his concepts of individual liberty, negative utilitarianism, epistemic fallibilism, government interventionism, piecemeal social engineering, criticism of utopianism, and of large-scale planning. While the combination of these concepts is unique to Popper's liberalism, many of these topics are equally discussed within the ambient of neoliberal principles. This forms the basis upon which some critics of Popper, such as Katrina Forrester, claim Popper to be first "sympathetic to Marxism at the beginning of his political life, but ended up a reactionary neoliberal" (Forrester 2012).

Before getting into the crux of Forrester's arguments labeling Popper a neoliberal, it is critical to first comprehend neoliberalism. Neoliberalism is a political and economic philosophy that values individual liberty. It is a philosophy that lays great emphasis on the

establishment of free markets thereby encouraging competition and deregulation, the entronement of individual freedom, assurances of limited government interference, and the promotion of market fundamentalism or free-market capitalism. The inception of neoliberalism reaches back to the early stages of the 20th century, propelled by the intellectual contributions of economists, such as Friedrich Hayek and Ludwig von Mises, who protested against the invasive policies of the welfare state and advocated for a revival of classical liberal principles. Although some of Hayek's scholars, such as Jeremy Shearmur, have argued that Hayek was (guardedly) in favour of a limited welfare state, if it was organised well (Shearmur 2020), many others, such as Andrew Farrant and Edward McPhail have berated the supporters of Hayek's idea of a welfare state. In their claim, "Hayek did not favour a welfare state" (Farrant & McPhail 2012). While the controversy ranges, the focus of this section is to delineate neoliberalism, and not strictly about Hayek on the welfare state. To this end, I restate that neoliberalism's fundamental beliefs hinge on the efficiency of open markets, an emphasis on personal accountability and merit-based achievement, and robust skepticism towards governmental regulation. This ideology also underlines the importance of private property rights, the enforcement of the rule of law, and the endorsement of competition as a tool for societal betterment.

Popper's political philosophy, without a doubt, has some parallels with neoliberalism. For example, the idea of epistemological fallibilism in Popper means that no knowledge or belief can be considered definite or absolute. The indication here is that society is to promote an atmosphere of openness and critical debate where ideas may be critically examined and improved. This is the same trend of thoughts with neoliberalism and its attendant emphasis on free markets and the free interchange of ideas within a society. While the complement of both ideologies is noted, it is pertinent to mention that epistemological fallibilism in Popper extends beyond economic

considerations or market dynamics, it covers social and democratic reconstruction of society.

Again, Popper's concept of methodological individualism has parallels with neoliberalism. Methodological individualism in Popper is the assumption that societal events can be explained by examining individual actions and choices. However, in neoliberalism emphasis is placed on individuals at the centre of the economy. For Popper, liberalism has a social dimension (Afisi 2014, 29), as social structures and their influence on individuals underscore roles that go beyond neoliberalism's narrow economic focus.

Karl Popper's Advocacy for Open Societies

The political philosophy of Popper developed from his personal experiences amid the emergence of totalitarian empires in Europe. Significant also were Popper's reflections on the Social Democrats' crucial role in resisting the Austrofascist dictatorship during the First World War, and how they shaped the Austrian political landscape after the war (Hacohen 2019). Popper wrote that "the breakdown of the Austrian Empire and the aftermath of the First World War ... destroyed the world in which I had grown up" (Popper 1976, 32). It is for this reason that Popper disapproved of these autocratic systems and championed the fundamental principles of open societies and democratic governance. Popper's unwavering belief in individual liberty, freedom of expression, the supremacy of law, and government interventionism is deeply ingrained in his political doctrine, underscoring the necessity for socio-political institutions to embrace criticism, deliberation, and critical dialogue.

Karl Popper's disapproval of totalitarianism stems from its intrinsic danger towards individual liberties, democratic ethos, and overall human progress. His stance was that such repressive systems shield divergent ideas, manipulate information, and centralise power within a limited ruling class. He was convinced that these systems impede advancement and restrict individuals from cultivating and voicing their thoughts uninhibitedly. Portraying them as a peril to open

societies, he accentuated the necessity to counter authoritarian philosophies by endorsing and safeguarding liberal democratic tenets.

In their stead, Popper endorsed democracy as the most commendable political framework, primarily because of its ability to peacefully transition leadership and navigate the intricacies and obstacles of governance. He appreciated democratic systems for their capacity to enable accountability, safeguard individual rights, and allow peaceful political transitions. Popper conjectured that democracy, with its structured process of presenting and scrutinising thoughts, facilitates rectifying societal issues and stimulates citizen involvement in policymaking. He perceived it as a defense mechanism against the perils of both authoritarian rule and mass-appeal politics.

It is based on his endorsements of democratic ethos that Popper devoutly adhered to the notions of the open society. He believed in the crucial role of the open society in fuelling progress, establishing individual liberty, and questing for truth. He insisted on the significance of institutions and procedures that cultivate open discussions, pluralism, and the questioning of established convictions. Popper was persuaded that through open societies, individuals could effectively discern and tackle socio-political concerns, leading to overall societal enhancement. He refuted the idea of closed societies that curtail individual liberties and promoted freedom, innovation, and individual self-determination.

Concerning Popper's Classification as a Neoliberal

In their edited volume, *Karl Popper: After the Open Society: Selected Social and Political Writings* (2008), Jeremy Shearmur and Piers Norris Turner, bring together some of Popper's manuscripts and personal correspondence with other scholars which express various views after the publication of the original *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. As a reviewer of Shearmur and Turner's book, Katrina Forrester believes that in the book, Popper had a "long march from socialism to neoliberalism" (Forrester 2012). Forrester argues that

Popper had portrayed himself to be sympathetic to Marxism in the autobiography *Unended Quest* (1976), but the collection of essays in Shearmur and Turner's *After the Open Society* pictures Popper as a reactionary neoliberal (Forrester 2012). According to Forrester, from someone who was originally a Marxist in ideals, to a liberal who advocated piecemeal social reform, and to a neoliberal who advocated a free-market economy, Popper, by all accounts, was a free-marketeer, and a grumpy old man who was unhappy about the younger generation's complaints about capitalism (Forrester 2012). In other words, Forrester sees the later views of Popper as belonging to the new right, particularly with Popper's membership of the Mont Pèlerin Society, alongside Hayek and Milton Friedman, which became the centre of neoliberalism. Forrester is of the view that Popper's piecemeal social engineering as advocated in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, and then detailed in *The Poverty of Historicism* should be a liberal concept for social reform. Yet, these views on social reform are at variance with Popper's neoliberal views as expressed in *After the Open Society* which are marked by "extreme risk and massive reward, but also social inequality and potential market failure" (Forrester 2012).

Again, Forrester harps on a letter written by Popper in 1956 in response to Henry Hazlitt, an American writer who defended classical liberal economic theories and was himself a foundational member of the Mont Pèlerin Society (Shearmur and Turner 2008,196). Hazlitt criticized Popper for granting an undeserved credit to Marx's outlook on social justice, in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. However, Popper rose to his defense against Hazlitt's criticism of Marxism. In defending himself against Hazlitt, Popper renounced some of the concepts articulated in *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, admitting that he sounded uncritical, for example, in his call for state interventionism, in eliminating unemployment, and his concerns about taxes. Popper later said that "all state intervention contains grave dangers" (Popper in Shearmur and Turner 2008,198). As a result of this, Forrester considers Popper's admittance as a contradiction to his original views.

Shearmur offered a rebuttal to Forrester in the Letters to the editor, *London Review of Books*, Vol. 34 No. 11, 7 June 2012, in his effort to support and restate the notion of social liberalism in Popper. According to Shearmur's letter (2012):

Katrina Forrester reads Popper as if he was a proponent of market liberalism, or 'neoliberalism' (LRB, 26 April). But this isn't the case. Popper certainly valued liberty and markets; but within the broad commitments of the 'open society' he was willing to accept considerably more government involvement than neoliberals – or any conservative, for that matter – would. Any account of Popper's views is complicated by the fact that he found admirers on the left as well as on the right. But today there is no reason to think that support for liberty and (well-regulated) markets alone entails any particular position on the liberal spectrum. Part of the interest of *After the Open Society*, the collection of Popper's writings that Forrester reviews, which I co-edited, is that it shows the extent to which Popper never fully joined with Hayek and other neoliberals. For example, late in his career he proposed that the state take a 51 per cent share in all public companies (but not an active role in management). His attention to the problem of overpopulation and his (curmudgeonly) worry about the effects of mass market television, also tell against a neoliberal interpretation of his views, especially when a more consistent social democratic interpretation is available. Popper was explicitly critical of 'free market ideology'. But the main contribution of his political philosophy was towards the defence of the widely shared liberal commitments of the 'open society', within which more specific policy prescriptions may be worked out through trial and error.

Although Shearmur's rebuttal appears to have settled the mislabeling of Popper as a neoliberal, other misconceptions of Popper's "later" expanded views on liberalism appear amenable to more neoliberal perspectives. One such is the conflation of Popper's discussion of

large-scale planning similar to Frederick Hayek's neoliberal concept of centralised economic planning (Kapeller and Puhlinger 2012, 4).

More fundamentally, Popper's liberalism, and hence his entire political philosophy, arose from his attacks on the 'false prophets', whom he termed the enemies of the open society. Popper accused Plato, Hegel, and especially Marx of historicism and labeled them as opponents of the open society. While Popper's criticisms of Plato and Hegel were equally important in the formation of his liberalism, his critique of Marxian historicism was the most influential in the development of his liberal philosophy. Popper defines historicist holism as large-scale planning and the concept of building an ideal society from a thorough blueprint. He contends that such endeavours frequently result in tyranny and the loss of individual liberties. This rejection of utopianism is consistent with neoliberal skepticism about large-scale social engineering initiatives and conviction in the limitations of central planning. Popper, unlike some neoliberal philosophers, does not ignore the potential of social growth or the necessity for societal changes through democratic methods.

One important factor to note is the fact that the term "neoliberal" was not coined during Popper's era, making it historically inappropriate to label Popper a neoliberal. Although some neoliberal proponents tend to fixate on Popper's espousal of open societies and critical evaluation of collectivism as seemingly in line with their convictions, this narrow interpretation disregards other facets of Popper's philosophy, such as the importance he placed on social justice and his caution against unchecked inequality. More importantly is the fact that while Popper criticised the totalitarianism of his time, he did not explicitly address neoliberalism in any of his publications as the term had not emerged as a dominant political and economic force. Popper was more concerned with the defense of liberal democracy and the critique of historicism and totalitarianism, as exemplified in ideologies, such as fascism. Popper was also critical of non-interventionist views; but did not discuss the neoliberal views of Hayek or Friedman who also favoured some intervention, provided that it took place under the

understanding of the rule of law while it is safe to assume that Popper's ideas may have influenced some aspects of neoliberal thought, he cannot be considered a direct influence on the development of neoliberalism as a political and economic ideology.

From all of these, it is clear that the ideas and thoughts from the collections in *After the Open Society* are not discordant with the fascinating liberal concepts presented by Popper in *The Open Society and Its Enemies* and *The Poverty of Historicism*. One only needs to come to a high level of understanding and a good appreciation of the values inherent in the publications by evaluating his liberal worldview in the context of Popper's critical rationalism.

No doubt, the views of neoliberalism and those of Popper's liberal ideas converge significantly in several respects. Both underscore the recognition of the dignity of individual freedom, limited state intervention, and open markets. The advocacy of Popper for open societies, where citizens are free to voice their ideas and participate in non-violent activities, complements the neoliberal esteem for individual self-rule. Moreover, his backing for democracy and criticism of totalitarianism reverberates with the neoliberal pledge to political democracy and opposition to dictatorial regimes. Nonetheless, despite these intersecting values and convictions, it is crucial to indicate that Popper's principles cannot be wholly categorised within the neoliberal framework, as Forrester erroneously claims, as the territories where they diverge are as noteworthy as their similarities.

The Challenge of Neoliberalism to Liberal Philosophy

In critical debates with other liberals, such as John Rawls, it is obvious how core liberal concepts differ from neoliberalism. The liberal philosophy of John Rawls is marked by its deep significance to fairness, equality, and justice, rooted in his seminal work *A Theory of Justice* (1971). Rawls presents a compelling theory of justice, known as justice as fairness. This theory of justice propounds an egalitarian

approach vested in promoting equal opportunities. Integral to his theory is the ‘original position’—a conjectured state where individuals, shrouded by a ‘veil of ignorance’, form social contracts oblivious to their personal circumstances. Underlying this perspective, Rawls postulates that rational individuals would adopt two guiding principles of justice: the equal basic liberties principle and the difference principle. While the former seeks to safeguard individual rights and freedoms, the latter tolerates disparities so long as they are to the advantage of the most disadvantaged in society (Rawls 1971, 237).

Commencing with the principle of equal fundamental liberties, Rawls posits that everyone is entitled to the widest range of basic freedoms in accordance with a comparable set for all. These fundamental freedoms encompass political rights like the rights to free speech and assembly, as well as personal liberties, such as the freedom of conscience and privacy rights. The next principle, known as the difference principle, entails that any socioeconomic inequalities need to be configured in a way that benefits society’s most disadvantaged members to the greatest extent.

The perspectives of liberalism embraced by Rawls have some contrast to Popper’s liberalism as well as some similarities. Alain Boyerh has addressed this concern in his paper, “Is an Open Society a Just Society? Popper and Rawls” (2005). Rawls’s ideas underscore a conviction in the doctrine of justice as equity, emphasizing equal freedoms for all. This includes special consideration for society’s least advantaged members and advocates for egalitarian distribution of resources via socio-economic strategies. Rawls aims to level the playing field and mitigate inequalities. Rawls proposes that socio-economic disparities can be justified if they work in favour of the least privileged people. In essence, any inequality must better the conditions of those who are at the lower end of society’s spectrum. This theory seeks to address the challenges of distributive justice by pushing for a fairer allocation of society’s resources and

opportunities. It advocates for a societal structure that considers the needs of the most disadvantaged individuals.

Popper's liberal approach to justice is more focused on the idea of an open society where individuals have the freedom to pursue their goals. However, Popper emphasizes the importance of individual freedom and critical rationalism over a predetermined concept of justice. As earlier stated, Popper advocates for a more gradual and experimental approach to social change by addressing social problems through piecemeal social engineering.

Looking at the above, Rawls's Difference Principle and Popper's piecemeal social engineering both embody a commitment to resolving social imbalances and advocating for societal fairness. They consider the implications of societal structures on the most susceptible individuals or groups, acknowledging the integral role of fairness in the establishment of a just society. However, whether Popper's and Rawls's liberalism are contradictory or complementary depends largely upon the perspectives and understanding of the author. Boyer finds both as interfacing with one another with the Rawlsian methodology being rather Popperian, while at the same time Popper's liberal philosophy being more or less close to Rawls's liberal outlook, with some restrictions (Boyer 2005). This perspective differs from Shearmur who argues that both Rawls and Popper's views are opposed (Shearmur, 2021).

Neoliberalism, on the other hand, favours extreme variants of libertarian principles such as freedom and individual autonomy, a minimum state, individualism, and voluntary association; these values are at odds with the heart of liberal beliefs. Neoliberalism aims to increase the efficiency of private enterprise. It also tries to eliminate government participation in economic concerns, which runs counter to Popper's liberal notion of government interventionism. To address this worry, Popper's rejection of unfettered capitalism, as well as his support for the creation of a legal framework and government

involvement, are all important characteristics of his liberal political philosophy (Popper 1945, 110-117).

Among noteworthy neoliberals is Robert Nozick, who vigorously opposed Rawls's redistributive theory before proposing his "settlement theory". In his book *Anarchy, State, and Utopia*, Nozick argued for a minimum state in which individual liberty takes precedence over the state. According to Nozick, when the state attempts to expand its restricted job of protecting individual rights and liberty, dealing with fraud and theft, and enforcing contracts into a broader rule, it is violating individual rights. Individuals in a minimum state can exercise their rights without intervention from the state. If residents have a dispute or need to protect themselves, they can form what Nozick refers to as a "mutual protection association", in which every member is "on call" to attend to disputes or protect others. He went on to say that if the mutual protection association cannot resolve disagreements amongst agencies or they cannot sufficiently defend themselves, they may form a higher organisation, a single authority known as the "dominant protective association" (Nozick 1974, 12-17). The inconsistency that heralds Nozick's minimal state is in its call for a mutual protection association, or, in a more advanced form, the dominant protective association, without realising that these associations also represent a form of higher political authority that can perform the functions of government involvement in state affairs that he is avoiding.

Popper recognises the need for government action, but not the idea of a big and strong government that the United States of America is often understood to value. For Popper, governments exist in the form of economic intervention, state protectionism, and the development of legal frameworks. Governments must respond to anything commonly understood to be damaging to individuals. This is done incrementally, particularly concerning recognised societal issues. To avoid the danger of extending the state's authority, Popper was quick to point out that "state intervention should be limited to what is truly necessary for the protection of freedom" (Popper 1945, 130). As a result,

governments' piecemeal approach will include trial-and-error attempts to reduce these acknowledged problems; and when those pressing evils of society are addressed incrementally, it is to best learn from one's failures.

In his book *The Road to Serfdom* (1944), Friedrich Hayek offers his most famous ideas in support of free-market capitalism over and against classical socialism. His critique of classical socialism was intended to serve as a warning against attempts to impose governmental central economic planning onto a market-based social order. Although Hayek's rejection of central economic planning is crucial in the sphere of liberal reform initiatives, the classical liberal reform advocated by Hayek's economic theory is not entirely consistent with Popper's argument that social engineering should always be incremental. Hayek and Popper differ in their emphasis and focus. The classical liberal thesis, according to Hayek, is that its prescriptions (market solutions wherever possible) result in desirable outcomes. Popper is expressly concerned with social change that allows for experimentation, criticism, and the correction of errors.

Although Popper shared many of Hayek's goals, his critical engagement came from a different angle (Kapeller & Puhlinger 2012, 6). Hayek and Popper disagreed sharply on the reasons and extent to which the government should intervene in markets and society. Hayek argued for minimal state intervention but wanted to find institutional forms for it, which rendered it unproblematic in terms of its effects on the economy and people's liberty. This is similar to and somewhat different from Popper. Popper was a supporter of government intervention. Popper preferred state intervention because he was concerned about the unexpected implications of unbridled capitalism. Popper was adamant about the dangers of unregulated capitalism, which, if unchecked, may lead to exploitation and societal degeneration. Popper pushed for the construction of legal frameworks without which the unexpected effects of free-market ideology may harm the individual freedom they sought to preserve. According to

Popper, “a free market can exist only if it is protected by a legal system, by the rule of law” (Shearmur and Turner eds. 2008, 386).

While many Popper critics, such as Forrester, see Popper’s advocacy for a free-market system protected by a legal system as leaning toward the “new right”, they fail to recognise Popper’s view that such a free-market system can only exist in an open society marked by rational intellectualism and democratic transformations. Popper stated the following in a speech titled “Open Society and the Democratic State”, published in *After the Open Society*:

I believe that a free market economy is more efficient than a centrally planned economy. Yet I hold that it is wrong to base the rejection of tyranny on economic arguments. Even if it were true that a centrally planned state economy is superior to that of the free market, I should oppose the centrally planned economy. I should oppose it because of the likelihood that it would increase the power of the state to the point of tyranny. It is not the inefficiency of communism against which we should fight, but its inhumanity and its inherent hostility to liberty. We should not sell our freedom for a mess of pottage, or for the promise that we shall obtain the highest possible productivity and efficiency — not even if we could be sure that we can purchase efficiency at the price of liberty (Shearmur and Turner eds. 2008).

Popper’s liberalism envisions an open society in which people have the right to make decisions that affect them personally, have the opportunity to raise problems about issues relating to collective decision-making and contribute knowledge to the socioeconomic and political processes, rather than a system of large-scale planning. Popper recognised the necessity to establish the liberal concept of individual freedom while saying that utopian / large-scale planning or central economic planning enhances the authority of the state and leads to tyranny. Individuals risk losing their liberty as a result of utopian / large-scale societal planning, not only to benefit from but most likely never even to generate their inventive thinking. The ability to make free, reasonable decisions (for oneself or in the

interests of one's social environment) is heavily reliant, not on verbal declarations, but on actual skill.

Essentials of Popper's Liberalism

Popper's liberal political philosophy serves as the foundation for a conceptual justification of change in all of these arguments over his political philosophy. Individual freedom, negative utilitarianism, state protectionism, piecemeal social engineering, and the open society, as previously said, underpin his political liberalism. Scholars such as Shearmur have questioned what form of liberal political system Popper's philosophy of politics entails. For instance, Shearmur mentioned the difficulties in categorising *The Open Society and Its Enemies*' political beliefs. Those principles appear irreconcilable with classical liberalism and socialism, and they may be closest to social democracy (Shearmur 1996, 114).

Bryan Magee (1973) characterised Popper's liberal democracy as a distinct sort of social democracy. Magee contended that Popperian liberalism entails state interference in political, economic, and social life. As a result, it is unmistakably a social democratic worldview. Popper's political philosophy beliefs, according to Magee, are both anti-conservative and anti-totalitarian. Popper's political philosophy is a theory of social change, and transformation that is logical and humanitarian rather than violent (Magee 1973, 75; Afisi 2020).

The difficulty that these scholars have in situating Popper's political philosophy inside the mainstream liberal canon shows Popper's liberalism's distinct position among all other liberals. The liberal viewpoint, as described by J. L. Holzgrefe (2003) is that human freedom is sacred and that universal human rights apply to everyone everywhere. This is the same type of viewpoint on individual freedom that is commonly attributed to Popper. Popper's liberal view of individual freedom is extended in terms of the concept of individualism that underlies his philosophy of freedom and politics in general. However, Popper's liberal politics have more room for the

social than the ubiquitous individualism for which he is most known. While I have consistently supported a view on social freedom that emphasises both the explicit individualism and the implicit social aspect of Popper's politics in demonstrating the social dimension of Popper's notion of freedom, especially because it will be essential to non-liberal societies (Afisi 2014). Popper's liberal philosophy can be said to include elements of various political ideologies, including social democracy, libertarianism, classical liberalism, and conservatism.

The preceding argument implies that, unlike most liberals, Popper has a distinct brand of politics that treats individual freedom as sacred. Freedom is one the most important constituents of Popper's liberalism, which makes him align favourably with neoliberalism. Although neoliberalism is an economic ideology for market developments, it is worth noting that Popper objected to the idea that freedom should be understood just in economic terms. However, Popper distinguishes freedom from equality, as attempts to impose equality can lead to tyranny. For Popper, "Freedom is more important than equality, and the attempt to realise equality endangers freedom" (Popper 1976, 36). Popper insists that socialism promotes an egalitarian society, but it is "nothing more than a beautiful dream, as the dream is undone by the conflict between freedom and equality" (Popper 1976, 36). Despite this assertion, Popper also maintains that individual freedom makes more sense when it is recognised within the confines of society (Popper 1953, ff. 1962, 297). This simply means that the individual's position must be found within the growth and advancement of the community. This point of view embodies both the individual and societal parts of Popper's liberalism. This perspective of Popper does not place him in the same category as communitarians like Charles Taylor (1979), Michael Sandel (1982), and Alasdair MacIntyre (1984), but he shared the belief that the self's identity resides within its community of others.

Popper's Liberalism: The Individual and the Social

Popper's endeavour in his philosophy of politics to create appropriate room for both the individual and the communal necessitates a balance between liberalism and communitarianism. My motivation for attempting to bridge the gap between these two natural political opposites is based on an assessment of the prospects for non-liberal societies to become liberal while retaining the ideals of those values of community and social cohesion that enhance human relationships and tolerance. In terms of Popper's social element, I agree with communitarians that the 'self' must be positioned inside a social context, but I disagree with them because they fail to articulate what type of social environment they would prefer within a society with liberal institutions. This is what I term liberal social reform or liberal-communitarian ideology.

Popper's open society idea will be strengthened by the "liberal-communitarian" ideology that I offer. This is a new school of thought in political theory that tries to retain the liberal idea of individual rights and freedom while also acknowledging individuals' social dependency on their community. Popper's critical rationalism is comprised of both individual and societal aspects. There is no danger to individual freedom in these beliefs, and social ties are viewed as a necessary prerequisite for the person's growth and advancement alongside others in society.

In the interest of expanding on Popper's liberal political philosophy, I analysed and investigated the philosophical implications of Popper's liberal concepts of piecemeal social engineering in a paper titled "Popper's piecemeal or Many-pieces-at-once Social Engineering" (Afisi 2021). This is to analyse the theoretical foundations of Popper's piecemeal approach to social transformation. Certain practical implementations of the notion have been studied to determine the extent of reforms that the trial-and-error, gradualist approach to social and political transformation may achieve in real-world conditions. The paper's results and the adjustments I make to them have

consequences for a new way of looking at Popper's piecemeal social engineering approach to social improvement.

Conclusion

After closely examining Popper's political philosophy, including his views in later years following the publication of his books on political philosophy, while there are points of convergence between his ideas and neoliberalism, his philosophy cannot be categorised as neoliberal. Popper's focus on individual liberty, minimal government, and the role of markets is consistent with neoliberalism. His understanding of market constraints, advocacy for social welfare, and dedication to social justice, on the other hand, represent substantial deviations from neoliberal doctrine.

Popper supports a democratic society with a welfare state that maintains a basic level of life for its inhabitants, but he opposes excessive governmental intrusion. He highlights the need to safeguard individual liberties while warning of the perils of an overpowering state. This viewpoint is comparable to neoliberal thinking, which emphasises the necessity of limited government interference and the free market. Popper understood the value of markets in increasing economic efficiency, but he also recognised their limitations. Popper, unlike hard-line neoliberals, such as Nozick, did not argue for total *laissez-faire*. He felt that the state should regulate and repair market failures to achieve a balance between individual liberties and societal well-being. According to Popper, a well-functioning market economy needs a supporting institutional structure that handles concerns such as externalities, monopolies, and wealth inequality.

Popper's emphasis on individual liberty and minimal government is similar to some parts of neoliberalism. He argued for the protection of individual rights and the avoidance of government meddling in personal matters. Popper recognised the risks of totalitarianism and maintained that to sustain a lively and healthy society, individual rights such as freedom of expression and assembly must be protected.

Popper's political philosophy and neoliberalism differ significantly in their approaches to social fairness and welfare. The general conception of neoliberalism is that it frequently prioritises economic development and market success while ignoring redistributive issues such as social justice. Despite this general notion, Milton Friedman advocated a 'negative income tax' where poor people would receive cash directly as support that would improve their traditional welfare as well as have an impact on their spending power (Friedman 1962). In the same vein, Popper understood the need for social welfare measures and pushed for a safety net to safeguard society's most vulnerable members through his concept of negative utilitarianism. He felt that a just society should work to decrease inequities and provide equal opportunities for all people.

Popper's broad political theories fit with some of neoliberalism's key concepts, such as the emphasis on individual liberty, minimal government interference in the economy, and the promotion of free markets. However, it is vital to emphasise that Popper's political theory extends beyond neoliberalism. He was critical of several features of classical liberalism and held strong opinions on a variety of subjects, including the role of the state, social fairness, and the limits of reason in social planning. While Popper's political philosophical theories have impacted the development of neoliberal thinking, as neoliberalism itself took root as a defence of Western liberal values, especially of individual freedom, against the growing prevalence of the forces of European totalitarianism and fascism in early 20th century (Peters 2023); categorising his whole political theory as entirely neoliberal would be an oversimplification. Popper's thought is varied and has parts that may connect with numerous political ideologies, therefore while examining his work's link to certain political movements, it is crucial to evaluate the intricacies of his work.

Popper's vehement opposition to totalitarian systems, his endorsement of open societies, and his stance defending democratic principles

resonate more with the ethos of liberal democracy than with the economic-leaning focus of neoliberalism. Adding weight to the argument, criticisms arising from painting Popper with the neoliberal outlook underline potential distortions of his theories and his distancing from his core liberal political philosophy. Suffice it to say, that Popper's political theory underscores concepts, such as individual freedom, government intervention, critical feedback, piecemeal social engineering, and resistance against totalitarianism, instead of aligning it wholly with the neoliberal doctrines that it is not.

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