

**Open Nationalism: Reconciling Popper's Open
Society and the Nation State**

Craig Wilkie

PhD – The University of Edinburgh - 2009

Contents

CONTENTS	ii
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	vi
ABSTRACT	vii
DECLARATION	viii
1	1
INTRODUCTION	1
ASSESSING THE COMPATIBILITY OF OPEN SOCIETY AND THE NATION STATE	1
1.1 Open Society and Popper’s Attack on Nationalism.....	1
1.2 The Conservative and Liberal Aspects of Popper’s Philosophy.....	7
1.3 Political Community in Popper’s Philosophy.....	10
1.4 Opening the Nation State.....	12
1.5 The European Union’s Relationship to Open Society.....	13
1.6 The Continuity between Popper’s Earlier and Later Works.....	14
1.7 Open Nationalism – Issues under Discussion	17
PART I – Re-examining Popper’s Philosophy	
2	21
Popper’s Conservative Liberalism	21
2.1 Introduction – Popper and Ideological Orientation.....	21
2.2 Science and the Logic of Discovery.....	24
Falsificationism and Popper’s Philosophy of Science.....	24
The Problem of Observation.....	28
Paradigms and the Logic of Science.....	29
Conserving and Liberating the Scientific Community.....	32

The Logic of Discovery and the Psychology of Research.....	35
The Struggle for Science's Soul.....	38
2.3 The Tradition of Critical Rationalism.....	42
Technical and Practical Rationality.....	47
Unity in Rationalism.....	48
The Technique and Practice of Science.....	50
Tradition and Critical Rationalism.....	53
Conservative Defences of Tradition.....	56
2.4 The Nature and Conduct of Political Change.....	58
Piecemeal Social Engineering.....	60
Liberation from Utopia.....	63
The Epistemology of Planning.....	64
2.5 Conclusion –Popper's Bid to Conserve Liberalism.....	73
3.....	80
THE BOUNDARIES OF THE OPEN SOCIETY AND THE LIMITS OF OPENNESS.....	80
3.1 Introduction – The Open Society and its Boundaries.....	80
3.2 The Open Society and the Open State.....	82
Freedom, Power and the Open Society.....	84
Defining Freedom – Two Concepts.....	85
Democracy and the Open Society.....	88
The Open Society and the Institutions of Politics.....	95
The Open Society and the Control of Economic Power.....	98
Individual Freedom and the Limits of the State.....	101
3.3 The Open Society and the Question of Community.....	107
Open Society and the Limitations of Liberalism.....	108
The Unencumbered Self.....	110
The Procedural Republic.....	117

3.4 The Pluralist Challenge to Popper.....	123
The Reef of Value Pluralism.....	125
Standards for Assessing Regimes.....	128
3.5 Conclusion – Bounded Open Societies.....	134
Bounded Rationality and Community.....	135

Part II – Applications of Popper’s Philosophy

4.....	143
---------------	------------

OPEN SOCIETY AND THE NATION STATE..... 143

4.1 Introduction – Opening the Nation State.....	143
---	------------

Liberal Nationalism: Autonomy and Membership.....	146
Particularity and Universality.....	153
Welfare in the Open Society and the Nation State.....	163
Applying Philosophy to the Social World.....	173

4.2 Promoting and Defending Open Society:

The Doctrine of the International Community.....	175
---	------------

Liberal Interventionism and the Continuation of History.....	178
A Popperian Assessment of Blair’s Criteria for Intervention.....	183
Instituting Open Societies.....	194
Promoting Open Society as an Ideal.....	195
Open Society and the Architecture of Global Politics.....	202
An Open Society Alliance.....	203
The Soros Doctrine: Bursting the Bubble of American Supremacy.....	205
Sovereignty, Intervention and World Order.....	209
A Community of Democracies.....	212
Democracy Promotion and the Question of Sovereignty.....	213

4.3 Conclusion: Two types of Nationalism and the Open Society.....	216
---	------------

5.....	219
---------------	------------

OPEN SOCIETY AND THE EUROPEAN UNION.....219

5.1 Introduction - European Integration and the Nation State.....	219
5.2 Sovereignty and the European Union.....	224
The European Union – Governance and Government.....	227
Social Justice and the European Union.....	233
5.3 The Postnational Constellation.....	235
5.4 Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society.....	249
5.5 Conclusion - Open Society and the Nation State in Europe.....	258
6.....	261
CONCLUSION.....	261
PROMOTING OPEN SOCIETY AND DEFENDING THE NATION STATE.....	261
6.1 Open Society in a World of Nation States.....	261
6.2 Popper’s Conservative Liberalism.....	267
6.3 Open Society and the Nature of Political Community.....	270
6.4 National Open Societies.....	272
6.5 Open to Supranationalism? Open Society and the European Union.....	278
6.6 Popperianism in the Twenty-first Century.....	280
BIBLIOGRAPHY.....	283

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my supervisors Lynn Dobson and Russell Keat for all of their valuable guidance and advice over the course of this project. The encouragement and assistance that they have both provided has left me with a considerable debt of gratitude.

Great gratitude is also due to my family and friends for the ceaseless support that they have given me.

The greatest gratitude of all is reserved for my wife Nataša who is a source of constant inspiration.

Jenny Crawford also deserves a special mention for her kindness in lending me her laptop for eighteen months.

My sincere thanks to you all.

I held an ESRC Postgraduate Studentship (PTA-030-2003-00774) during my postgraduate studies.

Abstract

This thesis examines the political philosophy of Karl Popper and his concept of open society in particular. It argues that despite Popper's hostility to nationalism there is no incompatibility between his concept of open society and the nation state. Indeed, it is shown to be both theoretically and practically possible for nation states to be constituted as open societies.

Popper considered nationalism to be a tribal ideology and an enemy of open society as a form of political community. The thesis develops the argument that Popper's dismissal of nationalism was unduly hasty, in part, because he failed to distinguish between different interpretations of nationalist ideology and thus gave no consideration to the prospect of a liberal or open form of nationalism. Liberal nationalism is shown here to be a coherent theoretical position that can accommodate Popper's conception of open society.

The extent to which Popper in fact assumed the nation state as a framework and context when theorising open society is also revealed and highlights a degree of ambiguity and inconsistency in his political philosophy. This leaves the way open for a re-conceptualisation of Popperian philosophy in which open society and the nation state are reconciled theoretically and a defence of the nation state as a locus for open society is developed.

Declaration

I hereby declare that, except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is entirely my own work, and that no part of it has been submitted for any other degree or qualification.

1 Introduction

Assessing the Compatibility of Open Society and the Nation State

1.1 Open Society and Popper's Attack on Nationalism

This thesis examines the political philosophy of Karl Popper and his concept of open society in particular. It considers the relationship between open society and the nation state as a form of political community in a bid to establish the extent to which the two are compatible. In doing so, ambiguities of Popper's philosophy are probed such as his dismissal of nationalism as a political ideology whilst simultaneously assuming the context and framework of the nation state in much of his theorising. Another potential tension that comes under scrutiny is the appearance of both liberal and conservative characteristics in Popper's theoretical approach. Understanding the nature of political community from a Popperian perspective is crucial to the task in hand here. It is also the case that the institutional framework of open society must be established in order to determine whether or not it can be accommodated within the nation state. Beyond that I seek to examine the implications for open society of the development of the European Union and this facilitates further consideration of open society as a concept as well as the possibility of instituting it in post or supranational contexts.

Although I take the concept of open society to be a normatively desirable political ideal, establishing such a claim is not the central aim of my thesis. Instead, the argument that I seek to defend is that open societies and nation states are compatible despite the hostility that Popper displays toward nationalism. An additional argument defended here is that a world comprised of nation states presents more opportunities than it does threats to attempts to institute open societies across the globe. Popper did not take nationalism or the nation state particularly seriously and I

seek to address that oversight in the pages that follow. It is an oversight on Popper's part because the international political system continues to be structured in accordance with the principle of national sovereignty as indeed it was when Popper first theorised open society.¹ A re-conceptualisation of Popper's liberalism is shown to be possible in which the nation state is accommodated as a viable form of political community and host of open society.

The research questions that animate the theoretical discussion of this work are therefore concerned with the potential linkages between Popper's open society and nation states. Can a nation state also be an open society? To what extent is open society to be considered a cosmopolitan concept? What, if any, accord can be reached between nationalism and Popperian liberalism? Can a defence of the nation state as a form of political community be simultaneously employed as a defence of open society? In addressing these questions my thesis constructs a defence of liberal democratic nation states as instances of open society and suggests that such political entities warrant conservation from a Popperian perspective.

This study seeks to fill a distinctive gap in the literature on Popper's political philosophy because very little has been written about the approach that Popper takes regarding the nation state. Even where the significance of Popper's attack on nationalism is acknowledged, such as is the case in Tamir's account of liberal nationalism, it is not subjected to detailed scrutiny and is encountered as something of a curiosity.² An exception to this is provided in an article by Andrew Vincent on Popper and nationalism.³ Vincent notes that for Popper, 'nationalism was considered a characteristically closed ideology – akin to totalitarianism – and the precise opposite of liberalism'.⁴ I do not dispute the characterisation that Vincent proposes here but suggest that given the relatively little attention Popper himself devoted to

¹ George Soros, *Open Society – Reforming Global Capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000, p.168.

² Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.80.

³ Andrew Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism", in Jarvie, Ian, Karl Milford and David Miller (eds), *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006

⁴ *Ibid*, p.157.

attacking nationalism in comparison with his book length case against totalitarianism it seems that he felt the latter to constitute a far greater enemy of open society.

The argument is made by Vincent, and echoed in this thesis, that Popper's views on nationalism are especially interesting at the present historical juncture of the early twenty-first century which has seen 'a practical renaissance of nationalism in the politics of Europe and elsewhere'.⁵ Vincent concludes his short assessment of Popper's relationship to nationalism with the observation that Popper's case against national politics was not systematically developed and nor did he resolve the relation of nationalism to contemporary politics.⁶ The work of this thesis provides an opportunity to look in more detail at those relationships in order to reach a fuller understanding of the actual critique that Popper made of nationalism along with the implications of it for his own philosophical position.

My examination of Popperian liberalism, his arguments against nationalism, and his conception of open society is designed to produce a piece of work that can make a contribution to general accounts and interpretations of Popper's political philosophy. It can be situated then as a detailed inquiry into a particular aspect of Popper's philosophy and thus provide an enhanced understanding of a prominent and influential political theorist. It is also a timely investigation because the issues explored here such as sovereignty and its limits along with the prospects for liberal interventionism have come increasingly to the fore in international politics. My assessment in chapter four of Tony Blair's doctrine of the international community from a Popperian perspective is illustrative of this point. The enduring relevance of Popper to such contemporary debates is something that the thesis seeks to illustrate.

The thesis presented here is a work of political theory but it is one that pays close attention to practical applications of theoretical perspectives. To do so is to take a Popperian approach to political philosophy. Popper described the challenge of checking and balancing political institutions, and controlling their power, as 'the

⁵ Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism" p. 157.

⁶ Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism" p. 175.

fundamental problem of political theory'.⁷ It is evident from such a description that Popper sought to apply his philosophy to particular political matters and envisaged that it could serve as a practical guide for statesmen and decision-makers. He also stresses the need to avoid large-scale and abstract attempts at socio-political reform, urging instead a focus on 'practical problems' utilising the theoretical method of trial and error which Popper holds to be fundamentally the same in all sciences, natural and social.⁸ This thesis takes up that Popperian challenge by seeking to apply Popper's political philosophy, and the concept of open society in particular, to a range of contemporary 'problems' such as renascent nationalism, humanitarian intervention and the potential construction of a supranational community and polity in the context of the continued development of the European Union. One of the purposes of doing so is to highlight the enduring relevance of Popper's theorising to current debates around those issues.

The structure of the thesis takes account of the applied nature of the theorising herein and is thus split into two distinct but connected parts. Part I addresses Popper's philosophical thought, both scientific and political, and sets it in the context of theoretical issues such as the nature of community and its boundaries as well as the conduct of change. It comprises chapter two – Popper's Conservative Liberalism – and chapter 3 – The Boundaries of the Open Society and the Limits of Openness. A more detailed account of those chapters is given slightly later in this introductory chapter but for now it is important to recognise the preparatory role that they perform in terms of setting out a version of Popperian liberalism, compatible with the nation state, that can subsequently be utilised as an analytical framework for considering contemporary philosophical and political questions about nations and nationalism.

The theoretical work of Part I of the thesis has its foundations in Popper's philosophy of science, not least because 'Popper's political theory builds on his analysis of the scientific enterprise, of the conditions necessary for the growth of

⁷ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.219.

⁸ Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2 – Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986, p.222.

knowledge, and for rational thought in general'.⁹ Such conditions are central to the conception of political community that Popper provides, albeit often implicitly, and the notion of Popperian political community is one that the thesis seeks to examine and extend by analysing it in relation to the nation state as a communal political form. Chapter three takes that task on to more explicitly political terrain as a precursor to looking at specific issues of liberal nationalism, humanitarian intervention and the development of the European Union from a Popperian perspective in Part II of the thesis. The two part division is helpful in a thesis such as this because it facilitates the construction of a theoretical framework as a specific and distinctive task that subsequently can be demonstrated to be applicable as an analytical tool for examining debates on the nature of political community and the nation state.

Part II of the thesis addresses the application of Popperian philosophy to the contemporary debates around nationalism mentioned above. It comprises chapter 4 – Open Society and the Nation State, chapter 5 – Open Society and the European Union, as well as the concluding chapter, chapter 6 – Promoting Open Society and Defending the Nation State. The focus in chapters 4 and 5 in particular is on the ways in which Popper's theorising can contribute to an examination of the nation state and its place in twenty-first century politics. Open society is shown to be a form of political organisation that can be realised within the context and structure of the nation state whilst also potentially serving as an exemplar against which actual national states could be assessed. The challenge set to contemporary Popperians on this basis is to find ways of rendering existing nation states more open rather than seeking to dismiss or ignore national configurations of political community as Popper himself tended to.

This is important in a study of Popper's open society since he intended the concept to be applied and sought to make the case for it serving as the basis of political life. The applied nature of the investigation that I have sought to conduct is exemplified

⁹ Michael Lessnoff, "Karl Popper: Critical Rationalism and the Open Society", in *Political Philosophers of the Twentieth Century*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1999, p.176.

in the reference made throughout to the attempts initiated by George Soros to implement Popper's political philosophy through his Open Society Institute.¹⁰ Soros' work merits analysis because he not only provides a detailed account of the concept of open society but has built an influential organisation that seeks to advance Popper's liberal vision by funding programmes aimed at 'building vibrant and tolerant democracies'.¹¹

Popper conceived of open society as the ideal at one end of a continuum that has closed society at the opposite end. It is crucial to remember that Popper wrote of the open society and its enemies and he devoted more attention to the enemies he identified such as totalitarianism, historicism and utopianism than he did to explaining the conceptual basis of open society. Thus Popper offers a fuller description of closed society than he does of open society. He describes a closed society as resembling 'a herd or tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress'.¹² Popper's methodological and normative individualism make him suspicious of what he terms tribal communities and structures but it is not at all clear that things such as sharing common efforts and dangers are inherently tribal activities. After all, the welfare states that Popper praises are predicated on the basis of shared effort and insurance.¹³

In Popper's conception open society is markedly more abstract than the closed alternative and he suggests that 'it may, to a considerable extent, lose the character of a concrete or real group of men, or of a system of such real groups'.¹⁴ It is not entirely clear what Popper means by this but insofar as he merely implies a level of abstraction beyond the face to face interaction of a small tribe then nation states can qualify as abstract societies on this basis. One of the important aims of my thesis is

¹⁰ <http://www.soros.org/>

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1- The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge, 1984, p.173

¹³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.125.

¹⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.174.

to develop a richer, fuller description and explanation of open society than that offered by Popper. Examining open society in relation to nation states turns out to be a useful way of doing this.

Whilst pointing to discrepancies, ambiguities and deficiencies in Popper's political philosophy and defence of open society, the intent remains to develop his philosophy by highlighting a potentially wider range of application for the principles of open society than Popper recognised. In a sense my task is to reengage Popper's liberal political philosophy with nationalism and the nation state. Doing so opens up new possibilities to advance and defend open societies, and suggests the utility of the nation state as a framework for instituting open societies in the early part of the twenty-first century. Popper's political philosophy is shown to be of continued relevance to deliberations on the nature and future development of forms of political community. It makes sense for any such deliberation to take, for the moment, the nation state as a starting premise given its enduring basis as the foundation of the international political order. The remainder of this introductory chapter will provide a brief overview of subsequent chapters and conclude the opening statement of the aims and objectives of the inquiry into Popper's political philosophy.

1.2 The Conservative and Liberal Aspects of Popper's Philosophy

Chapter two explores the liberal and conservative elements that together give ideological definition and contours to Popper's philosophy. Those elements are developed in both Popper's philosophy of science and his political philosophy and have implications for the approach that Popper takes to questions of reform and how it should be conducted. The analysis of the Popperian methodology of reform is intended to pave the way for subsequent analysis of the concept of open society. The purpose of chapter two is not to seek to attribute a particular and definitive ideological label to Popper but rather to begin to examine key concepts in Popper's philosophy, such as political reform and change, and understand more broadly the potential bases for seeking to apply those concepts.

Popper himself was not inclined to essentialism and was relatively unperturbed by the assignment of labels.¹⁵ In fact he was quite explicit that we should give up the view that ‘in every single thing there is an essence’.¹⁶ I do not attempt therefore to uncover either a liberal or conservative essential core to Popper’s theorising. Instead, the interest in Popper’s ideological orientation lies in examining the extent to which that orientation may have an influence in guiding political action and decision-making. This is of particular importance when applied to contemporary questions and challenges surrounding the nation state and its future as a form of political community. If, as this thesis contends, the nation state can be a suitable host for open society then the prospect of a conservative defence of the nation state, at least of liberal nation states, becomes a viable, practical political project from a Popperian perspective. The suggestion is not made here that Popper was a conservative. He described himself as a liberal¹⁷ and reasonably so, but his was a conservative liberalism and it is useful to consider the enduring effect of that conservative element to Popper’s thought when reflecting upon its applicability to debates on sovereignty, interventionism and the changing nature of the state which have come to the fore in political and theoretical discourse during the final decade of the previous century and the first decade of this century.

In putting Popper’s philosophy under an ideological lens chapter two concludes by drawing upon the work of John Gray who has written at length on the evolution of the liberal tradition. At the outset it is useful to acknowledge Gray’s view that ‘whereas liberalism has no single, unchanging nature or essence, it has a set of distinctive features which exhibits its modernity and at the same time marks it off from other modern intellectual traditions and their associated political movements’.¹⁸ Gray discerns a ‘single tradition’ composing a specific conception of man and

¹⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.13.

¹⁶ Karl Popper, “The Aim of Science”, in Popper, K (ed.), *Objective Knowledge*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, p.195.

¹⁷ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.160.

¹⁸ John Gray, *Liberalism*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995, p.xi.

society.¹⁹ Part I of the thesis looks in detail at Popper's conception of man and society, and the relationship between the two.

The central tenets of liberalism outlined by Gray help to set parameters of the discussion in chapter two along with the sketch of conservatism as 'maintenance of the social ecology' offered in recent work by Roger Scruton.²⁰ Scruton defends conservatism as inherently local in opposition to the global aims of liberalism and seeks to mount a specific defence 'of some pocket of social capital against the forces of anarchic change'.²¹ This thesis inquires as to the social ecology of Popper's open society and the extent to which it can be a localised rather than globalised concept. Scruton expresses the aim of mounting a 'qualified defence of the nation state' on the basis of his conservative philosophy.²² His book does not recognise Popper as a potential ally in that task but this thesis suggests that he could be. Chapter two lays the initial ground for the building of that argument.

It is important to note that Popper was a philosopher of science prior to turning his attention to politics and his scientific philosophy had a significant influence on the development of his political philosophy.²³ It is for this reason that chapter two opens by looking at Popper's philosophy of science and the logic of discovery that underpins it. After outlining the central components of Popper's philosophy of science and what he perceives to be the nature of scientific community, the critique of his position developed by Thomas Kuhn is introduced. The comparison of the Popperian and Kuhnian philosophies of science serves two useful purposes. The first is to examine the difference between liberal and conservative approaches to science and the implications for politics that can be derived from them. Secondly, the nature of change in the world of science is highlighted by Kuhn and parallels can be drawn from this in relation to the nature of political change which is crucial to

¹⁹ Gray, *Liberalism*, p.xiii.

²⁰ Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy – Arguments for Conservatism*, London: Continuum, 2006, p.ix.

²¹ Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.ix.

²² Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.ix.

²³ Steve Fuller, *Kuhn vs. Popper, Popper – The Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003, p.26.

developing an understanding of open society and the prospects of fostering open societies across the world.

The chapter continues to a discussion of Popper's notion of critical rationalism as both a methodological and moral doctrine. A question is raised in this section of chapter two as to the extent to which Popper treats critical rationalism as a tradition to be conserved. It is worth noting at the outset that for Popper, 'true rationalism is the rationalism of Socrates' and that reason 'grows by way of mutual criticism'.²⁴ Out of this discussion the question arises of how critical rationalism is to be embedded and preserved. Addressing this question shifts the emphasis of the chapter towards Popper's political theorising.

The scene is then set to consider the concept of piecemeal social engineering which represents Popper's attempt to transfer his methodology of scientific research to politics, and the conduct of political reform in particular. A conservative element to Popper's political philosophy can be glimpsed in the concept of piecemeal social engineering. Popper defines this method as the method of trial and error. He suggests that 'the kind of experiment from which we can learn most is the alteration of one social institution at a time' in order to avoid the risks inherent in large-scale and revolutionary projects whereby the outcomes are decidedly uncertain. The chapter serves as an important starting point in tracing the roots of some of the ambiguities that complicate Popper's account of open society.

1.3 Political Community in Popper's Philosophy

Chapter three raises the question of the possible boundaries of open society and the implications for attempts to apply Popper's version of liberalism. The chapter begins with an examination of the institutional and structural aspects of open society to provide a comprehensive picture of the concept that can then serve as a backdrop to

²⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.227.

the consideration of the nature of political community from a Popperian perspective. This allows for the investigation of open society as a framework and that investigation is made a comparative one via reference to communitarian and pluralist alternatives. In this way a fuller understanding can be reached as to the bases on which Popper would declare a society or state open rather than closed. The question of the boundaries of political community is shown to be relevant to this study and in relation to Popper's account, influenced by the interplay of the conservative and liberal elements of his philosophy.

The account of open society as a political community that emerges from the initial section of the chapter is then scrutinised through the communitarian critique of liberalism set out by Michael Sandel. At this point the conservative aspect to Popper's liberalism is shown to aid him in defending open society from communitarian criticism. The notion of moral community that Popper outlines forms a constitutive part of the investigation undertaken in chapter three. In a Popperian sense, communitarianism serves as a test for open society revealing both strengths and weaknesses. Viewing open society from a communitarian perspective enhances the argument as to the compatibility of open society and the nation state.

The communitarian test of open society is followed by a pluralist test in the form of the post-liberal position defended by John Gray. The pluralist philosophy of Gray poses challenges to both liberalism and communitarianism and so has considerable utility as a comparative framework here. Gray bases his theorising on a conception of value pluralism and contends that no one political regime can make a privileged claim on reason.²⁵ Popper of course seeks to make just such a claim for open society and the chapter concludes that Popperian liberalism passes both the communitarian and pluralist tests. The chapter does highlight however that open society cannot avoid confronting questions of community and part of the work of the chapter is to address the relative lack of reflection on the nature of political community in Popper's theorising.

²⁵ John Gray, *Post-Liberalism – Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.312.

1.4 Opening the Nation State

The fourth chapter takes a fresh look at the nation state from a Popperian perspective and in doing so seeks to re-conceptualise Popper's liberalism. Such a task is not quite as difficult as might be imagined because the concept of the nation state lurks as a hidden assumption in Popper's general political philosophy and his theory of open society in particular. In this chapter the nation state is shown to be both a potential and an actual locus and host of open society. By engaging with the political ideology of nationalism Popperians can focus attention on using the concept of open society as an ideal against which particular nation states can be judged. This highlights that nation states are not inherently hostile to open society but can be variously more or less open in the way that they are constituted.

The initial section of the chapter focuses primarily on Yael Tamir's theory of liberal nationalism, along with that outlined by David Miller and Joseph Raz, in comparison with Popper's liberalism. Such a contrast illustrates considerably more convergences than divergences and calls into question much of Popper's scepticism towards nationalism. Popper's dismissal of nationalism is shown to be somewhat superficial and a more nuanced understanding of differing variants of nationalism invites affinity between open societies and nation states. Tamir successfully demonstrates that nationalism need not be diametrically opposed to liberalism.

The next section of the chapter turns from the theory of liberal nationalism to the attempted application of a liberal worldview. The worldview at issue is that outlined by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in his famous speech on liberal interventionism, delivered a decade ago in Chicago. Blair argues that the international community is entitled, in certain circumstances, to uphold liberal principles of democracy and human rights where they are threatened by repressive or authoritarian regimes. In many respects Blair is laying out a doctrine for the international defence of open societies and in chapter four I seek to examine the

extent to which the Blair doctrine could be endorsed by Popperians. Blair's liberal interventionism is predicated on the notion of national sovereignty and so the focus is sustained as to the relationship between nation states and open society.

The following section of the chapter brings together the theoretical and practical elements explored in the earlier sections by examining the contribution made by George Soros in his philanthropic efforts to advance the cause of open society. Whilst in no way a nationalist, Soros is far more willing than Popper to acknowledge the compatibility of open societies and nation states. He also provides a more detailed account of the criteria that can be utilised in determining the extent to which a particular society is open rather than closed. Like Blair, Soros also sets out a doctrine of liberal internationalism and this is examined as part of chapter four.

The conclusion of the chapter returns to the initial issue of the nature of nationalism and the nuances of different variants. A distinction is drawn between positive and negative types of nationalism and whilst open society can reach no accommodation with negative nationalism the same cannot be said of positive nationalism. By acknowledging the existence of different variants of nationalist ideology, and thus different variants of nation states, the concepts of open society and the nation state can be brought into closer proximity.

1.5 The European Union's Relationship to Open Society

The final of the main chapters looks at open society in the context of the European Union and the process of European integration. The question of the potential opportunities and threats presented to the concept of open society by the development of the EU is raised and addressed in the theorising of chapter five. The level of cooperation between nation states that has been instrumental in the creation and maintenance of the EU holds out the prospect of cooperative endeavours in support of open society. Threats are evident at the European level however in terms of the democratic and accountability deficits that continue to constitute a problematic

for supranational institutions. The nature of governance at a supranational level is also examined in order to determine the extent to which it satisfies the requirements of open society. The issue of sovereignty remains relevant here and as the creators of the European Union, nation states continue to be a central category of analysis.

The future prospects for the nation state, and the relationship between national political community and open society, is then explored by way of Habermas's vision of an emergent post-national constellation. Habermasian political philosophy has broad parallels with that of Popper, particularly in the way that each regards a critical form of rationality as providing a basis for an abstracted form of political community. The merit of engaging with the work of Habermas here is due to the explicit position he takes in relation to the nation state in terms of the crisis he posits it to be experiencing.

After taking account of the post-national constellation, Soros' idea of the European Union as a prototype for a global open society is considered. Whilst this would suggest a strong cosmopolitan orientation to Soros' thought it is shown that any such orientation on his part is held and pursued moderately. Soros continues to view the nation state and national sovereignty as the foundational elements of international political order. This means that he theorises, advocates, and seeks to develop open societies within the context provided by the nation state and the role that he envisages for the European Union is explored in chapter five. Doing so ensures that the relationship between the nation state and open society is considered in a context whereby the concept of sovereignty is evolving.

1.6 The Continuity between Popper's Earlier and Later Works

This thesis argues that Popper's dismissal of the nation state as a form of political community was unduly hasty. His disregard for national politics stems from the attitude he took toward nationalism. Popper regarded nationalism as a tribal ideology and viewed it as being fundamentally at odds with his liberal vision of open

society. He did not recognise that nationalism, just like liberalism, is capable of being interpreted in a variety of different ways. Once this possibility is recognised however, then it becomes apparent that not all variants of nationalism are inherently hostile to liberal principles such as that of open society. Indeed, Yael Tamir makes the case that there is a defensible liberal version of nationalism that combines elements of the two ideological positions.²⁶

Just as nationalism as a concept is potentially open to varying interpretation²⁷ so too is Popper's political philosophy itself. In particular, it is worth pausing to reflect briefly on the question of the coherence of Popper's philosophy as a whole, and more specifically over time between his earlier and later works. Is there evidence to suggest a distinction between Popper's political philosophy as outlined in his early writings on the subject such as the two volumes on *Open Society* and that which appears in the theorising of texts such as *Conjectures and Refutations* which was published some considerable time after Popper initially set out his approach to politics?²⁸ It should come as little surprise that a philosopher's work will evolve gradually over the course of a lifetime's thinking and writing. In this sense then, it is possible to detect in Popper's theorising some subtle shifts of degree and emphasis in terms of his political philosophy. His treatment of the concept of tradition serves as a useful illustration here.

In the essay "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", contained within *Conjectures and Refutations*, Popper speaks of the 'need for tradition in social life' as a source of regularities in life to prevent the anxiousness and frustration that he associates with disorder.²⁹ Popper even goes on to refer to the need for traditions to provide a regulatory aspect to social life 'whether or not they are in other respects rational or

²⁶ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*

²⁷ For an introduction to a wide range of theories of nationalism see Hutchison J & Smith A (eds.), *Nationalism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994.

²⁸ Lessnoff notes that the two volumes of *Open Society* were first published in 1945 whilst *Conjectures and Refutations* appeared in 1963 and includes important elaboration of Popper's political philosophy. Lessnoff, "Karl Popper: Critical Rationalism and Open Society", p.177.

²⁹ Karl Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", in *Conjectures and Refutations*, London: Routledge, 1963, p.130.

necessary or good'.³⁰ This displays a greater acceptance of the role of tradition than that he accorded it in *Open Society* where he insisted that all traditions must be judged rationally 'according to their influence upon individuals'.³¹ Popper's seemingly greater accommodation of tradition in his later work however does not constitute a radical departure from his earlier views in which he recognised the importance of traditions in calling for studies 'of the way in which new traditions may be created, and of the way in which traditions work and break down'.³² Latterly, Popper appears to suggest the necessity of traditions in the provision of social order but crucially he still contends that they can, and should, be criticised and changed in accordance with his piecemeal social engineering methodology.³³ On the question of the role of traditions in social life, the 'later' Popper places a subtly greater emphasis on the extent to which traditions can help anchor individuals but does not grant them immunity from rational examination. He therefore maintains a broadly consistent position with that established in his earlier work.

More generally, and more importantly in the context of this thesis, is the consistency that Popper displays in seeking to defend his conception of open society throughout all his writings on political philosophy. As is discussed in subsequent chapters, Popper defends western liberal (nation) states as examples of open society and western civilisation as the birthplace of open society. He does so in *Open Society*³⁴ and continues this same defence in his intellectual autobiography *In Search of a Better World* in which he asserts that the citizens of western democracies enjoy a social order that is better and more just than any other in history.³⁵

Part of the purpose of this thesis is to provide a clearer account of what open society is, and the nature of community required to sustain it, than that outlined by Popper. Popper devoted considerable care and attention to historicism and utopianism for

³⁰ Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", p.130.

³¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.226.

³² Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge, 1972, p.149.

³³ Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", p.131.

³⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.171.

³⁵ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, Routledge: London, 1992, p.13.

example as enemies of open society but less so to a positive vision of open society itself beyond broad notions of democracy and a degree of economic egalitarianism. That general account of open society is constant however when Popper's political philosophy is considered as a whole and it is on that basis that for the purposes of this thesis I am content to treat Popper's body of work as unified and consistent in respect of its treatment of open society as a theoretical, and indeed practical, concept. There is therefore no particular distinction made in this work between an 'earlier' and a 'later' Popper but that is not to suggest that such a distinction would be entirely unwarranted in all circumstances.

1.7 Open Nationalism – Issues under Discussion

In concluding this introductory chapter it is important to set the parameters of the thesis and make clear which issues are and which issues are not under discussion. The thesis aims to rearticulate Popperian liberalism to highlight the compatibility of Popper's concept of open society and the nation state as a form of political community. In arguing that nationalism need not necessarily be an enemy of open society the thesis opens up space for the application of Popper's political theory to debates on the future of the nation state and attendant matters such as liberal interventionism, post or supranational political communities and developments, as well as the prospects for realising in today's world what Popper terms the 'rational unity' of humankind.³⁶

The two part approach taken in the thesis of firstly covering the theoretical ground in reassessing Popper's liberalism in the context of the nation state prior to applying that theoretical perspective to practical questions of *inter-national* politics is designed to ensure that aims posited above are met in a way that accords with a Popperian approach to social science which stresses the need to identify and resolve concrete problems.³⁷ The bridge between the theoretical and the practical here is in part built upon the notion of critical rationality that Popper outlined and the

³⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.243.

³⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.222.

implications of that, often underappreciated by him, in terms of the nature of political community. In particular the thesis raises the question as to whether it makes sense for Popperian critical rationalists to conserve the nation state as a form of political community given that it appears to offer no severely inherent theoretical or practical impediment to the development of open societies. The argument is advanced here that the pursuit of the goal of a world comprised of open societies does not require the overthrowing of a nationally-based framework of politics.

This thesis then is concerned with the utility of Popper's open society as an explanatory and potentially exemplary model in seeking to understand the endurance of the nation state and nationalism as animating political concepts. It is not an attempt to reconstruct Popper's entire political philosophy nor is the aim specifically to propose a range of ways in which societies that remain closed, in a Popperian sense, can be opened up. To some extent, the task undertaken is somewhat more modest than that in illustrating that potential reform beyond or away from the nation state runs the risk of endangering already established open societies. Furthermore, by considering open society from the perspective of the nation state, the relevance of Popper's work to a number of debates becomes more readily apparent than it otherwise would be. On issues such as liberal interventionism and the development of the European Union, the purpose of the discussion is not to cover all angles of the debates that pertain to them but rather demonstrate the particular contribution that a Popperian liberalism, based on a fuller positive account of open society, can make to those debates.

The title of the thesis introduces the term 'open nationalism'. What is meant by this? One way to distinguish between variants of nationalism is to identify two broad interpretations as positive and negative and this is the approach adopted by John Ralston Saul. He contrasts a positive civic version of the concept with a negative ethnic alternative. Whilst positive nationalism strives to be inclusive negative nationalism is based on exclusion.³⁸ In Popperian language we might distinguish

³⁸ John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism*, London: Atlantic Books, 2005, p.245.

between open nationalism and closed nationalism. The exclusionary and tribal nature of closed nationalism is the only form of nationalism that Popper could conceive of and so he dismissed it as an enemy of open society. This thesis posits that open nationalism is not an enemy of open society. It does not automatically follow that it is therefore a friend but it can at least be an acquaintance and companion.

Part I – Re-examining Popper’s Philosophy

2

Popper's Conservative Liberalism

2.1 Introduction – Popper and Ideological Orientation

This chapter explores Popper's philosophies of science and politics. In doing so account is taken of the ways in which they diverge and cohere, particularly with regard to ideological orientation. By ideological orientation I mean the extent to which an enduring tendency of thought or inclination can be discerned as underpinning his philosophical investigations.

One hypothesis that I seek to test in this chapter is that Popper's philosophy, especially when considered as a whole in its scientific and political guises, exhibits both liberal and conservative ideological orientations. The purpose of this initial test is to bring greater clarity to subsequent assessments of Popper's approach to political change and the conception of open society that he set out as a normative political model. By first surveying the broader ideological outlines of Popperian philosophy, surer steps can then be taken in applied theorising that attempts to utilise concepts such as open society in understanding the contemporary political circumstance that is the endurance and, arguably, resurgence of the nation state.¹

Popper was an implacable opponent of nationalism and yet as we shall see later in the chapter, and further in chapter four, his open society, or open state as I term it, was very much framed in the context of the nation state. This leads me to two further questions to be addressed in this thesis: 1, does the open society offer a template for political reform away from, or beyond, the nation state? 2, is it possible that despite Popper's thorough aversion to nationalism, his concept of the open

¹ Roger Scruton, for example, has recently argued that accession states to the EU from Eastern Europe, and indeed Turkey, in a bid to protect their sovereignty and 'ratify' their nation state status. Roger Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2006, p.31.

society can be reconciled with that of the nation state? To put it slightly differently, I am interested in the extent to which Popper theorised open society as opposed to many different open societies. Following on from that, the question also emerges as to the extent to which he was a cosmopolitan thinker.

Andrew Vincent detects a latent cosmopolitanism in Popper's philosophy but suggests that it was an idea that he failed to work out in any great detail.² The next chapter will undertake a wider consideration of the boundaries, if any, that might be thought to attach to open society. For now it suffices to observe that a cosmopolitan strand can be evinced in Popperian philosophy and that the process of doing so is aided by a preliminary inquiry as to the ideological basis of that philosophy.

The starting point of my inquiry in this chapter is the philosophy of science that Popper developed and the 'logic of discovery' that he held to underpin it. The purpose of my efforts to unravel the liberal and conservative elements of Popper's philosophy is to permit an analysis of the open society concept and its possible limitations both as a theoretical device and normative ideal. Insofar as the open society, and the philosophical approach that it represents, was conceived by Popper as being, at least in part, an antidote to nationalism, was he perhaps too hasty in dismissing the nation state? In arguing that nation states can satisfy Popperian criteria to qualify as open societies, I suggest that he was.

After an opening examination of the basic tenets of Popper's philosophy of science and the nature of the scientific community as he perceives it, attention will turn to the critique of this approach developed by Thomas Kuhn. A comparative analysis of Popper and Kuhn's philosophies of science will facilitate the exploration of two lines of inquiry. Firstly, it will help to highlight the liberal-conservative aspects that in part divide the respective philosophers as well as complicating Popper's own

² Andrew Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism", in Jarvie et al (eds.), *Karl Popper: A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006, p.169.

philosophy.³ Secondly, Kuhn's work brings to the fore the issue of the nature of change as it applies to the scientific world but this also has clear parallels, at least in Popper's case, with regard to the nature and conduct of political change. The initial section of the chapter draws to a close with a consideration of Kuhn's psychology of research in comparison with Popper's logic of discovery, a contrast that is thought by Fuller to hinge on the question of the extent to which science, and scientific endeavour, is rooted in the world.⁴ This is a question that will be shown to get to the heart of the divergences between liberal and conservative philosophies, and the complexities posed to a single philosophical position that seeks to contain them.

Thereafter the focus shifts to take a closer look at Popper's concept of critical rationalism. This begins to herald the move from science to politics since critical rationality is central to the way in which Popper theorises both. It is, in Popperian philosophy, simultaneously a methodological and a moral doctrine. This is true for the manner in which he conceptualises politics as well as science. One of the key questions that I raise in this section is the extent to which critical rationalism is to be regarded as a tradition that Popper wishes to conserve along with being a vision of rationality that he attempts to liberate and distinguish from other approaches. Having introduced the concept of critical rationality and subjected it to scrutiny the issues of embedding and preserving it in democratic states can then be addressed further in later chapters.

The consideration of critical rationalism is informed by Michael Oakeshott's work on rationalism in politics.⁵ Oakeshott's conservative philosophy has a number of key points of both convergence and divergence with Popper's liberalism and constitutes a useful comparative framework for exploring both liberalism and conservatism in Popper's philosophies of science and politics. Oakeshott's account of tradition and

³ The divide to which I allude is referred to, albeit in slightly different terms, by Fuller who labels Kuhn 'authoritarian' and Popper 'libertarian' in their attitudes to science. Steve Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper – The Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003, p.13.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.126.

⁵ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1962.

practical knowledge help to shed light on the extent to which Popper takes a conservative approach to the concept of critical rationality and seeks to defend it as tradition.

The discussion of critical rationality paves the way for a fuller investigation as to the nature and conduct of political change from a Popperian perspective. Popper's notion of piecemeal social engineering becomes crucial at this point and represents the boldest effort he makes to apply his methodology of scientific research and discovery to the social and political spheres. This effort is at once bold and conservative as it highlights his aversion to radical change in the domain of politics. Popper warns of the dangers of utopian planning and blueprints whilst I seek to assess how close this takes him to conservatism. In the final part of the section on political change I transfer the analysis to the level of political community.

2.2 Science and the Logic of Discovery

Karl Popper's most famous work in the philosophy of science is entitled 'The Logic of Scientific Discovery' and thus the title makes clear that it is indeed the subject of discovery, of scientific revelation, with which he is primarily engaged. The recognition of this is important because it subtly illustrates the attitude that Popper takes towards science; not only does science enable the discovery of things but there is an identifiable logic that guides the way in which scientific practice should be pursued. It is significant also that the book should be called 'The Logic' of scientific discovery rather than 'The Logics' for this denotes Popper's belief that there is a single unitary method of science rather than a multiplicity of such.

Falsificationism and Popper's Philosophy of Science

The formulation of Popper's philosophy of science can be seen as a project of overturning attempts to found the method of science on the support given to theories and generalisations by experience and corroborative observations. The key problem encountered by any such method is the problem of induction. Induction is a process

of reasoning that derives empirical conclusions from empirical premises but conclusions that are not deductively entailed by those premises. The premises may indeed provide a degree of supporting evidence for the conclusions reached but for Popper, the problem of induction raises the question of whether or under what conditions inductive inferences can be justified.⁶

Popper suggests that inductive inferences pass from ‘singular statements’, an observation for example, to ‘universal statements’ such as theories.⁷ He concludes that inductive inferences cannot be justified logically ‘for any conclusion drawn in this way may always turn out to be false: no matter how many instances of white swans we may have observed, this does not justify the conclusion that *all* swans are white’.⁸ Popper acknowledges his debt to Hume in addressing the matter of induction and shares with Hume the insight that the principle of induction breaks down because it leads to a process of ‘infinite regress’ whereby each inductive inference must be justified by reference to another.⁹

Having taken the view that the problems of inductive logic are ‘insurmountable’ Popper proceeds to elaborate his own theory that stands ‘directly opposed’ to inductivism.¹⁰ He describes his approach as ‘the theory of *the deductive method of testing*, or as the view that a hypothesis can only be empirically *tested* – and only *after* it has been advanced’.¹¹ Popper advances here his solution to the problem of induction and indeed the pivotal plank of his philosophy of science. By replacing the inductive method with the deductive method Popper sought to outline a logic of discovery that demonstrated the particular manner in which science could make progress. The particular manner of that progress is to be found in the fact that the

⁶ Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London: Routledge, 2002, p.4.

⁷ *Ibid*, p.3.

⁸ *Ibid*, p.4.

⁹ *Ibid*, p.5. Hume himself puts it that ‘there is nothing in any object, considered in itself, which can afford us a reason for drawing a conclusion beyond it; and ... even after the observation of the frequent or constant conjunction of objects, we have no reason to draw any inference concerning any object beyond those of which we have had experience’.

David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, p.189.

¹⁰ Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, p.6.

¹¹ Popper, *Logic*, p.7.

‘falsity’ of universal statements can be derived from single statements deductively; thus a single observation of a black swan falsifies the statement that all swans are white and simultaneously permits the universal statement that not all swans are white.¹²

This breakthrough that Popper has made is to introduce the concept of falsificationism into the methodology of science. Popper’s theory is that science proceeds by a process of trial and error with the bold propounding of hypotheses that are then subject to empirical testing. Those that survive the test, in the sense that they have not been ‘falsified’ by it, are not thereby verified but are instead corroborated for the time being and with the crucial caveat that subsequent tests may indeed falsify the specific hypothesis under examination.¹³ By progressing deductively Popper holds that science can avoid the problem of induction and also therefore avoid the need to assume that ‘by the force of verified conclusions, theories can be established as true, or even as merely probable’.¹⁴ The ‘truth’ of a scientific theory for Popper then is only ever provisional and always subject to the possibility of future falsifying in the light of some new test or observable instance.

It is worth noting at this point Fuller’s insight in suggesting that most of Popper’s ‘positive views were really negative ones in disguise: his deductivism was anti-inductivism, his liberalism was anti-authoritarianism, his individualism anti-holism’.¹⁵ This characteristic not only anchors his work in the philosophy of science but also provides a guiding influence for his political philosophy. It also partly explains some of the ambiguities of Popper’s work that I am concerned with insofar as he was, for example, less preoccupied with developing a theory of liberalism than with highlighting the dangers of authoritarianism.

Part of Popper’s intention in employing the falsification criterion to explain the

¹² Popper, *Logic*, p.19.

¹³ Popper, *Logic* p. 10.

¹⁴ Popper, *Logic*, p. 10.

¹⁵ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.142.

methodology of science was in order to provide a clear demarcation between the scientific and the non-scientific. This is part of his initial project to dethrone induction from a sovereign position in science and he makes this plain in stating that ‘not the verifiability but the falsifiability of a system is to be taken as a criterion of demarcation’.¹⁶ Hypotheses, and theories built upon them, that do not render themselves testable (that are not formulated in such a way as to make inter-subjective testing possible) are thus excluded from the realm of science and scientific activity. Popper elaborates his position in the following manner:

‘I shall not require of a scientific system that it shall be capable of being singled out, once and for all, in a positive sense; but I shall require that its logical form shall be such that it can be singled out, by means of empirical tests, in a negative sense: *it must be possible for an empirical scientific system to be refuted by experience*’.¹⁷

Popper suggests that this demarcating line renounces the requirement for all empirical scientific statements to be ‘conclusively decidable’¹⁸ and as such constitutes an advance on the inductivist position.

Popper shows himself here to be concerned with the procedure as well as the content of scientific practice and his philosophy of science sets out a procedural guide for both hypothesis framing (singular statements that can serve as premises in falsifying inferences)¹⁹ and testing (a Darwinian process whereby competing theories are submitted to inter-subjective tests).²⁰ The procedural aspect to Popperian philosophy and the demarcation line drawn between science and non-science will be seen to be significant in looking at his political philosophy. Popper’s open society in politics is a largely, and consciously, procedural guide to political action and reform whilst his mistrust of ideological ‘pseudo-science’ stems from the falsification procedure that

¹⁶ Popper, *Logic of Scientific Discovery*, p.18.

¹⁷ Popper, *Logic*, p. 18.

¹⁸ Popper, *Logic*, p.20.

¹⁹ Popper, *Logic*, p.21.

²⁰ Popper, *Logic*, p.91, Popper contends that ‘we choose the theory which best holds its own in competition with other theories; the one which, *by natural selection, proves itself the fittest to survive*’ (my italics).

he developed in the scientific domain.²¹

The Problem of Observation

Popper's falsificationist account of science is not without its detractors and before engaging with the more general critique of the Popperian approach that Kuhn outlines I shall firstly consider the specific problem of observation raised by Chalmers in respect of falsificationism. His objections lie in what he describes as the fallibility of observation statements.²²

Chalmers argues that observation statements are fallible in the sense that it is difficult for a scientist to be sure that what they observe is an accurate reflection of reality and not potentially distorted by the act of observation itself. He goes on to suggest that:

'consequently, if a universal statement or complex of universal statements constituting a theory ... clashes with some observation statement, it may be the observation statement that is at fault. Nothing in the logic of the situation requires that it should always be the theory that is rejected on the occasion of a clash with observation'.²³

Whilst Popper readily admits the fallibility of hypotheses and theories Chalmers wonders if he is prepared to extend the same doubt to observation itself.

Popper acknowledges the difficulties of ensuring a secure and reliable observational basis for science but thinks that the sort of criticism offered by Chalmers begins from the wrong place. For Popper, the epistemological question that matters is not on what does our knowledge rest but rather how do we test scientific statements by their deductive consequences?²⁴ It is precisely because we cannot be sure upon what our knowledge rests that testing and, it emerges, inter-subjective testing becomes so valuable. Popper argues that testable events must be observable events and testable

²¹ Frederic Raphael, *Popper*, London: Phoenix, 1998, p.9.

²² Alan F. Chalmers, *What is this thing called science?*, Open University Press, 1982, p.58.

²³ Chalmers, *What is this thing*, p.60.

²⁴ Popper, *Logic*, p.79.

‘inter-subjectively’.²⁵ The experimental tests that an individual scientist devises must be capable of being repeated by ‘anyone who has learned the relevant technique’.²⁶ This means that the problem of observation can be at least mitigated inter-subjectively. Furthermore, the observation problem applies both to induction and deduction and so Popper’s concern is to formulate a method for dealing with such uncertainty rather than eliminating it entirely.

Paradigms and the Logic of Science

A more systematic critique of Popper’s theorising of science is offered by the philosophical investigations pursued by Thomas Kuhn. In ‘The Structure of Scientific Revolutions’,²⁷ Kuhn sets out a philosophy of science that differs to that of Popper’s in a number of important respects. Foremost among these differences are the procedures by which scientific inquiry is conducted, the nature of the scientific community itself and the logic thought to underpin it. In this section I shall sketch a brief overview of Kuhnian philosophy highlighting the features outlined above before moving to a closer comparison of Popper and Kuhn’s work. In doing so I attempt to show not only the existence of a liberal-conservative dividing line between Popper and Kuhn but also the emergence of a similar, if more faint, such line within Popper’s philosophy.

Kuhn’s primary task is to elucidate what he terms ‘normal science’, the ordinary, everyday activity that scientists find themselves engaged in. He suggests that ‘normal science means research firmly based upon one or more past scientific achievements, achievements that some particular scientific community acknowledges for a time as supplying the foundation for its further practice’.²⁸ Several elements of this description are noteworthy at the outset. Firstly, Kuhn reveals something of a conservative approach with an immediate reference to the ‘past’ as the basis for present research. Secondly, he argues that previous

²⁵ Popper, *Logic*, p.84.

²⁶ Popper, *Logic*, p.81.

²⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

²⁸ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.10.

achievements become foundational at least for a period of time and thirdly he introduces a notion of particularism by mention of ‘some particular scientific community’. Popper’s falsification methodology by contrast is intended to be timeless, anti-foundational and designed to serve as a guide to the scientific community as a whole, indeed to demarcate that community and its practice from others.

The past scientific achievements that serve as a basis for ongoing work and development, Kuhn terms paradigms. He elaborates to say that ‘a paradigm is an accepted model or pattern’ and that it is ‘like an accepted judicial decision in the common law ... an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions’.²⁹ For Kuhn then, a given paradigm provides the foundations for the practice of science by a particular group of scientists who both recognise it and adhere to it. Within the security of a paradigm, researchers find a common pattern of work as well as common standards for the adjudication of knowledge claims.³⁰

Normal science can thus be regarded as scientific practice incubated by a particular paradigmatic structure or research programme whereby the practice consists in articulating, refining and investigating the ‘puzzles’, as Kuhn terms them, prompted by the research paradigm itself.³¹ What is interesting about this procedure is the extent to which the paradigm assumes a taken for granted quality in the conduct of normal science and that one of the characteristics of normal science is a lack of disagreement over fundamentals.³² Kuhn recognises this quality inherent in paradigms³³ and suggests that the breakdown and disruption of periods of normal science is heralded by emergent disagreement over fundamentals that had previously gone unquestioned.

²⁹ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.23.

³⁰ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.19.

³¹ Kuhn, *Structures*, p.36.

³² Chalmers, *What is this thing?*, p.92.

³³ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.37.

He argues that whilst normal research problems do not usually produce major conceptual or phenomenal novelties they nevertheless represent tests of skill and ingenuity as well as making a contribution to extending the scope and precision of scientific knowledge.³⁴ Periods of normal science tend not to endure however because eventually anomalies begin to appear between the paradigm and the anticipated results of puzzle solving.

‘When scientists disagree about whether the fundamental problems of their field have been solved, the search for rules gains a function that it does not ordinarily possess. While paradigms remain secure, however, they can function without agreement over rationalisation or without any attempted rationalisation at all’.³⁵

This approach contrasts starkly with that of Popper who sought to lay down rules, those of falsification, that would inform and direct each and every instance of normal science. Moreover, Popper does not believe that fundamental problems can ever be solved, instead trial solutions can be proposed, tested, and perhaps corroborated albeit provisionally. Where Kuhn uses security almost in a psychological sense as bringing comfort, or at least providing assurance, to scientific practitioners Popper contends that the enterprise of science is fundamentally uncertain and that scientists must learn to risk the failure (by way of falsification) of their theories.

In Kuhn’s conception of science periods of normality are punctuated by episodic crises whereby cracks begin to appear in collectively assumed foundations as well as in the security that they had previously supplied to the scientists employing them. Upon a crisis becoming too acute for a particular paradigm to be sustained a revolutionary disruption follows as the crisis-ridden paradigm collapses and gives way to an alternative. Kuhn argues that this process is ‘far from cumulative’ and the transition to a new paradigm from which ‘a new tradition of normal science can emerge’ is neither a gradual process nor does it result from the extension of the old paradigm.³⁶

³⁴ Kuhn, *Structure*, pp. 35, 36, 52.

³⁵ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.48.

³⁶ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.84.

The description of traditions of normal science constitutes further evidence of the conservative thread woven into Kuhn's philosophy. Popper does not recognise traditions of this sort since for him the significant question is whether or not a statement belongs properly to the realm of science (by virtue of the falsification principle) rather than the ability to situate it within a particular tradition. From Kuhn's conservative perspective, the progress of science is heavily reliant on its past, and the traditions entailed by it, whereas Popper contends that advance is primarily made possible by adherence to procedural rules.

Far from being gradual however, the transition that Kuhn describes from an old to a new paradigm entails a radical re-alteration not only of the research programme but even of the method of scientific practice itself. Kuhn defines the structure of scientific revolutions as 'a reconstruction of the field from new fundamentals, a reconstruction that changes some of the field's most elementary theoretical generalizations as well as many of its paradigm methods and applications'.³⁷ This sets out the scale of the change and transformation as Kuhn sees it. Indeed, so great is the change, Kuhn is prepared to conclude that 'after a revolution scientists work in a different world'.³⁸

Popper would rule out this conclusion on the basis that his philosophy does not distinguish between different scientific worlds, or even in any significant sense between fields, but rather between the scientific world and the non-scientific world. Popper's falsificationism does not separate normal and revolutionary abnormal periods of science because all statements that are to be regarded as scientific must be formulated in hypotheses that are capable of being inter-subjectively tested. This has implications for the nature of scientific community as conceived by both Popper and Kuhn.

Conserving and Liberating the Scientific Community

The different approaches taken to science by Popper and Kuhn manifest themselves

³⁷ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.84.

³⁸ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.135.

in divergent conceptions of scientific community on the part of the respective philosophers. Fuller captures something of this divergence when he notes that ‘whereas actual scientific communities existed for Popper only as more or less corrupt versions of the scientific ideal, for Kuhn the scientific ideal is whatever has historically emerged as the dominant scientific communities’.³⁹ Looked at in this way Kuhn appears to be accounting for a historical process, that of recurring revolutionary spasms in the progress of science, whilst Popper attempts to construct a procedural ideal against which scientific practice can be evaluated.

For his part, Kuhn observes that in science ‘novelty emerges only with difficulty, manifested by resistance, against a background provided by expectation’.⁴⁰ This attests to the power of the paradigm in the Kuhnian conception and the extent to which it influences and constrains the activity that occurs within it. The expectation that Kuhn refers to is that provided by the paradigm and the paradigm itself is a historical construct that sets the parameters of current research. Popper attacks this approach, calling it ‘the logic of historical relativism’.⁴¹ In doing so he demonstrates his opposition to the Kuhnian notion that a scientific community should judge its efforts in relation to its own past achievements as established by a specific piece of historical research.

It is, in part, Kuhn’s conservatism that Popper is taking issue with here. The historical relativism that he perceives in Kuhn’s work can inhibit the application of the falsification principle by leading to an unquestioning acceptance of the pre-given paradigmatic structure. Popper argues that science ‘consists of bold conjectures, controlled by criticism, and that it may, therefore, be described as revolutionary’.⁴² The difference from Kuhn’s ‘revolutionary’ account of science is that Popper holds this revolutionary quality to be inherent in the scientific enterprise rather than an episodic quality denoting periodic crisis. The normal scientific task of the Kuhnian

³⁹ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.6.

⁴⁰ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.64.

⁴¹ Karl Popper, “Normal Science and its Dangers” in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970. p.55.

⁴² Popper, “Normal Science and its Dangers”, p.55.

scientist is the conservation and tradition-led development of the research paradigm; the normal scientific task of the Popperian scientist is the permanent revolution of hypothesis testing whereby novel attempts to overthrow a theory, if only to assess its ability to resist such attempts, constitute the ordinary practice of science.

The contrast between these two positions has particular consequences for the way in which Kuhn and Popper conceive of the nature of the scientific community. In Kuhn's view, a particular paradigm provides more than just a setting for scientific practice.

Those 'whose research is based on shared paradigms are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice. That commitment and the apparent consensus it produces are prerequisites for normal science, i.e., for the genesis and continuation of a particular research tradition'.⁴³

Scientific communities require shared commitments on this account, commitments that give rise to at least the appearance of consensus amongst the community. Indeed, given Kuhn's description of normal science it would seem likely that actual consensus would prevail whilst the paradigm remained secure. Kuhn in fact goes even further in describing the commitment to their paradigm that he attributes to scientists when he suggests that 'to desert the paradigm is to cease practicing the science it defines'.⁴⁴ It is precisely this sort of commitment, in its character and extent, that Popper believes scientists must liberate themselves from.

Only by doing so can they hope to take the critical attitude necessary for the inter-subjective testing of hypotheses. The shared rules and standards for scientific practice that Popper demands commitment to are those of science itself, in its falsificationist guise, and the community formed by those thus committed is *the* scientific community, distinct from other communities that do not practice science at all. Kuhn's paradigms demarcate particular scientific communities, each concerned with its own conservation. Popper sees no need for demarcation at this level as he

⁴³ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.11.

⁴⁴ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.34.

conceives of a universal scientific methodology applicable across all scientific disciplines and by all practitioners of science.

It is apparent on this basis that Popper's philosophy of science is a universal one in terms of being applicable to all scientists, at all times, and in all places. His objection to Kuhn's philosophy concerns its inclusion of a common framework (the paradigm) to mediate the practice of science. In particular Popper takes issue with the notion that scientific rationality is dependent on 'something like a common language and a common set of assumptions' and dismisses as 'dangerous dogma' any suggestion that 'different frameworks are like mutually untranslatable languages'.⁴⁵ For Popper, the rationality of science is not located within specific scientific communities but rather within the deductive methodology that he argues makes its practice possible. Popper seeks to defend his logic of discovery against what he terms Kuhn's 'psychology of research'.

The Logic of Discovery and the Psychology of Research

Popper's logic of (scientific) discovery is the deductive method of falsification as already discussed. In defending this position he attacks Kuhn for having developed a 'psychology of research' that enforces a commitment on the part of scientists to particular paradigms. Given, as we have seen, that Kuhn describes any renouncement of that commitment as an act of desertion then Popper is entitled to at least question the nature of the relationship between scientist, scientific community and the methodology of science.

It is on this basis that Popper dismisses the success of Kuhn's normal scientists for consisting 'entirely in showing that the ruling theory can be properly and satisfactorily applied'.⁴⁶ This fails to impress Popper because he views the task of science as being to question the ruling theory as severely as possible in order to determine that it can even begin to justify a ruling, or more modestly for Popperians, corroborated position. Any individual adopting Popper's methodology is in principle

⁴⁵ Popper, *Normal Science*, p.56.

⁴⁶ Popper, *Normal Science*, p.53.

capable of the questioning and testing that Popper advocates, they do not need to have assimilated into a particular tradition of normal scientific research conditioned by a specific paradigmatic framework.

In a bid to find an element of common ground with Popper, Kuhn proposes that they are 'both concerned with the dynamic process by which scientific knowledge is acquired rather than with the logical structure of the products of scientific research'.⁴⁷ This does not entirely accurately capture Popper's position however because in his view the products of scientific research will only present a logical structure if the logic of falsificationist methodology is employed.

Kuhn goes on to suggest that Popper is concerned 'with the logical spurs to knowledge rather than with the psychological drives of individuals'.⁴⁸ Popper would not be likely to dissent from this claim since he takes the logic of discovery to exist independently of the psychological drives of individuals. Indeed his philosophy of science can be read as an attempt to institutionalise his logic of discovery and give it a greater degree of formality than is implied by invoking the psychological drives of individuals. Popper seeks to avoid a position whereby an account of the psychological drives of individuals practicing science is taken to be an account of science itself. It is necessary in Popper's view to demarcate science from non-science by appeal to the logic of discovery. If appeal is permitted to psychological drives then the basis for distinguishing the scientific and non-scientific is eroded and dissolved.

The case against Kuhn's normal science and psychology of research is taken up by Watkins who suggests that 'Kuhn sees the scientific community on the analogy of a religious community and sees science as the scientist's religion'.⁴⁹ In other words,

⁴⁷ Thomas S. Kuhn, "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?", *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds) Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1970, p1

⁴⁸ Ibid, p.22.

⁴⁹ John Watkins, *Against Normal Science*, in Lakatos, I and A. Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Volume 4*, Cambridge University Press, London, 1970, p.33.

Kuhn is accused of attributing to scientists faith, faith in the paradigm that guides their research, at the expense of reason, the reason of a consistent methodological principle. Watkins lays out the contrast between the logic of discovery and the psychology of research starkly. He refers to the clash between Kuhn's:

'view of the scientific community as an essentially closed society, intermittently shaken by collective nervous breakdowns followed by restored mental unison, and Popper's view that the scientific community ought to be, and to a considerable degree actually is, an open society in which no theory, however dominant and successful, ... is ever sacred'.⁵⁰

The assessment provided of Kuhn's view here is couched in psychiatric terms so as to illustrate its psychological foundations as Watkins perceives it. Collective nervous breakdown accompanies the crisis of a particular paradigm and mental unison is only restored with the passing of such crisis.

If the passing of a paradigm can be considered to prompt a psychological crisis for Kuhn's scientists then Popper has rather more faith that scientists can and should welcome the change brought about by a fundamental absence of sacredness as applied to hypotheses and theories. Subjecting a theory to testing may not be psychologically easy or comfortable for an individual scientist but to fail to do so is to fail to apply the method of science in Popper's eyes and pass up the opportunity for logical discovery.

The logic of discovery that he propounds attests to Popper's liberalism in that it has a distinctive focus on the individual, a central concern with freedom, an unswerving commitment to reason and rationality (of a critical form) and an underlying respect for the principle of toleration. Popper's falsificationist theory is designed to be applied by individual scientists in their scientific endeavours although, as we shall see below, it does have an importantly social aspect to it. The theory is intended as a disciplining influence on individuals rather than to provide an account, as Kuhn seeks to, of the communal relations and commitments that particular and distinct

⁵⁰ Ibid p.26.

groups of scientists share.

Popper's philosophy of science addresses freedom in terms of the liberty he seeks to provide to scientists in order to continually question and test theories. For Popper, the removal of inductive certainty from science is to be considered a liberating step. His work on science seeks to highlight the importance of reason to the scientific enterprise by anchoring it within his deductive methodology and via his insistence that even between Kuhn's different frameworks, rational critical discussion and comparison is always possible.⁵¹ Indeed Popper describes what he calls the 'myth of the framework', that is to say Kuhn's distinct and separate paradigms, as 'the central bulwark of irrationalism'.⁵² For Popper, the community of science is simply all those individuals employing the methodology of falsificationism to the study of phenomena.

The liberal principle of toleration is also implicit in Popper's philosophy of science because a diversity of hypotheses and theories must be permitted to flourish if robust inter-subjective testing is to take place. It has been argued that Popper's advocacy of pluralism in science stems from his belief that it is 'intrinsic to the day-to-day conduct of scientific enquiry, as scientists are encouraged to proliferate alternative hypotheses that then face stiff cross-examination by standards that command universal assent'.⁵³ Such pluralism illustrates Popper's desire to ensure that progress is made possible through the free battle of ideas. Scientists are the combatants in the battle of scientific ideals with Popper's logic of discovery designed to serve as the appropriate weapon of choice. It is the battle for science itself however, identified by Fuller in his comparison of Popper and Kuhn's philosophies, which is the subject of the final part of this section.

The Struggle for Science's Soul

According to Fuller, the respective philosophies of science of Popper and Kuhn do

⁵¹ Watkins, *Against Normal Science*, p.56.

⁵² Watkins, *Against Normal Science*, p.56.

⁵³ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.55.

not constitute merely a methodological dispute but rather a deeper epistemological disagreement. Before examining the basis and nature of the disagreement that Fuller perceives, we can acknowledge a point of agreement that he detects between the two philosophers. That is ‘that science requires an essentially social epistemology. The sustained pursuit of systematic knowledge means that certain social relationships must be maintained over time and space’.⁵⁴ For Kuhn, the relevant relationships are those entailed by the paradigm and the quasi-ideological commitment to paradigms that he attributes to scientists working within them. For Popper, the social relationship necessary for the conduct of science is a shared commitment to the falsificationist deductive logic that facilitates inter-subjective testing.

Fuller raises one key question that warrants consideration here. It is a question that gets to the very heart of the differences between Popper and Kuhn’s philosophical systems and it also has implications for the nature and ideological persuasion of the political philosophy defended by Popper. He asks simply, ‘is science about being rooted in the world, as Kuhn thought, or being uprooted, as Popper thought?’⁵⁵

Kuhn roots scientists in the world through the paradigms that serve as the foundations for normal science and via the historical authority that they are envisaged to convey. Popper, on the other hand, uproots scientists by treating disciplinary or communal boundaries as irrelevant and demarcating simply between science and non-science. He does not recognise paradigmatic foundations that could give root to science hence his appeal to the universal method of criticism by way of inter-subjective test.⁵⁶

Kuhn reveals the paradigm-rootedness of his scientists when he suggests that a paradigm can ‘even insulate the community from those socially important problems that are not reducible to the puzzle form, because they cannot be stated in terms of the conceptual and instrumental tools the paradigm supplies’.⁵⁷ It is precisely this

⁵⁴ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.123.

⁵⁵ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.126.

⁵⁶ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.127.

⁵⁷ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.37.

insulation that Popper opposes, although his concern is to ensure that hypotheses are not granted sanctuary within paradigms.

Popper claims that science involves the testing of theories by scientists but for Kuhn the emphasis appears to be on the testing of scientists by theories. Kuhn argues that the object of normal science 'is to solve a puzzle for whose very existence the validity of the paradigm must be assumed. Failure to achieve a solution discredits only the scientist and not the theory'.⁵⁸ It is difficult to reconcile the approach that Kuhn takes here with his acceptance that paradigms can and do fall into crisis. Having admitted this possibility, the failure to find a solution to a puzzle could indicate a problem with the paradigmatic theory as readily as representing the deficient application of it by a scientist.

It is in these assumptions that Kuhn permits and Popper forbids that some of the key divergences in their respective philosophies are to be found. Popper suggests that 'agitation' is an essential component both of life and the conduct of science.⁵⁹ Kuhn's paradigms seek to soothe agitation by offering frameworks of mutual comfort for specific communities of scientists. Fuller suggests that beyond that in the Kuhnian model, 'the entire sociology of science is reduced to the process of training initiates for a life of total commitment to their paradigm'.⁶⁰ Popper disagrees with this approach because the commitment he demands is to the scientific logic and method itself, a method that can liberate scientists, uproot them perhaps, from particular communities to allow them to engage in the universal practice of science.

Fuller captures the very essence of the different paths taken by Popper and Kuhn through reference to transcendence and immanence.

'Popper held that truth is always 'transcendent' of the community of inquirers,

⁵⁸ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.80.

⁵⁹ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.13.

⁶⁰ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.102.

whereas for Kuhn truth is always 'immanent' in the community. If Kuhn located truth within a scientific paradigm, Popper found it in a 'meta-language' into which the knowledge claims of the paradigm may be translated and evaluated'.⁶¹

Science is a universal language for Popper and he rejects Kuhn's attempts to erect barriers and boundaries around particular communities of scientists, each with its own native language.

By placing such emphasis on community Kuhn removes from individuals a degree of responsibility, at least in the Popperian sense of a responsibility to formulate and subject hypotheses to critical tests in a liberal environment that calls forth a plurality of both theories and tests. Normal science, for Kuhn, is an inherently conservative activity whereby scientists seek to preserve the paradigm that guides their work and pursue the puzzles that it prompts. Individual scientists are faced with a process of assimilation into the paradigmatic structure and the acceptance of the standards and assumptions that are contained by it. For Popper, this is a corruption of the scientific ideal because questioning is the purpose of science and he seeks to ensure that nothing escapes being questioned, including paradigms or the theoretical positions that they represent. Kuhn's approach allows such questions only rarely and as a last resort upon the discovery of crisis within a paradigm. He holds that the understanding of a science's significance comes only after the resolution of its major disputes.⁶²

Popper takes science to be an essentially critical enterprise and thus is liable to be suspicious of enduring and sustained consensus. Kuhn takes such consensus to be a prerequisite of the practice of normal science and posits that its loss is felt primarily as a psychological blow to those scientists that had previously relied on it to instruct their day-to-day endeavours. Indeed, in the transition from an old paradigm to its new replacement 'lifelong resistance, particularly from those whose productive careers have committed them to an older tradition of normal science, is not a violation of scientific standards but an index to the nature of scientific research

⁶¹ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.56.

⁶² Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.90.

itself".⁶³ The situation that Kuhn describes here is a violation of Popperian scientific standards.

Kuhn's conservative sympathy for those affected by radical change leads him to excuse such resistance whilst Popper is not prepared to tolerate the intrusion of psychological preferences into his scientific methodology. As we shall see however, Popper is less permissive of political revolution, more willing to concede its potential psychological draw backs for individuals and far more cautious about recommending it as a policy prescription. In turning our attention towards Popper's political philosophy we begin with an investigation of the nature of the critical method that he employs to both science and politics, that of critical rationalism.

2.3 The Tradition of Critical Rationalism

Popper's commitment to reason is of a particular kind. The power of reason, he contends, is unleashed when it is employed in a critical manner; that is when rationality is utilised deductively as part of the process of hypotheses testing in science for example. Critical rationalism is the method he perceives as underpinning both scientific progress and controlled political reform. Indeed, whilst a virtue in all walks of life, it has been suggested that Popper 'invested science with symbolic import as the standard-bearer for critical rationality'.⁶⁴ This interpretation could also be reversed as Popper attached symbolic importance to critical rationality itself and saw in the scientific method of falsificationism an exemplar of this attitude and approach. Popper sums up his commitment to critical rationalism in proclaiming that 'in order to learn to avoid making mistakes we must learn from our mistakes. To cover up mistakes is, therefore, the greatest intellectual sin'.⁶⁵ This establishes Popper's position that critical rationality is fundamentally about openness and involves an attitude whereby individuals must be prepared to actively seek out their

⁶³ Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, p.151.

⁶⁴ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.15.

⁶⁵ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.201.

own mistakes in a bid to learn the lessons that they may teach.

For Popper, such an attitude was embodied in Socrates and he was an admirer of the Socratic approach to rationality. Popper suggests that Socrates came to believe that wisdom constitutes 'simply the realisation: how little do I know! Those who did not know this, he taught, knew nothing at all'.⁶⁶ This indicates the sense of intellectual humility that Popper held must necessarily underlie the critical rational method because without such humility the prospect of mistakes being overlooked or, worse, ignored, would be magnified. It is a liberal creed that draws out the principles of freedom, in an intellectual sense, that is permissive of competition amongst ideas, and toleration in that mistakes are not only to be tolerated but in fact embraced for to spot a mistake is to make a discovery of a kind. Such discoveries are seen by Popper to be conducive to refining scientific hypotheses and, as we shall see, to refining attempts at political reform.

Kuhn of course disputes the efficacy of a critically rational attitude towards the development of science. He argues that 'it is precisely the abandonment of critical discourse that marks the transition to a science. Once a field has made that transition, critical discourse recurs only at moments of crisis when the bases of the field are again in jeopardy'.⁶⁷ This returns us to the distinction that Kuhn makes between normal and revolutionary periods of science and he considers it quite appropriate for scientists to operate without a critical attitude or methodology when attempting to solve the puzzles prompted by paradigm anchored normal science. Chalmers argues that this Kuhnian account of science and its attendant rationality equates to a conservative position and furthermore, one that 'leaves us with no way of criticizing the decisions and mode of operating of the scientific community'.⁶⁸

Chalmers point is slightly undermined however with the appreciation that in making

⁶⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1 – The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge, 1984, p.128.

⁶⁷ Kuhn, *Logic of Discovery*, p.6.

⁶⁸ Chalmers, *What is this thing?*, p.109.

it he is in fact critiquing the operational mode of the scientific community as conceived from Kuhn's point of view. What I suspect he meant to raise instead is that Kuhn appears to deny to scientists the opportunity to be self-reflective and self-critical of the methodologies they utilise, at least insofar as normal science is concerned. It is this denial that concerns Popper and leads him to dismiss Kuhn's approach on account of what he perceives to be its dogmatism. 'The normal scientist, as described by Kuhn, has been badly taught. He has been taught in a dogmatic spirit: he is a victim of indoctrination. He has learned a technique which can be applied without asking for a reason why'.⁶⁹ Notice that Popper does not regard Kuhn's failing as merely technical for in referring to the normal scientist as a 'victim' of indoctrination he reveals that he regards Kuhn's approach as a moral failure also.

To learn a technique which is applicable without the need to ask for reasons why is, for Popper, to abandon rationality and the critically rational method. To strip critical rationality out of the normal scientific process is Kuhn's great mistake as Popper sees it. Moreover, Popper does not recognise the distinction between normal and revolutionary periods of science since he believes that the methodology of science is what separates it from non-science and so the introduction of Kuhn's distinction blurs the clear line of demarcation that Popper sought to trace. Kuhn accepts this implication of his work by noting 'that it is normal science, in which Sir Karl's sort of testing does not occur, rather than extraordinary science which most nearly distinguishes science from other enterprises'.⁷⁰ It is difficult to see on what basis 'extraordinary' science, during periods of scientific revolution, is still to be considered science at all on this Kuhnian account. From a Popperian perspective Kuhn fails to provide an adequate general demarcation between science and non-science and then proceeds to compound this error by mistaking the non-critical method of normal science as representative of genuine scientific methodology.

As we have already seen, Popper considers Kuhn to have made both technical and

⁶⁹ Popper, *Normal Science*, p.53.

⁷⁰ Kuhn, *Logic of Discovery*, p.6.

moral errors but he goes on to suggest that a further shortcoming of Kuhn's position is its discounting of the contribution made to science by imagination. Popper suggests that criticism itself solicits the imagination whilst dogmatism by contrast will tend to suppress it.⁷¹ In attacking what he sees as the dogmatic approach of historicism Popper regards historicism's poverty to be first and foremost 'a poverty of imagination'.⁷² As highlighted previously, Popper held Kuhn's philosophy of science to inhere the logic of historical relativism that is diametrically opposed to Popper's own logic of discovery and critical rationalism.⁷³

Popper's invoking of the imagination is a function of his progressiveness and a desire on his part for human beings to be capable of liberating themselves from present circumstance where that circumstance is found to be in some way oppressive or not conducive to individual flourishing. Popper disdains Kuhn's conservatism for lacking an appreciation of imagined possibility and preferring instead the comfort of the status quo. What is interesting, as we shall see later the chapter, is the extent to which Popper seeks to temper the imagination in matters of political reform.

For now, it is worth exploring the sort of commitments that Popper's critical rationality implies along with the relationships within the scientific community that it presupposes. It is at this point that the universalism of Popper's philosophy of science comes under the microscope. Popper lays out explicitly the nature of the commitment that is entailed by critical rationality. The adoption of critical rationalism implies:

'that there is a common medium of communication, a common language of reason; it establishes something like a moral obligation towards that language, the obligation to keep up its standards of clarity and to use it in such a way that it can retain its function as the vehicle of argument'.⁷⁴

⁷¹ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2 – Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986, p.239.

⁷² Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge, 1972, p.130.

⁷³ Popper, *Normal Science*, p.55.

⁷⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.239.

Popper attaches here to reason a commonality, a morality and functionality. The commitments entailed do not apply to a particular group of scientists, working within a paradigm for example, but rather to all scientists as members of *the* scientific community.

The commonality that Popper infers in his critical rationalism is of a communicative and linguistic quality; scientists are able to communicate with each other by virtue of employing a common methodology that is understood, and capable of being interpreted, by the entire community. Popper does not envisage the scientific community as being linguistically subdivided in terms of the interoperability and communicability of the critical rationalist method. Popper's 'common language of reason' not only serves as a methodological device but also appears to some extent to denote the boundaries of scientific community and give it a communal sense of belonging and identity. Via the positing of this common language Popper implies that scientists can both understand and identify each other.

It is interesting that Popper talks of the 'moral obligation' due to the common language of rationality on the part of scientists. It is clear from this that Popper's story of science is to be read as a morality tale and that critical rationality brings with it certain responsibilities as part of the price of entry into the scientific enterprise. The primary responsibility that scientists are obliged to accept is that of clarity in respect of the hypotheses that they outline as well as the tests that they design for examining those hypotheses. Beyond that, Popper instructs scientists to remember the purpose to which critical rationality is to be put.

That purpose, or functionality, is described by Popper as 'the vehicle of argument'. Such a vehicle is the means by which science progresses, or at least is afforded the opportunity to progress through the testing of theories. Popper is setting out here that his concept of critical rationality is a method of argumentation and thus the scientific enterprise comprises arguments conducted in this way. Kuhn recognises the stark contrast between this approach and his own. He understands the Popperian

approach to require of scientists that they endeavour at all times to be critics and proliferators of alternate theories but suggests that for his own part he advocates ‘the desirability of an alternate strategy which reserves such behaviour for special occasions’.⁷⁵ Popper objects to this because for him every test situation is a ‘special occasion’ or at least should be as each critical rational test presents a learning opportunity. The paradigmatic framework is as close as normal scientists, in Kuhn’s conception, come to encountering a vehicle of argument. That said, with argument marginalised during periods of normal science, the paradigm is less a provider of a vehicle of argument than it is an arena for the technical task of working out a pre-given blueprint.⁷⁶ The notion of technical knowledge, or rationality, as it divides Popper and Kuhn can be usefully examined with reference to the work of Michael Oakeshott.

Technical and Practical Rationality

Oakeshott was a critic of what he termed rationalism in politics and his conservative scepticism led him to be doubtful as to the faith and trust that could be placed in reason as a guide to both discovery and conduct in human affairs. In Oakeshott’s view, the rationalist (for him a pejorative term) stands:

‘for independence of mind on all occasions, for thought free from obligation to any authority save the authority of ‘reason’. His circumstances in the modern world have made him contentious: he is the enemy of authority, of prejudice, of the merely traditional, customary or habitual’.⁷⁷

Oakeshott seeks to defend the roles of authority, prejudice, tradition and custom against the contentions of rationalists that would have them dismissed or sidelined on account of their paying insufficient heed to reason. It is clear that on the basis of the definition outlined above, Popper would qualify as a rationalist in Oakeshott’s eyes.

⁷⁵ Thomas Kuhn, “Reflections on my Critics” in *The Road Since ‘Structure’: Philosophical Essays, 1970-199, with an Autobiographical Interview*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London, 2000, p.243.

⁷⁶ This point is elaborated by Fuller who compares the notion of the paradigm with that of a blueprint. See Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.19.

⁷⁷ Michael Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, London: Methuen & Co Ltd, 1962, p.1.

Popper, as we have seen, makes plain the obligation he takes to be owed to reason and its authority. He considers that obligation to be owed because only reason can operate the deductive methodology of falsificationism; prejudice and custom are not equipped to perform such a task as far as Popper is concerned even although Kuhn permits them as principles capable of directing the enterprise of normal science. Popper's objection to the approach shared by Oakeshott and Kuhn here derives, at least in part, from a desire to institutionalise a rational methodology as a vehicle for argument. This is illustrated in his suggestion that the abandonment of the rationalist attitude invariably produces in its place an 'attitude which considers the person of the thinker instead of his thought'.⁷⁸ For Popper such an attitude is both dangerous and methodologically flawed, that is to say that it represents both a moral and technical failure. Rational criticism, Popper suggests, must always be specific: it must clearly specify any apparent falsity of specific statements and hypotheses and in doing so 'it must be impersonal'.⁷⁹ Popper seeks to guard against the potential relativism of personal criticisms and does so by attempting to institutionalise a technical methodology that can serve as an independent basis upon which to proceed with rational critique.

Unity in Rationalism

Universalism is another significant feature of rationalist thinking according to Oakeshott and such a feature can indeed be attributed to Popperian philosophy of science and, arguably as we shall discover, to his political philosophy but with a greater degree of ambiguity. Oakeshott's rationalist 'is fortified by a belief in a 'reason' common to all mankind, a common power of rational consideration, which is the ground and inspiration of argument'.⁸⁰ Again Oakeshott's description captures Popper's account of science and thus provides further evidence that Popper is to be considered a rationalist in Oakeshottian terms.

⁷⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

⁷⁹ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.202.

⁸⁰ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.2.

Popper's critical rationalism is in principle common to all of humankind, it is a choice open to individuals as to whether they adopt or reject it, and the rationality that he conceptualises is deemed to be independent of particular time, place and circumstance. Popper, once more appealing to the teachings of Socrates, contends that critical rationalism is founded on a 'faith in the rational unity of man' and that in its scientific outlook in particular its universal roots can be traced back to the ancient Socratic and Christian belief in the 'brotherhood of all men'.⁸¹ Popper's philosophy of science seeks to explain the rational unity of science as he perceives it, or indeed the unity of scientists, as much as provide a basis for such unity. This also serves to highlight further that Popper's account of science is not merely a methodological one but is also infused with a specific morality. Science serves for Popper as an exemplar of the potential unity of humanity. It is important to note in the context of that morality that it is reason that provides the basis for unity and enables the overcoming of barriers between individuals and communities.

The principle objection raised by Oakeshott to rationalism of this form, including critical rationalism, is that it neglects the cumulative character of experience and that it recognises and incorporates experience only when it has been converted into a formula. The past, Oakeshott suggests, is significant to the rationalist 'only as an encumbrance'.⁸² Popper's deductive falsificationism is formulaic in that it expresses a formula of scientific methodology: science proceeds via the proposing of conjectures that are subsequently subjected to refutation attempts in controlled tests that are critical, inter-subjective and capable of being replicated. The past is not necessarily viewed as an encumbrance in Popper's philosophical schematic however, since such a high priority is accorded to learning from mistakes.⁸³ To do so is to institute a reflective process in which the past does not encumber the present but rather helps to inform it. The Popperian approach is historically oriented insofar as it involves, in many instances, the repeated testing of conjectures and hypotheses that have been previously formulated.

⁸¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.243.

⁸² Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.2.

⁸³ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.201.

In attacking rationalism Oakeshott considers himself to be engaging in a defence of the conservative disposition. He argues that inherent to the rationalist disposition is a reluctance to practice repair, preferring instead the invention of a new device over the utilisation of a current and well-tried expedient.⁸⁴ Kuhn's approach involves the continued deployment of the paradigm framework as a well-tried expedient, at least as far as normal science is concerned. He refers to challenges and 'adjustments' as a standard part of normal research.⁸⁵ For Popper, each new hypothesis constitutes the invention of a new, potentially revolutionary, device as do the tests invented to assess hypotheses.⁸⁶ In their respective philosophies of science Kuhn appears to exhibit a conservative disposition whilst Popper is far more disposed towards liberalism in terms of the freedoms that he seeks to defend. The epistemological differences that separate Kuhn and Popper can usefully be explored through the distinction that Oakeshott draws between 'technical' and 'practical' knowledge.⁸⁷

The Technique and Practice of Science

Oakeshott suggests that every human activity involves knowledge and that such knowledge is always of either a technical or practical nature.⁸⁸ Technical knowledge is of a form that it can be 'formulated into rules' and thus is susceptible to precise formulation.⁸⁹ Practical knowledge, by contrast, exists only in its use and application, is not reflective and unlike technical knowledge is not capable of being precisely formulated in rule form.⁹⁰ As an advocate of practical knowledge, Oakeshott argues that its unreflective character does not render it 'an esoteric sort of knowledge'. Rather, the effect of its character is that the method by which practical knowledge 'may be shared and becomes common knowledge is not the method of formulated doctrine'.⁹¹ With the distinction that Oakeshott sets up here it is clear

⁸⁴ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.4.

⁸⁵ Kuhn, *Logic of Discovery*, p.13

⁸⁶ Popper, *Normal Science and its Dangers*, p.55.

⁸⁷ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, pp. 7-.8

⁸⁸ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.7.

⁸⁹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism* p.7.

⁹⁰ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.8

⁹¹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.8

that normal science as outlined by Kuhn has a practical quality whilst Popper's critical rational falsificationism can be regarded as a scientific technique and thus as technical knowledge. Popper's scientists are expected to learn a technique; Kuhn's scientists are expected to adopt a practice.

Taking up the case of science specifically, Oakeshott suggests that technical rules make up only one component part of the scientist's knowledge and that scientific discovery is not achieved merely by following and applying the rules of technique.⁹² This has important implications for what Chalmers calls 'the sociological characteristics of scientific communities'.⁹³ Both Popper and Kuhn recognise that the scientific community, in Popper's case, and particular scientific communities, in Kuhn's case, share a number of commonalities. Popper talks of the common language of reason that unites science whilst for Kuhn a scientific community consists 'of the practitioners of a scientific specialty' that have undergone 'similar educations and professional initiations'. Furthermore, such a community will see itself as responsible for 'the pursuit of a set of shared goals, including the training of their successors'.⁹⁴ This illustrates not only the extent of the communal bonds that Kuhn envisages to exist amongst members of scientific communities but also the sense in which new members are initiated into the community.

Popper's scientists exist in a single community of shared technique; Kuhn's scientists inhabit communities of shared practice. Oakeshott makes the point that technical knowledge can be both taught and learned but practical knowledge can only be 'imparted and acquired' and acquisition comes through apprenticeship to a master.⁹⁵ Initiation into a paradigm does appear to involve something resembling an apprenticeship for scientists. In this sense Kuhn's philosophy displays a high regard for Oakeshott's notion of practical knowledge; such a notion is central to the practice of normal science. With his concern to establish a criterion of scientific demarcation

⁹² Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.8

⁹³ Chalmers, *What is this thing?*, p.89

⁹⁴ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.177

⁹⁵ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.8

Popper's scientists are distinguished by their knowledge and application of the technique of science denoted by critical rationalism.

It is important to note that although the technical-practical distinction drawn by Oakeshott does capture a significant sense of what is at stake in the different approaches taken by Popper and Kuhn a danger exists in overstating that distinction and the differences it encapsulates. Kuhn, as we have seen, recognises that professional initiation sits alongside shared educational backgrounds and thus practical and technical components are combined in the induction process to scientific communities. In suggesting that testing regimes be inter-subjective Popper too invites the possibility of a practical component into his system in the sense that the scientific enterprise can be learned, in part, from others. That said there is no doubt as to the primacy given to technique by Popper. Indeed, he makes explicit his aim as being 'to establish the rules ... by which the scientist is guided when he is engaged in research or in discovery'.⁹⁶ In making this his aim Popper reveals the extent of his rationalism as seen from an Oakeshottian perspective.

Oakeshott argues that 'the sovereignty of reason, for the Rationalist, means the sovereignty of technique'.⁹⁷ For Popper, the sovereign position granted to reason in his philosophy marks him out not only as a rationalist but also as a liberal.⁹⁸ By investing sovereignty in reason Popper places high demands upon it but he does so out of a fear that an opposing attitude that would scorn human reason 'must lead to an appeal to violence and brutal force as the ultimate arbiter in any dispute'.⁹⁹ It is apparent therefore that the strength of Popper's commitment to rationalism stems in part from his view of irrationalism as fundamentally dangerous.¹⁰⁰ This is not to suggest that Kuhn, for example, in positing less sovereignty to reason (*vis-à-vis*

⁹⁶ Popper, *Logic*, p.29.

⁹⁷ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.11.

⁹⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.190.

⁹⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.234.

¹⁰⁰ It is on this basis that Ravetz asserts that Popper amongst others, including Kuhn, in philosophising science have treated it as a 'symbol of the good and the true in a certain ideologically engaged tradition of philosophical polemic'. See Jerry Ravetz, "Ideological Commitments in the Philosophy of Science", *Radical Philosophy*, Issue 37, Summer 1984, p.5.

Popper) leaves science without rational means of dispute resolution. It does however reinforce the distrust Popper has of approaches that grant considerable authority to frameworks that assume a taken for granted status and indeed to past achievement in the form of traditions. It is to the issue of tradition that I now turn.

Tradition and Critical Rationalism

As a conservative, Oakeshott places a high value on tradition and the practical knowledge he perceives to reside within it. Oakeshott in fact argues that what he describes as practical knowledge can, without being at all misleading, also be described as traditional knowledge.¹⁰¹ In the case of science Oakeshott suggest that scientific:

‘traditions are not fixed and finished, and they are not to be identified with merely current scientific opinion, or with an identifiable ‘method’; they are the guide in every piece of scientific investigation and at the same time they are being extended and enlarged wherever scientists are at work’.¹⁰²

In this conservative description of science as a tradition Oakeshott takes issue with Popper’s scientific philosophy and in doing so displays a considerable affinity with the conception of science proposed by Kuhn.

In refuting the existence of a timeless and universal method that can be identified as scientific, Oakeshott follows a similar path to Kuhn that leads to an anti-methodological position. Science becomes, on this view, more or less whatever scientists (themselves an essentially self-defining and self-referencing group or groups) actually do in their daily endeavours. With Oakeshott making the claim that mere current opinion cannot of itself be considered a tradition it is difficult to see what bases remain available for the identification of scientific traditions. In Popperian terms, for a scientific tradition to perform the task set by Oakeshott, that of guiding every investigation, then it must be a methodological one if it is to qualify as scientific to begin with. This raises the interesting question, which I shall come

¹⁰¹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.8.

¹⁰² Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.103.

on to address very shortly, as to whether or not critical rationalism can be conceived as a, or indeed the, tradition of science.

As Oakeshott suggests that scientific traditions are extended and enlarged in the course of scientists going about their work he is invoking Kuhn's notion of paradigms. Whilst Oakeshott indicates the character that he attributes to traditions of science, and the purpose he sees them as coming to serve, he does not tell us what they are or where they emanate from. Kuhn is less opaque in this regard since he is at least able to define paradigms as exemplary pieces of research, or 'shared examples', that pave the way for future research programmes.¹⁰³ Popper, by contrast, is able to describe a methodology of science. The question remains however as to the extent to which it may be considered a tradition.

The first thing to note regarding Popper's attitude to tradition is the emphasis that he places on the individual when evaluating traditions.

He takes the view that 'we can get rid of that attitude which considers every tradition as sacrosanct, or as valuable in itself, replacing this by an attitude which considers traditions as valuable or pernicious, as the case may be, according to their influence upon individuals'.¹⁰⁴

Considered from this perspective traditions are not the bearers of intrinsic value but rather are to be valued in accordance with the contribution that they make to individual wellbeing. In Popper's conception here individuals must judge traditions instead of being judged by them. It is worth remembering in this context Kuhn's claim that in relation to normal science the failure to achieve a solution to a puzzle 'discredits only the scientist and not the theory'.¹⁰⁵ The theory at issue here of course is the paradigm and the particular tradition of science that it is representative of.

¹⁰³ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.187.

¹⁰⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.226.

¹⁰⁵ Kuhn, *Structure*, p.80.

Having reiterated his methodological individualism in examining the concept of tradition it is interesting to discover the extent of the role and influence that Popper is prepared to concede to tradition. Firstly, he suggests that ‘traditions are needed to form a kind of link between institutions and the intentions and valuations of individual men’.¹⁰⁶ Popper does not detail the exact nature of that link and thus the statement has an inescapable ambiguity about it but at the very least it is apparent that he detects a relationship between individuals and the past that can be mediated through institutions. It would seem that Popper accepts that traditions can possess sediments of historic intent and value that is often manifest in particular institutional structures and arrangements. Perhaps the point that he is seeking to make is that without such a link institutions may well seem abstract and peculiar to individuals in circumstances whereby they have not consciously or directly brought them into being.

The second characterisation of tradition that Popper provides is less ambiguous and more illuminating. He notes that ‘all laws, being universal principles, have to be interpreted in order to be applied; and an interpretation needs some principles of concrete practice, which can be supplied only by a living tradition’.¹⁰⁷ On the face of it this conception of the relationship between universal principles, subsidiary principles of interpretation and tradition brings Popper much closer to Kuhn’s philosophy and account of science. Kuhn’s paradigms provide living scientific traditions to scientists and are the settings for ‘concrete practice’. The interpretative competency required by scientists is provided in part by the paradigm itself as well as by the practical initiation into the community that all scientists encounter. I would argue however that Popper can avoid endorsing the Kuhnian approach by differentiating more clearly between falsificationism as a methodology and critical rationality as an attitude.

The extension of this difference facilitates the conceptualisation of the falsificationist method as a ‘universal principle’ and critical rationalism as a ‘living tradition’.

¹⁰⁶ Popper, *In Search*, p.156.

¹⁰⁷ Popper, *In Search*, p.156.

Popper himself, as we have seen, traces a historical trajectory of the rationalist attitude through Socrates and the early Christians so it is a plausible interpretation of his work to suggest that critical rationality can be characterised as a tradition of thought. It is a tradition of thought that Popper held to be applicable to both science and politics. But what then of 'concrete practice' in relation to Popper's approach? It seems to me that this role can be performed by practicing critical discussion distinct from critical rationality as an attitude. Popper denotes a rationalist as being 'a person who is willing to learn from others, not simply by accepting their opinions, but by allowing them to criticize his ideas and by criticizing theirs: in other words by critical discussion'.¹⁰⁸ In this way the critical rational attitude can be translated into critical discursive practice.

By partially reconciling his philosophy of science with tradition Popper opens up a channel within it for the incorporation of a conservative aspect. He is adamant that tradition must be utilised in service of the individual rather than the other way round but it is nonetheless significant that he is prepared to sanction a guiding role of any sort to tradition. Of course it should be recognised that Popper is predominantly content with a particular sort of tradition, that of critical rationalism. Even so, once critical rationalism is conceived as a tradition of thought the boundary between the liberal and the conservative elements of Popper's philosophy becomes less clear cut. The possibility emerges, for example, to conceptualise the Popperian philosophical project as that of preserving and extending the critical rational tradition. Such a task is at least as conservative as it is liberal and there is little doubt that Popper views critical rationality as an inheritance to be both cherished and protected.¹⁰⁹

Conservative Defences of Tradition

In conceptualising critical rationalism as a tradition a degree of affinity can be traced between Popper's attitude and that of the conservative disposition as outlined by Oakeshott. To say as much is to not to label Popper a conservative on this basis

¹⁰⁸ Popper, *In Search*, p.205.

¹⁰⁹ Popper in fact regarded the conflict between rationalism and irrationalism as being the most important 'intellectual' and 'moral' issue of his time. Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.224.

alone but it does, I contend, permit the argument to be developed that Popperian philosophy has a conservative element inhering within it. The extent and implications of such an element will be explored in greater detail in the final section of this chapter with an assessment of the nature of political change from a Popperian perspective. As a prelude to that however, I conclude this section with a brief consideration of the continuity between scientific and political traditions that Oakeshott perceives.

Oakeshott's conservatism shares many similarities with the conservative philosophy of science developed by Kuhn. He envisages science as a practical craft, learned by way of apprenticeship¹¹⁰ and practiced within specific 'traditions of scientific inquiry'.¹¹¹ Oakeshott also suggests that the role played by tradition in science is reprised in the political world.

'Just as a scientific hypothesis cannot appear, and is impossible to operate, except within an already existing tradition of scientific investigation, so a scheme of ends for political activity appears within, and can be evaluated only when it is related to, an already existing tradition of how to attend to our arrangements'.¹¹²

This description of the scientific enterprise is one that Kuhn could endorse since it parallels his conception of normal science with paradigms acting as existing traditions of scientific investigation that prompt particular programmes of research.

Popper, by contrast, would not accept the tradition dependent nature of scientific hypotheses outlined by Oakeshott. Indeed, he believes that the creativity that is central to the practice of science is most readily found in the imagination and propounding of bold conjectures.¹¹³ Popper would likely contend that Oakeshott has subscribed here, with Kuhn, to the 'myth of the framework' as entailed by tradition in this instance. Popper's individualistic, rationalist, and tolerant (of a very wide

¹¹⁰ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.92.

¹¹¹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.119.

¹¹² Oakeshott, *Rationalism*, p.123.

¹¹³ Popper compares science to poetry in the sense that both are activities inspired by the imagination that seek to explain our world to ourselves. Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.227.

range of hypotheses for example) liberalism stands opposed to this form of conservatism.

Popper is happy to accept that human reasoning is considerably limited and thus that we are, without exception, fallible creatures but he sees the prospect of overcoming some of that limitation through cooperative effort – inter-subjective testing in the case of science.¹¹⁴ For all that Popper seeks and defends individual liberty, and the liberty of free thought as a fundamental component of personal freedom, he can neither fully escape nor abandon a slightly conservative adherence to tradition even if that tradition is the critical rationalism of Socratic teaching. Similarly, he is forced to accept that his advocacy of reason rests ultimately upon a faith in it, a quasi-religious commitment that is not easily disposed to rational deduction or critical test. These aspects of Popper's thought indicate that he is not entirely a stranger to the conservative disposition. Whilst that disposition emerges only episodically and relatively delicately in his philosophy of science it tends to inform his political philosophy rather more strongly and frequently.

2.4 The Nature and Conduct of Political Change

It has been argued that Popper's political philosophy is at heart a 'philosophy of how to change things' rationally and humanely¹¹⁵ as well as being an attempt to outline ways in which society could be reorganised 'so that it could be as genuinely experimental in its policies as a laboratory science is in its hypotheses'.¹¹⁶ It is apparent that Popper himself considered his political philosophy to be an extension of his philosophy of science and that the same basic methodology was applicable and conducive to both the scientific and political domains. He makes clear that in order to introduce scientific methods into the study of society and into politics, as is his intent, 'what is needed most is the adoption of a critical attitude, and the realization

¹¹⁴ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.201.

¹¹⁵ Bryan Magee, *Popper*, London: Fontana Press, 1985, p.83.

¹¹⁶ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.70.

that not only trial but also error is necessary'.¹¹⁷ It can be seen straight away therefore that Popper seeks to apply critical rationalism to politics alongside the methodology of inter-subjective testing.

There follows in this section a consideration of the manner in which Popper undertakes that task and the success or otherwise of it. I will argue that Popper consistently and successfully translates his scientific methodology to politics but in doing so the shape and tone of his political philosophy begins to diverge somewhat from his philosophy of science in the scale and scope of the conservative aspects that it incorporates. One of the significant effects of this divergence is that whilst Popper's philosophy of science sought to both encourage and aid scientific revolution (as an intrinsic component of scientific discovery) his political philosophy strongly discourages and seeks to obstruct social and political revolutions. With regard to science, such an approach is indicative of Popper's liberalism, in the case of politics however his liberalism is tempered to a far greater extent by a disposition that is of a conservative character.

The task here then is to look into both the continuity and disjuncture of Popper's bid to translate his philosophy of science into a political philosophy. His key purpose in doing so is to lay the foundations for what he calls the 'open society', a society that plans rationally and step by step 'for institutions to safeguard freedom, especially freedom from exploitation'¹¹⁸ animated by a faith in humanitarianism.¹¹⁹ The concept of open society itself shall be explored in the next chapter but for now it suffices to note that Popper's political philosophy has such a society as its aim. The subject of immediate inquiry here is that of the nature and conduct of political change that Popper advocates as a means both of advancing toward open society (or indeed preserving it where it is thought to exist) and toward a scientific approach to politics. The method developed by Popper in seeking to achieve these goals is that of piecemeal social engineering.

¹¹⁷ Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge Classics, London, 2002, p.87.

¹¹⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.143.

¹¹⁹ Popper, *Open society Volume 1*, p.196.

Piecemeal Social Engineering

In taking the attitude of an engineer toward questions of political change Popper views organisations and institutions as ‘machines’ for implementing policies.¹²⁰ As we have noted previously, Popper’s positive positions often have their roots in a profound opposition to something and his advocacy of the engineering method is no different in this regard. The social theory that Popper opposes is that of historicism which he describes as an approach to the social sciences that aims at historical prediction derived from attempts to discover the rhythms, patterns, laws or trends imagined to underlie the evolution of history.¹²¹ In contrast to this approach, Popper’s social engineers do not ask questions regarding historical tendencies believing instead that humans are masters of their own destinies; history therefore, or perhaps more accurately the future, can be influenced and changed by the actions and efforts of human individuals, it can be created in a manner similar to the (engineering) creation of new machinery.¹²²

Whilst historicists interest themselves in seeking out the origin and destiny of institutions in a bid to uncover their role in history Popper advocates that social engineers should focus on the appropriateness, efficiency and simplicity of institutions as means serving particular ends.¹²³ Institutions matter to Popper as part of the task that he sets himself of depersonalising politics in a similar vein to his attempts to do likewise with science. In Popper’s philosophy institutions represent a form of aggregated power beyond the physical capacity of individuals and, again drawing a comparison with machines, he suggests that ‘institutions multiply our power for good and evil’.¹²⁴ The extraordinary, almost mechanistic, capabilities possessed by institutions are such that they require constant and intelligent supervision.

¹²⁰ Magee, *Popper*, p.76.

¹²¹ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.3.

¹²² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.22.

¹²³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.24.

¹²⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1* p.67.

The institutionalisation of politics is intended to serve two primary purposes for Popper. Firstly, it is designed to make politics more susceptible to an engineering methodology and attitude which Popper equates with the approaches of falsificationism and critical rationalism he defended in relation to science. Secondly, he hopes to institute an impersonal politics, and disposition to political reform, that has reason as its basis rather than emotion. His fear of drawing upon the latter is encapsulated in the suggestion that ‘he who teaches that not reason but love should rule opens the way for those who rule by hate’.¹²⁵ He is advancing a technical conception of politics as an alternative that is drained of emotion so as to be able to focus on the technocratic task of institutional and structural modification. In this way Popper considers himself to be introducing both a rational perspective and scientific methodology into the world of politics.

Proceeding in such a manner offers further evidence of Popper as a rationalist thinker as defined by Oakeshott. Recalling the Oakeshottian distinction between technical and practical knowledge it is apparent that Popper’s piecemeal social engineers are supposed to work with the former whilst engaged in political reform. For his part, Oakeshott suggests that the knowledge involved in political activity is of a ‘dual character’, that is, a combination of the technical and practical.¹²⁶ There is no suggestion on my part that Popper operates a strict dichotomy between technical and practical knowledge with regard to politics. He provides a greater degree of clarity on his position in noting that ‘all social entities are products of history; not inventions, planned by reason, but formations emerging from the vagaries of historical events, from the interplay of ideas and interests, from sufferings and from passions’.¹²⁷ With this recognition Popper all but concedes the difficulties and limitations inherent to any attempt to introduce processes of engineering into politics.

That said the realisation that political institutions are not exclusively rational

¹²⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.236.

¹²⁶ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.9.

¹²⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.60.

inventions does not preclude subsequent attempts to render them, and their reform, susceptible to rational intervention that is of an engineering mode. It is also noteworthy that Popper incorporates historical vagaries, interests and passions in his conception of the factors that cohere in the production of social entities such as political institutions. Here he displays an appreciation that the introduction of a technical approach to politics will still have to contend with passions and emotions since they appear to be intrinsic to social constructions. It is also the case that by explaining institutions as ‘products of history’ and formations emergent from a multitude of interacting factors, Popper gives a further example of a periodic tendency toward conservatism in his philosophy. At the very least this highlights a degree of acceptance that his liberal desire to put politics on a more rational footing is likely to be constrained to some extent by forces of conservatism.

Whilst Popper seems unable to fully distance himself from conservatism he remains altogether more dismissive of historicism as a theoretical approach. He complains that historicists tend to the view that ‘political planning, like all social activity, must stand under the superior sway of historical forces’.¹²⁸ By this Popper means the historicist belief in historical patterns and laws that will be more influential in determining the outcome of political events and the shape of political institutions than conscious attempts to rationally plan or reform them. It is difficult for Popper to entirely dismiss the historicist approach however after having reached an acceptance that political institutions cannot fully extricate themselves from the sway of historical forces. Thus the dispute becomes a matter of, admittedly large, degree because it is of considerable importance to the Popperian approach that the sway of historical forces is in no way superior to political planning in the form of piecemeal social engineering. History may well play a part in informing and shaping the present, and through it the future, but that part is far less significant than the one potentially played by political planning. For Popper, whatever hold is granted to history over the political present, the political future of humankind remains open to be engineered.

¹²⁸ Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, p.44.

The central critique that Popper is making of historicism is that it ‘denies to human reason the power of bringing about a more reasonable world’.¹²⁹ Much like the criticisms that he levelled at Kuhn the denial of human reason referred to here implies both a technical and a moral failing. The technical failing is the underestimating of the engineering technique as a guide to social and political reform whilst the moral shortcoming is to be found in the marginal position allocated to morality itself in the historicist understanding of political change. If history is largely predetermined then political planning, of whatever moral value or quality, will have little or no bearing on the societies it seeks to effect. In defending his rationalist engineering method Popper seeks to challenge the efficacy of the historicist approach along with that of what he considers to be historicism’s strategic ally, utopianism.

Liberation from Utopia

Popper takes the view that utopianism suffers from a very similar poverty to that which he finds in historicism. Indeed, part of his reasoning for suggesting that this is so can be attributed to the strong parallels that he sees as existing between their respective approaches. Popper refers to an ‘alliance’ between historicism and utopianism founded on a holistic approach common to both. The holism that he detects is that of an interest in the development ‘not of aspects of social life, but of society as a whole’.¹³⁰ Historicism concentrates on trying to discover the rhythms that govern societal development whilst utopianism aims at the remodelling and reconstruction of society as a whole. It is worth noting here that Popper uses the term ‘utopian planning’ in describing this method in contrast to the piecemeal method of his philosophy.¹³¹

Once again Popper pursues technical and moral criticisms together when examining historicism’s alliance with utopianism. If holism is the technical deficiency common

¹²⁹ Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, p.50.

¹³⁰ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.74.

¹³¹ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.74.

to both, then unchosen ends represent their shared moral shortcoming. Popper contends that historicism and utopianism are predicated on a belief that ‘their aims or ends are not a matter of choice, or of moral decision, but that they may be scientifically discovered’ from within their respective fields of inquiry.¹³² In Popper’s understanding, historicism constrains present political action by an undue deference to history meanwhile utopianism is prepared to gamble the present by initiating radical and fundamentally transformative societal change in pursuit of an imagined or ideal state that is taken to be the end point for utopian engineering. Popper describes the utopian approach as dealing in ‘ultimate aims’ and only drawing up plans for ‘practical action’ on the basis of a ‘blueprint’ for society.¹³³ Popper’s opposition to utopianism is primarily an opposition to what I term blueprint politics, the notion that political reform must be based on a preconceived model of society as a whole to be engineered. Interestingly, this is an opposition that he shares with Oakeshott, albeit that they express their opposition in slightly different ways.

The Epistemology of Planning

For Popper, utopianism and utopian engineering in particular, come undone on epistemological grounds. His own piecemeal engineering however is argued to be able to stand on the epistemological ground that brings about the fall of utopian engineering.

‘Social life is so complicated that few men, or none at all, could judge a blueprint for social engineering on the grand scale; whether it be practicable; whether it would result in real improvement; what kind of suffering it may involve; and what may be the means for its realization. As opposed to this, blueprints for piecemeal engineering are comparatively simple. They are blueprints for single institutions, for health and unemployed insurance, for instance, or arbitration courts, or anti-depression budgeting, or educational reform. If they go wrong, the damage is not very great, and a re-adjustment not very difficult’.¹³⁴

Popper seeks to draw a sharp distinction between the epistemological requirements of piecemeal social engineering and those, perceived to be far more considerable and

¹³² Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p. 74.

¹³³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.157.

¹³⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.159.

perhaps even impossible, of utopian engineering. It is the complications of social life that render the utopian model so problematic in that the range of information and knowledge that needs to be factored into the planning process is beyond the scope of any group that might be constituted to consider and judge it. Popper's epistemological critique of utopian engineering is closely mirrored by Hayek who sets out very similar objections to planning in the economic sphere.¹³⁵

Popper is justified in highlighting the epistemological obstacles to a utopian engineering approach but it is arguable that the difference between that approach and his own piecemeal method is not as stark as he believes himself to have established. Firstly, it is evident that his opposition to blueprint politics is a matter of degree since his own method still takes guidance from blueprints even if of a smaller scale and more restricted scope. Secondly, and more importantly, however it is not all obvious that the single institution projects that he lists as examples could avoid the epistemological difficulties posed to utopian engineering. Educational reform in the UK for instance would be likely to involve social engineering on a 'grand scale' and be characterised as complex rather than simple. Part of the reason for that complexity stems from the fact that a term such as 'educational reform' does not even denote a single institution in a British context and this would add to the complications identified as being detrimental to planning of any kind. Similarly in the case of 'anti-depression budgeting' there is no evidence to suggest that such a task can be pursued uncomplicatedly or indeed judgements be made as to its practicability, real effects, or the sufferings that may result from it. The current global financial crisis does not appear to be particularly amenable to piecemeal social remedy. Furthermore, the potential damage to be done in any getting something such as anti-depression budgeting wrong is likely to be severe in terms of job losses, insolvencies and home repossessions.

Popper, I suggest, does not overestimate the likely epistemological difficulty to be faced by utopian planning but he does underestimate the extent to which similar

¹³⁵ Popper himself sets this out in an endnote in which he expresses the belief that Hayek can be interpreted as favourable to piecemeal engineering. Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.308.

difficulties befall his own approach, at least as conceived on the scale that he sets out here. In spite of such challenges the Popperian method of piecemeal political reform remains a more modest and cautious approach than that of utopian animated attempts to remake society at large. The restraint of ambition that Popper cautions in respect of political change as well as being anti-utopian and anti-historicist has considerable sympathy with conservative aversion to revolutionary change. Popper's epistemological preference for a cautionary approach to political reform also has roots in the particular unease that he displays toward unchecked power. He criticises the utopian or holistic planner for overlooking that whilst power can be centralised with relative ease it is far more difficult to centralise the knowledge 'distributed over many individual minds' that would be necessary for the 'wise wielding' of such centralised power.¹³⁶ Planning for society as a whole would require a conjunction of power and knowledge that Popper considers dangerous in respect of power and infeasible in terms of knowledge. His liberal concern here is to protect the individual from the invasiveness and revolutionary turmoil that could potentially result from wholesale change however meticulously planned it might claim to be.

Oakeshott too has grave reservations about projects of reform of such scale and ambition that they entail the redrawing of society from scratch; such a tendency, he asserts, is rationalist in origin. He suggests that undertakings of this kind require a 'blank sheet of infinite possibility' as a starting point. If however the tabula rasa of a particular society 'has been defaced by the irrational scribbles of tradition-ridden ancestors, then the first task of the rationalist must be to scrub it clean'.¹³⁷

Oakeshott's anti-rationalism stems from his conservative concern that much of value risks being lost in the process of scrubbing clean that he outlines here. Popper shares the fear that large scale social change is inherently risky and points specifically to an increased risk of 'unintended and largely unexpected repercussions'.¹³⁸ From a Popperian perspective then, the conducting of social and political change warrants an attitude composed of a degree of conservative caution in order that it can proceed in

¹³⁶ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.89.

¹³⁷ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.5.

¹³⁸ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.68.

a controlled manner that maximises the opportunity to learn from mistakes as they arise.

This conveys the essence of Popper's attempt to introduce his methodology of science (developed in the context of the natural sciences) into social and political matters. As he regards the scientific method to be encapsulated by 'a readiness to learn from mistakes'¹³⁹ it is not surprising that political reform from a Popperian perspective must be conducted in such a way that is both attuned to the possibility of error and prepared to amend in light of it. It is on this basis that Popper argues that the kind of 'experiment' from which most can be learned, and hence is most scientific, is that of the 'alteration of one social institution at a time'. It is by such advance that piecemeal engineers can learn to 'fit institutions into the framework of other institutions' and adjust them as required to work as intended.¹⁴⁰ I have already noted that by proceeding on the scale of institution at a time piecemeal planning may be rendered difficult on epistemological grounds. Whilst undoubtedly more cautious, and conservative, than attempts at broader social reform it would still be unlikely to satisfy a theorist such as Oakeshott that, conceived in this way, it was sufficiently cognisant of the nature of the risk inherent to institutional reform.

Popper's reference to the 'framework of other institutions' is a rather ambiguous term. On one hand, it can be read as a simple reflection of the fact that if focus is concentrated on a single institution then it must be remembered that it exists in relation to others and so internal institutional changes may well reap change beyond the institution itself. Indeed, in many cases this will be precisely the intent. On the other hand though, the term could be taken to imply a broader framework for society that is conceived by the instigator(s) of change. In this case the separation between institutions that would allow them to be engineered one at a time can be called into question. Furthermore, the wider framework is also suggestive of planning in that the engineer may be seeking to influence it in the particular reforms being undertaken. If this is so then even piecemeal engineers cannot avoid drawing upon

¹³⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.163.

¹⁴⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.163.

some wider societal conceptions and blueprints of their own to inform the particular changes that they aim to make. The issue at stake here is whether or not specific (institutional) aspects of society can be isolated to the extent that would appear to be necessitated by Popper's approach.

He is convinced that they can be and argues that one of the key benefits of the technological approach to political reform is that it 'imposes a discipline on our speculative inclinations' in forcing the submission of theories 'to definite standards, such as standards of clarity and practical testability'.¹⁴¹ It is not especially clear however that submission to definite standards will suffice in and of itself as a disciplinary imposition. Popper contends that the piecemeal engineer 'will avoid undertaking reforms of a complexity and scope which makes it impossible for him to disentangle causes and effects'.¹⁴² There seems to exist at least the possibility that the sort of the complexity and scope described here could be encountered by reform at an institutional level such as Popper is prepared to permit. It may well be that to achieve the avoidance that he seeks then reform would be better concentrated at a sub-institutional level particularly in its early stages. Otherwise, it is difficult to see how Popper can confidently insulate his engineers from potential complexities in relating cause and effect.

One of the most important claims that Popper makes in defence of piecemeal engineering is the ability, as he sees it, of its practitioners to proceed 'with an open mind' as to the scope of reform in contrast to utopian engineers who will have decided in advance that a 'complete reconstruction' is both possible and necessary.¹⁴³ The reason for this is the manner in which the respective approaches treat the question of ends. Popper suggests that piecemeal social engineering resembles physical engineering in 'regarding the ends as beyond the province of technology'.¹⁴⁴ The alternative utopian approach to political reform he characterises as aiming at the

¹⁴¹ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.59.

¹⁴² Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.67.

¹⁴³ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.69.

¹⁴⁴ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.64.

‘movement of society itself’ in that like a physical body it can ‘move as a whole’ in a particular direction. This notion, Popper dismisses as ‘a holistic confusion’.¹⁴⁵

Anti-utopianism and anti-holism are twin pillars that Popper considers integral to the structural strength of piecemeal social engineering. Similarly, it is the utopian and holistic aspects of alternative approaches that lead them, he argues, to set out on journeys of political reform with pre-identified and pre-fixed destinations in mind, very often destinations that will require engineering on a grand scale if they are to be realised. The question remains though as to how the issue of ends is to be addressed and Popper’s answer raises further questions still. He contends that:

‘there is no rational method for determining the ultimate aim [of political reform], but, if anything, only some kind of intuition. Any difference of opinion between utopian engineers must therefore lead, in the absence of rational methods, to the use of power instead of reason, i.e. to violence’.¹⁴⁶

The claims that Popper puts forward here provide further evidence of affinity between his philosophy and that developed by Oakeshott, suggest that the distinction he makes between piecemeal and utopian engineering is overblown in some respects and overstate the consequences of pursuing reform from a utopian perspective.

Firstly, the use of the word ‘intuition’ is an interesting one and highlights to an extent the challenges faced by Popper in attempting to institutionalise a methodology of political reform in the shape of piecemeal engineering. Institutions do not have intuitions, only individuals do and thus we return to the politics of the personal whereby individuals are faced with choices, including over whether or not to initiate any reform, in particular political contexts. For his part, Oakeshott explains that in his conservative politics, political reform should be in pursuit not of a dream or a general principle but rather an ‘intimation’.¹⁴⁷ Individuals and groups pursue intimations, or intuitions, guided by traditions and informed by practical knowledge. Political education for Oakeshott is thus ‘learning how to participate in a

¹⁴⁵ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.114.

¹⁴⁶ Karl Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.161.

¹⁴⁷ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.124.

conversation: it is at once initiation into an inheritance in which we have a life interest, and the exploration of its intimations'.¹⁴⁸ Popper's piecemeal engineers are also expected to learn the art of conversation, critical rational conversation in their case, and, it turns out, pursue intimations of their own in the conduct of political reform. In the conservative philosophy of Oakeshott those intimations are to be found in the traditions that shape communal life. Popper, in setting up the pursuit of intuitions as an aspect of political reform in a manner so similar to Oakeshott reveals a further conservative strand to this thought but he is far less explicit as to the source of those intuitions. Presumably they are constructs of individual imagination and open, upon formulation into hypothesis form, to subsequent testing.

Popper does in fact offer some sort of a guide to which his engineers can turn in search of pursuable intuitions and this is to adopt the 'method of searching for, and fighting against, the greatest and most urgent evils of society, rather than searching for, and fighting for, its greatest ultimate good'.¹⁴⁹ He argues that such a method is to be preferred because human suffering makes a direct moral appeal in a way that the call for an increase in happiness lacks. Popper also posits the existence of 'some kind of analogy' between this view of ethics and his view of scientific methodology in terms of negative formulation; of the elimination of suffering rather than the promotion of happiness in the case of ethics and the task of science conceived as the elimination of false theories rather than the attainment of established truths.¹⁵⁰

Even with the introduction of a methodology of ethics to parallel his scientific method it is not clear that piecemeal engineers should be able to avoid the differences of opinion that Popper thinks will likely be confronted by their utopian counterparts. The elimination of avoidable suffering may serve as a useful principle for political reform and action but it remains a general principle and so within it considerable disagreement might arise as to what is to count as suffering as well as

¹⁴⁸Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.129.

¹⁴⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.158.

¹⁵⁰ Popper sets this out in an extended end note that accompanies his methodological claim in relation to ethics. Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.158.

what particular sufferings should be prioritised for elimination. Popper does suggest however that social evils causing suffering ‘can be comparatively well established’ by contrast with imaginings of idealised social conditions, whatever form they may take.¹⁵¹ He appears to be on firmer ground here as a society such as the UK probably is capable of formulating a list of problems facing it that would find fairly general agreement – issues such as unemployment, educational and healthcare standards and provision, crime and the dangers of climate change for example. The manifestos of political parties seek, by in large, to address these same challenges but propose, to varying degrees, differing solutions. Popper’s injunction toward the avoidance of suffering seems reasonable then but it does not circumvent the question of disagreement in attempts to actualise the principle.

Popper seems to suggest that to pursue an approach of utopian engineering will lead by way of disagreement to the use of violence instead of reason but it does not follow logically that disagreements over an attempt to engineer a vision of utopia will be a prelude to violence. The French and Russian revolutions may for example be conceived as instances of utopian engineering from a Popperian perspective. It is also possible from such a perspective to view the violence that accompanied those revolutions to be intrinsic to change on a revolutionary scale that aims at a complete transformation of society but the fact that violence has been witnessed in conjunction with revolutionary change on occasion does not necessarily make it intrinsic to that type of change. To assume so is to fall for what Hume called the fallacy of ‘constant conjunction’.¹⁵² It is surprising given his anti-inductivism that Popper should appear to make an assumption of this sort in relation to utopian engineering. There is no reason in principle to preclude utopian engineers from pursuing their (varying) projects via the ballot box instead of at the point of a gun.

Popper’s piecemeal social engineering can generally be regarded as an extension of his falsificationist scientific methodology, and as we have seen he does regard it as such, but there are also components residing within it which hint at subtle but

¹⁵¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.159.

¹⁵² David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Books, 1985, p.189.

significant divergences in his conception of the nature and conduct of political as opposed to scientific change. In particular, he sets out a clear, and conservative, opposition to revolutions in politics. Political change or reform from a Popperian perspective should never aim to be revolutionary whereas every scientific hypothesis and test can legitimately and uncomplicatedly be conceived as a revolutionary enterprise with potentially revolutionary consequences. Whilst Popper's scientists must, in Fuller's description, be 'uprooted' from their world in order to participate in a universal enterprise of critical inter-subjective testing, his piecemeal social engineers seem to be rather more rooted by comparison, reliant on intuition to guide them in the specific tasks entailed by the attempted elimination of suffering as found in particular communities. Even if we modify the uprooted/rooted distinction to make it more explicitly a matter of degree it is apparent that Popper's political philosophy tends further towards the latter than does his philosophy of science and in doing so displays a conservative disposition inherent to it.

The attack upon rationalism in politics, and rationalists, developed by Oakeshott is nullified in large part by Popper's philosophical rationalism in that Popper shares some of the concerns that animate Oakeshott's position. They exhibit a common fear of large-scale political planning in terms of its potential disruptions and unintended consequences. Whilst Popper is more questioning of traditions he is nonetheless content to follow Oakeshott's disposition that prefers reform to destructive (re)creation of the political world. Popper is also prepared to countenance repair over invention when engaged in political reform. Popper's piecemeal engineers are expected to recognise 'that only a minority of social institutions are consciously designed while the vast majority have just grown, as the undersigned results of human actions'.¹⁵³ This is recognition of the organic growth of the social institutions inhabited by human beings and it is a conservative recognition.

Popper argues that the task of the physical engineer is 'to design machines and to remodel and service them' and similarly that 'the task of the piecemeal social

¹⁵³ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.65.

engineer is to design social institutions, and to reconstruct and run those already in existence'.¹⁵⁴ Reconstruction, reform and the conservation of institutions is shown here to be a key feature of Popperian philosophy. Physical engineers are expected to service machines not simply invent replacements and the same reparative disposition is held to apply to the machinery of social institutions. Popper and Oakeshott can find common conservative ground but a divide remains and the question remains open as to the extent to which Oakeshott would still be inclined to dismiss Popperian piecemeal social engineering as merely another instance, sophisticated or otherwise, of rationalism in politics.

Oakeshott makes clear that in his view the 'assimilation of politics to engineering is, indeed, what may be called the myth of rationalist politics'.¹⁵⁵ The engineering divide between these two philosophers does go beyond the merely semantic but is perhaps not quite as vast as either might imagine. Popper can, on occasion, overestimate the susceptibility of politics to engineering be it piecemeal or utopian whilst Oakeshott tends to underestimate the extent to which engineering can be indicative of reform as well as (re)invention. It is possible that in taking somewhat incommensurable views on the enterprise of engineering Popper and Oakeshott find the commonalities of their respective positions obscured. One potential consequence of this is that in considering the question of the nation state and its future both would favour reform over revolution. Popper might seek to engineer reform in a piecemeal fashion and Oakeshott would preference the pursuit of intimations prompted by particular traditions but the reforming task would in all likelihood be remarkably similar.

2.5 Conclusion – Popper's Bid to Conserve Liberalism

This chapter began by examining Karl Popper's philosophy of science and did so primarily by comparison with the alternative posited by Thomas Kuhn. The debate between Popper and Kuhn was seen to centre not only on the nature of the scientific

¹⁵⁴ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.64.

¹⁵⁵ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.4.

enterprise itself but also on the nature of the scientific community, or communities in Kuhn's case. Popper set out a logic of scientific discovery, exemplified in his deductive method of falsification, whilst Kuhn can be argued to have theorised a psychology of research that sought, in part, to explain the attachment of scientists to the particular research paradigms in which he considers them to work. Kuhn's scientists seek to conserve the paradigmatic frameworks that guide their research, at least insofar as the framework continues to provide useful lines of inquiry, or puzzles to solve. Popperian scientists have rather greater liberty, and indeed duty, to continually question and test theories on the basis of critical rationality.

In respect of their general philosophies of science then there is a readily apparent liberal-conservative divide separating Popper and Kuhn. More significant in terms of this thesis however is the emergence of a similar divide within Popperian philosophy itself, particularly when attention is turned to the concept of critical rationality and Popper's political theorising. Whilst Popper regards science, and the scientific method, as a more or less revolutionary activity, he is decidedly more suspicious of revolutionary political projects. His preference in politics is for a type of reform that he terms piecemeal social engineering which aims to proceed gradually and avoid the drawing up and pursuit of large-scale blueprints.

In concluding this chapter let us to return to the four constitutive elements of liberalism identified by Gray and referred to in the introductory chapter - individualism, universalism, meliorism and egalitarianism. Gray argues that each of these elements have been fundamentally undermined in a world characterised by what he calls value pluralism¹⁵⁶, and that liberalism therefore is dead as an animating political philosophy. Whilst the central purpose of this thesis is not to defend Popperian liberalism against Gray's pluralist attack it is worth exploring briefly the bases of that attack as part of a project that demonstrates the enduring value of Popper's philosophy to recent and current debates on liberalism and its applications.

¹⁵⁶ A world characterised by 'conflicts among ultimate values that are incommensurable'. John Gray, "Berlin's Agonistic Liberalism", in Gray (ed.) *Post-liberalism – Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.66.

Gray defines liberal individualism as the claim that since ‘nothing has ultimate value except states of mind or feeling, or aspects of the lives of human individuals, therefore the claims of individuals will always defeat those of collectives’.¹⁵⁷ There is no doubt that Popper values individualism as a political and philosophical concept but does so in a social context. ‘That man, and his aims, are in a certain sense a product of society is true enough. But it is also true that society is a product of man and of his aims and that it may become increasingly so’.¹⁵⁸ Gray’s individualist-collectivist distinction is drawn overly sharply and Popper’s liberalism can withstand this challenge. The concept of open society suggests the manner in which individuals can form and benefit from participation in a democratic collective. Similarly, the inter-subjective testing required in Popperian science suggests a symbiotic relationship between individuals and at least some of the collectives or communities of which they are a part.

In terms of universalism, Gray contends that ‘doctrinal liberalism must still affirm that all political institutions are to be assessed on the single scale that measures their approximation to a liberal regime’.¹⁵⁹ For Popper, open society does serve as such a scale. It could do so more effectively however with increased clarity around what is implied and required by the concept. This thesis seeks to give greater clarity to the concept of open society and extend its range of application by suggesting that it can be utilised as a scale for measuring the approximation of particular nation states to Popper’s vision of liberal society. This has two effects, firstly in highlighting the need for Popperians to engage with the nation state in any bid to advance open society and also to demonstrate the contribution that Popper’s theory can make to contemporary debates around the efficacy of the nation state.

Gray’s third element is meliorism, the view that ‘even if human institutions are

¹⁵⁷ John Gray, “What is dead and what is living in liberalism?” in Gray (ed.) *Post-liberalism – Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.286.

¹⁵⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.208.

¹⁵⁹ Gray, “What is dead and what is living in liberalism?” p.286.

imperfectible, they are nonetheless open to indefinite improvement by the judicious use of critical reason'.¹⁶⁰ Gray's attack here centres on what he considers to be a misguided liberal commitment to progress. Popper is certainly a critical rationalist who thinks that progress is possible in both science and politics via the application of the critical rational method.¹⁶¹ Again, the task at hand here is not to debate the possibility or otherwise of progress but Gray's critique raises some interesting questions in the context of this thesis. In particular, is movement away or beyond the nation state to be considered progress? What prospects exist for modifying institutions? From a Popperian perspective, the case is built that to jettison the nation state, especially liberal nation states, would be dangerous because it is difficult to guarantee that any replacement form of political community would be more liberal or more closely approximate open society. There is a Popperian case then to mount a conservative defence of liberal nation states where they exist.

The final element that Gray discusses is egalitarianism which he describes as 'the denial of any natural moral or political hierarchy among human beings'.¹⁶² Popper however considers equality to be a political demand rather than a natural fact.¹⁶³ The question for Popper is whether that demand can best be satisfied by some sort of cosmopolitan world order or whether it can be accommodated within an international order comprised of nation states. Although Popper does not provide an explicit answer on this much of his theorising assumes the existence of the latter and Popper's concern seems to be with how to render it more liberal. A world comprised of liberal, national open societies would be capable of satisfying this Popperian demand and this strengthens the case for aligning Popper's philosophy with liberal nationalism. This will be explored further in chapter four.

When considering Popper's philosophy, Gray makes clear the approach that he thinks should be adopted and the relevant aspects to examine.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid, p.286.

¹⁶¹ Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, p.87.

¹⁶² Gray, "What is dead and what is living in liberalism?" p.286.

¹⁶³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.234.

‘The object of any significant exploration of Popper’s work in political theory is to identify its most distinctive features, to comment on its relationship with his philosophy of science, and to evaluate its contribution to some of the central problem-areas of contemporary political thought’.¹⁶⁴

That is exactly the exploration that this thesis seeks to undertake with the nature and future of the nation state viewed as a central problem-area of contemporary political thought. Having identified conservatism as a feature of Popper’s philosophy I conclude this section by revisiting the conservative arguments of Scruton mentioned in the previous chapter.

For Scruton, conservatism is the maintenance of what he calls the ‘social ecology’.¹⁶⁵ He suggests that individual freedom is a part of that social ecology but that it is not the sole or true goal of politics. That goal is rather the conservation of shared resources – social, material, economic and spiritual.¹⁶⁶ From a Popperian perspective, this thesis examines the social ecologies of the nation state and of open society and seeks to establish their compatibility. Individual freedom is central to Popper’s philosophy and Popper is prepared to accept that ‘the most important part of our environment is its social part’.¹⁶⁷ The important point for Popper is that as individuals, through cooperative engagement with others, we can modify and adapt the social ecologies that we inhabit.

Scruton goes on to suggest that conservatism ‘is the politics of delay, the purpose of which is to maintain in being, for as long as possible, the life and health of a social organism’.¹⁶⁸ A nation state would qualify as an organism to be maintained from Scruton’s perspective. Popper would not grant it such status automatically but it does make sense, in Popperian terms, to give thought to the conservation of those nation states that function, more or less, as open societies. Scruton is keen to defend

¹⁶⁴ John Gray, “The liberalism of Karl Popper”, in Gray (ed.) *Liberalisms – Essays in Political Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1989, p.10.

¹⁶⁵ Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.ix.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid, p.ix.

¹⁶⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.209.

¹⁶⁸ Scruton, *A Political Philosophy*, p.ix.

the nation state as a social organism in its own right and commends what he regards as the inherent localism of conservatism in contrast to the globalism of liberalism. Again, Popper's liberalism has the potential to be developed in a way that bridges this divide. The concept of open society is capable of local application and adaptation (within particular nation states) whilst still serving as a 'global' measure against which the openness of societies can be assessed.

The potential tension between Popper's desire to liberate individuals, be they scientists, politicians or citizens, on the basis of critical rationality and his conservative aversion to radical political change becomes especially important in attempts to apply his philosophy. Popper's concept of open society sets out a model of political community but it contains ambiguities and uncertainties that partly result from the liberal and conservative elements that coexist in his underlying philosophy. This raises a crucial question about what Popper actually means by open society: does he mean a multiplicity of open societies, similarly constituted, that could easily recognise each other's legitimacy and so be peaceful and cooperative or does open society entail a more expressly cosmopolitan concept whereby the boundaries of political community simply divide those committed to critical rationality from those who are not?

Subsequent chapters take up the challenge of answering that question whilst this chapter has endeavoured to trace the roots of that question in Popper's philosophy. This thesis concerns itself with the boundaries that attach to political communities and those implied by the concept of open society. The nation state is one answer to the question of where political boundaries should be drawn. For Popper, it is an inadequate answer and one that he held to be incompatible with this vision of open society. Whatever the inadequacies of the nation state as a form of political community in the early part of the twenty-first century, the argument is made in this thesis that an incompatibility with the concept of open society is not one of them. As the chapters that follow illustrate, the interpretation of the relationship between open society and the nation state is crucial to addressing issues such as how to conserve

open societies where they exist and how to liberate closed societies and make them more open.

3

The Boundaries of the Open Society and the Limits of Openness

3.1 Introduction – *The Open Society and its Boundaries*

This chapter sets out to explore the concept of open society advanced and defended by Popper. In particular, the question is raised as to the possible boundaries of open society as a form of political community and the potential implications of any such boundaries in the application of Popper's political philosophy. The previous chapter introduced some of the key elements of that political philosophy and the manner in which it emerged out of his philosophy of science. Indeed so intertwined are Popper's approaches to science and politics that Fuller is drawn to conclude that 'once Popper's philosophy of science is read alongside his political philosophy, it becomes clear that scientific inquiry and democratic politics are meant to be alternative expressions of what Popper called the open society'.¹

While the previous chapter focused on the nature of political change from a Popperian perspective, with a specific analysis undertaken of the notion of piecemeal social engineering, the task here is to outline what Popper means by open society and submit it to critical examination. My overarching interest remains in the extent to which the open society is necessarily hostile to the concept of the nation state and although that issue is raised explicitly and in detail in the next chapter it warrants restating here. Before any such assessment can be made of open society a closer look must be taken at how it is conceived and the basis upon which Popper defends it. In tracing the outline of Popper's open society philosophy one of the features that I aim to demonstrate is that he is in effect positing what I call an 'open state'; and the state that Popper advocates implicitly presupposes many of the features common to

¹ Steve Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper – The Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003, p.26.

nation states. The open society is, for Popper, an ideal state, that is to say, a particular vision for the organisation of political community and power.

The first section of this chapter will offer a preliminary sketch of the open state with a consideration of what Popper suggests a society needs in order to be deemed open. This includes institutional and structural aspects as well as the values held to support them. Having outlined a Popperian version of the state the opportunity subsequently arises to compare it with communitarian and pluralist alternatives. This provides for a fuller understanding of what Popper actually means in declaring a society, or state, open whilst also helping me to revisit the liberal-conservative divide in his philosophical structure and its political application. Questions of the boundaries and purpose of the state are pertinent to this investigation and are seen to be influenced by the balance struck between liberalism and conservatism. The rather opaque boundaries of open society are teased out in relation to those imposed by communitarianism and pluralism. This process reveals a crucial ambiguity lying at the heart of Popper's open society. That ambiguity is whether it is devised (ideally) to be a single universal society or state or whether he intended the concept to find application in a range of particular open societies or states that bound distinct communities whilst holding an open philosophy and structure in common.²

Communitarians take issue with liberal philosophy and politics for misconceiving the nature of the relationships between individuals and the societies of which they are part.³ Via an examination of communitarian critiques of liberalism, particularly as found in the work of Michael Sandel, the relationship between individuals and open society is scrutinised. Does Popper's form of liberalism render the open society acutely vulnerable to communitarian attack or does his intermittently conservative disposition erect a defensive barrier against the communitarian

² The extent and character of the potential distinctiveness of particular open societies could be compared to varieties of capitalism. Variations of capitalist economies share sufficient features to be distinguished in common from non-capitalist economic systems whilst still exhibiting significant divergences of structure and complexion amongst themselves.

³ Stephen Mulhall & Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996, preface xiii.

offensive? The answer to this question depends very much on the extent to which particular open societies can be inferred from Popperian philosophy as opposed to a singular and universal open society. Establishing the nature of community within open society is an important prelude to the labour of the following chapter whereby the compatibility of open society and the nation state is examined.

After facing the communitarian test I then view open society through a pluralist lens. The theorising of John Gray is instructive here in that he endeavours to describe and defend a post-liberal position emerging from the collapse, as he perceives it, of the enlightenment project.⁴ For Gray the most striking failures of the enlightenment project are to be witnessed in ‘the confounding of Enlightenment expectations of the evanescence of particularistic allegiances, national and religious, and of the progressive levelling down, or marginalization, of cultural difference in human affairs’.⁵ The pluralist political philosophy adopted by Gray is of interest not only for the questions it raises of Popperian liberalism but also for its rejection of the communitarian alternative. How great a challenge does Gray’s pluralism pose to the philosophy of the open society and in particular what does such a challenge reveal about the boundaries that pertain to open society? In addressing questions of this sort the way will be paved for a fuller consideration of the nature of political community entailed by Popper’s theorising as well as the relationship it might bear to the nation state as a communal political form. The starting point of this investigation however, is to describe, explain and evaluate Popper’s conception of open society.

3.2 *The Open Society and the Open State*

What is the citizen to demand of the state? What is to be considered the legitimate aim of state activity? These are questions that Popper himself poses as a starting point to what he describes as a rational inquiry into the functioning of the political

⁴ John Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake*, London: Routledge, 1997.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.65.

state and its institutions.⁶ In particular, he suggests it worthwhile to ask the question as to why a well-ordered state is preferred by human beings to an anarchical one. Answering this question should be a priority for the ‘technologist’ – a piecemeal social engineer – before proceeding to the ‘construction or reconstruction of any political institution’.⁷ Only on this basis, Popper notes, can an engineer determine whether or not a particular institution is well adapted to its function.⁸ The political engineer, as we have seen, is tasked with adapting institutions in a piecemeal fashion and on the basis of an inter-subjective critical rationality. The adaptation that Popper seeks is in the direction of the open society but how is that direction to be ascertained? The Popperian method of doing so, unsurprisingly, is to root out and seek to eliminate the dangers posed by closed society.

For Popper, the open society is conceived ‘as a defence of freedom against totalitarian and authoritarian ideas, and as a warning against the dangers of historicist superstitions’.⁹ Totalitarian and authoritarian regimes are thus deemed to represent the greatest threat to the establishment and maintenance of the open society. Any government however might pursue an authoritarian idea or policy and so eternal vigilance is necessary on the part of those who would defend and protect the openness of society. Popper suggests that western civilization has not recovered from the shock of its birth (as noted previously he supposes the infant civilization to have been delivered in the Athens of ancient Greece) – that shock being ‘the transition from the tribal or closed society, with its submission to magical forces, to the open society which sets free the critical powers’ of humanity.¹⁰ Furthermore, he proposes that the open society aims at ‘humaneness and reasonableness’ as well as ‘equality and freedom’.¹¹ The initial part of this chapter explores what is meant by such aims and the manner in which open society is designed to serve them.

⁶ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1 – The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge, 1984, p.109.

⁷ Ibid, p.109.

⁸ Ibid, p109.

⁹ Karl Popper, *Unended Quest*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.115.

¹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.1.

¹¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.1.

Freedom, Power and the Open Society

Popper's concern with the safeguarding of individual freedom derives from the potential for harm that he perceives to be an ever present danger of power, and concentrated, unchecked power in particular. Indeed he goes so far as to say that 'the fundamental problem of political theory is the problem of checks and balances, of institutions by which political power, its arbitrariness and its abuse can be controlled and tamed'.¹² His open society theory is an attempt to address this very problem and to illustrate the necessity of the control of power and the ways in which such control can be instituted. The desire for the institutional control of power on Popper's part is interesting in that it suggests that his primary fear is the abuse and arbitrary wielding of power by individuals or groups unconstrained by institutional mechanisms and breaks.

The function of the state then is to provide institutional checks and balances to political power that will prevent, or at least minimise, its arbitrary abuse. The implication of this for the open state is that in order to fulfil its function 'it must have more power at any rate than any single private citizen or public corporation'.¹³ Piecemeal social engineers should be capable of designing institutions to mitigate the danger that such power will be misused but Popper concedes that this is a danger that cannot be eliminated completely.¹⁴ Whilst power represents a potential threat to freedom Popper is nonetheless clear that it must be acquired by the state so as to be put to the defence of freedom.

Popper outlines what he describes as the 'humanitarian' purpose of the state and it is one that closely approximates the harm principle as defended by Mill.¹⁵ Popper's open state aims at 'the protection of that freedom which does not harm other citizens' and so 'the state must limit the freedom of the citizens as equally as possible, and not beyond what is necessary for achieving an equal limitation of freedom'.¹⁶ This

¹² Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.219.

¹³ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.155.

¹⁴ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.155.

¹⁵ John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, London: Penguin Books, 1974.

¹⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.110.

highlights two principles that can be regarded as underpinning the open society from the outset. Firstly, the notion of equality is inherent to the manner in which Popper conceives of freedom; inequalities are not simply undesirable in and of themselves but also in the extent to which they detract from freedom. Secondly, just as individuals are to be limited in their freedom, corresponding limitations are placed upon the state. Popper recognises here that threats to individual freedom, and it is individual freedom that he is committed to protecting, can arise both from other individuals and also the state. Protection then is to be found in a state that is sufficiently powerful to counter the potential threats posed by fellow citizens but the power of which is institutionally constrained to nullify its latent potentiality to threaten the freedom of individuals.

Defining Freedom – Two Concepts

Popper may impose limitations on his open state but he does not intend that it should be non-interventionist. He argues that ‘liberalism and state-interference are not opposed to each other. On the contrary, any kind of freedom is clearly impossible unless it is guaranteed by the state’.¹⁷ While the power of the state can threaten freedom if abused, state power remains for Popper the only reliable guarantor of freedom for individuals.

This raises a question of what Popper means when he speaks of freedom, a question that can usefully be addressed through the distinction drawn by Isaiah Berlin between negative and positive freedom. Berlin defines negative freedom as non-interference or that area within which individuals ‘can act unobstructed by others’.¹⁸ By contrast, the definition of positive liberty stresses the notion of capacity in terms of the ability to make choices and follow self-generated goals. Berlin describes it as the wish:

‘to be conscious of myself as a thinking, willing, active being, bearing responsibility for my choices and able to explain them by references to my own ideas and

¹⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

¹⁸ Isaiah Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975, p.122.

purposes. I feel free to the degree that I believe this to be true, and enslaved to the degree that I am made to realize that it is not'.¹⁹

Positive freedom entails not simply the absence of barriers and constraints, as is the case with its negative counterpart, but rather a more dynamic concept whereby liberty is enacted in the purposeful engagement with a range of meaningful choices.

It is apparent from the limitations of freedom that Popper seeks to apply to individuals and the state that his understanding of the concept incorporates a substantial negative element in Berlin's terms. He does indeed seek to mark out a realm of non-interference within which the individual can act as they please, insofar as they do not interfere with a corresponding liberty for others in the process. Popper calls this the right of the individual to 'model' their own life.²⁰ However, by explicitly linking his liberalism to state-interference and conferring the power on the state to guarantee individual freedom he incorporates to some extent a notion of positive freedom into his political philosophy. Advocates of Popperian philosophy such as Bryan Magee have clearly interpreted his work as invoking a positive conception of freedom. Magee suggests that Popper aims to 'maximise the freedom of individuals to live as they wish' and that 'this requires massive public provision in education, the arts, housing, health and every other aspect of social life'.²¹ On this basis, the role of the state is far from restricted in Popper's philosophy.

Magee's interpretation of Popper here can be regarded as an accurate one if we recall from the previous chapter the list of single institution blueprints that were made available to piecemeal engineers – health and unemployment insurance, arbitration courts, anti-depression budgeting and educational reform.²² It is also the case that the importance attached to equality by Popper will require considerable state action to redress inequalities where they are to be found. Not only is freedom to be administered on the basis of equality, in terms of being applied by the state to all

¹⁹ Berlin, *Four Essays*, p.131.

²⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.165.

²¹ Bryan Magee, *Popper*, London: Fontana Press, 1985, p.86.

²² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.159.

citizens equally but inequalities, in Popper's view, are prejudicial to freedom because otherwise the potential will exist for 'a tyranny of the strong over the weak'.²³ It is for this reason that Popper seeks to guard against the paradox of freedom whereby 'unlimited freedom leads to its opposite'. Preventing the occurrence of such a scenario necessitates the protection and restriction of freedom 'by law', or put another way, by the state.²⁴

Whilst the open state must act to protect and restrict freedom in order that it can be secured equally for all citizens, Popper concedes that 'the important and difficult question of the limitations of freedom cannot be solved by a cut and dried formula'.²⁵ He does not elaborate on how this question can be further addressed but it is noteworthy that he insists that his 'protectionist theory of the state' (that the purpose of the state is to offer protection to individuals) 'says nothing about the essential nature of the state, or about a natural right to freedom'.²⁶ Popper, ever wary of essentialism, prefers to leave questions surrounding the limits of freedom undetermined and open ended so that the individuals who comprise a society can reflect upon them and engineer an answer or solution that they can be content with in its reasonableness. Popper in fact argues that the lack of a formula for determining the boundaries of freedom has a powerful normative attraction by providing the stimulus of political struggles and problems that will both engage the citizenry and encourage them, where necessary, to fight in defence of their freedom.²⁷

It is not particularly obvious why such indeterminacy in the question of freedom's limitations should result in citizens taking it upon themselves to adopt a greater duty of care towards freedom and this appears to be an area in which Popper proceeds on the basis of his faith in reason rather than by deductive persuasion. It is also somewhat surprising that he is content to simply describe the question as important

²³ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2–Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986, p.44.

²⁴ Ibid, p.44.

²⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

²⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

²⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

and difficult without attempting to posit even a general directive to be applied in answering it. This is especially peculiar given that Popper has already raised and stressed the significance of equality in the context of adjudicating freedom and this represents a missed opportunity to elaborate on the manner of ensuring that freedom is pursued equally and fairly. We might consider this issue to be that of the democratisation of freedom. Popper states that freedom does not exist unsecured by the state and conversely ‘only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all’.²⁸ This brings us to, arguably, the defining feature of the open state, its democratic character.

Democracy and the Open Society

We have already encountered the profound anti-totalitarianism that permeates Popper’s political philosophy and his fundamental principle that underpins liberal politics, from his perspective, of the control and restraint of power. The control of power is the very purpose of the Popperian state and his focus on individualism ensures that Popper seeks to give each and every citizen a stake and responsibility in controlling power. At the very outset of the first volume of the *Open Society and its Enemies* Popper explains why he attaches so much importance to the democratic control of power. He suggests that ‘only democracy provides an institutional framework that permits reform without violence, and so the use of reason in political matters’.²⁹ This explanation reveals three things about the Popperian approach.

Firstly, that the power with which he is most concerned is physical power and therefore circumstances that are either conducive to violent reform, or deny alternative possibilities, are to be considered a failure in the functioning of the state. Secondly, it becomes clear that the control of power must be an institutional form of control and so part of the efficacy and normative appeal of democracy is that it institutionalises a check on power; a check that is shared amongst the citizens of a given state. Thirdly, Popper views democracy as the vehicle by which reason is introduced into politics in the sense of creating an institutional area for the contest,

²⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

²⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.4.

or battle, of ideas. Popper's fear is that in the absence of democracy reform can only be achieved via physical contests whereby the strong will dominate the weak. The hope that Popper attaches to democracy is that the consideration of reforming proposals will provide the basis for political change and that such a process will have equality at its heart in that anybody can propose a reform whilst deciding between proposals will not involve recourse to violence.

Popper goes on to describe the principle of a democratic policy as being 'the proposal to create, develop, and protect, political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny'.³⁰ This could be considered as one of the principles making up a kind of mission statement for open society. Politicians and policymakers that may seek to use Popper's political philosophy to inform their decision making, in respect of either domestic or foreign policy, can recognise in this statement the core objective that Popper sought. The importance of democracy to Popper is further elaborated when he considers the question of political power and those that would wield power through, and on behalf of, the state. Just as individuals are fallible so too must governments be since they are comprised of individuals after all. Popper argues that it is naïve and dangerous to assume or rely upon the 'goodness and wisdom' of government, comprised as it is of fallible human beings of varying morality, and thus political thought should engage with the prospect of bad government.³¹

For political philosophy to be cognisant of such a prospect then it must take a particular approach to the problem of politics. Popper suggests that this approach forces the replacement of the question: 'Who should rule? By the new question: How can we so organize political institutions that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?',³² Democracy is not to be valued chiefly for permitting rule by the people, however conceived, but rather for providing a mechanism for the removal of damaging governments (at periodic intervals) without the need to employ force. Popper does not for instance argue the case for direct

³⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.125.

³¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.121.

³² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.121.

democracy and this is in part because he is less concerned with the form of democracy adopted than with the fact that it is adopted at the expense of undemocratic procedures. His approach here does echo to some extent the way he dealt with theory selection and testing in his philosophy of science. Popper's scientific philosophy is designed to institute a mechanism whereby bad theories, in terms of being false, can be exposed and rooted out. The institution of democracy can be read as a means of falsifying governments or, more regularly, the policies that they seek to implement and so pointing the way to revision and reform where tests are failed.

Popper does indeed describe democracy as the right of adjudication on the part of the people vis-à-vis their government.³³ He also suggests that democracy is the 'only known device' offering protection against the misuse of political power.³⁴ It should be reiterated that Popper does not imagine that the misuse of political power can be prevented but rather that its damage can be mitigated in circumstances whereby rulers can be dismissed democratically. Two further points are worth noting on the view that Popper takes of democracy. Firstly, that it provides a forum for the utilisation and application of reason but the institution of democracy does not of itself in any way provide or guarantee the deployment of reason in political matters, it merely renders such a course possible. Secondly, that democracy is the only sustainable and reliable means of controlling not just political power but also economic power.

On the relationship of democracy to rationality Popper suggests that the democratic process 'cannot provide reason. The question of the intellectual and moral standard of its citizens is to a large degree a personal problem'.³⁵ In a simple sense this seems obvious given that democratic institutions form but a set of relationships between rulers and ruled and do not discriminate on the basis of intellect. Popper is arguing here that democracy has little, if any intellectual impact upon those that operate with

³³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.127.

³⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.127.

³⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.126.

it but in recognising this he does not accept that the intellectual capacity of citizens should be beyond the concern of the state. It is instructive here to compare Popper's view of political education with that of Oakeshott.

Having made the state the guarantor of freedom Popper seeks to ensure that individuals attain the intellectual capacity that will allow them to recognise threats to their freedom and take steps to defend it. A degree of 'state control' is needed in education in order to guard against 'neglect' that would leave individuals unaware of freedom and its importance.³⁶ Popper is in effect arguing here that ignorance is the friend of the tyrant and that education is crucial to the vigilance required to supervise and preserve freedom. Popper's demand then is that citizens must be educated as critical rationalists if they are to be meaningful contributors to the open society and armed to combat (intellectually) its enemies. On this basis the state should make universal educational provision but, Popper warns, 'too much state control in educational matters is a fatal danger to freedom, since it must lead to indoctrination'.³⁷ Popper does not attempt to draw the line at which state control becomes indoctrination and presumably this question can only be addressed with reference to particular instances.

Whilst democracy may not make a direct contribution to this educational process Popper considers political freedom to be a critical element of it. In describing critical discussion as 'the foundation of the free thought of the individual' he contends that 'this means that true freedom of thought is impossible without political freedom'.³⁸ This accords with Popper's view, discussed in the previous chapter, that to conceal error is the greatest of intellectual sins.³⁹ The suppression of error is equally to be frowned upon in political matters and so too is the suppression of critical discussion itself because the loss of that entails a corresponding loss of free thought and hence individual liberty. Popper regards this to be a moral as well as an

³⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

³⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

³⁸ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.208.

³⁹ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.201.

intellectual imperative and states that ‘if the growth of reason is to continue, and human rationality to survive, then the diversity of individuals and their opinions, aims, and purposes must never be interfered with (except in extreme cases where political freedom is endangered)’.⁴⁰ Political education then must foster this diversity whilst inculcating only a critical attitude that will liberate individuals to think for themselves. This is a delicate balancing act that Popper requires of the state and as an educational policy proposal it has a rather abstract character. It is of a decidedly more abstract nature than Oakeshott would deem feasible or indeed desirable.

Oakeshott set out his perspective on political education in an inaugural lecture at the London School of Economics and began by restating his definition of politics as being the activity of attending to the general arrangements of a society.⁴¹ His definition in this context is noticeably short and does not display an overabundance of detail but this is deliberate since he considers it inappropriate and misguided to ‘seek a definition of politics in order to deduce from it the character of political knowledge and education’; far better he insists to ‘observe the kind of knowledge and education which is inherent in any understanding of political activity’.⁴² Oakeshott bids to proceed on the basis of concrete observations of the epistemological and intellectual currents of a political community and thus gain insight into the nature and character of that community’s politics.

The observations at which Oakeshott aims are of traditions of behaviour. He concedes that these may be considered ‘flimsy and elusive’ but insists that they are ‘not without identity’.⁴³ This identity can be traced because the various parts that comprise a tradition of behaviour do not all change at the same time and the changes that it undergoes ‘are potential within it’.⁴⁴ Oakeshott appears here to be once more

⁴⁰ Karl Popper, *The Poverty of Historicism*, Routledge Classics, London, 2002, p.159.

⁴¹ Michael Oakeshott, “Political Education” in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen and Co, London, 1962, p.112.

⁴² Ibid, p.113.

⁴³ Ibid, p.128.

⁴⁴ Ibid, p.128.

in pursuit of intimations. That pursuit is of a particular kind.

‘Political education is not merely a matter of coming to understand a tradition, it is learning how to participate in a conversation: it is at once initiation into an inheritance in which we have a life interest, and the exploration of its intimations’.⁴⁵

Political education for Oakeshott then is primarily, and crucially, a practical activity. It is practical knowledge, acquired in a participative manner, that citizens must familiarise themselves with in undertaking a political education. Popper, by contrast, would appear to suggest that a political education can and should be taught rather than obtained by way of communal apprenticeship. In short, Popper contends that political education can be formulated as technical knowledge.

Popper does of course recognise a participative and conversational aspect to political education in that he wants the state to educate young citizens as critical rationalists. Upon becoming a critical rationalist the citizen will then be qualified to participate in critical rational discussion (or conversation) and the inter-subjective testing of policy proposals. The danger for Popper in this is that some citizens will likely be more critically rational than others and therefore, however well intentioned and resourced the state’s educational provision might be, considerable inequalities may well arise that serve to inhibit the participation of a class of citizens in rational deliberation.

From Oakeshott’s conservative point of view, political education ‘begins in the enjoyment of a tradition, in the observation and imitation of the behaviour of our elders’.⁴⁶ In this sense, there is no escaping a political education. It cannot be volunteered for as there is little or nothing in the world that does not in some way contribute to it over the course of our formative years. Coming to understand the societies that we inhabit is to learn to participate and communicate in them. In this task individuals are guided by those around them, particularly those that are older than them and who have more experience of the traditions of behaviour that shape the society. Oakeshott’s educational prescription involves the imitation of behaviour

⁴⁵ Oakeshott, “Political Education”, p.129.

⁴⁶ Oakeshott, “Political Education”, p.129.

whilst Popper would consider this, potentially at least, to be a form of indoctrination. The Popperian preference is for the protection and celebration of diversity through which it is hoped a range of possibilities can be explored and critically evaluated.

That said, as I noted in chapter two, critical rationalism can, to some extent, be viewed as a tradition of behaviour itself and thus Popper could be content for education by way of imitation in this particular tradition. As Popper does not offer a guide as to how critical rationalism should be taught, or the precise manner in which a state can seek to develop a critically rational citizenry, it is difficult to evaluate the degree to which he avoids following a similar path to Oakeshott. The political education advocated by Oakeshott must also embrace 'knowledge of the politics of other contemporary societies' at least insofar as their politics, or attending to arrangements, relate to those of the society in question.⁴⁷ The knowledge sought in this instance is again of a traditional and practical kind and Oakeshott intends that it be used to inform the traditions embedded within the society that so inquires.

The study of another people's politics 'should be an ecological study of a tradition of behaviour, not an anatomical study of mechanical devices or the investigation of an ideology'.⁴⁸ Oakeshott does not seek the transference of technical knowledge across societies and communities nor does he perceive much of insight to be gained in studying ideologies from distant perspectives. This partly reflects Oakeshott's general aversion to ideologically derived and practised politics but it also implies that ideologies can be properly understood only in relation to the societal contexts within which they are applied.⁴⁹ People in other societies will attend to different arrangements of politics on this analysis, in a manner similar to the diversity of paradigms envisaged by Kuhn in science. Oakeshott's conversational politics takes place largely within a society rather than across societies. Having critiqued Kuhn for erecting barriers between paradigms and scientific communities, Popper's politics,

⁴⁷ Oakeshott, "Political Education", p.131.

⁴⁸ Oakeshott, "Political Education", p.131.

⁴⁹ This point is recognised by Mulhall & Swift who note that 'even in the language of everyday politics the term 'liberal' means different things in the United States and the United Kingdom' for example. Mulhall & Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, p.xiii.

and the political education that supports it, must be translatable across communities. At least among those willing to adopt a critically rational attitude a political conversation that transcends communal boundaries should be possible. In this way, Popper's political education can be viewed as uprooting citizens from the world in the same manner that Fuller suggests Popperian scientists must be. A critical rational education is thus intended to prepare students for entry into a (potentially) universal society of critical rationalists in which a common approach is taken to the question of how to proceed with political reform. A state educational system promoting critical rationalism is one institution that makes up an open society and Popper indicates that the institutionalisation of politics as a principle is vital to realising the open society.

The Open Society and the Institutions of Politics

Popper, as we have seen, contends that the open society has to be constituted by institutions that can facilitate the rational engineering of social and political reform. He argues that in the long run all problems of politics are institutional problems and thus 'problems of the legal framework rather than of persons, and that progress towards more equality can be safeguarded only by the institutional control of power'.⁵⁰ Equality re-emerges here as foundational to Popper's political project and as we shall explore shortly, the construction of institutions that provide economic protection and shelter to citizens is a core function of the open state. More generally however it can be established that controlling power institutionally involves the implementation of a framework of law that is impersonal in nature and application.

Institutions are created by fallible human beings and so are invariably liable to contain flaws and produce unintended consequences. This is especially so if we accept Oakeshott's characterisation that political institutions are always deeply veined with 'the traditional, the circumstantial and the transitory'.⁵¹ Popper would not necessarily dispute this description but he would be inclined to suggest that traditions and circumstances, however transitory, can be evaluated rationally and that

⁵⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.162.

⁵¹ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.3.

such a process is best conducted in an institutional context. Just as it is not scientists, as individuals, that are subject to inter-subjective testing but rather their scientific hypotheses so too in politics the focus should not be on political leaders as individuals but rather their proposals for pursuing reform through political institutions.

Oakeshott's aversion to rationalism in politics stems from a perception that there is no place in the rationalist's 'scheme for a 'best in the circumstances', only a place for 'the best', because the function of reason is precisely to surmount circumstances'.⁵² Popper's piecemeal social engineering does indeed attempt to surmount circumstance to a degree but the piecemeal approach is insulated from Oakeshott's attack because it does not recognise the best solution, conceived as a foundational and timeless position, but concurs that the best in the circumstances represents the limits of ambition in matters of political reform. One important point of divergence however is that the piecemeal social engineer is tasked with designing and maintaining institutions that are the best in particular circumstances at enhancing and preserving individual freedom, that is the criterion against which they are to be evaluated. Reformers of an Oakeshottian persuasion contemplate the slightly different task of pursuing the intimations evoked by particular traditions of behaviour.

Both Popper and Oakeshott conceive of political reform as attempts to modify the legal framework that denotes the governance of a society. The great benefit of a legal framework, Popper argues, is that it 'can be known and understood by the individual citizen; and it should be designed to be so understandable. Its functioning is predictable. It introduces a factor of certainty and security into social life'.⁵³ The implication of this claim is that institutions can be engineered to be more predictable than individuals and so render the exercise of controlling power more straightforward. The certainty and security that a legal framework introduces to social life is an insight that can be attributed to Hobbes who gave a vivid and

⁵² Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.5.

⁵³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.132.

disturbing depiction of life in the state of nature as 'solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short'.⁵⁴ Focused on the sheer unpleasantness of such a situation Hobbes sought to remedy it, or rather held that individuals experiencing it would, by means of a social contract that would institute an all powerful sovereign, the Leviathan.

Popper shares the Hobbesian concern regarding the circumstances of life in the absence of a state but departs from Hobbes in terms of the type of state required to prevent the insecurities that arise out of the state of nature. Popper suggests that 'we must plan for freedom, and not only for security, if for no other reason than that only freedom can make security secure'.⁵⁵ Hobbes and Popper can agree that neither freedom nor security is to be found in the state of nature but Popper takes the view that both are absent from the Hobbesian state also. This further illustrates the importance of democracy as an institution for Popper in that it makes possible not only freedom, but through that freedom security as well. From a Popperian perspective the problem with the solution proposed by Hobbes is that is insufficiently impersonal; the power vested in the Leviathan (potentially just a single individual) is too great and all-encompassing to permit a feeling of freedom in their security or indeed security in their freedom on the part of citizens subject to it.

However the boundaries of the open society are to be configured it is clear that they must be institutional boundaries. Those boundaries should demarcate a democratic polity that is subject to a framework of law that is readily and easily understood by citizens. The institutions of democracy and law should be subject to checks and balances designed to prevent abuses of power and limit the potential of either incompetent or immoral rulers to do lasting damage. Reform of these institutions, along with the multitude of others aimed at promoting freedom and equality or a combination thereof, should be possible without recourse to violence and conducted on the basis of critical rationalism. Grand reforming blueprints are to be eschewed owing to their tendency to produce unforeseen and unintended consequences and a piecemeal methodology employed in their place that seeks circumscribed alterations

⁵⁴ Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

⁵⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.194.

that focus on a single institution at a time. The open state is democratic, aims at substituting impersonal institutional politics for personal politics wherever possible, open to continuous but gradual reform that has freedom and equality as its purpose, permissive of a plurality of perspectives that can contest with each other in critical battle of ideas, tolerant of all but intolerance, and strives to tame human passions by the limited reasonableness of which individuals may be capable.⁵⁶ With equality being a vital principle underlying open society the open state must concern itself with the control of not only political power but also economic power.

The Open Society and the Control of Economic Power

In considering economics Popper once more starts from the viewpoint that all power is potentially dangerous and so economic power can be no exception.⁵⁷ It is on this basis that Popper concludes that the need exists to ‘construct social institutions, enforced by the power of the state, for the protection of the economically weak from the economically strong’.⁵⁸ We have already encountered Popper’s indication that an interventionist state is not incompatible with his liberalism and it is apparent that he envisages an interventionist role for the open state in the economic domain.

The minimum level of economic protection that a citizen should be able to expect from their state is the prevention of the need ‘to enter into an inequitable arrangement out of fear of starvation, or economic ruin’.⁵⁹ Any inequitable arrangements of this kind would constitute a tyranny of the economically powerful over the weak. Popper’s concern here is not solely with the deprivations and hardships which can accompany poverty, although he felt that every effort should be made to eradicate the suffering caused by impoverishment, but also with the severe curtailment of freedom that severe economic dependency brings. The open state then should root out and seek to eliminate poverty and with it the radical, and dangerous, power differentials that it can signify. This argument could be used to

⁵⁶ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.175.

⁵⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.129.

⁵⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.125.

⁵⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.125.

justify market interventions such as a minimum wage and social policies that would include a redistributive system of taxation and the construction of a welfare state.

What is important is that interventions of the sort outlined above are political decisions and it is imperative that they should be so since ‘economic power must not be permitted to dominate political power; if necessary, it must be fought and brought under control by political power’. Popper’s demand that economic power be always subject to political control has significant implications for the boundaries of states in relation to a globalised economy. The question of how to control economic power that is of a global scale and scope is one that will be addressed in subsequent chapters but it warrants mention here in order to highlight that the political control of economic power is not necessarily easy or straightforward. Indeed, even at a domestic level, it may well require the accumulation of considerable political power in order to make substantial interventions in the economy. This is exemplified by the fact that in the current financial crisis governments around the world have found themselves taking controlling stakes in private banks in a bid to exert political control over economic power.⁶⁰

Popper is alive to the prospect that exerting political control will in all likelihood demand the acquisition and concentration of political power which has the potential to be dangerous in its own right. Bureaucratic power is a particular concern in this regard.

He observes that ‘the fight against poverty has produced in some countries a welfare state with a monstrous bureaucracy engulfing for example the hospitals and the entire medical profession, with the obvious result that only a fraction of the money spent for welfare actually benefits those who need it’.⁶¹

The use of the term monstrous to describe a bureaucracy out of control is instructive of Popper’s thinking as it highlights the dangers, as he sees it, of the unintended consequences that can flow from attempts to exert political control. The example he

⁶⁰ <http://www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7929820.stm>

⁶¹ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.217.

chooses also demonstrates that professions only indirectly related to the issue at hand can fall under the suffocating blanket of an overextended bureaucracy.

This is another instance in which the rulers and policymakers of an open state must tread a very fine line. They must garner sufficient political power to establish dominance over economic forms of power but do so in ways that minimise the potential abuse of the political power garnered. On the particular issue of poverty Popper notes that it is best tackled by the realisation of a high standard of living which renders it 'so rare a phenomenon that limited social work can take care of it, thus avoiding the danger of a numerous and powerful bureaucracy'.⁶² Popper does not tell us at what constitutes sufficient rarity in this context but the central point for piecemeal social engineers to be aware of is that bureaucracies pose a potential danger to the open society and so proposals that aim at the alleviation of poverty must be carefully designed to avoid creating burdensome bureaucracies in their wake.

Popper is clear that an increase in the bureaucratic power of the state is both the greatest danger and challenge of government intervention in social and economic life.⁶³ This is another example of Popper's paradox of freedom in that the absence of state power (unlimited freedom) is no secure freedom at all and yet as soon as power is conferred upon the state the potentiality for its misuse is conferred with it. I would argue therefore that one of the most critical boundaries of the open society revolves around the balance of power invested in the state in a bid to protect individual freedom. Establishing where this boundary falls is an exceptionally difficult task and in the practice of politics we might wish to adopt the modest approach of contenting ourselves with provisional positions that can be adjusted in light of changing circumstances. Popper would expect no more other than the assurance that the positions taken are arrived at democratically and capable of being revised on the basis of critical rational reflection.

⁶² Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.218.

⁶³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.193.

Individual Freedom and the Limits of the State

In order for the open state to be a secure and reliable guarantor of freedom for the individuals it is designed to serve then those same individuals must have a significant degree of control over the power that the state wields. For Popper, democracy gives citizens that control. He recognises however that democracy is a necessary but not of itself a sufficient condition for the creation and preservation of individual freedom. Securing an equality of freedom for all citizens requires the role of the state to be constituted in a particular way in terms of the manner in which reform is conducted.

Popper explains this approach as ‘a systematic fight against definite wrongs’ and avoidable sufferings such as poverty or unemployment rather than the attempt to realise an ideal social blueprint.⁶⁴ One reason why Popper prefers the former to the latter is that he perceives that this method should not lead to an accumulation of power or the suppression of criticism on the part of the state.⁶⁵ This claim appears somewhat dubious though even if we concede that the combating of identifiable problems is less likely to warrant an accumulation of power on the part of the state than would a wider ranging social transformation seeking out a predetermined template.

The dubiety of the claim is revealed by recalling Popper’s fear that the welfare state for example can bring a powerful, indeed ‘monstrous’, bureaucracy in its wake. Popper, as has been discussed, appears to underestimate the level of power that a state would need to acquire in order to facilitate the operation of his piecemeal social engineering method of reform. Similarly, he seems to exaggerate the distinction between addressing concrete pre-existing problems and the pursuit of a more positive reform agenda animated by some conception of the good for a society. In actuality, most policy initiatives are capable of being interpreted either way, as alleviating a perceived problem or as pursuing a positive goal. Environmental

⁶⁴ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.91.

⁶⁵ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.91.

legislation for example can pursue the positive goal of creating a cleaner environment and/or be viewed as a response to the particular problems of climate change.

The Popperian open state must be limited because the accumulation and concentration of any power, state power included, poses a potential threat to both individual freedom and security. Popper's concern is that the state should serve the citizen rather than vice versa and whilst he posits democratic institutions as a means to securing such a relationship he does accept that democracy cannot perform this task alone. The reason it cannot is because even the principle of democracy carries within it the potentiality of power differentials, that is the power of the majority versus the minority and so Popper insists 'that minorities have rights and freedoms which no majority decision can overrule'.⁶⁶ The protection of these rights and freedoms must involve the ceding of power to the state, whether in its executive or judicial branches, if they are to be enforceable and thus a trade-off is once more required as to where power should be held and in what concentration. Popper's political philosophy attempts to address and manage that trade-off although in doing so he has a tendency to misjudge the power that he invests in piecemeal social engineers and indeed the engineering method of political reform.

This brings us back to the thread of tension between liberalism and conservatism that is interwoven throughout Popper's philosophy. His liberalism demands the primacy of the individual, seeks to extend individual freedom for all, is hugely wary of all forms of power and seeks to achieve what in many circumstances would constitute a comprehensive transformation of society in seeking to eliminate poverty for example. His conservatism cautions as to the nature of political change however, seeks to deal with the concrete shortcomings revealed in the present as well as the recent past rather than aiming to realise a holistic ideal in some imagined future, and takes as a starting point that human beings and the institutions they create (consciously or otherwise) are inherently fallible. Amidst all of these aspects a

⁶⁶ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.221.

balance has to be found between security and freedom for the individual as well as between the power and limitations of the state.

Popper does not go very far in telling us where such balances should be struck but he does indicate how they should be struck: among a free and equal community of critically rational citizens. The inter-subjective application of rationality to the political world, in circumstances permissive of the freedom of thought, can assist individuals in planning for both freedom and security within their state.⁶⁷ The open state of Popperian philosophy endeavours to strike the balance between freedom and security, power and its harnesses, on the basis of critical rationalism and piecemeal social engineering. The balance is sought by way of a methodology of rationality and in its methodological guise it could arguably be characterised by Oakeshott as a formulation of technical knowledge. Oakeshott's concern with an approach of this sort is that it potentially ignores or undervalues the contribution that can be made by practical and traditional knowledge. His conservative state would endeavour to strike its delicate balances by reference to the intimations embedded within traditions of behaviour.

What is perhaps of most interest to the discussion of the role of tradition is the view that Popper takes of attempts to understand situational logic in historical contexts. He suggests that there exists a need for 'studies, based on methodological individualism, of the social institutions through which ideas may spread and captivate individuals, of the way in which new traditions may be created, and of the way in which traditions work and break down'.⁶⁸ Popper is focused here on the question of what social institutions are capable of transmitting and the manner in which they do so, his quest being that of equipping institutions to transmit the idea of critical rationalism.

It is significant that he should inquire as to the prospect of new traditions being created for this suggests a belief on his part that traditions themselves can be

⁶⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.194.

⁶⁸ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.149.

engineered and so consciously designed. Oakeshott would dispute such a notion on the basis of the sharp distinction that he draws between the practice of traditions and the engineering method of rationalism. He views traditions as emergent from patterns of behaviour rather than as products of rational design. By seeking to pay attention to the working and malfunctioning of traditions Popper hints at compatibilities between his technical method for the engineering of politics and Oakeshott's invoking of practical and traditional knowledge as a searchlight to guide the pursuit of political intimations.

It is worth concluding this section of the chapter with Oakeshott's broader observations as to the role and function of the state. His description of government conducted in accordance with a conservative disposition is illuminating here.

'Governing is a specific and limited activity, namely the provision and custody of general rules of conduct, which are understood, not as plans for imposing substantive activities, but as instruments enabling people to pursue the activities of their own choice with the minimum frustration, and therefore something which it is appropriate to be conservative about'.⁶⁹

It is striking the extent to which this parallels a Popperian conception of governance. The approach to governing laid out by Oakeshott in this passage could almost serve as part of a preamble to a constitution for the open state.

Oakeshott shares Popper's perception that the act of governing, and the power conferred for its functioning, should be limited. Furthermore, the principle function of government should be to provide a society with general rules of conduct or what Popper conceived as a predictable and understandable legal framework.⁷⁰ The rules of which Oakeshott's government is custodian do not seek to impose substantive activities which could include 'that of making the people happy', a political ideal that Popper dismisses as perhaps the most dangerous.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Michael Oakeshott, "On Being Conservative" in *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, Methuen and Co, London, 1962, p.184.

⁷⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.132.

⁷¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.237.

In refusing to endorse substantive activities on the part of government Oakeshott seeks to limit its power and interventionist capacity. This approach also implies an anti-holism and an anti-utopianism that Popper would applaud. Even closer proximity to the Popperian conception of the state is exhibited in Oakeshott's stress on choice, and recognition of the liberty of individuals to pursue their own activities and intimations. Insofar as such pursuits are legal and do not infringe upon the liberty of others to do likewise then individuals should not find themselves or their activities frustrated by the state. On this point Popper and Oakeshott would, I think, concur. The question remains however as to whether or not Popper could accept Oakeshott's account of government as something which it is appropriate to be conservative about.

I would argue that there is little in the Popperian disposition to governance that would prevent the acceptance of it as an appropriately conservative activity; in doing so there are two separate ways of interpreting the term conservative in this context. The first is that Popperians would be expected to seek to conserve the open state where it exists and avoid reforms that may endanger the institutions of open society. To take such an approach is to engage in a specific project of political conservation. This indeed is a project that directly engaged Popper who developed his political philosophy in response to perceived threats to the open society, and sought to defend and maintain 'the supreme strength of the West' and western open societies against the closed system of communism for example.⁷² So, as would be reasonable and expected, Popper displayed a conservative attitude towards the general structure and principles of those societies that he viewed as having instituted the form of open governance that he held to be most conducive to individual flourishing. Of course considerable scope for reform remains within such societies as there will always be particular sufferings that could be better avoided but here the change sought is partial and not systemic.

⁷² Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.210.

The other way of interpreting conservatism here, the way that Oakeshott intended it, is as an attitude to governance itself and in fact as an attitude to life or at least certain aspects of it.

‘To be conservative, then, is to prefer the familiar to the unknown, to prefer the tried to the untried, fact to mystery, the actual to the possible, the limited to the unbounded, the near to the distant, the sufficient to the superabundant, the convenient to the perfect, present laughter to utopian bliss’.⁷³

I do not suggest that this attitude characterises Popper’s political philosophy in its entirety nor do I particularly seek to argue over the labels of liberalism and conservatism as they may be thought to apply here. In my view Popper was completely justified in labelling himself a liberal but he tended to overlook just how deeply elements of a conservative disposition were embedded within his liberalism. In its stress upon anti-utopianism and aversion to radical, revolutionary and systematic change conservatism accords with Popper’s philosophy of open society. Where open societies and open states exist Popper seeks to conserve them, where they are absent he accepts the conservative recognition of the dangers entailed in attempts to institute them by way of revolution.

In the next two sections of this chapter critiques of liberalism are considered. Firstly, the communitarian critique as exemplified in the work of Sandel, and secondly the pluralist critique as developed by John Gray. Both the communitarian and the pluralist approaches attack liberalism for what they perceive to be an excessive and unfounded individualism and for a consequent neglect of the communal attachments that they consider to be constitutive of individual identities. Of particular interest in this regard is the extent to which Popperian liberalism can withstand such critiques and indeed whether its conservative element may aid it in doing so. More specifically, the concept of open society is examined in relation to what we might call communitarian and pluralist society. The purpose of doing so is in order to develop a fuller understanding of the notion of community that Popper’s open

⁷³ Oakeshott, “On being Conservative”, in *Rationalism in Politics*, p.169.

society assumes as well as of its limitations and boundaries.

3.3 *The Open Society and the Question of Community*

The question of community was raised in the previous chapter in relation to Popper's philosophy of science. There the discussion centred on transcendence versus immanence or the extent to which scientists were either uprooted or rooted in the world. The issues at stake here are of a similar kind and in particular the questions remain as to the nature of the community supposed by open society and the bases upon which Popper defends such a supposition. This investigation can be illuminated by considering alternative visions of social and political arrangement such as envisaged by communitarianism. I recognise at the outset that communitarian thinkers span a broad spectrum of thought, as of course do liberals. Nevertheless the nature of the challenges that they pose to liberalism are sufficiently allied in terms of the balance and relationship between individual and community, or society, to justify reference to *the* communitarian critique conceived as a general and coherent philosophical position.⁷⁴

The balance and relationship between the individual and society is not a simple equation consisting of two sides because there is the additional aspect of the state to consider. Kymlicka suggests that 'liberals and communitarians disagree, not over the individual's dependence on society, but over society's dependence on the state'.⁷⁵ Over the course of this section attempt will be made to demonstrate that Kymlicka is correct to posit the dependency of society on the state as a source of disagreement but mistaken to suppose that the individual's dependency on society is not. On the latter point there is a case to be made that liberals, and it is certainly true of Popper, do not deny that individuals exist within societies and amidst intricate social relationships but there are significant divergences between the liberal and

⁷⁴ This issue is highlighted and explored in Mulhall & Swift's, *Liberals and Communitarians*, and they also recognise the diversity of communitarian thought but do not refrain from using the term communitarianism as representative of a particular position in political philosophy.

⁷⁵ Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy – An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990, p.230.

communitarian positions in terms of the extent of individual dependency of society.

The interrelationship between individuals, society and the state can also be explored in the context of the dividing lines that separate liberals and conservatives. It will be useful here to examine the commonalities between communitarian and conservative critiques of liberalism as well as the extent to which their conceptions of political community overlap. The primary interest here is in the convergence of the notions of organic communities in the conservative case and the communities of constitutive ends posited by communitarians. Scruton goes so far as to suggest that ‘conservatism presupposes the existence of a social organism’ with conservative politics being ‘concerned with sustaining the life of that organism’.⁷⁶ Sandel defends constitutive communities against the liberal communities in which he claims the individual is stripped of substantive attachments to become what he calls the ‘unencumbered self’. He argues that ‘what is denied to the unencumbered self is the possibility of membership in any community bound by moral ties antecedent to choice’.⁷⁷ The unencumbered individuals that Sandel regards as misconceived liberal creations find themselves adrift in the ‘procedural republic’.⁷⁸ In examining what Sandel means by the unencumbered self and the procedural republic we can derive tests for Popperian philosophy against these concepts. Does Popper render individuals unencumbered in his political philosophy? Is his open society a procedural republic?

Open Society and the Limitations of Liberalism

Sandel’s starting point is to consider what he deems to be the prioritisation of the right over the good in liberalism. He was primarily concerned with Rawlsian liberalism; a ‘paradigm statement of contemporary liberal theory’ in the views of Mulhall and Swift.⁷⁹ As we have seen, Popper contends that the open state should not regard its purpose as being ‘to establish some ideal good’ but rather limit itself to

⁷⁶ Roger Scruton, *The Meaning of Conservatism*, London: MacMillan, 1984, p.25.

⁷⁷ Michael J. Sandel, *The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self*, Political Theory, Volume 12 No. 1, February 1984, p.87.

⁷⁸ Ibid, p.92.

⁷⁹ Stephen Mulhall & Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, p.xii.

that which is necessary for the safeguarding of individual freedom.⁸⁰ In this regard Popper's liberalism can also be argued to give priority to the right over the good. Sandel defines the prioritisation of the right over the good as the argument that:

'a just society seeks not to promote any particular ends, but enables its citizens to pursue their own ends, consistent with a similar liberty for all; it therefore must govern by principles that do not presuppose any particular conception of the good'.⁸¹

This characterisation accurately reflects the kind of state advocated in Popper's political philosophy particularly with the reference to individual's ability, and freedom, to determine their own ends and to be granted an equality of liberty in pursuing them.

Sandel goes on to argue that the implications of the prioritisation of the right over the good are firstly that 'individual rights cannot be sacrificed for the common good' and secondly that in denying particular visions of the good life as premises for establishing principles of justice it opposes 'teleological conceptions' of politics.⁸² Again this accurately characterises the Popperian approach which seeks to both protect individual rights, as necessitated by its methodological individualism, and also resist the utopian appeals of grand and broad teleological visions for society. Magee argues that from Popper's perspective 'a free society cannot impose common social purposes, a government with utopian aims has to, and is bound to become authoritarian'.⁸³ In eschewing common social purposes the open state seeks to avoid the promotion of the good of the community, however conceived, as a legitimate function or purpose of the state. Upholding the right of individuals to freedom, and ensuring that this right is enjoyed equally by all citizens is the right that is prioritised by the open state of Popper's theorising. For a society or state to be open then it must prioritise the right (of the individual) over the good (of the community).

⁸⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.130.

⁸¹ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.82.

⁸² Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.82.

⁸³ Magee, *Popper*, p.104.

The Unencumbered Self

Sandel considers one of the major failings of liberal philosophers, such as Rawls, to be a tendency to theorise individuals as being in some profound way or to some large extent unencumbered. He explains what he means by this in suggesting that ‘for the unencumbered self, what matters above all, what is most essential to our personhood, are not the ends we choose but our capacity to choose them’.⁸⁴ The individual is conceptualised as a chooser, indeed the capacity for choice is a moral one in that it brings with it responsibility for the choices made. Popper places a strong philosophical and moral weight on the notion of choice in proclaiming humans masters of their own destinies and that our ends are not imposed upon us ‘but rather that they are chosen, or even created, by ourselves’.⁸⁵ What is constitutive of individuals, for Popper, is the capacity for choice itself rather than any particular end chosen. In both science and politics this is the case; scientists must choose amongst competing hypotheses on the basis of critical inter-subjective tests and citizens in democracies must do likewise amongst competing parties and proposals for reform.

Sandel contends that only by making the self prior to its ends can the right be accorded priority to the good. Thus only if an individual’s identity is never tied to the aims and interests that they may have at any time can they think of themselves as a free and independent agent capable of exercising choice.⁸⁶ In Popper’s view the determination of ends is the preserve of the individual⁸⁷ and furthermore that the emancipation of the individual was ‘the greatest spiritual revolution’ which led ‘to the breakdown of tribalism and to the rise of democracy’.⁸⁸ The question remains however: emancipation from what? For Popper, the emancipation sought for the individual is from the encumbrances of the closed society. ‘A closed society resembles a herd or a tribe in being a semi-organic unit whose members are held

⁸⁴ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.86.

⁸⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.22.

⁸⁶ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.86.

⁸⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.278.

⁸⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.101.

together by semi-biological ties – kinship, living together, sharing common efforts, common dangers, common joys and common distress'.⁸⁹ There are two immediate issues with this however, firstly in terms of how much of an encumbrance such common ties represent to individuals and secondly whether or not a society could maintain such commonalities and yet still be regarded as open.

On the first point Popper's characterisation of closed society seems rather peculiar in that the sharing of common efforts, dangers, joys and distress are far from necessarily 'semi-biological ties' and indeed there is no reason why individuals should not choose, if they so wish, to share such things with others. More intriguingly still is the line that Popper takes on the relationship between individuals and society: 'that man, and his aims, are in a certain sense a product of society is true enough. But it is also true that society is a product of man and of his aims and that it may become increasingly so'.⁹⁰ This illustrates that however emancipated the individual might be, the choices that they make, even on Popper's account, are choices conditioned by a social context. That social context is likely to include shared efforts and dangers.

Popper's focus is on the extent to which the individual can influence the development of society but he demonstrates here an acceptance that individuals are shaped by social circumstance. Given the description he provides of closed society it would seem that the distinction he draws between closed and open society is overblown. If closed society can simply represent a variety of shared endeavours and problems then that does not clearly distinguish them from any number of open counterparts. The Popperian task makes more sense if it is conceived as increasing or enhancing the openness of a society rather than seeking the attainment of a qualitatively different society categorised as open, at least in circumstances that do not require the overthrow of a totalitarian regime.

We saw in the previous chapter that Popper's philosophy of science presupposes an

⁸⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.173.

⁹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.208.

extensive social context with inter-subjective testing being an explicitly social activity. Popper's description of the social context encountered by individuals has a contradictory and slightly ambivalent quality to it that, in part, obscures the dividing lines between the open and the closed society.

'That our minds, our views, are in a way a product of 'society' is trivially true. The most important part of our environment is its social part; thought, in particular, is very largely dependent on social intercourse; language, the medium of thought, is a social phenomenon'.⁹¹

It is difficult to conceive of a way to reconcile the contention that the most important part of an individual's environment is the social part with the assertion that the social conditioning of an individual's views is but a trivial truth. If thought and language, so crucial to the practice of critical rationality, are social phenomenon depending for their very existence on social intercourse then it makes little sense for Popper to dismiss as largely trivial a central aspect of the nature of the relationship between individual and society. Sandel concurs that the most important part of an individual's environment is the social part and that is why he seeks to put that insight at the heart of his political theorising. It is clear that the emancipated individuals of Popperian philosophy remain socially encumbered.

The other issue identified with Popper's description of closed society as 'semi-organic' and held together by shared or common efforts and dangers is the extent to which this can serve to demarcate the closed from the open society. We have already discussed Popper's advocacy of a welfare state as a means of preventing economic domination and exploitation but what is a welfare state if not a common effort aimed at mitigating the potential common danger of sickness, hardship or unemployment? Similarly, what differentiates a 'semi-organic unit' from any other form of political unit in the sharing of common efforts and dangers? Recalling Popper's admittance of piecemeal blueprints for health insurance, anti-depression budgeting or educational reform it is apparent that shared efforts to meet common dangers are an

⁹¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.209.

intrinsic part of the open society. Indeed, even democracy itself, perhaps the key feature of open society, can be interpreted as a common endeavour for regulating and directing the political reform of society. The citizens of an open society are expected to commit themselves to the common employment of critical rationalism and this, in combination with democracy, is intended to serve as a defence against the common threat to all individuals of totalitarianism or authoritarianism.

The granting of extensive freedoms to all individuals is entirely compatible with the recognition of communal attachments among the citizens of an open society. Popper demonstrates a far greater awareness of the former than the latter in his own philosophy even although both are present. He suggests that ‘in an open society, many members strive to rise socially, and to take the places of other members. This may lead, for example, to such an important social phenomenon as class struggle’.⁹² If individuals can have bonds of solidarity, and a corresponding sense of collective identity, that would give rise to class struggle in an open society then it is clear that such a society encompasses the sorts of common dangers and efforts that Popper suggests pertain to closed society. At this point it is worth laying a marker for the next chapter by noting that the collective identities and endeavours that are to be found in open societies are similarly present in nation states.

It is also interesting that Popper refers to the emancipation of the individual in the move from closed to open society as a ‘spiritual revolution’. This highlights firstly that Popper conceives of the change in terms that are primarily moralistic. Indeed he argues that ‘totalitarianism is not simply amoral. It is the morality of the closed society – of the group, or of the tribe; it is not individual selfishness, but it is collective selfishness’.⁹³ Popper may be correct to observe a collective selfishness in totalitarianism but neglects to recognise that such a morality can also apply to a social class engaged in class struggle for example. Selfishness may warrant moral reproach but collectivism, in and of itself, less so. Individuals can pursue collective

⁹² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.174.

⁹³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.108.

moral endeavours, in seeking to eradicate poverty for instance,⁹⁴ which are unselfish and can do so within the institutional and civic structures of the open society.

Popper considers the spiritual revolution of individualism to have broken the grip of tribalism in society but by invoking spirituality he hints at a phenomenon that is simultaneously individual and collective. Those that have religious faith regard it as a constitutive part of their individual identity as well as generally perceiving themselves to belong to a particular spiritual community. It is also worth remembering Kuhn's conception of scientific revolutions from one paradigm to another as processes of spiritual conversion. It is clear that for Popper the transition from closed to open society is revolutionary, hence his view that western civilization, the vanguard civilization in the pursuit of open society, is yet to recover from the 'shock of its birth'.⁹⁵ In his bid to emancipate the individual Popper supposes that he leaves them largely unencumbered and thus free to choose and pursue their own ends. Whilst the open society does permit and encourage such freedom it does so in a social context that does not discourage collective identification and does assume a morality of its own.

For his part, Sandel recognises that the notion of the unencumbered self and its underlying ethic point to a 'liberating vision'.⁹⁶ This vision sees the human subject 'installed as sovereign, cast as the author of the only moral meanings there are'. As such individuals become 'participants in pure practical reason' whereby they are 'free to construct principles of justice unconstrained by an order of value antecedently given'.⁹⁷ The critique that Sandel develops here is reminiscent of Oakeshott's cautioning against rationalism in politics. Oakeshott regards moral ideals as 'a sediment; they have significance only so long as they are suspended in a religious or social tradition, so long as they belong to a religious or a social life'.⁹⁸

⁹⁴ The Make Poverty History campaign is a good example of this.

<http://www.makepovertyhistory.org/>

⁹⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume I*, p.1.

⁹⁶ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.87.

⁹⁷ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.87.

⁹⁸ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.36.

We can see here the alliance between the communitarian and the conservative criticisms of liberalism and specifically what both regard as its excessive individualism. Popperian liberalism is susceptible to this critique but is insulated to some extent as a consequence of its own latent conservatism that anchors the individual within a social context.

For Sandel, the relationship between individual, community and morality is best illuminated in the consideration of principles of justice. Sandel does so by reference to Rawls and the Rawlsian principles of justice. The first of those principles states that 'each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all'.⁹⁹ The second argues that 'social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity'.¹⁰⁰ The second of these principles was termed by Rawls the difference principle. The principles outlined by Rawls, of equal liberty and socio-economic arrangements designed to benefit the least advantaged, strongly echo the position that Popper seeks in the open state.

Popper sets out what he calls the 'humanitarian theory of justice' and the three demands or proposals that it makes. These are '(a) the equalitarian principle proper, i.e. the proposal to eliminate 'natural' privileges, (b) the general principle of individualism, and (c) the principle that it should be the task and the purpose of the state to protect the freedom of its citizens'.¹⁰¹ This humanitarian theory of justice is sufficiently aligned with that of Rawls to render it subject to the same critical examination provided by Sandel. The first observation that Sandel makes is that the difference principle, or here Popper's equalitarian principle, 'is a principle of sharing. As such it must presuppose some prior moral tie among those whose assets

⁹⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971, p.302.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid*, p.302.

¹⁰¹ Karl Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.94.

it would deploy and whose efforts it would enlist in a common endeavour',¹⁰² It is not the case that sharing as a principle need necessarily presuppose prior moral ties but there is more traction in Sandel's linking of moral attachments with groups engaged in common endeavours. Sharing can also be conceived as a common endeavour and Sandel's claim could be modified to suggest that common endeavours, including the sharing of resources, is more likely amongst individuals that do have some pre-existing moral ties between, even if the nature of those ties may be quite abstract. This is an issue to which we shall return in subsequent chapters.

Sandel goes on to argue that what the difference principle fails to provide is a means of identifying those who are to form the shared community of its operation and this is because 'the constitutive aims and attachments that would save and situate the difference principle are precisely the ones denied to the liberal self' in Rawls's theory.¹⁰³ Again, there is no reason to suppose that Popper's theory of justice is sufficiently differentiated from that of Rawls to avoid this sort of critique by Sandel. Popper's description of the closed society that we encountered previously suggested an ambivalent and rather contradictory approach to constitutive attachments in that he implies them to be tribal characteristics overcome in the journey from closed to open society yet invites them back in via the communal nature of the projects that piecemeal engineers are encouraged to undertake. Even if Popper may consider himself to be denying constitutive aims and attachments to individuals in the open society he does so only half-heartedly and incompletely. Whether by accident or design then Popper's philosophy passes this particular test posed by Sandel.

Constitutive attachments take on so much importance for Sandel because he regards individual character and moral depth as derivative of them. The conception of constitutive ends that he advocates has a distinctly conservative tone. Sandel suggests that to have character is to 'move in a history that I neither summon nor command, which carries consequences nonetheless for my choices and conduct. It

¹⁰² Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.89.

¹⁰³ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.90.

draws me closer to some and more distant from others; it makes some aims more appropriate, others less so'.¹⁰⁴ On this account character is formed in a historical narrative, a narrative in which history conditions the choices available to individuals and indeed the scope of communal attachments and endeavours. Quinton contends that individuals depend 'for the realization of their moral and social potentialities on the settled customs and institutions of their societies' and so illustrates the proximity of Sandel's thought in this regard to conservative philosophy.¹⁰⁵

Oakeshott goes so far as to say that 'to suppose a collection of people without recognized traditions of behaviour ... is to suppose a people incapable of politics'.¹⁰⁶ In a sense this captures Sandel's dismissal of liberalism for he fears that unencumbered individuals, shorn of constitutive attachments and historical anchorage, will be incapable of sustaining principles of justice and practising politics. Twenty-first century Popperians can be content that the open society does not leave individuals unencumbered in this way or without the resources to engage in the practical activity of politics and political reform. In the open society critical rationalism itself is to be regarded as a tradition of behaviour as well as a guide to the conduct of change. There is no room for complacency however because the defence of the open society mounted here against Sandel's charges has required the making explicit of that which Popper merely implied and highlighting the contradictions inherent to the differentiation he sought between closed and open society. Popper's emancipated individuals are not so radically unencumbered as to succumb to Sandel's critique but we now turn to the question of whether the open society is conceived sufficiently substantively to avoid characterisation as a procedural republic.

The Procedural Republic

The definition of the procedural republic that Sandel provides is somewhat opaque in that he defines it simply as a public life animated by the liberal vision and self-image

¹⁰⁴ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.90.

¹⁰⁵ Anthony Quinton, *The Politics of Imperfection*, London: Faber and Faber, 1978, p.18.

¹⁰⁶ Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics*, p.123.

that posits unencumbered individuals.¹⁰⁷ That is to say, a vision that prioritises the right over the good and thus concerns itself with the procedures by which a community will operate rather than the substantive aims or conception of the communal good life to which it will aspire. Sandel argues that the liberal vision that he dismisses ‘is not morally self-sufficient but parasitic on a notion of community it officially rejects’.¹⁰⁸ The consequence of this, he maintains, is that the liberal vision ‘must draw on a sense of community it cannot supply and may even undermine’.¹⁰⁹ What self-sufficiency of morality does the open society provide and what sense of community does it draw upon?

Sandel’s critique of Rawlsian liberalism centres on Rawls’s conception of individuals as ‘antecedently individuated’ and so excluding ‘the possibility that attachment to any good or end might ever be integral to one’s identity as a person’.¹¹⁰ It is in this sense that Sandel considers liberalism in its commitment to neutrality to encounter potential difficulty in sustaining a stable moral life of a community. Against such a backdrop Popper’s version of liberal morality can be explored. He is clear firstly that ethics cannot be regarded as a science but nevertheless Popper does conceive of an ethical basis of science and of rationalism.¹¹¹ That ethical basis is founded on a principle of impartiality.

‘The idea of impartiality leads to that of responsibility; we have not only to listen to arguments, but we have a duty to respond, to answer, where our actions affect others. Ultimately, in this way, rationalism is linked up with the recognition of the necessity of social institutions to protect freedom of criticism, freedom of thought, and thus the freedom of men. And it establishes something like a moral obligation towards the support of these institutions’.¹¹²

The protection of free thought and free criticism is a moral duty in Popper’s view, a duty that falls upon the state. The issue of free criticism in particular highlights the

¹⁰⁷ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.92.

¹⁰⁸ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.91.

¹⁰⁹ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.91.

¹¹⁰ Mulhall & Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, p.67.

¹¹¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.239.

¹¹² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.239.

communal basis of Popperian morality.

In this sense, the moral community is one that protects individual freedoms equally and impartially. The moral community establishes rational duties owing to the way in which arguments entail a duty to respond or provide answer in circumstances whereby individual actions produce communal affects. It is clear from Popper's account of morality here that he would consider the scientific community to be a moral community every bit as much as a rational community. Indeed, for Popper, the two are related since rationality has an inherent morality that animates it. The open society then can be read as an attempt on Popper's part to institute not only rationality in politics but also the morality that he suggests accompanies it. What is especially interesting about Popper's line of argument here is that it is a procedural account of morality that he is setting out. It is moral to proceed in a particular way; that is by mutual criticism and by recognising the duty to respond to rational argument in engagement with others. Popper's open society is a procedural republic but intentionally so and it manages to incorporate a procedural vision of morality as a basis for regulating and sustaining relationships between individuals within it.

Of course it can be pointed out that Popper's rationalist morality will only be fully accepted, and practiced, by those individuals who share his commitment to rationality in the first place. Those that do not may either fail to identify with such a morality or dissent from it if they do not recognise the responsibilities that Popper deems it to entail. That may be so but the same problematic holds true for any version of morality which is instituted by the state and seeks to guide conduct within the public as opposed to the private sphere. Popper does recognise an inter-subjective context to the development of the moral sphere and the notion of morality he develops does imply that it can serve to bind a community in a moral life. The procedural nature of Popper's moral conception suggests that it is designed to be self-sufficient, in relation to Sandel's term, by serving as an individual ethic as well as a communal guide.

In setting out a procedural morality to be applied in a procedural republic, does Popper advance a philosophy of liberal neutrality? Sandel argues that the ideal of a society governed by neutral principles is liberalism's 'false promise. It affirms individualistic values while pretending to a neutrality which can never be achieved'.¹¹³ Does Popper's open society, with a morality based on a principle of impartiality, offer a false promise? A Popperian response to this question can begin by suggesting that the promise of the open society is a relatively modest one and in its modesty chooses not to aim at the realisation of a particular substantive ideal vision of society. Further, Popper's affirmation of individualistic values does not arise from any pretence at neutrality but from an explicit commitment to it, hence his stress on the concept of impartiality.

For Popper, impartiality is achieved when the scientist or citizen takes account of a rational argument, or indeed where the state permits the expression of an argument, irrespective of who is making it. Popper's liberalism is not in any way neutral between rationalism and irrationalism or between tolerance and intolerance and he makes no attempt to pretend otherwise.¹¹⁴ What he does seek is the greatest possible neutrality from the state on the question of the communal good for society but he does not require the state to be neutral with regard to the procedure by which questions of the good are addressed. This gets to the heart of the procedural republic that is the open society: Popper's liberalism focuses on procedure through which morality can emerge rather than advocating a particular conception of collective morality because he thinks that procedure is more susceptible to rational deliberation. Popper's faith is that the substantive and affective outcomes of such deliberations will be acceptable to individuals as a result of the critical rational procedure that produced them.

Sandel's suspicion remains that in the practice of the procedural republic there will

¹¹³ Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998, p.11.

¹¹⁴ Popper says specifically that 'if we concede to intolerance the right to be tolerated, then we destroy tolerance, and the constitutional state'. Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.190.

be firstly a tendency to crowd out democratic possibilities and secondly a tendency to undercut the type of community upon which it can be thought to depend.¹¹⁵ We have already considered the second of these tendencies in terms of the extent to which Popper's impartial ethic is self-sufficient in relation to the nature of the community that it presupposes. The first tendency that Sandel posits as likely to befall the procedural republic however is interesting to examine from a Popperian perspective. The implication of Sandel's suggestion here is that in prioritising the right over the good the procedural republic constructs a legalistic form of politics at the expense of democratic participation in that individual rights serve as trumps over broader notions of collective good even when such notions may be democratically derived.

The open society seeks to preserve democratic possibilities but of a particular kind. Popper upholds the democratic procedure but rejects the idea that (democratic) majorities should be permitted to overrule the basic rights and freedoms of minorities.¹¹⁶ Individualism is the abiding ethic of Popper's philosophy and consequently the rights of the individual must always take precedence over the collective good, however conceived. Popper's procedural republic is a democratic republic, a republic that functions in accordance with democratic procedures. It is also fair to say that the morality that underpins Popperian philosophy is democratic in character with its stress on individualism, impartiality and equality. In developing the democratic procedural republic that is the open society Popper is offering his response to a choice that he perceives to be facing humanity.

'The choice with which we are confronted is between a faith in reason and in human individuals and a faith in the mystical faculties of man by which he is united to a collective; and that this choice is at the same time a choice between an attitude that recognizes the unity of mankind and an attitude that divides men into friends and foes, into masters and slaves'.¹¹⁷

It can be inferred from this that the morality Popper holds to underpin the open

¹¹⁵ Sandel, *Procedural Republic*, p.93.

¹¹⁶ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.221.

¹¹⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.271.

society is a universal one and also that the open society itself is in principle at least capable of being conceived universally. Popper's procedural morality aims at the unity of individuals in place of division.

Sandel would perhaps regard Popper's rationalist morality and individualism as mystical faculties, quite alien to his own conception of political community. The communitarian critique of liberalism put forward by Sandel accuses liberals of an excessive individualism giving rise to communities that lack solidarity and character because they are bound, if at all, only by procedures and not by more constitutive goals, visions or commitments. Popper of course does not seek to bind individuals tightly into communities but his procedural politics do aim at a unity, a unity that he considers to be rational and to have a morality inherent to it. Sandel's critique is undermined by an overly sharp distinction between atomised individuals and cohesive communities. Popper's liberalism has no problem in recognising that individuals are social and communally situated. Indeed, Popper takes the view that the rational approach to both science and politics is a social one reliant on inter-subjective testing in circumstances whereby institutions are created to defend and support the critical appraisal of ideas.

With his ever present desire to uphold individual rights and liberties Popper has a tendency to underplay the communal attachments exhibited by individuals. Popper does not make lengthy reference to the nature of community he believes to be entailed by the open society but he offers enough to sketch the sort of picture that has been examined above. If Sandel's criticisms serve an enduring purpose then it is as a reminder to liberals such as Popper that individualism, like anything else, can be carried too far. Popper and his open society pass the test provided by Sandel though because the individuals of Popperian philosophy are not unencumbered and the procedural republic that they inhabit is not without a morality or mechanisms to support communal bonds. Indeed, by enacting morality procedurally individuals can share in a common purpose. The nature of the community that open society either makes possible or rules out is central to the work of this thesis. Popper's theorising

is often ambivalent on this question and to the extent that he addresses it he does so implicitly more regularly than explicitly. That is why there is value in exploring critiques of liberalism and the characteristics of political community that liberals are held to assume by their detractors. These critiques can serve not only to test Popperian liberalism and the political community represented by open society but assist in coming to understand them better. The next test to be examined is that set by John Gray's account of pluralism as a response to what he contends to be liberalism's demise.

3.4 The Pluralist Challenge to Popper

This section of the chapter looks at the work of John Gray and the shortcomings he identifies in liberal political theory. This provides a further test of Popper's liberal political philosophy and his concept of open society. Gray pays particular attention to the nature of political community which makes his theorising very relevant to the discussion here. By considering his pluralist critique of liberalism assessment can be made as to the adequacy of Popperian responses to what Gray regards as the universal implication of radical value pluralism: 'that no one political regime can be privileged as having a claim on reason'.¹¹⁸ Popper regarded the open society as having a privileged claim on reason and that claim can be explored in relation to the pluralist position adopted by Gray. The pluralism that he defends has its basis in the 'thesis of incommensurability among ultimate values', an insight that Gray attributes to Isaiah Berlin.¹¹⁹

The proposition that I defend here is that Gray, like Sandel, offers a worthwhile critique of liberal thought and a useful check on its more radically ambitious tendencies but, again similarly to Sandel, does not evince grounds for the rejection of liberalism but rather prompts avenues to pursue in modifying it. It is interesting to note at the outset the view expressed by Gray on communitarianism. He argues that the community invoked by communitarians is not 'an historic human settlement with

¹¹⁸ John Gray, *Post-Liberalism – Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996, p.312.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid*, p.312.

its distinctive exclusivities, hierarchies and bigotries' such as human beings actually live in but instead 'an ideal community, in its own way as much of a cipher as the disembodied Kantian self the communitarians delight in deflating'.¹²⁰ Gray takes the view that communitarian communities are as much an abstraction as the liberal self that communitarians disdain. By referring to the cipher of the 'ideal community' of communitarian thought he implies that whilst liberals may neglect or underestimate the notion of community, communitarians tend to romanticise it and in doing so blunt the edge of their attack.

Gray suggests that this error is one shared by communitarians and conservatives alike. The conservative theorist, like the communitarian critic of liberalism:

'moves unreflectively from the truth that we are none of us unencumbered or disembodied selves to the very different, and indeed manifestly false proposition that we are, or ought to be radically situated selves – that is to say ... selves whose identity is contoured by membership in a single moral community and mirrored in the institutions of a single political order'.¹²¹

If communitarians and conservatives fall into the same trap then the question remains as to whether Gray's pluralism can avoid doing so. The argument that will be developed here suggests that Gray does not succeed in defending his pluralism from similar charges and that he ends up endorsing a single political order of his own. Furthermore, his rejection of liberalism denies to him a means of instituting and situating his version of pluralism. Interestingly, Gray contends that Oakeshott's philosophy represents an exception to the unreflective move described above but makes this claim on the basis of characterising Oakeshott as a liberal.

Gray argues that the only aspect of liberalism that endures and can be sustained 'is the conception and the historic reality of civil society that has been bequeathed to us'¹²² and therefore the form of liberal theorizing that should continue to command a claim of allegiance in present historical circumstance is 'the Berlinian liberalism

¹²⁰ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, London: Routledge, 1997, p.7.

¹²¹ Gray, *Post-Liberalism*, p.261.

¹²² Gray, *Post-Liberalism*, p.287.

which is itself founded on radical value-pluralism'.¹²³ Berlin's value pluralism will be considered in this chapter in light of Gray's critique of liberalism with a view to assessing whether or not Popper's open society can be defended against it. This task can be begun with a consideration of value pluralism as outlined by Gray.

The Reef of Value Pluralism

Value pluralism is the idea that underpins Gray's philosophical approach and an idea, he thinks, that should be the major preoccupation of both political theory and public policy.¹²⁴ Gray argues that the 'rationalist and universalist' tradition of liberal political theory runs aground on what he calls 'the reef of value-pluralism – on the truth that the values embodied in different forms of life and human identity, and even within the same form of life and identity, may be rationally incommensurable'.¹²⁵ The incommensurability thesis that Gray proposes here is to suggest that different ways of life and forms of identification are not susceptible to comparison and rational comparison in particular.

One of the flaws in Gray's theory is a failure to define with any clarity what is meant by different forms of life and identity. If the communities of communitarian imagination are but ciphers and liberal individualism is merely one among many particular forms of life then what does pluralist community consist in for Gray?¹²⁶ He does not, perhaps cannot, tell us. The closest he comes is in remarking that 'on the pluralist view, human history as a whole has, and can have, no meaning; it is, at best, a series of adventures in civilization, each singular and discrete'.¹²⁷ The term adventures in civilization does not reveal very much about the type of community that Gray posits or indeed what distinguishes differing communities amongst a plurality of political communities. By appearing to situate difference at a civilizational level his theory has a close family resemblance to Huntington's 'clash

¹²³ Gray, *Post-Liberalism*, p.288.

¹²⁴ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.109.

¹²⁵ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.67.

¹²⁶ Gray, *Post-Liberalism*, p.307.

¹²⁷ Gray, *Post-Liberalism*, p.292.

of civilizations' thesis; the central theme of which, Huntington notes, is that 'culture and cultural identities, which at the broadest level are civilization identities, are shaping the patterns of cohesion, disintegration, and conflict in the post-Cold War world'.¹²⁸ The lack of definition given to his conception of political community undermines Gray's pluralist solution to a greater extent than it does his pluralist diagnosis.

For his part, Berlin's pluralism derives from the recognition that even in the world of ordinary and every day experience human beings 'are faced with choices between ends equally ultimate, and claims equally absolute, the realization of some of which must inevitably involve the sacrifice of others'.¹²⁹ It is due to this situation, Berlin argues, that freedom of choice is rightly so very important to human individuals.¹³⁰ The Berlinian theory of pluralism implies the ever-present prospect of conflict and tragedy in human affairs, both personal and social, and so 'the necessity of choosing between absolute claims is then an inescapable characteristic of the human condition'.¹³¹ For Berlin, we can say that freedom of choice is a normative principle to be pursued because of the existence of value pluralism and the incommensurability that it entails.

Indeed, the universality of pluralism, on Berlin's view, provides grounds for the freedom to choose, although such choice cannot be unlimited, to be considered a universal value applicable to all human communities¹³² Gray is prepared to accept that 'the virtue of toleration is of universal value because of the universality of human imperfection'.¹³³ Toleration is a slightly ambiguous term here because insofar as it implies toleration of the right of people(s) to make different choices then Gray's position has a close proximity to Berlin's but if it means a more modest tolerance between communities, on the part of state leaders for example, then the

¹²⁸ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2002, p.20.

¹²⁹ Berlin, *Four Essays*, p.168.

¹³⁰ Berlin, *Four Essays*, p.168.

¹³¹ Berlin, *Four Essays*, p.169.

¹³² Berlin, *Four Essays*, p.170.

¹³³ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.30.

concept could serve to mask the denial of choice to individuals. Popper, as has been discussed, is clear as to the need for toleration to be one of the pillars supporting open society and is equally clear that it is the right of individuals to make their own choices, insofar as they do not harm others, which warrants tolerance.¹³⁴

On account of the tolerance that is central to it, Berlin's pluralism entails a considerable measure of negative liberty. The pluralist approach is, for Berlin:

'a truer and more humane ideal than the goals of those who seek in the great, disciplined, authoritarian structures the ideal of 'positive' self-mastery by classes, or peoples, or the whole of mankind. It is truer, because it does, at least, recognise the fact that human goals are many, not all of them commensurable, and in perpetual rivalry with one another'.¹³⁵

The vision that Berlin provides in this passage has many parallels with Popper's ideal of open society. With its stress on humaneness, its explicit anti-authoritarianism and recognition of the diversity of human goals Berlin's pluralism is shown here to be an open philosophy that captures much that is crucial to the Popperian approach.

It is apparent too that there is a form of pluralism inherent to Popper's conception of open society. He suggests that pride should be taken in the fact that open societies do not have one idea but many, good and bad; that they are not based on a single belief; and that they are found to accommodate not one religion but many.¹³⁶ It is, Popper contends, 'a sign of the supreme strength of the West that we can afford that'.¹³⁷ The strength of the open society is held to reside in its diversity and in its pluralism. Indeed this would suggest that the existence of such plurality is a critical characteristic of open society and means of identifying a society as such. Popper in particular, although Berlin also to some extent, concentrates on the pluralism that is internal to a community, domestic pluralism as it were. Gray's principle concern, by

¹³⁴ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.190.

¹³⁵ Berlin, *Four Essays on Liberty*, p.171.

¹³⁶ Popper, *In Search* p.210.

¹³⁷ Popper, *In Search*, p.210.

contrast, is with a more external pluralism of and between communities, what could be termed international pluralism.

Gray argues that the real agenda for political thought 'is given by the conflicting claims of communities, just as the agenda for ethics is the conflict among duties and among goods and evils'.¹³⁸ He seems to draw here a rather sharp distinction between ethics and political thought and it is not obvious as to why the former should be largely excluded from the agenda of the latter. The conflict among duties as well as goods and evils cannot cease to preoccupy any political theory, or indeed any government, that seeks the imposition of particular duties or aims to mediate conflicts between goods and evils. Indeed Popper identifies the need to moralise politics rather than politicise morals.¹³⁹ The open society must operate with a political morality that is rooted in individualism. The conflict between the claims of communities that Gray perceives could of course be either an intra-state one or an inter-state conflict and his pluralist theory aims to encompass the former and the latter. He does seek to establish the implication of pluralism on a global scale and concludes that the likely persistence of a 'diversity of irreducibly different regimes' both liberal and non-liberal is the most fundamental recognition that underpins his pluralist philosophy.¹⁴⁰ This illustrates the key dividing line between Gray and Popper: Gray finds genuine human flourishing in non-liberal forms of life and regimes whilst Popper seeks to defend the superiority, as he sees it, of liberal regimes over non-liberal ones and furthermore that he regards that superiority as being a moral superiority.¹⁴¹ The question arises here as to what, if any, guide Gray offers from a pluralist perspective as to the criteria against which regimes may be judged and how this differs from a Popperian approach.

¹³⁸ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.129.

¹³⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

¹⁴⁰ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.127.

¹⁴¹ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.133.

Standards for Assessing Regimes

The standard of assessment that Gray employs to evaluate political regimes is a Hobbesian one, and he finds much of the philosophy of Hobbes to be applicable in pluralistic circumstance. Where its subjects can ‘coexist in a Hobbesian peace while renewing their distinctive forms of common life’ a regime carries legitimacy in Gray’s view and performs a valuable function on behalf of those subject to it.¹⁴² There is a slight ambiguity in this definition however. It is not clear if Gray is referring to a variety of distinctive forms of common life that are peaceably coexisting or whether individuals are to coexist in a state that permits and supports the renewal of the distinctive commonalities that the community, conceived as a singular entity, shares. In either case though the implication is that any conflict between distinctive forms of common life is to be resolved on the basis of the likelihood of peace being achieved as a result of the particular compromise or settlement implemented.

Popper frequently endorsed a commitment to peace, a commitment to the removal of violence from politics, but the concern with Gray’s approach here from a Popperian perspective would be the degree and scope of power he invests in the state to determine the terms of peaceful coexistence.¹⁴³ Popper shares Gray’s conviction that the state is a necessary guarantor of security, not least with regard to freedom, but argues that only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer those citizens any sort of reasonable security.¹⁴⁴ Popper’s adherence to individualism sees him conclude that ‘the morality of states (if there is any such thing) tends to be considerably lower than that of the average citizen’ and thus the morality of the state should be controlled by citizens to a far greater extent than the other way round.¹⁴⁵ Both Popper and Gray are concerned to ensure peaceful coexistence but Popper recognises that the institution of a mighty state is almost as grave a threat to such peace as the absence of a state.

¹⁴² Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake*, p.140.

¹⁴³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.115.

¹⁴⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

¹⁴⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

Gray concurs with what he perceives to be the Hobbesian view of the rationale of politics as being the avoidance of war and Popper, as has been discussed, has considerable sympathy with this perspective. Gray also suggests however that his own pluralist perspective is Machiavellian, and thus devoid of ‘Enlightenment illusions’ which he attributes to Hobbes’s thought, in recognising that success in pursuing such a rationale of politics ‘can always be only partial, temporary, and in part a gift of fortune’.¹⁴⁶ Popperian philosophy, to some extent, accords with the humility and caution exhibited by Gray here; Popper considers hypotheses to be of a generally partial and temporary nature, subject to revision or indeed replacement as a result of testing. The success of that approach however, for Popper, is no gift of fortune but rather the outcome of applying a rational methodology to the realm of politics. In the case of the open society Popper is clear that it can offer, as a framework, a complete, permanent and consciously designed solution to the question of how to provide individuals with both security and freedom. Popper goes so far as to say that if humans are to avoid shrinking from the task of carrying the cross of humaneness, reason and responsibility then there ‘is only one way, the way into the open society’.¹⁴⁷ Individuals may have a plurality of aims, perspectives and values but, animated by his normative individualism, Popper does not conceive of a plurality of regimes conducive to human flourishing, he recognises only one – the open society.

The contrasting standards of regime assessment employed by Gray and Popper are particularly illuminating when addressed to the political regime that is the nation state. From Gray’s pluralist perspective a nation state can be deemed a success, and legitimate, if it facilitates a Hobbesian peace amongst its citizens or subjects. He alludes to an enduring significance of the nation by suggesting that in the modern world ‘common cultures are typically those of nations, common ways of life recognized by themselves and others as constituting distinct peoples’.¹⁴⁸ As we have

¹⁴⁶ Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake*, p.130.

¹⁴⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.201.

¹⁴⁸ Gray, *Enlightenment’s Wake*, p.79.

seen, the ability to renew distinctive forms of common life is the other standard of assessment that Gray utilises to assess political regimes and here it is apparent that national common cultures are to be regarded as qualifying for such renewal. Gray contends that the variety of value pluralism that is most salient in today's world is not individualistic but 'arises from the plurality of whole ways of life, with their associated moralities and often exclusionary allegiances'.¹⁴⁹ There is nothing, on this basis, to prevent Gray endorsing a political world composed of nation states with distinctive and separate ways of life culturally and institutionally embedded within each. Such a framework could be regarded as a world order of pluralist nationalism whereby a plurality of national ways of life can coexist peacefully with each other.

The criterion by which Popper judges a political regime is that of openness. Regimes can be assessed along a continuum with open society at one end and closed society at the other. In practice, despite Popper regarding nationalism as a tribal and primitive form of association it remains 'an ever-present reality within every state in the world, in fact, it is given virtual international status in terminology such as self-determination'.¹⁵⁰ The implication of this, Vincent contends, is that viewed through the lens of the theory of open society then every society for Popper is, by definition, an 'unusual mix of the open and closed', probably more closed than open.¹⁵¹ Nation states, judged by the standards of open society, can be assessed as to their openness. This means that nation states, as a form of political regime, can be more or less compatible with open society. A particular nation state, such as France for example, can be regarded as at least approximating the open society ideal insofar that it pursues political reform via democratic institutions, accords rights and liberties to individuals and continually holds itself open to improvement. The next chapter will explore the question of the compatibility of open society and the nation state in greater detail but for now it suffices to acknowledge the potential openness, in Popperian terms, which a nation state may exhibit in a general sense.

¹⁴⁹ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake* p.136.

¹⁵⁰ Andrew Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism", in Jarvie, Milford & Miller (eds), *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p.173.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid*, p.173.

For all that Popper conceived of open society as a practical framework that could be implemented and instituted within political communities he retained a sense that it must inevitably be, to some extent, a regulative ideal that real world societies could only hope to approximate. For Popper, no dream of heaven can be realised on earth, even an inherently modest one such as open society represents. Indeed, once individuals start to employ critical rationalism, and hear the call of personal responsibilities that accompany it, then there can be no 'return to a state of implicit submission to tribal magic'.¹⁵² To bite of the tree of critical rationalist knowledge is to render paradise lost. Nationalism is to be considered a form of tribal magic in Popper's view owing to the emphasis placed upon the collective at the expense of the individual.¹⁵³ It is with the development of the critical rational powers of individuals that the transition from closed to open society is facilitated. With his political philosophy, Popper seeks to lead individuals out of collective bondage toward personal freedom and responsibility in the open society but, perhaps to his surprise, such things can be found without leaving the nation state.

Gray's pluralism is somewhat vague in that it is not clear what he means by common or whole ways of life. Nonetheless he does provide a tentative guide as to what he considers to be the pivotal task of politics, 'that of devising institutions in which communities and cultural traditions are given recognition and shelter, and in which their often conflicting claims are mediated and moderated'.¹⁵⁴ As mentioned earlier, the implicit understanding behind this task that Gray sets of politics is that it is an international one, in terms of devising an international institutional order that accommodates and tolerates a plurality of communities and the traditions that sustain them. Gray does make clear his view that 'liberal states must learn to live with non-liberal states, liberal cultural forms with non-liberal ones, in peace and harmony'.¹⁵⁵ This can be seen as the transference of the Hobbesian task from the domestic to the

¹⁵² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.200.

¹⁵³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.9.

¹⁵⁴ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.180.

¹⁵⁵ Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, p.156.

international arena. Compromise is forced upon liberal states that must come to accept that history did not end with the fall of the Berlin Wall and that liberalism, particularly in its global free market guise, has displayed manifest flaws and shortcomings.¹⁵⁶

For advocates of open society there can be no sense of history having come to an end with the tearing down of the Berlin Wall as many societies in the world remain far from open.¹⁵⁷ Indeed, as we shall see in the next chapter, George Soros bemoans what he perceived to be the collective failure of western liberal democratic states to seize the opportunity provided by the Soviet collapse to spread the principles of open society more widely. Fostering open societies is the goal of Soros' Open Society Institutes and Programmes. John Gray's pluralist theorising offers a useful critique of at least some forms of liberalism and the grander ambitions of such ideology but he provides little by way of an alternative framework to structure political community and international relations between communities.

Gray's tolerance of non-liberal regimes goes well beyond anything that Popper could endorse but the significance of Gray's work in the context of this thesis is to be found primarily in the obstacles he highlights as standing in the way of any liberal project that seeks to transform the world and its order. A world comprised of open societies would be transformative and it is the transformation that Popper sought and that Soros continues to seek in his philanthropic efforts. Gray's pluralism takes its cue from the endurance of the nation state as the predominant form of political community and the next chapter will build the case further that such an insight should also serve as the foundation for Popperian attempts to extend and entrench the concept of open society across the globe.

¹⁵⁶ John Gray, The era of globalisation is over, in *The New Statesman*, 24 September 2001.

¹⁵⁷ It was of course Francis Fukuyama who proclaimed the triumph of liberal democracy following the collapse of communism. Francis Fukuyama, *End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin Books, 1992.

3.5 Conclusion – Bounded Open Societies

Despite his attack on nationalism and the nation state Popper actually had surprisingly little to say on the nature of political community and the possibilities for its development. This thesis is to some extent an attempt to address that deficiency in terms of the concept of open society. Whilst Popper does view the development of political community along a collectivist tribal – individual rationalist continuum his concern is more with the structure of the state, and the freedom it affords individuals, rather than with the boundaries of the state that demarcate particular political communities.¹⁵⁸ It is possibly for this reason that Popper fails to set out exactly where he intends the boundaries of open society to lie.

This has implications for attempts to apply his theory, not least in terms of the extent to which he envisaged open society as heralding a cosmopolitan form of political community in contrast to the nation state. The potential cosmopolitanism of Popper's political philosophy is explored further in the next two chapters. The task of this chapter has been to outline and assess Popper's general conception of open society along with some of the institutional aspects necessary to support it. The question of community was posed in this chapter, firstly with reference to a communitarian critique of liberalism and secondly by drawing upon John Gray's pluralist philosophy. The intention throughout has been to show that attempts to implement open society cannot avoid confronting questions of boundaries and community. The next chapter looks at the particular boundaries and communities that are nation states whilst the ground has been paved for that discussion here with the focus on the nature of political community more broadly.

In drawing Part I of the thesis to a close however it is useful at this juncture to reflect briefly on the manner in which the issues of critical rationalism discussed in relation to Popper's philosophy of science carry forward to his political philosophy. To some extent the move from the first to the second part of the thesis is an attempt to apply a

¹⁵⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.9.

Popperian understanding of community to the political domain, the outlines of which have been glimpsed in the scientific sphere. As noted at the outset of the chapter, scientific enquiry and democratic politics can be regarded as alternative expressions of open society from a Popperian perspective.¹⁵⁹ Exploring the concept of open society in relation to the nation state as a form of political community is helpful in gaining a fuller understanding of communal boundaries as envisaged by Popper as well as demonstrating the relevance of his philosophy to moral general debates about the nature and limits of political community. Whilst it's clear that democratic politics are an expression, or at least a fundamental aspect, of open society, how bounded can such politics be and still remain open? Are national democratic polities also expressions of open society? This initial discussion of boundaries is concluded here with an initial sketch of a notion of bounded rationality and community that need not be incompatible with open society.

Bounded Rationality and Community

In considering questions of the boundaries of rationality and community it is instructive to begin by drawing upon the work of Imre Lakatos and what he describes as the 'methodology of scientific research programmes'.¹⁶⁰ In describing and explaining his proposed scientific methodology Lakatos seeks to defend a position of 'sophisticated falsificationsim' which 'shifts the problem of how to appraise *theories* to the problem of how to appraise *series of theories*'.¹⁶¹ On this basis, series of theories can be considered scientific or unscientific rather than an isolated theory; Lakatos thus suggests that to apply the term scientific to a single theory is to make a 'category mistake'.¹⁶² Lakatos is very much building on Popper's falsificationist foundations in the philosophy of science and this thesis seeks to do likewise in terms of Popper's political philosophy, taking open society as the starting point and extending its range of application.

¹⁵⁹ Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.26.

¹⁶⁰ Imre Lakatos, "Falsificationism and the Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes" in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, London: Cambridge University Press, 1970, p.91.

¹⁶¹ Lakatos, "Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes", p.119.

¹⁶² Lakatos, "Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes", p.119.

Interestingly, Lakatos suggests that the clash in the philosophy of science between Popper and Kuhn is not merely one of technical epistemology but concerns ‘central intellectual values’ and as such has implications for the social sciences as well as moral and political philosophy.¹⁶³ Chapter two of this thesis began to highlight that and the nature of community takes on even greater significance in the second part of the work. In defending a version of Popper’s scientific philosophy against Kuhn, Lakatos develops what he refers to as ‘the framework of a *methodology of research programmes*’.¹⁶⁴ As outlined above, the key to this conception is the replacement of single theories or theoretical statements as the objects of falsification with broader research programmes, or series of theories, that can be evaluated as to their ability to produce either progressive or degenerative problem shifts.¹⁶⁵ Although Lakatos notes that science as a whole can be regarded as a huge research programme he has primarily in mind particular research programmes, such as Cartesian metaphysics for example. The concept of the research programme thus takes us back to universalism versus particularism in terms of rationality.

Popper takes this matter up in a paper entitled “The Myth of the Framework” in which he criticises the proposition that ‘a rational and fruitful discussion is impossible unless the participants share a common framework of basic assumptions’.¹⁶⁶ This is, broadly, the position taken by Kuhn in relation to scientific community and practice. The question of great interest in this thesis is whether or not the nation state represents a political ‘framework’ of this sort and if so, does this render it mythical and indeed irrational as Popper would seem to suggest?

Popper argues that different groups of humans do have much in common, not least the problem of survival for example. His concern is with opportunities for different groups to learn from each other and success in that will largely depend ‘on our

¹⁶³ Lakatos, “Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes”, p.93.

¹⁶⁴ Lakatos, “Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes”, p.132.

¹⁶⁵ Ibid, p.132.

¹⁶⁶ Karl Popper, “The Myth of the Framework” in *The Myth of the Framework – In Defence of Science and Rationality*, M. Notturmo, London: Routledge, 1994, p.34.

goodwill, and to some extent also on our historical situation, and on our problem situation'.¹⁶⁷ These variables take us on to intriguing territory for examining the nation state and open society because they concede an important role to history and invite interpretation as to what contemporary problems consist in and how they might be resolved. This is crucial when thinking about the nation state as a potential framework: do problems such as international terrorism and climate change, amongst many others, require a new framework of politics, perhaps a politics that is more cosmopolitan and less reliant on varied and particular frameworks?

One very significant aspect of Popper's discussion of frameworks is that he does not seek their eradication but rather to stress that they do not represent barriers to dialogue and, specifically, critical rational debate.¹⁶⁸ In describing frameworks as mythical a question is raised as to why they should therefore represent such a potential danger from Popper's perspective. Here, as elsewhere in his philosophies of both science and politics, he is concerned at the prospect of the 'unity of mankind' being undermined and a subsequent increase in the likelihood of violence and war.¹⁶⁹ In prosecuting a case against the myth of the framework however Popper does not suggest that the existence of frameworks (sets of basic assumptions or fundamental principles)¹⁷⁰ need be a cause of damaging conflicts and disputes. Indeed Popper goes as far as to put forward the thesis that 'Western civilization is the result of the clash, or confrontation, of different cultures, and therefore of the clash, or confrontation, of different frameworks'.¹⁷¹ This is a revealing view and has significant implications for the line of argument developed in the thesis presented here.

If frameworks can be cultures on Popper's account then it's possible that they could be national cultures. It's worth noting that Popper refers to both frameworks and nation states as being in some way mythical but goes on to engage theoretically with

¹⁶⁷ Popper, "The Myth of the Framework", p.38.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid, p.38.

¹⁶⁹ Popper, "The Myth of the Framework", p.35.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid, p.35.

¹⁷¹ Popper, "The Myth of the Framework", p.38.

these concepts regardless.¹⁷² Popper's perception of clash and confrontation is striking in this context because he conceives of a battle of ideas, 'fought' on the basis of critical rationalism in which all parties to the confrontation can potentially benefit from participating in it. In fact, such clash may 'lead men to think critically' which for Popper, is key to the rational scientific method and to rational projects of political reform.¹⁷³

Lakatos, in developing Popper's philosophy, concludes that the history of science has been and should be 'a history of competing research programmes ... but it has not been and must not become a succession of periods of normal science: the sooner competition starts, the better for progress'.¹⁷⁴ For Popperians, science makes progress on the basis of competing hypotheses, inter-subjectively tested. Lakatos modifies this slightly to suggest that it is wider programmes of research that need to be conjectured and then tested rather than specific and more limited theoretical statements. The crucial factor in both cases however is that there be a range of competing alternatives to be discussed, debated and tested. In political matters such competing alternative frameworks can also serve a useful purpose.

Popper is explicit that this can apply to the frameworks that we recognise as countries.

'Some countries and their laws respect freedom while others do so less, or not at all. These differences are most important, and they must not be dismissed or shrugged off by a cultural relativism, or by the claim that different laws and customs are due to different standards, or different ways of thinking, or different conceptual frameworks, and that they are therefore incommensurable or incomparable. On the contrary, we should try to understand and to compare. We should try to find out who has the better institutions. And we should try to learn from them'.¹⁷⁵

The basis for learning that Popper sets out here is underpinned by a rational critical attitude that is universal in the sense of being able make comparisons against varied

¹⁷² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹⁷³ Popper, "The Myth of the Framework", p.39.

¹⁷⁴ Lakatos, "Methodology of Scientific Research Programmes", p.155.

¹⁷⁵ Popper, "The Myth of the Framework", p.46.

frameworks and make judgements against a common standard. The argument presented in this thesis is that Popperian liberalism, and the concept of open society in particular, can serve as that standard for assessing nation states as specific political frameworks. In this way, the concept of national politics does not need to be jettisoned from a Popperian perspective but rather assessed in terms of the contribution that it can make to the development and indeed preservation of open societies across the world.

The learning opportunities that can be derived from having a plurality of options to explore, discuss and critique suggest that significant caution toward cosmopolitan projects – particularly where concentrations of power may result – is an appropriate position for Popperians to adopt. Popper goes on to suggest that cultural relativism and the doctrine of the ‘closed framework’ are serious obstacles to the readiness to learn from others. He argues that these represent ‘obstacles to the method of accepting some institutions, modifying others, and rejecting what is bad’.¹⁷⁶ Applying this approach to the nation state as a form of political community would indicate that the concept should not be rejected as a system but rather some nation states can be endorsed as open societies, others modified where possible to make them more open, and those that remain stubbornly closed would be rejected by other states. What form such rejection would take in practice is of course very difficult to determine but some thought is given to this question in subsequent chapters.

To evaluate political regimes such as nation states in a manner consistent with Popper’s theorising requires the adoption of his method of science, the ‘method of critical discussion’, which makes the transcendence of culturally acquired frameworks possible.¹⁷⁷ Rather than dismiss the concept of the nation state out of hand we can instead consider from the perspective of critical rationality and try and learn what is to be valued and what is not valuable in the nation state, both conceptually and specific instances. To an extent then, this thesis is an attempt to hold Popper to that approach when contemplating nationalism, something that he did

¹⁷⁶ Popper, “The Myth of the Framework”, p.46.

¹⁷⁷ Popper, “The Myth of the Framework”, p.58.

not do consistently or systematically.

In some senses Popper's critical rationalism is a universal concept in that it can take us towards 'objectivity' in terms of the transcending of particular frameworks; thus Popper describes scientific objectivity as the 'inter-subjectivity of scientific method'.¹⁷⁸ Here Popper is referring to the 'friendly-hostile co-operation' of many scientists rather than individual scientists working in isolation.¹⁷⁹ Those cooperative scientists may be working within different frameworks and traditions however and the point that Popper makes in his essay on frameworks is that the frameworks need not be a barrier to scientific practice and progress so long as the inter-subjective methodology can be applied across frameworks. There are parallels in this for a political philosophy of liberal nationalism whereby the frameworks of particular nation states need not constrain individuals from a Popperian perspective because they may still a) adopt inter-subjective critical rationality within the bounds of their own framework but also b) adopt that approach in evaluating between frameworks against some other criterion such as open society.

Although Popper was dismissive of the nation state as a form of political community, and of nationalism on account of its appeal to tribal instincts,¹⁸⁰ he endorsed western liberal democratic states as instances of open society.¹⁸¹ These states were, and are, also nation states. I have argued earlier in this chapter that the ideas of open society and critical rationalism are capable in themselves of providing a limited form of communal solidarity and the important point is that Popper did not seek to defend open societies in a social vacuum.

The world we inhabit is already divided into distinct sovereign political communities, mostly taking the form of nation states. The question posed of Popperians in this thesis is how to render that framework more accommodating of

¹⁷⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.217.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p.217.

¹⁸⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.49.

¹⁸¹ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.13.

the principles and values of open society. Promoting open societies is not mutually exclusive with defending nation states. Bearing in mind Popper's caution with regard to revolutionary political reform it makes sense to start from the reality of a world comprised of nation states and seek to make that form of political community increasingly correspond with the philosophy of open society. How that might be done forms part of the work of the next chapter.

Part II – Applications of Popper's Philosophy

4

Open Society and the Nation State

4.1 Introduction – Opening the Nation State

In the previous chapter the nature of Popper's open society, as he outlined it, was considered in some detail along with its relationship to potential boundaries of political community. This chapter shifts the focus to concentrate explicitly on national boundaries to political community and the compatibility of those boundaries with the philosophy of open society. It should be reiterated at this point that attempting to find an accommodation between open society and the nation state is to attempt quite a radical reconfiguration of Popperian political philosophy. This is particularly so given 'Popper's indictment of nationalism. There are no distinctions in his work between acceptable and unacceptable nationalisms. All nationalist beliefs are considered absurd'.¹ This thesis does not dispute Vincent's characterisation of Popper's attitude to nationalism but rather seeks to question that attitude as well as explore the extent to which Popper unwittingly accommodated the structure and framework of the nation state in much of his theorising.

If Popperians choose to engage with the political community that is the nation state instead of ignoring it then what form should that engagement take? How suspicious should Popperians be that the nation state represents an impediment to the spread of open society values and principles? This chapter addresses these questions and seeks to allay some potential concerns. Whilst a crisis of the nation state is often hypothesised it is difficult to deny the nation states continued endurance as a communal political form into the twenty-first century.² It has been argued by

¹ Andrew Vincent, Popper and Nationalism, in *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Jarvie, Milford & Miller (eds), Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p.158.

² See Philip Bobbit, *The Shield of Achilles*, London: Penguin Books, 2003; John Dunn, *Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State?*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995; Jean-Marie Guehenno, *The End of the Nation State*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995; and Martin van Creveld, *The Rise and Decline of the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

Hurrell that ‘popular understandings of globalization have vastly exaggerated the alleged demise of the nation-state and its degree of powerlessness’.³ If the nation state is set to remain a political reality then advocates of open society cannot avoid the influence of the national framework on both domestic and international politics. That being so, a more sustained exploration than that undertaken by Popper is required of the ways in which open societies can be instituted, including within the context of nation states. Tan suggests that the post-Cold War years have seen a resurgence in interest among liberal thinkers on the topic of nationalism and liberals have found themselves ‘having seriously to confront a problem that they had hitherto largely ignored in contemporary debates’.⁴ My thesis endeavours to remedy this liberal blind spot by looking afresh at the nation state as a potential locus and host of open society and thereby demonstrating the contribution that Popper’s philosophy can make to such debates.

The starting point in such a task is a consideration of the work of several theorists of liberal forms of nationalism: David Miller, Joseph Raz, and in particular, Yael Tamir. This is important because in viewing nationalism as an enemy of open society Popper implies that nationalism and liberalism cannot comfortably coexist in a single coherent theory or ideology. The theorists mentioned above beg to differ and each provides an account of a liberal, what might be deemed open, version of nationalism that can be distinguished from the conception of nationalism to which Popper was so hostile. Although it is unfortunate that Tamir specifically elects not to confront Popper’s critique of nationalism directly, having pointed to its potency, she nevertheless sets out a detailed position that merits scrutiny in terms of its potential affinity with open society. The account of liberal nationalism outlined by Tamir is comprehensive in scope and seeks to address the question of openness in a framework that combines liberalism and nationalism and thus warrants significant attention here.

³ Andrew Hurrell, “Global Inequality and International Institutions”, in T. Pogge (ed) *Global Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p.35.

⁴ Kok-Chor Tan, *Justice Without Borders – Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Patriotism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004, p.13.

Having taken a theoretical perspective of liberal nationalism the chapter goes on to consider the practical application of a liberal worldview that remains predicated on the nation state. That view is provided by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in a speech he gave in Chicago in 1999 entitled *The Doctrine of the International Community*. In his speech, Blair sets out a vision of liberal internationalism and interventionism that seeks to promote the principles of democracy and individualism that are central to Popper's political philosophy. Tony Blair is in effect proposing a doctrine to assist the international community in trying to open up societies that are in some way closed. An assessment of the Blair doctrine is a very useful in examining the potential utility of open society as a principle of foreign policy. The question can thus be considered as to the extent to which national governments can play a role in developing open societies internationally.

That question is extended through an analysis of both the theoretical and practical work of George Soros in trying to promote open societies around the world. His Open Society Institute is based on Popper's philosophy and is an interesting example of philanthropy with a clear political philosophical aim, to open up closed societies.⁵ What we discover with Soros is something akin to a neo-Popperianism that is far less hostile to the nation state than Popper was. Soros is far from a nationalist however and so the work of his institute offers a valuable template for trying to strengthen international cooperation whilst simultaneously promoting open societies within the framework of a world comprised of nation states.

The chapter concludes by pointing to a distinction between positive and negative forms of nationalism and suggesting that Popper's dismissal of the nation state was unduly hasty in part because he failed to appreciate or accept any such distinction. My work here aims to show that the nation state is not inherently hostile terrain for attempts to develop open societies. Popper's lack of sustained engagement with the potential boundaries of political community indicates that it is the way in which

⁵ <http://www.soros.org/>

political communities are structured that was his prime concern. The suggestion of this chapter and thesis more broadly, is that Popperian attention should focus where possible on translating existing political communities into open societies rather than re-engineer the predominant nature and boundaries of political community with all the risks and uncertainties implied by that enterprise. The initial focus of that attention is on Tamir's liberal nationalism.

Liberal Nationalism: Autonomy and Membership

One of the most systematic attempts to develop a liberal theory of nationalism is that produced by Yael Tamir in her book that has as its title, simply, 'Liberal Nationalism'. In it she sets out to 'capture what is essential to both schools of thought, drawing from liberalism a commitment to personal autonomy and individual rights, and from nationalism an appreciation of the importance of membership in human communities in general, and in national communities in particular'.⁶ The success or otherwise of that endeavour will be examined here. A consideration of Tamir's work affords the opportunity not just to explore further the compatibility of Popper's open society and liberal nationalist thought but also to understand more fully what Popper means by the concept of open society and how it might be applied in the context of twenty-first century politics.

Tamir's concern is to situate individual autonomy within national communities; to embed the citizen as simultaneously an autonomous individual and a member of a substantive community of identification. In seeking to do so she argues that:

'individuals wish to be ruled by institutions informed by a culture they find understandable and meaningful, and which allows a certain degree of transparency that facilitates their participation in public affairs. When they are able to identify their own culture in the political framework, when the political institutions reflect familiar traditions, historical interpretations, and norms of behaviour, individuals come to perceive themselves as the creators, or at least the carriers, of a valuable set of beliefs'.⁷

⁶ Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, p.35.

⁷ Ibid, p.72.

This characterisation of individual preference for comprehensible culturally informed institutions is actually rather conservative in nature. Firstly it speaks to a communal, socially conceived notion of authority and to the participation rather than to the rights of individual citizens. Secondly it refers to the familiarity of traditions and reflected historical interpretations that are distinctive aspects of the conservative disposition and theoretical understanding.

Popper, as has been discussed above, is an opponent of what he terms the philosophy and politics of identity, believing these approaches to merely serve and justify the existing order.⁸ Popper's open society is susceptible to a similar challenge however in that 'the idea of piecemeal social engineering seems to presuppose that the general aims of a society and its institutions are both broadly agreed on by the members of that society and are already embryonically embodied in its institutions'.⁹ The question of Popper's conservatism resurfaces here and his aversion to large scale or radical change does at least imply a toleration of prevailing circumstance, the prevailing political order. Insofar as Popper is tolerant of such it is due to the fear with which he holds all grand and comprehensive plans to remake society in accordance with some preconceived plan or blueprint. The particular danger of doing so as far as Popper is concerned is that individuals risk being treated as means to particular social or communal ends.¹⁰

This argument has a significant resonance in the context of the nation state and nationalism. The political system should serve individuals and not the other way round in Popper's view and this would apply to the political system that is the nation state as much as any other. What's interesting here is that if we apply Popper's theoretical approach to the nation state, his position does not diverge widely from

⁸ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2 – Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986, p.41.

⁹ Anthony O'Hear, *Karl Popper: Philosophy and Problems*, Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, Cambridge, 1995, p.158.

¹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.134. Despite being an admirer of Marx, at least of his intentions and commitment to eradicating poverty in particular, Popper rebuked him as 'the last of the great holistic system builders' whilst stressing that piecemeal social engineering rather than holism was the key to rational political reform.

that of Tamir's. The distinction that's worth observing at this stage is one of degree with regard to normative individualism. For Popper, the community or state is to be judged solely on the contribution or otherwise that it makes to individual well being whilst Tamir is more content to proclaim the eminence of 'cultural membership' and the shared experiences that an individual can access via participation in (national) communal life.¹¹

David Miller makes a similar point to Tamir by reference to what he terms a 'common public culture'. Such a culture, Miller argues, is central to national identity and 'may be seen as a set of understandings about how a group of people is to conduct its life together'.¹² Joseph Raz also points to the common character and culture of peoples that can be considered 'serious candidates for the right to self-determination'.¹³ Popper himself would not dispute the potential benefit to be derived from some sort of common public culture for after all his conception of open society rests upon a notion of the public sphere that is predicated on an underlying critical rationality and openness to reform. Indeed, Popper remarks upon the 'socially conditioned atmosphere' within which scientific and political thought is developed.¹⁴ Popper's open society is to some extent an attempt to promote and defend a liberal public culture which he holds to be conducive to the practice of science and piecemeal social reform. With that in mind as the primary value of liberal public cultures, it makes sense for contemporary Popperians to defend such cultures where they are to be found, including within national boundaries.

The extent to which a common public culture can be deemed to serve the interests of individuals who live the public aspects of their lives in relation to it is of significance here. Tamir makes mention of the individual's ability to be a part-creator of valuable beliefs but this is quickly qualified, with individuals deemed to carry such belief without necessarily having created them. This again suggests an element of

¹¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

¹² David Miller, *On Nationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997, p.26.

¹³ Joseph Raz, "National Self-Determination", in *Ethics in the Public Domain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, p.114.

¹⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.213.

conservatism to Tamir's thought in that there is a recognition that human beings are perhaps more likely to inherit their particular set of circumstances – in terms of identities, attachments, political practices – than be the authors or conscious designers, social engineers from a Popperian perspective, of them. This point is stressed by Miller who suggests that the past constrains the present and that 'present identities are built out of the materials that are handed down'.¹⁵ Raz notes that people growing up in a particular national culture are likely to acquire the group culture to some extent and be marked by its character.¹⁶ It warrants noting again that particular individuals may not perceive 'their own' culture in the political framework of which they are a part but that does not necessarily detract from the broader point Tamir is making to suggest that in order to value something of the nature of a set of beliefs, an individual must feel an attachment to them and preferably a substantive attachment that encompasses their identity and sense of self.

For his part, Popper is generally more interested in the notion of individuals as creators of valuable beliefs rather than just carriers of them. This is the case in both his philosophies of science and politics. Popper regards the human species as an intrinsically creative one and refers to the new worlds created by humankind – worlds of language, music, poetry, science and most importantly, moral demands.¹⁷ The moral demands that Popper considers to be most urgent and significant are those for equality, freedom and extending help to the weak.¹⁸ These moral convictions, Popper contends, were rediscovered in the French Revolution and served to animate it; furthermore these convictions are deemed to be 'perennial ideas' that have a universality founded on their Christian origins.¹⁹ By referencing the French Revolution as a positive step in pursuit of the moral world that underpins his conception of open society Popper demonstrates that such a cause can be pursued in the context of what we would now regard as a nation state and also suggests he does

¹⁵ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.175.

¹⁶ Raz, "National Self-Determination", p.114.

¹⁷ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1 – The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge, 1984, p.65.

¹⁸ *Ibid*, p.65.

¹⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.30.

not share the conservative concerns, expressed most fully by Burke, regarding the violent disruptions and radical alterations that were component parts of the revolution in France.²⁰ The extent to which Popper is prepared to support revolution as a means of bringing about open society in the first place, as opposed to pursuing political reform within it, is an interesting question to which we shall return later in this chapter when looking at liberal interventionism from a Popperian perspective.

Tamir defines the main characteristic of liberal nationalism as being that of fostering national ideals without losing sight of other values against which such ideals should be weighed and of which account ought to be taken.²¹ Thus, she contends, liberal nationalism ‘celebrates the particularity of culture together with the universality of human rights, the social and cultural embeddedness of individuals together with their personal autonomy. In this sense it differs radically from organic interpretations of nationalism, which assume that the identity of individuals is totally constituted by their national membership’.²² It would appear from this description that the theoretical foundations of liberal nationalism have quite a lot of weight that they are required to support.

Popperians would likely be alarmed that on this description individualism is but one amongst many values of which sight should not be lost amidst the process of fostering national ideals. Indeed for Popper, the very notion of a national ideal is a peculiar and dangerous one.

‘Even if anyone knew what he meant when he spoke of nationality, it would be not at all clear why nationality should be accepted as a fundamental political category, more important for instance than religion, or birth within a certain geographical region, or loyalty to a dynasty, or a political creed like democracy (which forms, one might say, the uniting factor of multi-lingual Switzerland). But while religion, territory or a political creed can be more or less clearly determined, nobody has ever been able to explain what he means by a nation, in a way that could be used as a basis for practical politics’.²³

²⁰ Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

²¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

²² Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

²³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

Popper is raising two separate objections to nationalism here, one philosophical and one political. Firstly, he can find no basis for according nationality the status of a fundamental political category even if it may form a part of the complex array of elements that coalesce into individual identities. Popper's normative individualism is such that individuals are the fundamental political category that matter but he accepts that realising individual welfare and opportunity requires cooperation and a collective effort, in the inter-subjective practice of science for example, and thus there is a need for the state. The state must be servant rather than master of the individual however. That a particular state is national in character however, does not rule out this possibility.

Miller argues that to see one's own welfare as bound up with the community to which one belongs facilitates an attitude that contributing to the communal good is itself a form of individual goal-fulfilment.²⁴ Popperians can appreciate that idea: an individual accomplishment in science for example can be regarded as a contribution to the common good and of the scientific enterprise more generally. Raz suggests that 'group interests cannot be reduced to individual interests. It makes sense to talk of a group's prospering or declining ... without having to cash this in terms of individual interests'.²⁵ Popper places a greater emphasis on individual interests and the need for communal structures to serve individual interests and be judged in light of them. Nationality represents a somewhat arbitrary, even irrational, category for Popper but Tamir makes clear that her liberal theory of nationalism is 'structured in line with the assumptions of ethical individualism' in that it can only be justified by reference to the interests of those individuals affected by it.²⁶

In theory at least then, Tamir's account of liberal nationalism has a defence against Popperian claims that nationalism, as a normative approach, either neglects individuals as a fundamental political category or fails to adjudicate the (nation) state

²⁴ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.67.

²⁵ Raz, "National Self-Determination", p.119.

²⁶ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

on the basis of the contribution it makes to individual welfare and wellbeing. Tamir argues that liberal nationalism is not only pluralistic and open but also a product of human will as much as of history.²⁷ Popper does insist that ‘whatever authority we may accept, it is we who accept it’.²⁸ Tamir’s point in theorising a liberal form of nationalism is that individuals are free to accept the authority of nation states in the form of national governments on account of the recognition that ‘national rights can only be consistently justified on universal grounds by referring to the value individuals find in the existence of nations’.²⁹ If the people of Switzerland can choose to accept the unifying authority of democracy as the basis of their state then it is not obvious why individuals should be unable to choose nationality or the nation to perform a similarly unifying role. It is quite possible to agree with Popper regarding the inherent difficulties of providing a comprehensive definition of nationality but dispute his claims that this debars nationality from serving as a fundamental political category and that such difficulties are easily avoided in deploying a concept such as democracy. This brings us to Popper’s second objection, that of the practicality, or a lack thereof, pertaining to the concept of nationality.

Popper’s rejection of nationalism runs far deeper than is conveyed by an objection on practical grounds but it is nevertheless interesting that he should bring up such an issue as a way of seeking to dismiss the notion of national politics. Popper’s argument is that the difficulty of defining nationality renders it an unsuitable candidate to serve as a political category and as a basis for practical politics. Popper’s hypothesis here appears to have been decisively refuted given that nationality, however loosely or imprecisely it may be defined, is serving as a practical basis for politics in many, arguably most parts of the world. This situation has become more pronounced over the past two decades following the collapse of communism. The countries of the Balkans for example have (re)established themselves as nation states, as national polities, following the dissolution of

²⁷ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

²⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.67.

²⁹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

Yugoslavia.

The situation in the Balkans as recently as ten years ago can be argued from a Popperian perspective to illustrate the dangers of extreme forms of ethnic nationalism and the risk of violence stemming from the separation of human beings into groups of others, unable often to identify with each other on a level of common humanity. All that may be so without undermining the case that Tamir builds for liberal variants of nationalism thoroughly opposed to more cultural variants of the concept that she describes as verging on the pathological.³⁰ Miller argues that there is nothing inherent to particularism to preclude the recognition that any individual stands in some relationship to all other human beings on account of physically sharing a single world. The problem however is to identify 'what ethical demands stem from this relationship, and to weigh it against other more specific loyalties'.³¹ By refusing to recognise that nationalism can exist in a moderate form, such as outlined by Tamir, indeed in a form that accords with Popper's own commitment to ethical individualism Popper undermines the case that he prosecutes against nationalism. Some individuals drive dangerously and recklessly and in doing so cause death but it would be a rather strange argument to suggest that cars should be outlawed on the basis that in the wrong hands they can be dangerous. Those found responsible for dangerous driving are dealt with as criminals. So too with nationalism, that it can be perverted, violent and dangerous is not reason to dismiss it as a political concept or animating feature of politics. Rather, those individuals that act violently and dangerously in the name of nationalism can be dealt with as criminals. Such an approach is respectful of the principle of individual responsibility to which Popper is committed and upon which his theorising of open society is based.

Particularity and Universality

As outlined above, Tamir's liberal nationalism seeks to celebrate simultaneously both the particularity of culture and the universality of human rights. It is not clear

³⁰ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

³¹ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.53.

however on Tamir's account how much particularity can be tolerated without violating the universality of human rights. Presumably she must have in mind a conception of human rights to be applied universally that each national political community must adhere to. Such a conception is implied but not explicated. The liberal desire to universalise rights is invariably likely to present a barrier to the expression of some aspects of particular cultures. Even in circumstances of strong cultural convergence as is to be found between Britain and the United States of America for example, it is difficult to determine what perspective liberal nationalist theory would take on an issue such as the death penalty as practiced in the U.S. but not in Britain. Should a universal declaration of human rights include the outlawing of the death penalty or is the death penalty a matter that can reasonably be determined by particular national communities on the basis of their own particular cultures and traditions? In this example the universalism inherent to aspects of liberalism does not easily accompany the particularist implications of self-governing national communities.

Popper's concept of open society in many respects faces a similar sort of challenge as that posed to liberal nationalism in the attempt to balance the universalism of human rights and the particularity of different cultural forms and ways of life. In conceptualising open society Popper does not directly address the potential tensions between universalism, as applied to human rights and particularities that may emerge from distinct communities taking democratic decisions and undertaking distinctive cultural practices. As Miller puts it, 'the universalist sees in particularism a failure of rationality; the particularist sees in universalism a commitment to abstract rationality that exceeds the capacities of ordinary human beings'.³² By failing to adequately address this tension in his writings Popper leaves a significant degree of ambiguity at the heart of his open society concept. Specifically, the question remains open as to whether his preference was for some sort of cosmopolitan form of a universal open society or, as I argue is more likely, he was content to promote the notion of open societies as separate but nevertheless cooperative republics. Popper does offer just

³² Miller, *On Nationality*, p.58.

enough of a guide as to the nature of open society though to mitigate some of the tension arising out of attempts to find a form of political community that can successfully balance the universal and the particular. This issue will be taken up at greater length later in the chapter with an examination of George Soros' bid to actually institute open societies across the world but for now two initial observations can be made.

The first is that Popper's concept of open society can serve as a template or framework against which actual states or political communities could be assessed. States that fulfil a range of criteria in terms of democratic institutions, the rule of law, respect for individual freedoms and rights, the existence of a free press and compliance with international law and agreements could in doing so be recognised as open societies whilst those that do not meet such criteria would be regarded as closed societies, to varying degrees, from a Popperian perspective. Such a framework could act as a useful buttress, and indeed alternative, to the characteristics of a liberal national entity as laid out by Tamir.

'This entity will endorse liberal principles of distribution inwards and outwards; its political system will reflect a particular national culture, but its citizens will be free to practice different cultures and follow a variety of life-plans and conceptions of the good. The political entity described here differs from the traditional liberal entity in that it introduces culture as a crucial dimension of political life'.³³

This description has points of both convergence and divergence with Popper's open society concept. The freedom to practice different cultures and pursue various life-plans would be central to the openness of a society as advocated by Popper. Beyond the recognition of a freedom underpinning plurality however it would be difficult to endorse the reflecting of a particular national culture as a central aim of the state on Popperian terms. This is due to the limits that Popper thinks it necessary to place upon the power of the state so as to protect individual liberty.³⁴

³³ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.163.

³⁴ Limitations of this sort are also endorsed by Oakeshott in theorising civil association. Michael Oakeshott, *On Human Conduct*, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2003, p.174.

What is striking about Tamir's summation of the characteristics that make up the liberal national entity is the rather vague manner in which they are formulated. 'Liberal principles of distribution' for example are open to a very wide range of interpretations of which Popper's liberal 'humanitarian theory of justice' would be but one.³⁵ Similarly it is not clear how a state is to be recognised as reflecting a particular national culture or how such a notion is to be defined. To say as much is not to suggest that cultural forms do not find reflection in political structures and institutions nor does it deny at least the potential for something resembling a national culture to exist but rather it is to question on what basis a liberal national state is to be distinguished by virtue of its perceived cultural reflectivity. For his part, Miller argues that national public cultures are products of political debate which are transmitted via mass media.³⁶ Whilst Popper disputes the utility of the nation as a political category it is clear that Tamir regards the nation as a possible locus for the practice of something closely approximating open politics of a Popperian conception.

Tamir does in fact make explicit reference to what she describes as one of the best known attacks on nationalism, that put forward by Popper in claiming that nationalism is 'akin to a revolt against reason' and an ever present danger to Popper's own theoretical notion of the open society.³⁷ Popper attacks nationalism for its appeal 'to our tribal instincts, to passion and to prejudice, and to our nostalgic desire to be relieved from the strain of individual responsibility which it attempts to replace by a collective or group responsibility'.³⁸ Rather than defend her theory against the Popperian critique however, Tamir opts instead to dismiss it. In the following manner she simply asserts that 'this attack notwithstanding, this book attempts to describe an interpretation of nationalism that cherishes reason and the open society, rests on a systematic view of human nature and the world order, and on a coherent set of universally applicable values'.³⁹ Popper's attack does warrant the

³⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.94.

³⁶ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.68.

³⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.80.

³⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.49

³⁹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.80.

sort and level of scrutiny applied here though for it reveals that he struggles to provide a convincing and systematic argument that his open society is incompatible with the liberal nation state. It also serves to highlight the enduring relevance of Popper's political philosophy to debates concerning the status and future of the nation state.

Popper contends that Hegel developed a historical and totalitarian theory of nationalism and in doing so clearly foresaw the 'psychological possibilities' of the concept.⁴⁰ In particular, Popper suggests that Hegel 'saw that nationalism answers a need – the desire of men to find and to know their definite place in the world, and to belong to a powerful collective body'.⁴¹ Unfortunately Popper does not expand on this claim to reveal, for example, whether or not he thinks that humankind have a legitimate and reasonable desire to know their place in the world and belong to some form of powerful collective. Such a debate is reminiscent of the one introduced by Fuller regarding Popper and Kuhn's respective philosophies of science in terms of individuals being uprooted in the former case and rooted in the latter. On this basis it can be argued that the 'shock' to which Popper refers regarding the birth of open societies, and the transition from tribal or closed society entailed by this, derives from the loss of a certain and definite place in the world encountered by individuals.⁴² Being uprooted in this way is to take on the 'strain of civilization' to use Popper's term.⁴³

What is interesting is the fact that in the account of liberal nationalism provided by Tamir it is made absolutely explicit that she 'attempts to describe an interpretation of nationalism that cherishes reason and the open society'.⁴⁴ Tamir contrasts her interpretation of nationalism as differing radically from 'organic' interpretations which assume that individual identities are totally constituted by national membership and, invoking Rousseau, that personal will is free only when submerged

⁴⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.69.

⁴¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.69.

⁴² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.1.

⁴³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.69.

⁴⁴ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.80.

in the general one.⁴⁵ By drawing such a contrast, and doing so in this way, it can be argued that Tamir considers liberal nationalism to be an open version of the concept in opposition to the closed version represented by organic nationalism. Popper, it is worth recalling, described a closed society as a ‘semi-organic unit’⁴⁶ and Tamir shares with him an aversion to organic forms of political community.

Tamir goes on to describe liberal nationalism as ‘pluralistic and open’, that it ‘sees national groups as not only a product of history, but also of human will, and broadly follows humanistic tradition’.⁴⁷ The open society of Popper’s philosophy can be described in very similar terms and Popper does make clear that he holds the pluralism of open society in high regard. Furthermore he considers the creation and maintenance of open societies to require acts of human will and not mere historical fortune whilst also seeking to situate open society within the humanistic tradition.⁴⁸ Indeed, he considers the move from closed to open society to be a ‘step from tribalism to humanitarianism’.⁴⁹ Popper’s overriding concern with Tamir’s account of liberal nationalism here would likely focus on the use of the word broadly to indicate the extent of liberal nationalism’s adherence to humanitarian principles.

For Popper, as we have seen, the fundamental purpose of the state is to be regarded as a humanitarian one, that of ensuring an equal protection of freedom for all citizens.⁵⁰ The open society cannot merely follow humanitarianism in a broad sense rather it must be founded and anchored in humanitarian principles. Popper however offers only the broadest guidance as to how such principles should be instituted when he says that ‘the protection of that freedom which does not harm other citizens’ should be the fundamental purpose of the humanitarian, open state.⁵¹ Not only does he leave open the question of how the scope of such freedom is to be defined but he

⁴⁵ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

⁴⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.173.

⁴⁷ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

⁴⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.3. As Popper puts it at the very outset of his reflections on open society, ‘the future depends on ourselves, and we do not depend on any historical necessity’.

⁴⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.171.

⁵⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.110.

⁵¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.110.

also offers little by way of explanation regarding the integration of this fundamental purpose with the considerable interventionism that he elsewhere posits as appropriate on the part of the state.⁵² The important point that emerges from this is that Popper's argument with Tamir on the question of humanitarianism is one of scope and interpretation, not over the principle itself or the need for it to underpin state conduct. The liberalism that Popper and Tamir share appears to be stronger than the differences that arise out of her sympathy toward a particular form of nationalism.

A further question that highlights both convergence and divergence in the work of Popper and Tamir, between open society and liberal nationalism, is that of continuity and in particular the continuity of communities and communal membership. Tamir argues, again in a somewhat conservative vein, that continuity is a benefit provided to individuals by the existence of nation states.

'The respect for continuity inherent in national membership enables individuals to place themselves in a continuum of human life and creativity, connecting them to their ancestors as well as to future generations and lessening the solitude and alienation characteristic of modern life'.⁵³

Tamir does not make clear why the ability to place oneself in a continuum of human life is to be viewed as particularly beneficial or advantageous to individuals nor does she provide evidence as to the solitude and alienation that she perceives to characterise modern life. Nevertheless, this can be understood as a claim that individuals have socio-historical aspects to their identity and that they may seek to preserve and draw upon the cultural communities that could be deemed to have contributed to their identities.

The issue of continuity that Tamir raises in relation to liberal nationalism brings us to Popper's view of history. For Popper, continuity is far from as straight forward as Tamir would appear to assume, at least when viewed from the perspective of ethical individualism.

⁵² Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

⁵³ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.86.

‘There is no history of mankind, there is only an indefinite number of histories of all kinds of aspects of human life. And one of these is the history of political power. This is elevated into the history of the world. But this, I hold, is an offence against every decent conception of mankind. It is hardly better to treat the history of embezzlement or of robbery or of poisoning as the history of mankind. For the history of power politics is nothing but the history of international crime and mass murder’.⁵⁴

The nation state and national membership, as Tamir puts it, would come under the history of political power as outlined by Popper here in that political power is, and has been, held at a national level. Popper rather narrowly and unfairly writes power politics off as involving nothing but crime and mass murder but then it is not entirely clear what he means by power politics since he concedes that the open society itself must harness the ‘power’ of the state even if only to guarantee protection for the weak. His more general point however, is to question the notion of history, or indeed continuity, as being represented and interpreted as the various incarnations and developments of political power. Popper’s objection to Tamir’s continuity of national membership would be that it elevates one aspect of human life into a comprehensive history of the world that it does not particularly merit. It is not obvious from a Popperian perspective why nationality should be accorded special status as a locus of continuity since the continuums of human life and creativity that individuals may wish to place themselves in will be so varied and diverse. That national membership provides one continuum of continuity for individuals is not a reason in itself to value that form of membership above others in Popper’s view.

Popper suggests that attempts to record history actually require to some extent a negation of the individual and the abstraction of various groups. He argues that a concrete history of humankind would have to be a history of all humans since no one is more important than any other. It would have to be, Popper contends, ‘the history of all human hopes, struggles and sufferings’ and ‘clearly this concrete history cannot be written’.⁵⁵ Instead, historians must neglect and select in order to make

⁵⁴ Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2*, p.270.

⁵⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.270.

their task feasible and manageable.⁵⁶ Two observations can be made on the approach that Popper takes to history and historical analysis.

The first is to question his claim that no one individual is more important than any other in a historical sense. The moral equality of all human beings is an ethical proposition that Popper supports but this does not imply a corresponding equality of historical significance for all human individuals. In the history of political thought for example Popper clearly regards some thinkers as more important than others. Plato, Hegel and Marx are identified as opponents of the open society and whilst Popper seeks to argue against their respective philosophical positions he does this on the basis of a belief that these thinkers have had a significant historical role, more significant than that of other individuals, in impeding the development of open society.

The second observation on Popper's account of history that warrants mention is his concession that selections are necessary and that at least a degree of abstraction is required if historical study is to be made comprehensible. In accepting that the history of all human individuals cannot be written Popper alludes to abstractions that either aggregate or collectivise individuals. The history of the nation state could be an example of an abstracted historical account from this perspective but then so too could an attempt to trace the history of open society or even the idea of open society. Popper suggests that the only rational attitude 'towards the history of freedom is that we are ourselves responsible for it'.⁵⁷ If we permit the possibility that the history of nationalism can be interpreted as one version of a history of freedom then the nation state can become the responsibility of individuals in the same way that the open society can. In recognising that both the nation state and open society are to some extent abstractions they are both capable of being adjudicated on the basis of the contribution that they make to individual wellbeing.

Popper would be inclined to dispute this conclusion however and it is because he

⁵⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.270.

⁵⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.271.

denies that the nation state is capable of being applicably formulated even in the abstract.

‘None of the theories which maintain that a nation is united by a common origin, or common language, or a common history, is acceptable, or applicable in practice. The principle of the national state is not only inapplicable but it has never been clearly conceived. It is a myth. It is an irrational, a romantic and Utopian dream, a dream of naturalism and of tribal collectivism’.⁵⁸

For Popper then the nation state is but a myth, a naturalist and collectivist dream. But if this is so then it raises several questions of Popper’s own theory. The first question is why the nation state should be deemed to pose such a threat to freedom and open society if it is mythical and never been clearly conceived. Popper does not provide an answer to this. Another question concerns the abstractness of open society as a concept and it has been argued that it was not clearly conceived in Popper’s theorising. Bryan Magee for example, an avowed Popperian and champion of open society, argues that ‘our task is not the impossible one of establishing and preserving a particular form of society: it is to maximise our control over the actual changes that occur in a process of change which is never-ending – and to use that control wisely’.⁵⁹ This description of open society is no more clearly conceived than the various theories of the nation that Popper dismisses. My argument however, is that the abstract and at times opaque nature of open society is not a reason to reject it and Popperians should not reject the nation state on such a basis either.

There are a key set of principles that underlie Popperian liberalism: normative individualism, a concern to avoid concentrations of power, a presumption against holistic and radical political reform, a determination to relieve avoidable suffering, alertness to the perceived dangers of bureaucratisation, and a commitment to democratic principles. A society structured and governed in accordance with these principles could reasonably be described as open from Popper’s perspective. It is interesting to note that there is absolutely no reason why these principles cannot be

⁵⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

⁵⁹ Bryan Magee, *Popper*, Fontana Press, London, 1985, p.106.

adopted and instituted within the political framework that is the nation state. The extent to which this is practically taken for granted will be revealed later in the chapter when consideration is given to the work of George Soros and his Open Society Institute. Soros has for many years now spent substantial time and money seeking to promote the concept of open society around the world and in particular has sought to help institute open societies in various nation states, usually those undergoing some form of post-Communist transition.

It has been highlighted in the discussion above that Popper perceives and attacks a single conception of nationalism, one that is organic, ethnically based and deemed to be incompatible with liberal principles and values. Tamir seeks to argue that nationalism can indeed be rendered compatible with liberalism and thus it is a more complex phenomenon than Popper may assume. Miller stresses, like Popper, the value of democracy whereby 'all citizens are at some level involved in discussion of public issues' but unlike Popper, suggests that 'only a common nationality can provide the sense of solidarity that makes this possible'.⁶⁰ Thus, a nation state can be liberal, or otherwise, in the same way that a city state, an empire, or even a supranational or cosmopolitan entity could be. Popper builds a convincing case that an open society cannot be governed by Platonic Philosopher Kings nor can it subscribe to the historicism that he finds in Marx's theorising but he fails to show what is intrinsic to the nation which means that it, as a form of political community, cannot be made open.⁶¹ Further evidence can be found of the compatibility of open society and the nation state by looking at the issues of distributive justice and the welfare state and it is to these that we now turn.

Welfare in the Open Society and the Nation State

Tamir notes that questions of distributive justice have become increasingly central to liberal theory.⁶² She argues that it is often overlooked that 'the liberal welfare state is necessarily predicated on certain national beliefs' and goes on to claim that the

⁶⁰ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.98.

⁶¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*.

⁶² Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 117.

liberal conception of distributive justice is ‘only meaningful in states that do not see themselves as voluntary associations but as ongoing and relatively closed communities whose members share a common fate’.⁶³ The critique that Tamir offers of the liberal account of distributive justice follows the same lines as the communitarian objections that were discussed in the previous chapter, in particular that the individualistic values of liberalism are unable to sustain the substantive commitments and mutual obligations required for a ‘caring’ welfare state to function.⁶⁴

In the context of this thesis the use of the term ‘closed communities’ by Tamir with reference to the welfare state is particularly noteworthy. This bears a close resemblance to the argument that John Gray makes that social democracy ‘presupposed a closed economy’. He suggests that deficit-financed full employment policies and the extensive welfare provision of the post-war period were predicated on a conception of political community and economy that was far from open, as are egalitarian theories such as those of John Rawls.⁶⁵ It is true that the welfare state has come to be established within national boundaries and the extent to which it may yet come to transcend them remains an open question, international aid transfers notwithstanding. Chauvier notes that the situation of the world as a whole does ‘fall within the purview of global justice; however, the appropriate conception of justice at the global level cannot simply replicate the conception that is suited to the domestic level’.⁶⁶ It is significant however, as Tamir claims that liberal philosophers have seldom made serious attempt to justify the restricting of distributive policies to members of particular (often national) communities.⁶⁷

Instead of justifying the restriction of distributive policies liberal theorists, with

⁶³ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 117.

⁶⁴ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 118.

⁶⁵ John Gray, *False Dawn – The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, The New Press, New York, 1998, p.88.

⁶⁶ Stephane Chauvier, “Justice and Nakedness”, in T. Pogge (ed) *Global Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p.91.

⁶⁷ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 118. David Miller is an exception however, see Miller, *National Responsibility and Global Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007.

Rawls a paradigmatic example, start from what is and grope towards ought. The 'is', in this case, being 'a world divided into nation states'.⁶⁸ Tamir argues that 'a coherent liberal theory should either endorse this world order and explain its virtues, or reject it and suggest ways of changing it. Accepting it without explaining it seems unjustified'.⁶⁹ Forst makes the point in this context that when thinking about issues of justice that transcend state boundaries it is important to distinguish between *international* and *global* justice with the former taking political communities as the main agents of justice with the latter taking persons as the primary focus of justice.⁷⁰ Popper's philosophy has a degree of incoherence to it on this basis in that he professes to reject nationalism but speaks only of controlling or harnessing the power of the state as is, he does not seek in any sustained or systematic way to build a case for a cosmopolitan state for example. When Popper refers to the need for social institutions that protect the economically weak to be 'enforced by the power of the state' he does not elaborate on what he means by the state.⁷¹ In declining to elaborate on the concept of the state it can be assumed that Popper meant states as constituted at the time of his writing. Whilst by no means all of these were nation states, many were and so it would appear that Popper's chief concern is with protecting the weak and utilising state power to this end rather than with the particular form, national or otherwise, that the state may take. Pogge argues that these questions require further thought from a liberal perspective in that support for the current global order and the national policies that sustain it cannot be divorced from the 'harms they foreseeably produce', those harms being severe poverty and associated problems in many parts of the world.⁷²

Popper was absolutely clear that the avoidance of preventable harm should be a guiding political principle.⁷³ Popper's philosophy can play a role in addressing questions of international harm and it need not be irreconcilable with the nation state

⁶⁸ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 120.

⁶⁹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 120.

⁷⁰ Rainer Forst, "Towards a Critical Theory of Transnational Justice", in T. Pogge (ed) *Global Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001, p.169.

⁷¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.125.

⁷² Thomas Pogge, *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002, p.144

⁷³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.237.

as a form of political community in doing so. Popper believed, and argued, that nationalism was inherently hostile to liberalism⁷⁴ but Tamir sets out a vision of nationalism that need not be and her theory provides grounds for establishing a degree of common accord between the concept of open society and that of the nation state. In terms of welfare and distributive justice it can be seen that Popper's approach can be accommodated within the nation state. Recalling his 'humanitarian theory of justice' which demands (i) that attempt be made to eliminate natural privileges, (ii) adherence to the general principle of individualism, and (iii) that the purpose of the state should be the protection of the freedom of its citizens, it is apparent that the nation state is not intrinsically or structurally incompatible with the realisation of these demands.⁷⁵

It is demand two of the humanitarian theory of justice, adherence to the principle of individualism that Popper thinks is most at risk of being undermined or neglected where the politics of nationalism are pursued. His fundamental rejection of nationalism is based upon his perception that it 'appeals to our tribal instincts, to passion and to prejudice, and to our nostalgic desire to be relieved from the strain of individual responsibility which it attempts to replace by a collective or group responsibility'.⁷⁶ The depiction of nationalism provided by Popper here is of a particular and arguably extreme kind. It is extreme for denying the capacity of nationalist theories and narratives to appeal beyond tribal instinct and prejudice, and for assuming that the invocation of some form of collective responsibility need be a negation of individualism. Tamir is no more an advocate of the type of nationalism envisaged by Popper than he himself is and Tamir bemoans what she regards as hidden assumptions that grant validity only to extreme versions of nationalism and identify it with 'fanaticism, violent struggle, and disaster'.⁷⁷

Tamir argues that 'moderate nationalism' offers a coherent theoretical position,

⁷⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.50.

⁷⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.94.

⁷⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.49.

⁷⁷ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

indeed, offers markedly greater coherence than its more extreme ‘relatives’.⁷⁸ She asks why liberal nationalism, ‘which places reflection, choice, and internal criticism at its centre’ and rejects the notion that exaltation of the idea of the nation should define nationalism, seems so often not to be distinguished from the extremities of nationalist theory.⁷⁹ This is a particularly apt question to ask of Popper, and of Popperians, because reflection, choice and internal criticism are exactly what Popper hopes will guide and underpin the state and the conduct of politics in his conception of open society.⁸⁰ One central aim of this chapter is not only to establish, with Tamir, that liberal nationalism represents a coherent theoretical position but moreover and more importantly that it represents a coherent theoretical position for Popperians seeking to advance the cause of open society and see open societies instituted across the world. A further aim is to show that the concept of open society, and thinking about the ways in which it can be realised, has the potential to illuminate contemporary questions as to the nature of political community and the prospects for the nation state.

It is interesting to note Popper’s apparent aversion to collective responsibility in his broader attack on nationalism, especially in the context of distributive justice and the welfare state. Tamir contends that ‘the “others” whose welfare we ought to consider are those who we care about, those who are relevant to our associative identity’.⁸¹ Welfare, on this account, is a form of collective responsibility extending beyond the individual but a responsibility that is bounded and demarcated by associative identities. The use of the term ‘those who we care about’ would likely prompt concern from Popper in that he takes issue with the very boundaries that Tamir sets up as delineating separate spheres of welfare.

By invoking passion and emotion, for those for whom we care, Popper fears the prospect of the rationalist approach to politics being abandoned.⁸²

⁷⁸ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

⁷⁹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

⁸⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.137.

⁸¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.121.

⁸² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

‘We cannot really love in the abstract; we can love only those whom we know. Thus the appeal to even our best emotions, love and compassion, can only tend to divide mankind into different categories. And this will be more true if the appeal is made to lesser emotions and passions. Our ‘natural’ reaction will be to divide mankind into friend and foe; into those who belong to our tribe, to our emotional community, and those who stand outside it; into believers and unbelievers; into compatriots and aliens’.⁸³

Popper is justified in pointing to the potential dangers of passion and emotion coming to dominate politics but here again he is perhaps incapable of seeing beyond extremities. Emotion in politics may cause division among humans but that is not necessarily a reason to banish it from the political arena, indeed it is doubtful that such banishment would be possible. Furthermore, the pursuit of ‘rational’ politics is no guarantee against division since it may be deemed rational to administer welfare on a sub-global basis for example and this would require the creation of at least administrative boundaries. Nowhere does Popper make the case for a world government or even for a global regime of distributive justice so in practice he appears content to tolerate a degree of division in providing for individual welfare. The world is already divided into compatriots and aliens but that does not render appeals to love and compassion redundant nor does it preclude the prospect of creating open societies that temper emotion with critical and rational reflection.

Popper seems to suggest, in contrast to Tamir, that emotional communities should be the basis neither of politics nor welfare. Miller follows Tamir’s line of reasoning in arguing that a ‘shared identity carries with it a shared loyalty, and this increases confidence that others will reciprocate one’s own co-operative behaviour’.⁸⁴ It is clear that Popper regards nation states as particularly perverse forms of emotional community which appeal, in his view, to lesser human emotions and passions. The logic of avoiding separate emotional communities would require the creation of a single emotional community of humankind with no individual left standing outside it. This both poses and expresses a dilemma at the heart of Popperian political

⁸³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

⁸⁴ Miller, *On Nationality*, p.92.

philosophy and the concept of open society. Popper avoids confronting the choice that his theory prompts: that between advocating a single, global, cosmopolitan open society and advocating a variety of separate republics across the globe each constituted as open societies. This perhaps leaves him unable to appreciate the opportunities that exist to moderate nationalism by means of the theory of open society and at least whilst a world comprised of nation states continues to exist, seek to render it more liberal.

It is an oversimplification on Tamir's part to suggest or imply that the welfare of those beyond an individual's associative identity is irrelevant to them and the fact that people donate to international charities and expect their governments to provide international aid is evidence of such. Tamir continues that 'communal solidarity creates a feeling, or an illusion, of closeness and shared fate, which is a precondition of distributive justice'.⁸⁵ For Popper, the notion of illusion here is to be feared for the possibility that it may perpetuate division and opposed as irrational for facilitating a belief in emotion and passion as the mainspring of human action at the expense of reason.⁸⁶ Popper however does not deny that emotion and passion animate human action and therefore that they play a part in the human activity that is politics. His goal is to marginalise them and pave the way for a conception of rational politics whereby it is the thought rather than the person of the thinker that is considered, debated and acted upon.⁸⁷ Once more the dichotomy that he sets up between rational politics and emotional politics is overblown and this clouds the important issue of how to make politics *more rational* and minimise the dangers of extreme emotions and passions being unleashed in the political arena. This holds in relation to matters of welfare as well as broader political structures and arrangements.

Tamir concludes her discussion of welfare by making the claim that 'the community-like nature of the nation-state is particularly well suited and perhaps even necessary,

⁸⁵ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.121.

⁸⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.233.

⁸⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

to the notion of the liberal welfare state'.⁸⁸ In the creation of a sense of community, however illusory or 'imagined'⁸⁹ it may be, Tamir takes the view that some form of communal solidarity is a precursor to the operation of liberal principles of (re)distributive justice. For his part, Popper states simply that 'it is our duty to help those who need our help; but it cannot be our duty to make others happy, since this does not depend on us'.⁹⁰ What Popper does not make clear is who is meant by 'us'.

The duty that he imposes to help those in need is couched in terms of his commitment to alleviate avoidable suffering and as a caution against attempts 'to make others happy' since that he regards as a privilege for friends and not a political task for the state.⁹¹ Popper does not tell us to whom the duty is addressed nor does he explicate any boundaries that may be entailed by it. His silence on this matter can be interpreted as a belief that no boundaries should entail in relation to distributive justice but it would be rather strange to hold this view and the radical departure from present circumstance that it demands, without being explicit about it. Alternatively, and more likely in my view, Popper's ambiguous approach to the boundaries of justice and the welfare state stem from a more or less taken for granted acceptance of those boundaries and structures already in place: predominantly those of the nation state. Popper's overriding concern was not to alter those boundaries but instead to alter the welfare provision contained therein.

Tamir suggests an explanation for the position of Popper here and it is a position that she regards as common to many liberal theorists. In her view liberalism has absorbed national concepts and this has enabled it 'to take for granted the existence of states inhabited by specific populations' and discuss notions such as distributive justice, as well as consent, obligations and participation, in this context.⁹² Such a position, Tamir contends, has allowed liberals to circumvent thorny issues of

⁸⁸ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.121.

⁸⁹ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, London: Verso Books, 2006.

⁹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.237.

⁹¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.237.

⁹² Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 139.

membership and immigration and also more general questions of group structure.⁹³ This assessment is harsh and rather sweeping of liberalism as a whole, as a body of political thought and ideas, but it is not an unfair critique to pose of Popperian liberalism which does indeed circumvent the issues that Tamir points to. In correspondingly strong terms Tamir concludes by claiming that liberal theory has become ‘dependent on national ideals and a national world order, thus leaving liberals little choice. Except for some cosmopolitans and radical anarchists, nowadays most liberals are liberal nationalists’.⁹⁴ It is not so much that liberal theory exhibits a dependency on national ideals or even a national world order but there does appear in Popper’s case to be an acceptance of the national world order, be it consciously or otherwise. By declining to define or distinguish himself as a cosmopolitan theorist Popper leaves himself open to the charge, as he would see it, of being a liberal nationalist on the terms set by Tamir.

That ethnocentric nationalism is dangerous and needs to be confronted by liberals is a point on which both Tamir and Popper could agree. Her approach to this confrontation however is to argue that national interests should not be denied altogether, as Popper would submit, but rather it is incumbent upon liberals to offer an alternative national view.⁹⁵ To Tamir it seems clear that ‘nationalism will simply not go away, and the question that remains open is whether its guise will be some form of virulent ethnocentrism or a sober vision, guided by respect for liberal values’.⁹⁶ Popper, in arguing the necessity of recognising the principle of what he calls an ‘unprejudiced view of politics’, that ‘everything is possible in human affairs’ would likely be inclined to dispute Tamir’s claim that the only open question remains as to the variant of nationalism that persists and not of the concept itself.⁹⁷ Just as previous forms and bases of political community, such as the city state, have by and large ceased to be the locus of political authority and foundations of world order so too in all likelihood will the nation state eventually come to be replaced by

⁹³ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 139.

⁹⁴ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 139.

⁹⁵ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.167.

⁹⁶ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.167.

⁹⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.197.

alternatives. For the moment however, that scenario does not appear close at hand, the world order is still predominantly structured around nation states and so Tamir is correct to at least suggest that one of the most pressing political questions remains that of what form the nation state should take and what principles should guide it.

For twenty-first century Popperians such a scenario can be regarded as either a threat or an opportunity. The persistence of the nation state, and of nationalism as an animating ideology, can be seen as a threat to open society and more particularly to the ‘rational unity’ of humankind.⁹⁸ Two points may be made however in response to the view of the nation state as a threat to rational unity. The first is that Popper conceived such a unity in terms of adherence to the ‘scientific outlook’ and it is not obvious that the existence or preservation of nation states as a political form is an impediment to the development and maintenance of such an outlook. Indeed Popper speaks of the rationalism of ‘Western civilization’, a civilization that has nation states as constituent political parts but still warrants commendation from a Popperian perspective on account of its commitment to rationality.⁹⁹ Secondly, we can observe that for Popper the rational unity of human beings rests on the twin pillars of science and open society. Western civilization is ‘rational’ because it is composed, broadly speaking, of open societies that value science. If the entire world were similarly constituted then presumably Popper would be content to refer to the rationalism of such a world order. The task for contemporary Popperians can reasonably be adjudged to be that of spreading open society, and its liberal principles, across the globe. This has similarities, although not I would suggest in terms of method, with American neoconservative ambitions to spread democracy to those parts of the world where it is absent or severely lacking.

The parallel that I draw with neo-conservatism I do so with the utmost caution. Soros, as we shall see later in the chapter, does view his mission as being to foster open societies across the world and promoting democracy is of course a very important part of that task. He was however thoroughly opposed to the US-led

⁹⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.243.

⁹⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.243.

invasion of Iraq and considers it neither feasible nor desirable to promote open society via the point of a gun. That said, it should be remembered that one of the fundamental principles of Popper's political philosophy is that avoidable suffering should be alleviated and where possible prevented. Moreover much of that suffering can be inflicted by the state, and this Popper judges to be more likely in closed societies governed by totalitarian regimes. Whatever it may be now, Iraq was far from an open society under Saddam Hussein and his Ba'ath party. This raises an important question for Popperians: on what basis, if any, can liberal interventionism be justified? Popper did not consider this question explicitly but he did have some interesting and relevant things to say on issues of national self-determination, the nature of political reform and the role of international institutions. The discussion that follows here seeks to assess Popper's approach in the light of one of the most significant attempts of recent times to set out and defend a concept of liberal interventionism, that provided by Tony Blair in his 'Doctrine of the International Community' speech delivered in Chicago in April 1999.

Applying Philosophy to the Social World

In this work of political theory it is important to explain why I devote time and effort to conducting a Popperian analysis of Tony Blair's doctrine and the significance of this in terms of attempts to apply Popper's political philosophy. It is worth reflecting at this point on what Popper considers to be the purpose and function of social science.

'It is the task of social theory to explain how the unintended consequences of our intentions and actions arise, and what kind of consequences arise if people do this that or the other in a certain social situation. And it is, especially, the task of the social sciences to analyse in this way the existence and the functioning of *institutions* (such as police forces or insurance companies or schools or governments) and of social *collectives* (such as states or nations or classes or other social groups).¹⁰⁰

For Popper then, it is clear that theory is designed to serve a very practical purpose. It can, and should, be concerned with the practical effects of social actions and

¹⁰⁰ Karl Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", in *Conjectures and Refutations – the Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1969, p.125.

intentions. The emphasis on collectives such as nations or states is of particular importance here and Popper is suggesting that such collectives should be the subject of social study. In one sense, Blair is a reasonable subject of Popperian study as the ex-leader of a social collective, the United Kingdom. Moreover however, Blair's Chicago speech set out a guide for social collectives – other (liberal) nations – on when and how to act in certain social situations.

Popper takes a problem-solving approach to philosophy: what are the key problems to be solved and what light can social theory shed on them? He refers to trying to identify and tackle the problem situations of the day.¹⁰¹ That is just what Blair attempts to do in his speech; he is seeking to set out what he anticipates the international problems of the twenty-first century to be and how states might address them. Tony Blair, as we shall see, firmly advocates the normative desirability of liberal states and the ability of those states to influence the creation of a more liberal world order.¹⁰² This should be of considerable interest to contemporary Popperians not least because of Popper's assertion that despite its troubles, our social world (that of liberal democratic states) is 'by far the best society which has come into existence during the course of human history'.¹⁰³ Blair was not only in a position to advance and defend such a conception of society but actually undertook interventions that had the defence of such society as a central aim.

Popper's interest in the work of Plato, Hegel and Marx was in the practical effects he contended were the results of pursuing the philosophical schematics of those thinkers: effects that, in Popper's view, tended to close rather than open societies. Now I am not suggesting that Blair sets out a philosophical position that bears comparison with Plato, Hegel or Marx. Popper does however seek to advance the

¹⁰¹ Popper, "Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition", p.129.

¹⁰² Charles Beitz considers such matters and takes an applied approach in *The Idea of Human Rights*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009.

¹⁰³ Karl Popper, "The History of Our Time", in *Conjectures and Refutations – the Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1969, p.369.

thesis that ‘the world is ruled by ideas: ideas both good and bad’.¹⁰⁴ It need not necessarily be philosophers that outline those ideas and rarely will it be philosophers who are charged with implementing those ideas. In his position as Prime Minister, Blair was well placed not only to espouse ideas on the international stage but put ideas into action backed, on occasion, by military force.

In critiquing the Platonic idea of the philosopher king, Popper contrasts it with what he regards as the ‘simplicity and humaneness of Socrates, who warned the statesman against the danger of being dazzled by his own power, excellence, and wisdom’.¹⁰⁵ The extent to which Blair was so dazzled during his time in office is a matter for debate beyond this thesis but the important point for present purposes is that statesmen represent crucial subjects of study from a Popperian perspective. Let us remember that the overriding concern of Popper’s political philosophy is power and how it is wielded.¹⁰⁶ As a powerful political leader Blair had, and took, the opportunity to wield political power on the international stage. Understanding the bases on which he did so is useful if we want to pursue a Popperian approach whereby philosophy addresses itself to current problem situations, to social collectives and to practical applications that can guide statesmen and through them, their states.

4.2 Promoting and Defending Open Society: The Doctrine of the International Community

Blair dedicated his Chicago speech ‘to the cause of internationalism and against isolationism’.¹⁰⁷ His appeal was of course to national governments not to isolate themselves in the face of international and global challenges that he argued require international cooperation if they were to be dealt with successfully. The speech was

¹⁰⁴ Karl Popper, “Epistemology and Industrialization”, in *The Myth of the Framework – In Defence of Science and Rationality*, London: Routledge, 1994, p.187.

¹⁰⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.156.

¹⁰⁶ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.219.

¹⁰⁷ Tony Blair, *Doctrine of the International Community Speech*, 24 April 1999.

set against the backdrop of Kosovo and NATO military action there and he sought to place events in the Balkans in a wider context – economic, political and security.¹⁰⁸ Blair refers to the NATO intervention as constituting a ‘just war’ and one based ‘not on any territorial ambitions but on values’. As far as the former Prime Minister was concerned at stake was the nature of the world order and the extent to which it was, or could be, a liberal one.

Popper’s philosophical war against those that he deemed to be enemies of open society also had values at its heart and he too was motivated by a desire to bring about a more liberal world order. Popper held with Marx, to whom he was sympathetic despite identifying his work overall as antagonistic to open society, that ‘our responsibility extends to the system, to the institutions which we allow to persist’.¹⁰⁹ This is a responsibility that Blair appears to have accepted in relation to Kosovo; in his speech he sets out a vision of a liberal world order and offers a set of criteria for assessing potential cases of liberal or humanitarian intervention. Popper does not specify the precise system or institutions that we are to be responsible for but he does make clear that whether or not to defend liberal values and principles is a choice for individuals to make. As he puts it, humans may not be equal ‘but we can decide to fight for equal rights. Human institutions such as the state are not rational, but we can decide to fight to make them more rational’.¹¹⁰ This argument was framed by Popper in a domestic context and thus it is a matter of some speculation as to how he intended it to apply internationally but even so one of the central tenets of Popper’s thought is that institutions should be judged on the contribution that they make to the welfare of individuals. Viewed from this perspective, Popperian philosophy does at least hold open the prospect of some form of liberal intervention where the state is inflicting severe harm on individuals.

According to Blair these issues have become more acute in the period since the end of the Cold War as the world has become at once more fragmented, in not being split

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

¹⁰⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.211.

¹¹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.278.

into two hostile Superpower blocs, and also more integrated through technological advances and transformed economic and working practices as a consequence of globalisation.¹¹¹ Central to Blair's argument is that globalisation is not merely an economic phenomenon but that it also has important political and security components. Instability in one part of the world is likely to have ramifications elsewhere and on this basis Blair proclaims that 'we are all internationalists now, whether we like it or not'.¹¹² Vincent is one theorist that discerns a strong internationalist element to Popper's thought, indeed a cosmopolitan strand, although he concedes that Popper 'did not really work this idea out in any detail'.¹¹³ According to Vincent, Popper's cosmopolitan instincts envisaged the finding of substantive common ground among liberal states to create an international moral and legal structure alongside a shared concern for rationalism and science.¹¹⁴ The interpretation of Popper's thought on international politics provided by Vincent hints at its close familial resemblance to Kant's notion of perpetual peace and also indicates that Popper did not pose a fundamental challenge to the concept of the nation state as the building block of international order.¹¹⁵ Blair, in the internationalist mode of his Chicago speech, proceeds on the basis of a similar assumption regarding inter-state cooperation. Tamir may be inclined to modify his 'we are all internationalists now' claim to 'we are all internationalist liberal nationalists' now since Blair stresses repeatedly both the opportunities to engage and collaborate with *other countries* as well as the international scope of threats that can emanate from within national borders.¹¹⁶

Tony Blair speaks of mutual dependence and 'that national interest is to a significant extent governed by international collaboration and that we need a clear and coherent debate as to the direction this doctrine takes us in each field of international

¹¹¹ Blair, *Doctrine of the International Community Speech*, 1999.

¹¹² Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

¹¹³ Andrew Vincent, "Popper and Nationalism", in Jarvie, Milford & Miller (eds), *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p.169.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, pp. 168- 169.

¹¹⁵ Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, New York: Cosimo, 2005.

¹¹⁶ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

endeavour'.¹¹⁷ Popper's philosophy of open society can make a contribution to such a debate but is best placed to do so by accepting, with Blair, the concept of the nation state as a starting premise. For all that Blair's speech references and seeks to promote international cooperation and the recognition of 'global' issues it remains predicated on an understanding of the prevalence and endurance of national interests. Popper may have regarded the very concept of national interest to be something of an absurdity¹¹⁸ but that does not mean that Popperians following in his wake need necessarily adopt the same approach to this particular question. Popper's philosophical dismissal of nationalism and the nation state is somewhat at odds with his general acceptance of the status quo in international politics whereby he viewed the prospects of progress in broadly similar terms to Blair: that of attending to the internal nature of political units (states) and hoping that the growth of liberal states would enhance cooperation and strengthen the international rule of law. Although Popper could see no reason for the nation state to occupy its place as a 'fundamental political category' he did not in effect make any systematic attempt to reformulate the state as a post-national category.¹¹⁹ Blair's speech also refrains from any such attempt and the term international in the title indicates at the very outset that his primary objective is to set out a vision for nations to come together and work together in the creation of a refined world order; a world order based still on nation states and created by them acting in concert, at least those who share the international values that Blair espouses.

Liberal Interventionism and the Continuation of History

Blair's optimism regarding the 'principles of international community' is tempered to some extent by the 'decade of experience since the end of the Cold War'.¹²⁰ In a disavowal of the neo-conservative view made famous by Fukuyama he states that 'it has certainly been a less easy time than many hoped in the euphoria that followed the collapse of the Berlin Wall'.¹²¹ As we shall see later in this chapter, whilst

¹¹⁷ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*

¹¹⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹¹⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹²⁰ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

¹²¹ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

Fukuyama concluded that history had reached its end with the Berlin Wall's collapse and that liberal democracy had won an ultimate triumph. George Soros saw that the battle for liberty, democracy and open society was just beginning. Soros concluded that the collapse of communism provided a critical opportunity to fight for the cause of open society where it had been absent or suppressed and realised that it would not simply appear automatically out of the rubble of the Wall or the vacuum left by the communist demise.

For his part Blair accepts that despite the triumph that was the end of the Cold War it also brought to an end a degree of clarity and simplicity in international affairs.¹²² Blair notes that in the post-Cold War period Britain's armed forces have been busier than ever, tasked with delivering humanitarian aid, deterring attacks on defenceless people, enforcing UN resolutions and engaging in wars such as in the Gulf and in the Balkans.¹²³ Blair is clear as to what must be done to render the post-Cold War world less disorderly and based on what he calls 'our values' by which he presumably means the Western values that he deems himself to share with his American audience.

'Now we have to establish a new framework. No longer is our existence as states under threat. Now our actions are guided by a more subtle blend of mutual self interest and moral purpose in defending the values we cherish. In the end values and interests merge. If we can establish and spread the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and an open society then that is in our national interests too. The spread of our values makes us safer'.¹²⁴

Blair's argument starts out by implying that the end of the Cold War removed a framework of international politics and that the opportunity exists to utilise the changed circumstances to construct, or to use a more Popperian term, re-engineer, a new one.

The subtleties that Blair perceives of greater mutual interest blended with clarity of

¹²² Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

¹²³ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

¹²⁴ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

moral purpose to defend shared values represent for him a merger that opens up a path toward greater security that can be paved by the spread of those values. The fact that Blair uses the term ‘open society’ is noteworthy and suggests the broad outlines of a merging of his liberal internationalism and the promotion of the particular form of liberalism that Popper advocated. The safety that Popper sought to ensure was that of the individual and he argues that for this purpose ‘protective institutions are necessary, both on a regional and on a world-wide scale’.¹²⁵ The manner in which Popper reaches this conclusion is particularly interesting and revealing.

Popper contends that the protection of the individual can be enhanced and extended internationally but clearly recognises that in many states individuals are already very well protected at the domestic level.

‘From the protectionist point of view, the existing democratic states, though far from perfect, represent a very considerable achievement in social engineering of the right kind. Many forms of crime, of attack on the rights of human individuals by other individuals, have been practically suppressed or very considerably reduced, and courts of law administer justice fairly successfully in difficult conflicts of interest. There are many who think that the extension of these methods to international crime and international conflict is only a Utopian dream; but it is not so long since the institution of an effective executive for upholding civil peace appeared Utopian to those who suffered under the threats of criminals, in countries where at present civil peace is quite successfully maintained’.¹²⁶

Here Popper reveals a number of aspects to his thought that highlight the potential compatibility of open society and the nation state.

Firstly, and most significantly of all, Popper endorses ‘existing democratic states’ as representing a considerable and valuable achievement of social engineering which he describes as being of the correct sort. This endorsement has far reaching implications: it highlights that Popper is comfortable in supporting and promoting open societies in the plural so long as they are democratically constituted;

¹²⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

¹²⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

furthermore, many of the existing democratic states to which Popper refers are nation states and thus his endorsement, albeit indirectly, includes democratic nation states. A democratic nation state that applies the rule of law equally and impartially, and that upholds human rights within its jurisdiction is to be regarded as a positive piece of social engineering on this account. By referring to existing states and suggesting that they have already made considerable progress, Popper hints once more at a conservative element to his political philosophy. This is fundamentally important to any attempt to apply Popperian principles today because it holds out the prospect of preserving existing institutions and structures in circumstances where they can be demonstrated to offer protection to individuals as well as having their foundations in the principles of open society. Liberal democratic nation states do offer institutional protection to individuals and can, as Blair suggests in his speech, function as open societies domestically and supporters of such a concept beyond their borders.

Popper's use of the word 'countries' is further evidence of his acceptance of a range of political states with defined borders as a basis for the establishment and continued provision of protective institutions. The above passage is a clear example of a case in which Popper ends up a supporter of particular types of nation states on account of the liberties that they permit and the democratic nature of the politics conducted within them. He does not say that liberal democratic countries have been poorly engineered because they remain nations but rather he prefers to focus on their liberal, democratic and open qualities.

One further point of interest that merits noting here is Popper's respect for those states that are able to successfully maintain civil peace. This brings Popper's notion of the state, and its primary function, much closer to that set out by both Oakeshott and Gray. Indeed Gray argues that the most urgent engineering task is that of rehabilitating the state in those parts of the world that can be characterised by 'the absence of effective government of any kind'.¹²⁷ Where Popper and Gray disagree is

¹²⁷ Gray, *False Dawn*, p. 201.

that for the former such rehabilitation need not necessarily be liberal in nature but for the latter the maintenance of civil peace requires liberal institutions.¹²⁸ Blair's doctrine of the international community more closely resembles Popperian liberalism than Gray's pluralism as the values of liberty and open society are stressed by Blair as key component parts of bringing about enhanced global security, or to put it slightly differently, a more international civil peace.

Tony Blair states that identifying the appropriate circumstances that would justify intervention in the affairs of any particular sovereign state is 'the most pressing foreign policy problem' facing the international community.¹²⁹ Blair's Chicago speech was of course given several years prior to the events of September 11th 2001 and also the subsequent US-led, and Blair government supported, invasions of both Afghanistan and Iraq. It is at least arguable that the acuteness of the problem regarding the justification of overruling the principle of non-interference has grown in the period since the intervention in Iraq. Humanitarian intervention is defined by Caney as intervention that has as one of its primary aims the protection and welfare of the members of another political regime.¹³⁰ In Chicago in 1999 Blair set out 'five major considerations' that he held must be borne in mind in circumstances whereby the international community sought to decide when and whether to instigate an intervention, humanitarian or otherwise.

These five considerations are (1) the sureness of the case, Blair accepts that war is but an 'imperfect instrument for righting humanitarian distress' but concludes that it can sometimes be the 'only means' of dealing with dictators; (2) that all diplomatic options have been exhausted prior to embarking upon military intervention; (3) that practical assessment is undertaken of the situation in order to determine that there are sensible, prudent and viable military operations that can be executed; (4) that preparation and commitment is made for the long term where necessary and Blair

¹²⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

¹²⁹ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

¹³⁰ Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders – A Global Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006, p.230.

suggests that it is not credible or helpful to ‘simply walk away when the fight is over’; and finally (5), in my view rather peculiarly, that national interests are involved. Blair accepts that these are not ‘absolute tests’ but are the kind of issues that need to be considered in debating and deciding questions of intervention.¹³¹

A Popperian Assessment of Blair’s Criteria for Intervention

To examine from a Popperian perspective the five considerations which make up Blair’s case for liberal or humanitarian intervention it is first necessary to determine Popper’s general attitude and approach to interventions and, more broadly, the use of violence to advance a political cause. Whilst this is another instance whereby Popper does not develop anything so comprehensive as a ‘doctrine’, such as that espoused by Blair, Popper does give several key indications of the sorts of considerations that he regards as pertinent to such questions. It is in dismissing what he perceives to be Marx’s ‘prophecy of a possibly violent revolution’ that Popper admits to not being against violent revolution ‘in all cases and under all circumstances’.¹³²

Now it must be mentioned that Popper talks here primarily in a domestic context and the ‘revolution’ to which he refers is that of citizens rising up against their own government under certain circumstances. For our purposes however that need not detract from Popper’s wider point on the use of violence which is that it ‘is justified only under a tyranny which makes reform without violence impossible, and it should have only one aim, that is, to bring about a state of affairs which makes reform without violence possible’.¹³³ This, Popper contends, is the limit of achievement that should be attempted by violent means.¹³⁴ He does however consider one further use of violence to be justified: that is ‘resistance, once democracy has been attained, to any attack (whether from within or without the state) against the democratic constitution and the use of democratic methods’.¹³⁵ Popper’s justification for the

¹³¹ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

¹³² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.150.

¹³³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.151.

¹³⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.151.

¹³⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.151.

employment of violent means highlights that he takes a more restrictive view of what can and should be achieved by violence than that argued by Blair. Specifically, it is democracy that is the overriding and fundamental criterion that could justify interventionist violence from a Popperian perspective rather than the wider range of criteria, including humanitarian distress, which Blair sets out. Popper's stance also suggests that he would be supportive of international efforts to support democrats in particular countries who may be engaged in a struggle for democracy, violently or otherwise.

The second general Popperian point that merits scrutiny in this context is the thoroughly dismissive approach that Popper takes regarding the principle of national self-determination, a principle that he considers to be inapplicable.¹³⁶ It was, Popper believes, Woodrow Wilson's profound error, despite being a 'sincere democrat', to introduce the principle of national self-determination so firmly into international politics and allow it to constitute the foundation of world order.¹³⁷ In his notes Popper describes national self-determination as a 'reactionary' principle and one that is at odds with open society.

Furthermore, Popper suggests that national self-determination is particularly inapplicable in Europe 'where the nations (i.e. linguistic groups) are so densely packed that it is quite impossible to disentangle them'.¹³⁸ The claim that Popper makes here is significant because not only does he accept that there is a conception of nationhood that has been applied in practice, in contrast to his earlier contention that the national state is inapplicable and has never been clearly conceived, but he also declines the opportunity to develop a systematic alternative. Popper is left to conclude his chapter on 'Hegel and the new tribalism' by endorsing Schopenhauer's disdain for Hegelianism and asserting that to forcefully combat the influence of Hegel's nationalism is a duty incumbent upon all those who seek to defend liberty.¹³⁹

¹³⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹³⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹³⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.358.

¹³⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.85.

Popper does not offer an explanation as to why the density of nations in Europe precludes the application of national self-determination and history suggests that it has not.

The crucial outcome of Popper's attack here however is that it reveals his recognition of the reality and existence of the nation state as a form of political community. He does so perhaps unwittingly, perhaps self-consciously but grudgingly; either way, he does recognise the nation in attacking it. In light of this it is particularly ironic that Popper should caution a very striking warning that the nation state is a concept that can all too often seep virtually unnoticed into political thought and provide its backdrop and its agenda.

'It is so widely accepted in our day that it is usually taken for granted, and very often unconsciously so. It now forms, as it were, an implicit assumption of popular political thought. It is even considered by many to be the basic postulate of political ethics'.¹⁴⁰

The problem for Popper is that he fails to consistently heed his own warning and thus struggles to defend himself against Tamir's charge that most liberals are liberal nationalists, however unconsciously they may find themselves adopting such a position. In my thesis the concern is not only to demonstrate that Popper is vulnerable to being labelled a liberal nationalist on Tamir's terms but more importantly to argue that this need not be a negative outcome in that it does not fundamentally undermine the philosophy of open society.

Tony Blair appears to assume the concept of the nation state, more or less take it for granted and also postulate it as the basis for an international political ethics. Thus Blair has little qualms over using the language of 'national interests' and seeks only to qualify the principle of non-interference that underpins national self-determination and not 'jettison' it.¹⁴¹ Popper on the other hand proceeds to dismiss national self-determination, as indeed the very concept of the nation, as inapplicable whilst

¹⁴⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.50.

¹⁴¹ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

simultaneously granting the notion of a linguistic community variant of the nation and more remarkably still, as we saw earlier, referring to the success of democratic countries as approximating the ideals of his philosophy in resembling open societies. Blair thus starts from the premise that intervention concerns instances of the international community of nations deciding to intervene in the internal affairs of a particular state and we have already encountered the criteria that he argues must be met if any such intervention is to be legitimate, justified, and also carry a likelihood of success in terms of achieving liberal or humanitarian aims.

Popper's own philosophy is rather more ambiguous on the question of intervention and that can in large part be explained by the ambiguities and inconsistencies that surround Popper's account and treatment of the nation state. Nevertheless, the humanitarian and individualistic principles that underpin Popper's philosophy hold open the prospect of developing a Popperian doctrine of the international community, or at least of international politics. The question remains as to how close Blair's doctrine, with its explicit commitment to open society, comes to accommodating Popperian principles and serving as a template for international efforts to both promote and defend open societies. Can Popperians find common ground with Blair on the basis of the former Prime Minister's claim that 'we cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we want still to be secure'?¹⁴² The crucial consideration from the perspective of Popper's philosophy concerns the circumstances in which violence can be employed in defence or support of democracy in order to create the conditions necessary for open society.

Popper's approach to international politics and Blair's doctrine of the international community bear comparison because both seek to advance a liberal agenda that assumes and implies the primacy of the West and both take as a starting point a world comprised of nation states, albeit with Blair being far more positively disposed to such a starting point. Blair's thesis is that the interdependence of states means that

¹⁴² Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

non-interference in the internal affairs of a sovereign state as a governing principle of international order must be qualified in circumstances whereby actions of a particular state can have serious security implications for neighbouring states or the wider international community. Blair cites the example of oppression causing massive refugee flows that may destabilise neighbours and constitute a threat to international peace and security.¹⁴³ Blair speaks the language of national interest, and frames his argument in that general context, but the adoption of his doctrine would have the potential to protect individuals threatened by oppressive and totalitarian states. This potential effect of Blair's doctrine would accord with Popper's overriding commitment to humanitarianism and individualism.

To return to Blair's five major considerations then, we can assess them from a Popperian perspective in terms of the extent to which they would help establish humanitarian individualism as a principle of international politics as well as the contribution they would make to extending and entrenching democracy as a foundation of open societies. Blair's first consideration is the acknowledgement that war, or military intervention, is an imperfect means of advancing a humanitarian cause but nevertheless may be the most appropriate means of dealing with dictators. By identifying dictators as a threat to international peace and security Blair adopts a position of close proximity to Popperian philosophy.

Recalling Popper's claim that totalitarianism is to be resisted as the 'morality of the closed society'¹⁴⁴ alongside his acceptance that violence has a legitimate role in the opening up of democratic spaces there is little reason to suppose that Popper would raise a major objection to Blair's view that armed force may on occasion be required to confront dictators. Whilst Blair sees the confrontation primarily through the lens of collaborative national interest, Popper would more likely contemplate such confrontation on the basis of protecting individuals. If we think of Blair's decision to support the US-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, he took the decision on a national security prospectus with the focus being the alleged Weapons of Mass Destruction

¹⁴³ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999

¹⁴⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.108.

programme of the Iraqi regime. Had he argued the case from a more Popperian point of view he would have placed greater emphasis on the moral case to prevent harm done to individuals by a brutal dictator and also to create the opportunity for future reform without the need for violence by establishing democratic conditions.

The second doctrinal consideration that Blair mentions is that all diplomatic options must be exhausted prior to embarking on military intervention. Again, there is no reason for Popper to dissent from this criterion especially as he places such a great stress on the avoidance of violence where possible. His support for democratic principles and institutions emphasises democracy as ‘an invaluable battle-ground for any reasonable reform, since it permits reform without violence’.¹⁴⁵ Non-violent reform is one of the key principles of Popper’s political philosophy and this would include reform of a kind that sought to establish democracy where it is lacking. If this can be achieved non-violently by diplomatic methods then such interventions should be prioritised by Popperians over military ones.

Blair’s third and fourth considerations are more strategic and tactical recommendations than they are principles underlying a political doctrine. He cautions that practical assessment must be made as to the availability of ‘prudent’ military options and also that commitment be made for the long term if necessary when undertaking an intervention. The first point is uncontroversial since imprudent military options are hardly likely to attract much support. The point about long term commitment and exit strategies is more debatable however, including from a Popperian perspective. This is due to Popper’s contention that the use of violence should have but a single aim, that of establishing democracy.¹⁴⁶ A long term intervention that sought to go beyond the sole objective of democratisation would therefore lack legitimacy when examined in light of Popper’s political philosophy. It could be accepted however that establishing democratic conditions may represent a long term task in itself and in practical terms it is unlikely that democratisation could or should be divorced from broader interventionist objectives such as the provision

¹⁴⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.161.

¹⁴⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.151.

of physical security or the control of dangerous weapons.

The final consideration that Blair sets out is whether or not national interests are involved with the suggestion being that they should be if an intervention is to be seriously contemplated on the part of a particular nation state. For Popperians, this would be perhaps the most contentious consideration as the invocation of national interest could be construed as being at odds with the principle of humanitarianism, at least in relation to the manner in which the humanitarian principle is set out by Popper. He perceives the existence of a very close relationship between humanitarianism and rationalism and this leads him to define a particular conception of the humanitarian principle.

‘A direct emotional attitude towards the abstract whole of mankind seems to me hardly possible. We can love mankind only in certain concrete individuals. But by the use of thought and imagination, we may become ready to help all who need our help’.¹⁴⁷

Humankind as a whole, as an entity, is deemed by Popper to be too abstract a notion to provoke strong emotional attachment to it on the part of individuals. In particular, he argues that so strong an emotion as love does not extend to a concept as abstracted as humanity. Rather, Popper supposes, human individuals love other concrete, specific individuals that are known to them. Reason however permits and facilitates a wider recognition of need and sympathy; thus we can identify those who may require assistance from us and feel sufficiently for their plight to grant it. It is not surprising that Popper refers to the use of imagination since he regards reasoning as a creative activity. One of the important implications of the account that Popper gives of humanitarianism is to reinforce his position on the nation state as fellow nationals would also be regarded as too abstract to be bound to us by strong emotional bonds.

This raises two very significant issues that Popper’s philosophy takes very little heed

¹⁴⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.240.

of. The first is that his explanation of the humanitarian principle suggests that humanitarianism as a political and moral concept relies on reason to a far greater extent than emotion. It should be reiterated in this context that for Popper an appeal to reason is itself a moral appeal. If Popper is correct on this point then it is to be wondered why charity appeals, and international appeals especially, tend to feature strong emotional content. This also returns us to the question of welfare and the communal bonds, if any, needed to support and sustain it. If reason demands a readiness to recognise and aid *all* who need our help then it is curious that Popper seemed to so readily accept the existence of national welfare states and that he did not make a far greater attempt to argue the case for international or global distributive justice. Indeed, as we saw earlier, the humanitarian demands that Popper makes of justice – equalitarianism, individualism and the protection of the freedom of citizens – can all be realised within the nation state.¹⁴⁸

The second implication of Popper's characterisation of humanity as an abstract concept is that it is not radically differentiated from the qualified 'humanistic tradition' that Tamir invokes in her defence of liberal nationalism.¹⁴⁹ The issue at stake in this debate is the degree of abstractedness that the respective theorists are prepared to recognise. For Popper there appears to exist a fairly simple philosophical dichotomy for any particular individual between concrete and known other individuals who can inspire the emotion of love and abstract and unknown other individuals to whom little emotional connection may be felt but with whom a sympathetic and rational understanding can be shared.

Tamir, by contrast, regards the nation state as providing something of an intermediate position between love amongst known individuals and the abstract recognition of humanity as a whole. Thus she describes, and defends, nations as associative communities rather than as strictly voluntary associations.¹⁵⁰ Tamir would not dispute that nations retain an abstract quality but the crucial argument is that the

¹⁴⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.94.

¹⁴⁹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 83.

¹⁵⁰ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 130.

degree of abstractedness is sufficiently constrained, by a shared language for example in many cases, to produce feelings of communal identity.¹⁵¹ Popper, as we know, rejects the politics of identity but he does so without going to any great lengths in seeking to understand the possibility of its enduring appeal. The only mention that Popper makes of national interests comes towards the end of his second volume on open society and it is to dismiss them as leading to irrationalism.¹⁵² He explains his problem with national interests as being that they divide humankind 'into the few who stand near and the many who stand far; into those who speak the untranslatable language of our own emotions and passions and those whose tongue is not our tongue'.¹⁵³ Where such divides are created Popper takes the view that 'political equalitarianism becomes practically impossible'.¹⁵⁴ Popper does not explain why the division of humanity, along national lines or any other, in itself rules out the practical application of equalitarianism in politics.

It has already been pointed out that his humanitarian theory of justice, and the equalitarian principle at the centre of it, is not invalidated by the existence of the nation state as a form of political community. Equalitarianism need not be abandoned in making the case for a world comprised of national open societies. In this scenario equalitarianism can be championed by the insistence that all individuals, on account of being human, are entitled to a set of fundamental rights and liberties, including that of democratic participation. The practical task then becomes that of seeking to ensure that all states are structured and governed in a way so as to grant those rights and liberties. A national form of the state is one plausible means of achieving this, a fact that Popper implicitly concedes with his praise for Western democratic states.¹⁵⁵

As far as Tony Blair is concerned national interests do not represent major impediments to the pursuit and achievement of either humanitarian or equalitarian

¹⁵¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p. 128.

¹⁵² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

¹⁵³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.235.

¹⁵⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.236.

¹⁵⁵ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.215.

goals. In fact Blair argues that national interests should be taken into consideration when contemplating interventions; that is to say that where national interests are at stake the case for intervention is strengthened. By including a national interest criterion in his doctrine Blair not only signals his intent that nation states should remain entrenched as the foundations of world order and major actors of international politics but also implies that strictly humanitarian principles can be qualified to some extent by national interests. Blair's doctrine shows him to be a liberal (inter)nationalist in that he seeks to combine the primacy of the nation state with a broader commitment to humanitarianism. This brings his doctrine close to the sort of approach advocated by Tamir. She argues for example that 'it is justified for a nation to seek homogeneity by restricting immigration only if it has fulfilled its global obligation to assure equality among all nations' in terms of efforts to reduce disparities in standards of living.¹⁵⁶ Whilst Popper conceives of providing help to individuals purely as individuals both Tamir and Blair seek to aid individuals but also the communities, often national communities, of which they are a part.

For all that Blair's national interest criterion may be a practical consideration and an attempt to capture the likelihood of sovereign national governments deciding to intervene in the affairs of another sovereign state, it does carry the potential to detract from the aim of intervention that Blair himself sets at the outset – that of dealing with dictators and righting humanitarian distress. This aim presumably holds irrespective of national interests being at stake. From a Popperian point of view, the Blair doctrine does not require major adaptation in order to be adopted as a framework for the promotion and defence of open societies around the world. To do so however, twenty-first century Popperians have to be prepared to find a greater accommodation with the nation state than Popper did, even although he, as has been argued, was less hostile to the concept in practice than he supposed himself to be.

Tony Blair perceives a world of nation states and national interests and asks how the impulse towards interdependence, driven in his view by globalisation, can be

¹⁵⁶ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.161.

harnessed in the cause of internationalism and humanitarianism.¹⁵⁷ For those committed to the principles of open society and the liberties that Popper held to be most fundamental, Blair's is a sensible question to be asking. A neo-Popperian philosophy can answer it: one that takes nation states as a starting point and seeks to encourage them to become open societies; a philosophy that recognises, as Popper did, that democracy can on occasion have to be defended or even established by force; and a philosophical position that can seek the protection of individuals whilst accepting that does not require the elimination of national states and national political communities.

Blair's speech sought to argue for the qualification of the principle of national self-determination and he made his argument on liberal grounds; Popper refused to recognise such a principle but declined to make a systematic case for a more cosmopolitan alternative. Instead, he accepted the nation state, or at least western liberal democratic versions of it, almost by default. It is possible to argue that every state should be structured and governed as an open society and so universalise the concept in this way. Neo-Popperians have the option of making this their aim, allying themselves with Blair's doctrine of the international community, and recognising nation states as potential vehicles for instituting open societies.

The next section of the chapter looks at what can be regarded as a neo-Popperian philosophy – that which has been adopted by the billionaire financier and philanthropist George Soros in his attempts to promote and support open societies across the globe. Soros makes for an interesting object of study here because not only does he expressly commit to furthering and implementing Popper's political philosophy, he also has the financial means and international influence to have made a significant contribution to doing so. With the establishment of his Open Society Institute, Soros has funded a range of initiatives designed to spread open societies internationally, particularly in former communist states and spent vast sums in the process. It is worth considering the ways in which Soros has gone about his task

¹⁵⁷ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

along with the interpretation of Popper's philosophy that he employs in order to learn lessons as to the prospects of furthering the cause of open society in a world comprised of nation states.

Instituting Open Societies

George Soros describes his book entitled 'Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism' as a work of 'practical philosophy' that aims to provide the 'guiding principles for a global open society'.¹⁵⁸ It is crucial to note however what Soros means by a global open society or at least the path toward achieving it. He states that he is advocating 'that the democracies of the world ought to form an alliance with the dual purpose of, first, promoting the development of open societies within individual countries and, second, strengthening international law and the institutions needed for a global open society'.¹⁵⁹ The possible tension between *a* global open society and a multitude of open societies across the globe has already been raised in this thesis and it also features in Soros' thinking on the subject. It is clear however that Soros views the two positions as complimentary since he argues for the promotion of open societies 'within' countries alongside taking steps to strengthen both international institutions and law to facilitate the creation of a global society that is more open than at present.

I use the term creation in relation to global society because Soros perceives that the development of a global economy has not resulted in a corresponding development of a global society and further, that 'the basic unit for political and social life remains the nation state'.¹⁶⁰ This highlights one of the main reasons why I think it important to consider the work of Soros here because he seeks the implementation of a practical Popperian philosophy that operates with the existing structure of a world shaped by nation states and national interests. It is clear, as we shall see, that Soros has his own doctrine for the international community that raises similar issues to

¹⁵⁸ George Soros, *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000, p.ix.

¹⁵⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.x.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid*, p.168.

Blair's in terms of the appropriate limits of national self-determination. Whilst Blair's doctrine takes account of open society, and makes mention of it, that elucidated by Soros has the development of open societies as its overriding aim and ambition. Before looking in more detail at the Open Society Alliance that Soros proposes it is useful to examine the manner in which he conceptualises open society, not least because he does so in a more detailed way than Popper.

Promoting Open Society as an Ideal

Whilst Popper defined open society primarily in relation to its enemies Soros attempts to go beyond this and give thought to the positive purposes that open societies can acquire in order to command allegiance although he accepts that there are difficulties inherent in such a task.¹⁶¹ Soros argues, in Popperian fashion, that a perfect society is not possible and so we must content ourselves with 'an imperfect society that holds itself open to, and strives for, improvement'.¹⁶² Soros is endorsing here the critical rationalism of Popper by suggesting both that improvement must be actively sought and that it is not a simple by-product of historical forces. Soros distinguishes between closed and open societies with the claim that 'closed society offers the certainty and permanence that is lacking in open society, and open society offers the freedom that is denied to the individual in closed society'.¹⁶³ He also suggests that the closed/open distinction provides a better insight into what was at stake in the Cold War than the distinction between capitalism and communism.¹⁶⁴ In his broad definition of open society Soros echoes Popper's commitment to the freedom of the individual and it is such liberty that open societies must seek to protect.

Where Soros begins to gradually develop and extend Popper's philosophy is with the introduction of a 'tripartite division similar to water, ice and steam: open society (near-equilibrium), closed society (static disequilibrium), and chaos or revolution

¹⁶¹ George Soros, "The rulers of the United States have embarked on policies that violate the principles of open society", *New Statesman*, 16th December 2002, p.43.

¹⁶² Soros, *Open Society*, p.117.

¹⁶³ Soros, *Open Society*, p.104.

¹⁶⁴ Soros, *Open Society*, p.108.

(dynamic disequilibrium)'.¹⁶⁵ This goes beyond the simple open/closed dichotomy that Popper generally based his analysis on. Soros perceives open society as occupying a 'precarious middle ground' between closed society and revolution and that the 'analogy with water, ice and steam is apt because open society is fluid, closed society rigid, and revolution chaotic'.¹⁶⁶ This not only introduces revolution as an additional enemy of the open society it also highlights a reaffirmation by Soros of the conservative strand of Popperian philosophy. In suggesting that chaotic circumstances pose a threat to open societies Soros aligns himself with Gray who perceives instability arising from the absence of effective government¹⁶⁷ as well as with Tony Blair who notes that 'we have learnt that big government doesn't work, but no government works even less'.¹⁶⁸

The tripartite distinction drawn by Soros could also be used to distinguish between liberal nationalism, organic nationalism (as Tamir terms it), and laissez faire liberalism (what Gray calls the 'global free market'¹⁶⁹ and Soros describes as 'market fundamentalism'¹⁷⁰). The depiction of liberal nationalism provided by Tamir is of a fluid form of political community that is 'pluralistic and open'¹⁷¹ as well as placing 'strong emphasis on the possibility and the importance of choice'.¹⁷² Organic, or cultural, nationalism by contrast favours 'authoritarian uniformity' and 'preaches the establishment of closed societies' in Tamir's view.¹⁷³ What's particularly interesting here is that in distinguishing between two variants of nationalism Tamir is drawing an open/closed distinction in a manner similar to the competing Cold War blocs identified by Soros. This highlights that Tamir conceives liberal nation states as a form of open society and suggests that the nationalism that Popper decried could well have been of the cultural variant rather than the liberal alternative. The complexities and variances of types of nationalism that Tamir points

¹⁶⁵ Soros, *Open Society*, p.107.

¹⁶⁶ Soros, *Open Society*, p. 107.

¹⁶⁷ Gray, *False Dawn*, p.201.

¹⁶⁸ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

¹⁶⁹ John Gray, "The Era of Globalisation is over", *New Statesman*, 24 September 2001.

¹⁷⁰ Soros, *Open Society*, p.143.

¹⁷¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

¹⁷² Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.84.

¹⁷³ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.83.

to were largely overlooked and ignored by Popper. Soros, in accepting the basic tenet of the nation state, is less susceptible to such a charge and shows that Popperianism has the potential to reach an accommodation with the nation state in seeking to further the cause of open society.

Soros concurs to some extent with the distinction between cultural and liberal nationalism drawn by Tamir. He notes that ‘morality can have two sources: tribal belonging and the universal human condition. It is in the latter that open society must be anchored’.¹⁷⁴ Tamir’s point in her defence of the nation state is that liberal nationalism is indeed anchored in the universal human condition and that being so does not mean that it cannot simultaneously recognise that individuals are socially and culturally embedded to a significant degree.¹⁷⁵ Both Tamir and Soros are opposed to tribal belonging; it is as incompatible with liberal nationalism as it is with open society. In this argument, proponents of liberal nation states and those of open societies find themselves on the same side.

The issue of social values features prominently in the analysis that Soros conducts. He suggests that social values are ‘rooted in the family, community, background, and tradition to which the individual belongs, and they evolve in a reflexive fashion’.¹⁷⁶ This is actually quite a conservative account of the roots of social values although it is also one that would likely find agreement with a liberal nationalist such as Tamir. For his part, Popper does not dispute the notion that values derive from social contexts and interactions but his concern is to ensure that humans can choose the values that they wish to guide their conduct and so also be granted the possibility to choose the sorts of contexts and interactions that make up the social environment.

It is on this basis, as we have seen, that Popper calls for studies of the social institutions ‘through which ideas may spread and captivate individuals’ along with

¹⁷⁴ Soros, *Open Society*, p.115.

¹⁷⁵ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

¹⁷⁶ Soros, *Open Society*, p.126.

the ways in which social traditions are created, work, and break down.¹⁷⁷ Popper's overarching goal is to have individuals take on the 'strain of civilization' and choose not only the conditions of open society but also the values that underpin it.¹⁷⁸ A lot of the vagueness that pertains to Popper's political philosophy can be traced back to the lack of an unambiguous declaration of what is to be understood by taking on the strain of civilisation. Fortunately, the writings of Soros can be of some help to us here.

Soros declares firstly that the establishment of a set of fundamental values applicable to a largely transactional, global society is the supreme challenge of our time.¹⁷⁹ Recalling the doubt that Soros casts on the very existence of global society the challenge that he sets can be regarded as somewhat contradictory. As it turns out however, his aim is the simultaneous creation of a self-confessedly modest form of global society with a set of attendant social values. The set of arguments that he makes in relation to this provide a form of philosophical scaffolding designed to support a civilisational conception of open society – that which Popper recognises can place a strain upon individuals.

The starting point in the analysis offered by Soros is to take several steps back from notions of global society and accept the communitarian account of the encumbered individual.¹⁸⁰ Soros suggests that individuals generate a sense of themselves to a degree in relation to their social setting, family and culture which in turn can have an influence on their thinking.¹⁸¹ Having encumbered the individual and denoted the importance of community to individual wellbeing, Soros contends that a globalised society would be incapable of satisfying encumbered individuals' need to belong and further, that such a society could never become a community. It would be, he claims, 'just too big and variegated for that, with too many different cultures and traditions'

¹⁷⁷ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.149.

¹⁷⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.93.

¹⁷⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.116.

¹⁸⁰ Soros, *Open Society*, p.127, Soros explicitly acknowledges the influence of Michael Sandel on his thinking.

¹⁸¹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.128.

so ‘those who want to belong to a community must look for it elsewhere’.¹⁸² On this point Soros could not be clearer, whatever global society may become it cannot and will not be a community. It is destined therefore to remain an abstraction, what Soros calls ‘a universal idea’.¹⁸³

It is with global society being conceptualised ideationally rather than as a concrete form of community that Soros posits the need for the idea to retain a modesty of ambition and awareness of its limitations given that it cannot satisfy a need for belonging.¹⁸⁴ He pours particular scorn on the notion of a global state by saying that this would carry the idea of a global society too far. In doing so he removes from his philosophy any doubt as to whether he’s theorising (the prospect of) a single open society or a plurality of separate open societies. This is a clearer position than that adopted by Popper and one that is potentially far more sympathetic to the concept of the nation state. Soros suggests that all ‘open society as a universal idea could do is to serve as a basis for the rules and institutions that are necessary for the coexistence of the plethora of individuals and the multiplicity of communities that make up a global society’.¹⁸⁵ The pluralistic stance that Soros adopts here demonstrates his comfort with a variety of different states cooperating within international institutions to agree international rules to govern the conduct of international relations and politics. Whilst the current world order, with states enmeshed in a multitude of different relationships including within institutions such as the United Nations, may be fairly far removed from the vision of global society conceived by Soros that order does not need to be radically re-engineered in terms of the structure of its component parts (nation states) for reality to be brought into closer proximity with the vision.

What, if anything, however, is to bind this prospective society and make it at least cohesive even if it cannot be rendered a community? For Soros, the answer is to be found in what he identifies as a ‘minimal brotherhood of humanity based on our

¹⁸² Soros, *Open Society*, p.128.

¹⁸³ Soros, *Open Society*, p.128.

¹⁸⁴ Soros, *Open Society*, p.129.

¹⁸⁵ Soros, *Open Society*, p.129.

common fallibility, mortality, and ... selfishness'.¹⁸⁶ Although it might be granted that such things are shared by humanity it is not self-evident that they would be capable of unifying the plethora and multitudes to which Soros referred into anything resembling a society on a global basis. In a way, Soros neglects here his own advocacy of modesty for the concept of a global society. It is not strictly necessary to spell out in advance which qualities possessed by individuals should contribute to the uniting of humanity. Even if individuals were to recognise such qualities amongst each other that does not mean that they would conceive of themselves as forming a global society, however loosely configured, especially given the enduring cultural and communal difference that Soros anticipates and respects.

Soros is perhaps on surer ground in this respect where he follows Popper's lead and introduces the idea of enemies to his own conception of open society as universal idea. There is recognition on Soros' part that a quandary is posed in seeking to create a global open society because whilst communities are built on the exclusion of the other, open society aims to be inclusive on a global scale.¹⁸⁷ He concludes that fortunately there are global problems to fight against such as poverty, disease and environmental dangers and therefore 'the enemy need not be a rival state'.¹⁸⁸ This manner of thinking also informs Blair's doctrine of the international community.

The key objective that Soros sets is to find a common enemy to unite against in order to avoid a 'divided world in which nation states will fight against one another'.¹⁸⁹ In putting together the case for global open society as a guiding idea Soros effects a profound alteration of Popperian philosophy. Whilst Popper sought to avoid a world divided into nation states altogether, believing nationalism to be an ideology of closed society, Soros seeks merely to avoid nation states coming into conflict. History suggests that even Soros's more modest aim remains an ambitious one but is more clearly conceived than that of Popper's and requires a less fundamental

¹⁸⁶ Soros, *Open Society*, p.129.

¹⁸⁷ Soros, *Open Society*, p.137.

¹⁸⁸ Soros, *Open Society*, p.137.

¹⁸⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.137.

transformation of the international system. It strikes a note of conservatism and in doing so suggests Soros to be a more consistent adherent to the conservative tradition of thought than Popper.

It has been discussed earlier that conservatism exerted a not inconsiderable influence on Popper's philosophy but he rather abandons conservative principles in his analysis of nationalism and the nation state. Popper seems to assume that the nation state will all but wither away in a world that is increasingly scientific and rational. Insofar as he acknowledges it at all he regards it as a concept with historical and tribal roots but does not offer a clear vision of open society as an alternative form of community, however potentially universal, to take its place.¹⁹⁰ Soros does not see an intrinsic need to theorise open society in opposition to the nation state. Instead, he accepts the nation as a viable locus of community, and acknowledges that individuals appreciate a sense of communal belonging, and sets out to render the nation more open, more liberal, as a form of political community. For him, there is no reason why the two concepts cannot be brought together, open society need not be pursued at the expense of the nation state.

As we have encountered, in the view of George Soros open society as an idea on a global scale is concerned with the need for international law and international institutions. The world of course already has both international law and institutions so it is not a question of creating these from scratch but rather attempting to (re)engineer them in such a way as to have them encourage the principles of open society. Soros argues that the overriding need for international law and institutions is to subordinate national sovereignty to the international common good.¹⁹¹ He does not argue that international institutions should have as their purpose to render national sovereignty redundant or indeed replace it. Instead, Soros is content to work with national sovereignty as a component part of the international system and his ambition is to tame rather than eliminate it. Such an approach, Soros argues, leads to the adoption of the principle of subsidiarity whereby decisions regarding the

¹⁹⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.49.

¹⁹¹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.130.

common good are made at the lowest possible level. In the account of open society put forward by Soros, nation states retain a position as major and significant actors in the international system.

Open Society and the Architecture of Global Politics

Soros, like Blair in his international doctrine speech, considers the issue of national sovereignty and the circumstances in which intervention may be justified. Soros is concerned that many conflicts arise from relations within sovereign states as well as that unless or until they spill over borders ‘they can fester under the protective umbrella of national sovereignty’.¹⁹² Moreover, there is a greater prospect of states abusing their power in relation to their own citizens than in relation to other states because they are subject to fewer constraints in terms of their domestic actions.¹⁹³ Soros obviously shares Popper’s concern to protect individuals, from the power of the state in particular, and appears to recognise more fully than Popper did that such protection may have to be externally provided.

In terms of determining legitimate interventions however Soros offers only a vague framework which includes a presumption against ‘punitive intervention’¹⁹⁴ – and this applies to military action, peacekeeping and economic sanctions – and a plea that ‘crisis prevention cannot start early enough’;¹⁹⁵ if prevention is initiated in time then Soros maintains a hope that diplomatic or economic pressure, as opposed to military intervention, will in most cases be sufficient.¹⁹⁶ These might be sensible principles to be kept in mind ahead of any prospective intervention but their adoption would hardly constitute a dramatic shift in the conduct of international politics.

Furthermore a problem remains for Soros with regard to convincing states to engage in intervention to protect individuals from abuse by their state in circumstances in which national interests are not directly at stake. After all, in his Chicago speech, despite seeking to build a broadly humanitarian case for intervention Tony Blair

¹⁹² Soros, *Open Society*, p.302.

¹⁹³ Soros, *Open Society*, p.303.

¹⁹⁴ Soros, *Open Society*, p.320.

¹⁹⁵ Soros, *Open Society*, p.344.

¹⁹⁶ Soros, *Open Society*, p.344.

nevertheless opted to retain the involvement of national interest as a criterion for assessing potential interventions.¹⁹⁷

As we shall see below Soros, like Blair, produces a doctrine for the international community to follow. He does so despite reservations that open society is not very susceptible to being expressed in doctrinal form and thus focuses attention on the structure of the international community and whether that serves or impedes the cause of open society.¹⁹⁸ He observes that there are various systems generally recognised as ways of preserving peace and stability with a balance of powers, such as occurred during the Cold War, being one; the hegemony of an imperial power representing another; and, Soros suggests, ‘an international organisation capable of effective peacemaking could be a third’.¹⁹⁹ There is an implication in this contention that the UN, as currently constituted, is not an effective peacemaking organisation. Irrespective of the view taken of the UN, by addressing himself to preserving peace and stability, Soros risks obscuring his case for the protection of individuals because peace and stability could ensue between states without much, if any, attempt to tackle individual suffering within states at the hands of abusive regimes.

An Open Society Alliance

The main task that Soros sets himself in relation to international politics is to consider the nature of the global political architecture and how that could be amended so as to enhance the fostering of open societies along with international rules of conduct. Soros envisages two distinct but related tasks as being necessary to create a global open society: furthering the development of open societies across the world and establishing institutions that would ‘govern the behaviour of states toward their citizens and one another’.²⁰⁰ The UN attempts to be such an institution and whilst Soros maintains considerable doubts over its effectiveness he does still regard it as an institution of ‘great potential’.²⁰¹ Soros is far from the first to characterise

¹⁹⁷ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

¹⁹⁸ Soros, *Open Society*, p.309.

¹⁹⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.306.

²⁰⁰ Soros, *Open Society*, p.308.

²⁰¹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.351.

the main flaw of the UN as being ‘that the goals outlined in the Preamble of its Charter are couched in terms of “people” whilst the organization itself is structured in terms of states’.²⁰² Having recognised this flaw in the UN system it is all the more curious that Soros himself is not slightly more careful to avoid a similar flaw in his own theorising of international relations and his call for peace and stability.

That said, the vision of a global open society that Soros conceives does indicate a greater preoccupation with the nature and structure of the states that make up the international system than is to be found in simple adherence to the principle of national sovereignty. It might be asked in this context how Soros’ view is to be distinguished from that of neo-conservatives who advocate the forceful spread of democracy. Firstly, Soros identifies value-pluralism as a facet of his approach and he rejects as ‘fundamentalist belief’ positions that rely upon black-and-white, either-or judgements.²⁰³ Soros also refers to the US as ‘the greatest open society in the world’ but bemoans its failure to accept the limitations implied by the concept of open society and its consequent assuming of ‘the right to impose its own standards of human rights and democratic values on other countries’.²⁰⁴ In a way, the question of the limitations implied by the concept of open society gets to the heart of what is at stake here.

Surely Soros’ own purpose, as that of Popper, is to impose or at least encourage some standard of human rights and democratic values on countries where they are deemed to be lacking or insufficient. Such concepts may indeed be malleable and open to a range of interpretation and application but not infinitely so. The value pluralism that Soros recognises and endorses is actually of quite a narrow and constrained form; far narrower and subject to much greater constraint than that advocated by John Gray for example. Soros makes clear his belief that ‘there is no single design for open society. Countries have different traditions, with different levels of development. What makes a society open is that its citizens are free to

²⁰² Soros, *Open Society*, p.351.

²⁰³ Soros, *Open Society*, p.197.

²⁰⁴ Soros, *Open Society*, p.356.

decide how society should be organized',²⁰⁵ He does not say how far traditions can reasonably diverge and still be bracketed together as open nor does he outline the level of development below which concessions should be permitted, that being the implication of the claim that the level of development of a particular country will influence the open society design options available to it.

The Soros Doctrine: Bursting the Bubble of American Supremacy

In developing something akin to a doctrine of his own, George Soros has taken particular issue with the policies pursued by the Bush administration and the neo-conservative philosophy that he regards as underpinning the former President's approach to foreign policy and international relations.²⁰⁶ In his book 'The Bubble of American Supremacy', Soros both critiques the neo-conservative approach of George Bush and elaborates on his own vision for a more constructive and open international order. In critiquing neo-conservatism Soros draws what he sees to be a parallel between 'the pursuit of American supremacy and the boom-bust pattern that can be observed from time to time in the stock market'.²⁰⁷ To understand this parallel it is important to note the view that Soros takes of stock market fluctuations, particularly the more severe fluctuations that prompt either booms or busts.

Economic booms and busts, Soros suggests, stem from misconceptions that come to distort reality, causing a discrepancy between what people think and the actual state of affairs.²⁰⁸ Often, such misconceptions and distortions (such as expectations regarding future property prices for example) are limited by 'self-correcting processes' whereby if outcomes fail to correspond to expectations then expectations themselves are adjusted; these circumstances are described by Soros as 'near-equilibrium conditions'.²⁰⁹ On occasion however, a trend manifested in reality is reinforced by a market bias or misconception, or indeed vice versa. This can unleash

²⁰⁵ Soros, *Open Society*, p.345.

²⁰⁶ Soros refers to neo-conservatism as 'a crude form of social Darwinism' because it places all emphasis on competition in relation to survival of the fittest and ignores the role of cooperation; George Soros, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, Phoenix: London, 2004, p.4.

²⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p.xiv.

²⁰⁸ *Ibid*, p.177.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p.177.

a boom-bust process in which ‘both the prevailing interpretation *and reality itself* are propelled into far-from-equilibrium territory’.²¹⁰ Soros gives the example of the performance of technology stocks at the beginning of this decade as conforming to this model and property prices in the UK and elsewhere over recent years would be another example. The interesting point as far as Soros is concerned is that very similar processes to these boom-bust bubbles can also be found in politics.

The argument that Soros makes is that the Bush administration’s ‘quest for American supremacy qualifies as a bubble’.²¹¹ Soros explains the bubble of American supremacy as follows: there did exist an underlying reality of the US occupying a dominant role in the world and there also existed a prevailing bias within the Bush administration, that a competitive and unilateral foreign policy would serve US interests, and preserve its hegemonic status, much better than a cooperative and multilateral foreign policy. The pursuit of self-interest was carried too far, Soros claims, with the neo-conservative belief in maintaining and enhancing American supremacy primarily by military means. With the terrorist attacks of September 11th, the administration, at least in the early stages, was able to carry enough of the nation behind them in support of their doctrine and with the eventual invasion of Iraq, far-from equilibrium territory was entered.²¹²

Before examining in more detail the alternative options that Soros sketches for America, and indeed other democratic states, to follow it is helpful to pause and consider the effectiveness of the bubble analogy and some of the possible implications of it in terms of theorising international politics. The first thing to note is that Soros himself accepts that the analogy is imperfect but nevertheless thinks that it has a degree of utility in shedding light on the predicament created by intervention in Iraq.²¹³ John Gray considers the parallel between the pursuit of American supremacy and the boom-bust pattern that is periodically characteristic of

²¹⁰ Ibid, p.178.

²¹¹ Ibid, p.179.

²¹² Soros, *Bubble*, p.179.

²¹³ Soros, *Bubble*, p.177.

stock markets to have merit but suggests that Soros underplays the extent to which religious fundamentalism infused the Bush doctrine.²¹⁴ Gray may be correct in this claim but in a sense it does not detract from the general argument that Soros makes which is in essence about the dangers of pursuing fundamentalist doctrines of any kind, be they religious, economic, or politico-military. Insofar as neo-conservatism is either a fundamentalist philosophy/doctrine, or came to be pursued in a fundamentalist way by the Bush administration, it represents an enemy to open society because ‘it claims possession of an ultimate truth’, the truth of the ideology of American supremacy.²¹⁵

Soros is not simply disdainful of claims to ultimate truth; he is especially scornful of neo-conservative truth claims. By way of example he cites the opening sentence of the Bush administration’s national security strategy: ‘The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom – and a single sustainable model for national success: freedom, democracy, and free enterprise’. Soros contends this statement to be false on two counts: firstly, that there is, he suggests, no single, sustainable model for national success, and secondly that America’s success is owed to its dominant position at the centre of the global capitalist system, a position that is thus denied to other states.²¹⁶ It is the first charge of falsehood here that is more relevant and more interesting.

Once again Soros appears torn between pluralism and making a robust defence of the particular form of liberalism, as defined by the concept of open society, which he advocates. It is rather strange that Soros is so reluctant to endorse a single model for national success because that is what he is proposing in general terms with his support for the adoption of the principles of open society in every country. Let us recall that ‘fostering the development of open societies throughout the world’ is one

²¹⁴ John Gray, *The Moving Target*, *New York Review of Books*, Volume 53, Number 15, October 5, 2006.

²¹⁵ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.10.

²¹⁶ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.11.

of the two key tasks that Soros envisages as necessary to embed the concept of open society on a global scale.²¹⁷ Moreover, Soros does not refrain from setting out a series of conditions, developed by the President of his foundation, which should be satisfied in order for a society to qualify as open. These include free and fair elections, a free and pluralistic media, an independent judiciary, constitutional protection for minority rights, a market economy that respects property rights, a commitment to peaceful conflict resolution, and anti-corruption laws.²¹⁸

This list is far more precise than any offered by Popper but having proposed it Soros immediately retreats from it by producing caveats such as that ‘fallibility allows for a broad range of cultural divergences’ and that the ‘Western intellectual tradition ought not to be imposed indiscriminately on the rest of the world in the name of universal values’.²¹⁹ More surprising still is the conclusion that Soros draws in claiming that ‘the Western form of representative democracy may not be the only form of government compatible with an open society’.²²⁰ Leaving aside whether or not representative democracy is a peculiarly Western electoral device, and indeed the merits of other democratic compositions such as more direct forms of democracy, it is obvious that an undemocratic society cannot be regarded as open in a Popperian sense. The ambiguity of the claim made by Soros here obscures the case that he is seeking to build. By employing the term ‘form of government’ rather than form of democracy he leaves this claim open to the interpretation that undemocratic forms of government may not be entirely incompatible with the concept of open society.

I do not think that Soros intends to concede the prospect of open societies that are not democratically constituted but if he does he puts himself at odds with Popper. As we have seen, Popper was considerably less hesitant in proclaiming what he regarded as the superiority of western democracies on account of them being more favourably disposed to reform.²²¹ It appears somewhat as though Soros is overly

²¹⁷ Soros, *Open Society*, p.308.

²¹⁸ Soros, *Open Society*, p.133.

²¹⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p.134.

²²⁰ Soros, *Open Society*, p.134.

²²¹ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.13.

cautious out of a concern not to appear to be advocating any kind of fundamentalist doctrine in order to distance himself from neo-conservatism. In fact Soros admits that his vision 'is not diametrically opposed to the policies adopted by the advocates of American supremacy' since there is agreement that the United States cannot, and should not, avoid intervening in the internal affairs of other countries.²²² The difference between the Soros and Bush doctrines concerns the grounds on which intervention is legitimated and also the extent to which it is multilaterally oriented. Exploration of the differences between these two positions reveals the importance of the concept of sovereignty to both and the manner in which the concept is interpreted. It also reveals that both philosophies, the Popperian liberalism of Soros and the neo-conservatism of the Bush administration, continue to subscribe to the centrality of the nation state as a framework of international politics.

Sovereignty, Intervention and World Order

Like many before him Soros considers the Treaty of Westphalia of 1648 to be the point at which sovereignty became the cornerstone of international relations and that it has remained as such ever since. He also suggests that despite the attempt to take sovereignty by the people that was the French Revolution, in practice sovereignty has come to be exercised by governments with a dynastic concept of sovereignty being superseded by a national one.²²³ More importantly, Soros regards it as utopian to think that sovereignty will cease to be the basis of world order any time soon.²²⁴ This has significant implications for attempts to institute open society as a concept across the world and helps to further explain the accommodation that Soros appears to have reached with the nation state as a form of political community. The endurance of state sovereignty as the foundation of world order poses two challenges according to Soros for those who do not wish to see repressive regimes protected from external interference: firstly, who has the authority to intervene in the internal affairs of sovereign states, and secondly, on what grounds?²²⁵

²²² Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.170.

²²³ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy* p.100.

²²⁴ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.101.

²²⁵ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.101.

Interestingly, an almost identical dilemma is posited by Francis Fukuyama who contends that the central project of contemporary international politics has become that of determining how to promote governance of weak states, improve their democratic legitimacy, and strengthen self-sustaining institutions.²²⁶ Such a project accords with Popper's concern that freedom is absent where it is not secured by the state and further that 'only a state which is controlled by free citizens can offer them any reasonable security at all'.²²⁷ States which do not permit their citizens control of them, via opportunity for democratic participation, are illegitimate from a Popperian perspective and intervention to rectify such a situation can be justified within the framework of Popper's philosophy.²²⁸ What is crucial to reiterate is that Popper's chief concern in relation to the state is the extent of the power it wields and the ability of citizens to control and direct that power by democratic means rather than whether or not a particular state is a nation state. The project identified by Fukuyama also has affinity with Soros' proposition that open society is threatened or undermined in chaotic circumstances as well as by the rigidity of closed society.²²⁹ Fukuyama argues that the state building project he advocates is attractive on a series of grounds – humanitarian, security and economic.²³⁰ It is possible and reasonable to add the promotion of open societies to his list.

The convergences and divergences that emerge from a comparison of the views and approaches of Soros and Fukuyama merit exposition and analysis for the light that they shed on the nature of the international system, the prospects of reforming it and the role that the concept of open society as well as that of the nation state may play in any prospective reform. Both Soros and Fukuyama recognise that sovereignty should and does have its limits and thus Fukuyama claims that few people are now willing to defend the principle of sovereignty in a pure form. He suggests that 'not

²²⁶ Francis Fukuyama, *State Building – Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century*, Profile Books: London, 2005, p.133.

²²⁷ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.111.

²²⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.151.

²²⁹ Soros, *Open Society*, p. 107.

²³⁰ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.133.

all sovereignties are created equal and that poor governance contributes directly to downgrading of the international community's respect for a country's sovereignty' and moreover that this position has not occurred as a result of September 11th 2001 but rather was developed in relation to humanitarian interventions in the 1990s.²³¹ He concurs with Soros that the question remains as to who gets to decide on whose sovereignty to violate, and on what grounds. More specifically he raises the issue of 'to what extent does it remain the prerogative of sovereign nation states, and to what degree must such decisions be constrained by international law or norms?'²³² The question of the degree of international constraint to which nation states should be subject is central to what is at stake in this debate.

Fukuyama shares some of the concern expressed by Soros at the preventive war against Iraq launched by the Bush administration. Fukuyama notes that this kind of action cannot serve as a good principle of international relations, and that the US would surely object to Russia or China asserting such a right.²³³ With this Soros and Popper would surely agree. More debatable however is whether the modest alternative that Fukuyama proposes can be deemed acceptable by those whose goal is the fostering of open societies throughout the world.

By distancing himself from the Bush doctrine Fukuyama takes steps towards repudiating, to some extent, the neo-conservative philosophy that he once espoused as a signatory to the Statement of Principles for the Project for the New American Century.²³⁴ He does however retain a considerable scepticism regarding the efficacy of international institutions as well as believing the notion of international community to be 'a fiction insofar as any enforcement capability depends entirely on the action of individual nation states'.²³⁵ Fukuyama does not offer much by way of a solution to the crippling collective action problems that he identifies as afflicting international organisations other than to suggest that decisive collective action is still

²³¹ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.141.

²³² Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.142.

²³³ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.147.

²³⁴ See <http://www.newamericancentury.org>

²³⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.157.

most likely to be achieved where and when the US is prepared to take on a leadership position.

Soros, as we shall see, does not dispute the desirability of American leadership on the international stage but wants to see it more specifically focused on the development of open societies and international rules to govern relationships between those societies. The most telling conclusion that Fukuyama draws however is that in seeking to preserve international order ‘we have no choice but to turn back to the sovereign nation state and to try to understand once again how to make it strong and effective’.²³⁶ In addition, he contends that those who have argued for the ‘twilight of sovereignty’²³⁷ bear the burden of proof ‘to explain what will replace the power of sovereign nation states in the contemporary world’.²³⁸ In his discussion of sovereignty, Popper regards the concept as dangerously ambiguous in that he views it as having the potential to obscure the fundamental question as to the powers accrued by state rulers and the extent to which institutional controls are established to check that power to prevent its abuse.²³⁹ Popper’s preference, as we saw in chapter in two, is for what he describes as ‘the principle of a democratic policy’²⁴⁰, that is, the creation, development, and protection of political institutions for the avoidance of tyranny.

A Community of Democracies

Such a goal would appear to be shared by both Soros and Fukuyama. Soros argues that the principle and policy of tyranny avoidance can be encapsulated in a doctrine that seeks to promote open societies.²⁴¹ Moreover, he identifies steps that have already been taken in this direction, beyond the work of his own institute and foundations, via the Warsaw Declaration.²⁴² The declaration was signed in June

²³⁶ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.163.

²³⁷ Peter Evans, *The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization*, *World Politics*, 1997, 50: p62-87.

²³⁸ Fukuyama, *State Building*, p.163.

²³⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.123.

²⁴⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.125.

²⁴¹ George Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.112.

²⁴² See <http://www.demcoalition.org>

2000 by 107 states at a conference in Warsaw hosted by the US State Department. The signatories, meeting in this particular forum, term themselves the Community of Democracies and seek to ‘collaborate on democracy-related issues in existing international and regional institutions, forming coalitions and caucuses to support resolutions and other international activities aimed at the promotion of democratic governance’.²⁴³ Soros sees great potential in the Community of Democracies but expresses a disappointment that hitherto it has remained something of an ‘empty shell’ that has yet to fully establish itself in practical pursuit of its stated cause.²⁴⁴

Democracy Promotion and the Question of Sovereignty

Promoting democracy around the world can be considered a shared objective of the Blair, Fukuyama and Soros doctrines respectively. All three are interested in the question of sovereignty, its evolution, and limits and more specifically in the question of the possible bases for intervening in the internal affairs of sovereign states. Soros contends that the Warsaw Declaration is deserving of attention precisely because it establishes, in his view, a valid basis for intervention.²⁴⁵ The faith that Soros professes in this particular document appears somewhat optimistic given that it does not spell out any principle of intervention. Indeed, it includes the commitment that signatories ‘will cooperate to consolidate and strengthen democratic institutions, with due respect for sovereignty and the principle of non-interference in internal affairs’.²⁴⁶ With the inclusion of this caveat, the Community of Democracies make clear that the Warsaw Declaration is not a radical attempt to rewrite or even influence the interpretation of the rules concerning sovereignty and non-interference in international politics. Soros is mistaken if he thinks he has found a basis for intervention set out in the declaration.

That said, the signatories do ‘resolve jointly to cooperate to discourage and resist the

²⁴³ Community of Democracies, Warsaw Declaration, June 27th 2000.

²⁴⁴ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.119.

²⁴⁵ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.112.

²⁴⁶ Community of Democracies, Warsaw Declaration, June 27th 2000.

threat to democracy posed by the overthrow of constitutionally elected governments'.²⁴⁷ Whilst this resolution is rather opaque, in that it does not set out particular institutional mechanisms to be activated in resistance or discouragement of democratic overthrow, it does at least provide a starting point for the consideration of such scenarios. There could be scope to expand such a commitment to suggest that an attack on the democracy of one member is to be regarded as an attack on the democratic principles of all members. The ambiguous wording of the text does suggest however a reluctance to countenance a collective security arrangement of this sort. Of greater concern to a Popperian such as Soros should be the narrowness of the protection that the Community of Democracies purports to offer. By restricting themselves to resisting the overthrow of constitutionally elected governments they make no commitment to individuals living under tyrannical rule in circumstances where elected government is entirely absent. As an institution then, it would seem that the Community of Democracies is ill-prepared to address the problem that 'many states are not democratic, and many inhabitants do not have the status of citizens' which Soros identifies.²⁴⁸

He critiques the UN as institutionally hampered in terms of resolving its own ambiguities between protecting individuals and upholding the sovereignty of member states²⁴⁹ but it is not at all clear that the Community of Democracies, as currently constituted, is any better equipped to resolve such tensions. Having drawn attention to the limitations of the UN as a body made up of sovereign states it is difficult to see why Soros holds out considerably more hope for the Community of Democracies given that it too is a membership organisation comprised of sovereign states. More peculiar in this regard is the proposal that Soros makes for members of the Community of Democracies to arrange themselves into a faction or bloc *within* the UN.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁷ Community of Democracies, Warsaw Declaration, June 27th 2000

²⁴⁸ Soros, *Bubble*, p.115.

²⁴⁹ Soros, *Bubble*, p.115.

²⁵⁰ Soros, *Bubble*, p.119, my italics.

On this basis he concludes that repressive regimes could be excluded from active decision making and that failed states could be put under UN protection.²⁵¹ Whilst there may be some prospect of this, and it is neither particularly controversial nor farfetched to suggest that benefit could be derived from democracies cooperating within international institutions, it is rendered less likely by the supremacy that Soros himself attributes to the Security Council and the frequent ‘unwillingness of sovereign states to sacrifice their national interests for the sake of the common interest’.²⁵² Whatever the merits or otherwise of the proposals that Soros makes to try and overcome this situation it is clear that he perceives an international system that remains dominated and shaped by the concept of national interest.

Indeed the most productive route that Soros charts is that of harnessing national interests to the cause of promoting both democracy and open society more broadly. Soros suggests that an increasing interdependence between states, made even more evident since September 11, increases the likelihood of intervention in the internal affairs of sovereign states where national security interests are deemed to be at stake.²⁵³ Whilst Soros would undoubtedly prefer the establishment and utilisation of an international policy of humanitarian intervention, which sought to uphold and protect the principles of open society, he is pragmatic in enlisting the concept of national interest to this cause. He argues that ‘it is in the common interest of all democratic, open societies to foster the development of open societies all over the world’ because failed states, repressive regimes and internal conflicts pose dangers beyond the borders of the countries concerned.²⁵⁴ The internationalism that Soros displays here is cognisant of the enduring significance of the nation state and national interests.

Although Soros concurs with the view expressed by Popper that ‘protective institutions are necessary, both on a regional and on a world-wide scale’²⁵⁵ he does

²⁵¹ Soros, *Bubble*, p120.

²⁵² Soros, *Bubble*, p.116.

²⁵³ Soros, *Bubble*, p.112.

²⁵⁴ Soros, *Bubble*, p.113.

²⁵⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

so whilst simultaneously acknowledging the influence that nation states continue to exert over the nature and conduct of international politics.²⁵⁶ Popper was never prepared to make such an acknowledgement and so ended up at once implicitly predicating the nation state as the framework for his theorising of open society and at the same time assuming that the irrationality, as he saw it, of nationalism would be increasingly exposed as societies became more open. Among Popper's most crucial oversights in this regard was a failure to lay out a clear and comprehensive cosmopolitan theory of open society. In the absence of such a theory the tensions and ambiguities between the concept of open societies, instituted in separate and particular countries, and that of open society as a supranational or even global form of political community remain unresolved in his philosophy. Soros largely avoids this problem by being considerably more explicit that his aim is the establishment of open societies in countries across the world rather than to subsume, to any significant degree, those countries into a broader, post-national open society. Evidence of this approach is to be found in his endorsement of a community of democracies and in the activities of his Open Society Institute with its various branches working domestically within many countries exhibiting varying degrees of openness.

4.3 Conclusion – Two Types of Nationalism and the Open Society

In bringing this chapter to a close it is useful to turn attention to a distinction between two types of nationalism drawn by the philosopher John Ralston Saul. Saul distinguishes between negative nationalism on the one hand and positive nationalism on the other as part of a broader consideration of what he terms the 'collapse of globalism'.²⁵⁷ He suggests that all nationalism is concerned with belonging, place and imagining the other.²⁵⁸

'It can take a positive, civic form, one in which belonging brings the obligation to

²⁵⁶ Soros, *Bubble*, p.114.

²⁵⁷ John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism*, London: Atlantic Books, 2005.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p.245.

reach out and to imagine the other in an inclusive, multiple way. It can also take a negative form, above all ethnic, dedicated to belonging as an expression of privilege and exclusion'.²⁵⁹

Interestingly, Saul conceives of positive nationalism as tied to self-confidence and openness. Saul's contention is that the new era ushered in by the collapse of the Soviet Union looks set to be nationalist of one form or other; whether it is positive or negative remains to be seen but the opportunity exists to shape the direction of the era.²⁶⁰ This point is echoed by Holton who contends that 'the historical dynamic of the nation-state is very far from being played out' whilst also recognising that the world inhabited by nation states is changing.²⁶¹

From a Popperian perspective such insights are relevant in terms of thinking about the future development of open society as a concept and form of political community. More importantly, it can aid our understanding of Popper's view on nationalism. Popper conceived of open society in opposition to nationalism, as individualistic rather than collectivist, as rational rather than traditional, and as outward looking rather than insular. In doing so however, Popper neglected to consider the possibility of different variants of nationalism and the nation state. Perhaps he did so unconsciously with his endorsement of western liberal democracies but his general treatment of nationalism is to dismiss it as a singular and straightforward phenomenon.²⁶² With the recognition of at least the potential for a more positive form of nationalism comes the opportunity for Popperians to look again at the nation state as a vehicle for advancing the cause of open society.

What is particularly intriguing for Popperians about Saul's conception of positive nationalism is the centrality he accords to what he terms 'the democratic reality of choice'. Achieving such a reality is Popper's overriding concern in theorising open society.²⁶³ Saul though refers not just to choices for citizens but also choices for

²⁵⁹ Ibid, p.245.

²⁶⁰ Ibid, p.245.

²⁶¹ Robert J. Holton, *Globalization and the Nation-State*, London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1998, p.106.

²⁶² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.49.

²⁶³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2* p.127.

countries as well as choices for coalitions of countries.²⁶⁴ He describes positive nationalism as ‘a belief in the positive tension of uncertainty and the central importance of choice. It is not wedded to narrow absolutes’.²⁶⁵ A belief in the positive tension of uncertainty seems to be an excellent description of Popper’s philosophies of both science and politics. The combination of positive nationalism and open society merits exploration by Popperians at this particular historical juncture in a bid to ensure that democratic communities can continue to draw upon such positive tension in making collective choices. To advocate open society today does not require a dismissal of the nation state as Popper thought. Instead of planning to replace the nation state, a project of such grand scale and scope that Popper would surely caution against it, reform can be considered. There is no reason why positive nationalism cannot be harnessed to support open society.

²⁶⁴ Saul, *Collapse of Globalism*, p.270.

²⁶⁵ Saul, *Collapse of Globalism*, p.271.

5

Open Society and the European Union

5.1 Introduction - European Integration and the Nation State

European nation states currently cooperate to a hitherto unprecedented degree within common institutions and a common framework of law that takes precedence over national law. There is much to admire in the process of European integration and its achievements have been quite spectacular. A continent ravaged by war and conflict throughout the first half of the twentieth century, has now enjoyed over half a century of peace (apart from the Balkan conflict of the nineties) and generally increasing prosperity. This prompts some significant questions in the context of this thesis. Has the process of developing the European Union involved the transcending of the nation state? Has peace and prosperity flourished only with the eclipsing of nationalism by a supranational process of integration? What opportunities and threats are presented to the concept of open society by the development of the EU?

This chapter seeks to address these questions as well as the nature of the European integration process and the extent to which it has been and remains state-driven. This is vitally important since ‘a central political and philosophical issue regarding the future of Europe is the legitimate role of the member states’, especially given that ‘unlike the USA, the EU developed and develops from pre-existing independent, legally equal, de jure sovereign nation states’.¹ The EU has not merely developed from sovereign nation states but it has been developed *by* sovereign nation states and it is sovereign nation states, I will argue, that continue to steer its direction.

The European Union has expanded from humble beginnings, in terms of both

¹ Follesdal, A, ‘*Democracy, Legitimacy and Majority Rule in the European Union*’, in Nentwich, M & Weale, A, ‘*Political Theory and the European Union*’, Routledge: London, 1997, p.43.

membership and scope, to the enormous organisation that it is today encompassing some twenty seven states following its most recent enlargement, and bearing responsibility for a vast range of policy areas. The extent of economic integration and cooperation in Europe today has reached a level that includes the adoption and use of a single currency, the Euro, by most EU member states with monetary policy directed by a European Central Bank (ECB) based in Frankfurt. Interest rates in France are thus now decided by a panel of European bankers situated in Germany and it is possible to travel across most of the continent without the need for any currency exchange.

Politically too, the European Union has hugely developed its scope and the range of policy issues that fall under its jurisdiction. The ‘Three Pillar’ approach (conceived at Maastricht in 1991) includes Justice and Home Affairs, as well as moves towards a Common Foreign and Security Policy alongside the central economic aims of constructing and regulating the Common Market. It is in Pillar 1, that of economic policy, that integration has gone furthest and fastest. Justice and Home Affairs, Pillar 2, has gathered momentum of late and intricate cooperation is to be found here. Pillar 3 however has proved problematic and despite initiatives aplenty and much hopeful rhetoric there has not emerged anything that could be described as a consistent or sustained Common Foreign and Security Policy in Europe.² The difficulties of trying to create or cultivate one were vividly demonstrated in the run up to the U.S.-led intervention in Iraq in 2003.

Governance in the EU is a somewhat complicated matter that involves member states themselves and their representatives – acting as the European Council, the European Commission made up of member state appointees who are placed in charge of ministerial departments (External Relations, Transport, the Environment and so on) and is the institution that most closely mirrors that of a government at nation state

² This is something that Soros notes disappointedly and, as will be discussed later in the chapter, he conceives of considerable scope for the EU to become a more active and vocal advocate for open society as a foreign policy principle. George Soros, *Open Society, Reforming Global Capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000, p.340.

level, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) that can de facto create EU law as well as interpret it through its rulings, and the European parliament that is primarily charged with an oversight role.

The only elected institution of the EU is the Parliament and even these elections are conducted on a national rather than a pan-European basis; Members of the European Parliament (MEPs) are elected by national constituencies with the number of MEPs per member state being determined by population size. It has been claimed that 'the dynamics of reform will be governed by the continuing desire of European political elites to manage the processes of institutional reform, so that in consequence it will be difficult for a trans-national European demos to emerge'.³ The political elites of national governments, to varying degrees, wield power over the processes of institutional reform within the EU although that power can be checked at a national level via referenda on particular treaties for example.

Nation states within the European Union arguably face an important choice and one that has thus far largely been put off and ignored; either the trans-national polity that is served by the institutions of the EU should begin to become a genuine demos or else it is likely that the case will grow for some of the functions currently performed by the European institutions to be returned to national parliaments and governments. This is, in short, the much debated democratic deficit that faces the European Union. It is not simply the case that European institutions are subject to insufficient scrutiny and democratic parliamentary control but that the governments of member states themselves can evade democratic accountability and responsibility for decisions taken at the EU level.

'It is the member state governments which are the main legislators in the community. Add to this the continuous expansion of community legislative powers vis-à-vis the member states and you see EU member countries gradually return to a pre-democratic polity where the executive regains a monopoly of legislation, no longer

³ Nentwich. M & Weale. A, *Political Theory and the European Union: Legitimacy Constitutional Choice and Citizenship*, Routledge: London, 1997, p.5.

bound by the representatives of the people'.⁴

This is an issue of the power of the executive, here European institutions established and dominated by member states, versus that of the legislature both at the national (member state) and trans-national (EU) level. Any prospect of a return to pre-democratic polities should be of great concern to Popperians and brings into focus the question of the contribution made by European integration to the cause of developing and supporting open societies.

European nation-states have grown steadily more cooperative over the course of the last fifty years and Europe is now the location of the most advanced experiment in supranational governance anywhere in the world. Indeed, Soros regards the experiment as being one of piecemeal social engineering and so methodologically appropriate to an open society.⁵ Relations between states within the EU have been placed on a firm legal footing; the prospect of war between member states is virtually unthinkable with negotiation and dialogue now the entrenched form of interaction.⁶ That negotiation and dialogue has been most significant in the creation of the Treaties that have underpinned the development of the EU, serving as guiding frameworks, regulatory agreements and quasi-constitutional foundations. From the Treaty of Rome in 1957 to the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 member states have sought to increase the competencies, powers and responsibilities of supranational institutions. As a result of this national sovereignty has undoubtedly changed.

The next section of this chapter takes a closer look at sovereignty in a European context as well as the nature of governance that has evolved with the development of the EU. From a Popperian perspective there is a particular interest here in the question of checking political power and holding it to account. The extent to which those tasks are made more difficult at the level of the EU is one focus of attention in

⁴ Abromeit, H, *Democracy in Europe: Legitimising Politics in a Non-State Polity*, Berghahn Books, 1998, p.22.

⁵ George Soros speech, *Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society*, Brussels, November 20 2006.

⁶ Frank Vibert, *Europe Simple – Europe Strong*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.2.

the chapter. The issue of social justice is also important in that Popper regarded open society as a framework within which economic as well as political power could be controlled by citizens with a firm emphasis on ensuring a degree of protection for the economically weak.⁷ Does the EU provide or facilitate such a framework? Answering this question is relevant to an assessment of the EU from the point of view of open society.

The chapter then proceeds to consider the work of Jurgen Habermas. Habermasian philosophy takes a place here for two key reasons. The first is that there are a number of parallels between Habermas's theorising and that of Popper's, and this is most readily apparent in the manner that they deal with the concept of rationality. Secondly, Habermas takes a clear position on the nation state and its future. He argues that it is no longer fit for purpose as a form of political community and that moreover a post-national constellation can already be glimpsed that is signalling the end of national political predominance. In this chapter the Habermasian philosophy of political community is explored via reference to the notion of the post-national constellation and its implications in terms of open society.

Thereafter, an examination is undertaken of George Soros' reflections on the European Union as a potential prototype for a global open society. He set out his vision in a speech delivered in 2006 and whilst it may initially appear as though Soros is advocating the pursuit of a decidedly cosmopolitan project it turns out that he is actually articulating a reconfigured national constellation that can bear significant contrast to the post-national position defended by Habermas. Soros sets out his expectations of what the EU can and cannot hope to achieve as a potential advocate and guardian of open society and it is striking the extent to which he continues to think and act in the context of a national framework as the basis for politics.

⁷ Karl Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2–Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986, p.125.

The chapter concludes with an overview of the prospects for the development of open societies alongside and within the process of European integration. Of particular note here is the question of whether the EU has either secured or threatened open societies over the course of its development. Furthermore, what risks do the acknowledged democratic deficits of the EU pose to the concept of open society? Such risks cannot be ignored by open society advocates but neither need they be deemed intractable. One thing that open societies and the European Union have in common is that they have both developed in close relation to the nation state. As they have done so conceptions of sovereignty have altered and it is to that issue which we now turn.

5.2 Sovereignty and the European Union

The concept of sovereignty, as explored in the previous chapter, was itself brought into being by the state. Sovereignty has become inter-twined with the nation state and exists pre-eminently in the form of national sovereignty. Have the nation states of Europe ceded this sovereignty to the European Union? Has national sovereignty been made redundant in a globalised world? These two questions are linked in terms of how the relationship between European integration and globalisation may be interpreted. To put it differently, has globalisation prompted and accelerated the drive towards ever closer union in Europe, or has the integration of European states itself been a part of the process of globalisation? We live in a world of global financial markets and huge multi-national corporations that wield great economic power. Globalisation has put pressure on the nation state and on national sovereignty. Regional integration and cooperation can be viewed as a prudent response to this as a way of insulating the national state from some of the disruptions and dislocations wrought by global capital flexibility and manoeuvrability.⁸

Despite the challenges of globalisation national sovereignty has survived intact. The

⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.6.

process of European integration has seen a re-conceptualisation of sovereignty but not the dissolving of the national variant. 'National sovereignty is a concept rather than a fact, and one which has been deliberately reconfigured in the EU context'.⁹ Sovereignty is conceptual and there is no theoretical reason that it need remain tied to the nation state but the existence of national sovereignty is nevertheless a fact; however much the world may have changed in the last half century or so, after the Second World War, after the Cold War, after the more recent events of September 11th 2001, it is still a world comprised of sovereign nation states. The grand engineering project of an integrated union in Europe has radically altered the continent and relationships amongst its states but it has not displaced sovereignty from its national habitat. Sovereignty of the people is currently and necessarily a national sovereignty; the (national) peoples of Europe have their national sovereignties and since there is no recognisable concept of *a people* of Europe as a whole there is no corresponding supranational sovereignty that a European government might claim on its citizens behalf.

It is significant that Warleigh should refer to the deliberate reconfiguration of sovereignty in the context of the European Union and this indicates the extent to which nation states have maintained (control of) sovereignty, pooling or sharing it only in those areas that they wish to and developing it in a manner that is intended to serve the national interest. It is notable that 'in practice, sovereignty is being rearticulated and contested, rather than forgotten or transcended'.¹⁰ The process of European integration has been accompanied by a re-articulation of sovereignty so that national governments can turn to international institutions such as those of the EU for the provision of governance in certain areas where cooperation beyond the state is deemed useful and worthwhile. It is not altogether clear as to the manner in which sovereignty is being contested.

National sovereignty has neither been forgotten nor transcended because the effect of

⁹ Alex Warleigh, *Democracy in the European Union: Theory, Practice and Reform*, Sage Publications, London, 2003, p.58.

¹⁰ Warleigh. *Democracy in the European Union*, p.63.

European integration and the development of the European Union has not been the transcending of the nation state. Perhaps one day this shall be the result and national sovereignty will be of interest primarily to historians but such an eventuality does not appear immanent. It has been concluded that 'large-scale constitutional engineering, far from leading to a diffusion of state sovereignty, maintains the ability of member governments to manage the process of building trans-national bodies'.¹¹ The European Union as a trans-national organisation is dependent upon the support and finance of the member states that created it. The manner of its creation, an evolving series of Treaty agreements between increasing numbers of member states, has allowed those states to place limits on the organisation in order that their own sovereignty does not come to be unduly diffused by the supranational institutions that they themselves have established and maintained.

Among the successes of the European Union has been to entrench liberal democracy across the continent and all twenty seven of its members are functioning liberal democracies. The entrenchment of liberal democracy in Europe has been at the national level however; Europe is a continent comprised of liberal democratic nation states. 'Historically, the establishment of liberal democracy came to be tied to, first, popular sovereignty and, later, national self-determination' and 'these two principles have been fused in the powerful combination of ideas and values that is the nation state'.¹² This historic construction has proved to be durable and robust. It is possible that European integration has managed to travel as far as it has, as quickly as it has, because it has not attempted to fundamentally undermine either of these principles.

One of the key challenges facing the European Union today, and its future development, is to find a way of preserving liberty and democracy alongside the operation of supranational institutions and governance. This is particularly important from a Popperian perspective. Since liberal democracy is already in place at the

¹¹ Tsinisizelis. M and Chrysochoou. D, 'The European Union – Trends in Theory and Reform', in Nentwich and Weale (eds), '*Political Theory and the European Union*', Routledge: London, 1997, p. 83

¹² Christiansen. T, '*Legitimacy dilemmas of supranational government*', p.103. in Nentwich and Weale (eds), '*Political Theory and the European Union*', Routledge: London, 1997

national level the burden of proof rests at the supranational level to show that it is either capable of greater democratisation or that decisions taken there will have a particular utility that compensates for any potential democratic deficit. It is reasonable to suggest that ‘as the powers of the EU have increased, so it can no longer rely upon the principle that its normative justifiability can be wholly derivative from the authority of the nation states who established it as an international organisation’.¹³ This is a challenge faced by all international organisations but it is its pervasiveness in the everyday lives of the citizens of Europe that make it a particularly pressing and acute issue for the European Union. As Popper consistently argued, power unchecked is dangerous.¹⁴ What Popper underestimated is the extent to which the nation state contains democratic safety valves that are tried and tested, and accessible to citizens. The governance balance in the EU between national governments and supranational institutions warrants exploration from a Popperian viewpoint in order to assess how best to check supranational power and ensure democratic accountability.

The European Union – Governance and Government

More explicit attempts at identity creation within the EU as a whole have proved to be less than successful. Europeans still ‘tend to emphasise their diversity rather than what they have in common, and have failed to be persuaded otherwise by the adoption of EU symbols of common identity such as the flag, hymn and passport’.¹⁵ As often as not communities define their identities by what, or who, they are not as much as what, or who, they are. National and sub-national communities have many similar ‘other’ communities against whom they can define themselves. This process is far more difficult at the supranational level where others are far scarcer and often less clearly defined in many cases. The EU has no genuine regional equivalent elsewhere in the world but does counter pose itself, at least in matters of economics, to huge nation states across the globe such as the U.S.A, China, India and Russia. It is not impossible therefore for attempts to create a European identity to make use of

¹³ Nentwich. M and Weale. A, ‘*Political Theory and the European Union*’, p.3.

¹⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.125.

¹⁵ Warleigh. *Democracy in the European Union*, p.11.

a process of othering, it is just that the opportunity to 'other' presents itself only infrequently.

It has been observed that 'the lack of a common culture and language makes the creation of a public discourse within which political accountability is discharged an inherently precarious exercise'.¹⁶ Europe lacks a common language and without this there is little or no prospect for the emergence of a genuine public discourse. Citizens of the European Union do not have a European-wide public discourse that is open to them and few means of participating in one. Democratic politics requires public debate so that citizens understand the decisions being taken on their behalf and in order to make informed decisions when called upon to do so whether that is voting in an election or referendum, joining a political party or campaign, or taking part in other forms of political activity.

Individuals acquire political information and education from a variety of sources: family, peers, party literature, official documents, schools, colleges and universities, and perhaps most significantly of all today, from the media.

'So far, there are only very limited attempts to launch Europe-wide or at least trans-border media. The only newspaper is The European along with the TV channel Euro-News operating on a large scale. The obvious reasons for this are the difficulties met by such enterprises by the diversity of languages and media traditions in Europe'.¹⁷

This indicates the almost total lack of trans-continental media currently in existence in Europe.¹⁸ It is a reflexive problematic for the EU because the lack of Euro-wide media is a reflection of the absence of a Euro-wide discourse and the lack of such

¹⁶ Lehning, P and Weale, A, *'Citizenship, Democracy and Justice in the New Europe'*, Routledge: London, 1997, p.8.

¹⁷ Nentwich, M, *'Opportunity Structures for Citizens' Participation'*, in Nentwich and Weale (eds), *'Political Theory and the European Union'*, p.132.

¹⁸ It is worth noting however, as Nentwich does, that European public forums are somewhat more in evidence for a small elite such as Financial Times readers for example. Those who regularly read the FT will often have transnational business interests, associations and networks. They may well be frequent travelers within the continent and take a more active interest in the development of the Single Market than most.

pan-continental media is simultaneously a barrier to the development of any such discourse.

A particular problematic is evident whereby citizens fail to identify with the EU and thus turn-out in small numbers for European elections which causes legitimisation issues for the EU that are hard to overcome.

‘Lack of interest, information and identification in European citizens are, in common with the low turnout, both an indication of lacking democratic legitimacy and a cause of the prolongation and even widening of the EU’s legitimacy gap, which in its turn originates from the lack of proper democratic accountability’.¹⁹

In failing to identify strongly with the European Union citizens interest is limited and this makes the job of disseminating information about the EU all the more difficult. The combination of these factors is a significant hindrance to attempts to develop democratic accountability for the EU.

Even were a method of democratic accountability found that was applicable to the European Union it is unclear as to who exactly would, or should, be held to account. The complex governance procedures are an impediment to clear and simple accountability.

‘Given that legislative powers are shared between the Council of Ministers, the Commission and the European Parliament, there is no ‘government’ to be identified and held accountable, nor any opposition able to constitute a rival government to which electors could turn’.²⁰

With a government, such as those of nation states, there is a relatively unambiguous source of power to be held to account. Oppositions provide potential alternative governments and also play an important part themselves in the job of holding government to account. The replacement of government by governance makes accountability difficult to obtain and practice in an EU context.

¹⁹ Heidrun Abromeit. *Democracy in Europe – Legitimising Politics in a Non-state Polity*, Berghahn Books, New York, 1998, p.167.

²⁰ Warleigh. *Democracy in the European Union*, p.8.

The European Union not only lacks a government and opposition but also European-wide political parties. Parties facilitate ideological contestation within political systems, allow the expression of ideological identity and contribute to public discourse and debate. Currently, elections to the European Parliament are held on a national basis with national parties competing to be elected by national electorates and once elected, national parties join loose trans-national coalitions within the parliament. It is hard to envisage the transformation of this system into one of truly European political parties competing trans-nationally. It has been suggested that 'in order to promote the evolution of a genuine European party system instead of the present party federations without any direct relationship to the European citizenry, trans-European parties should be founded and individual membership allowed'.²¹ No detail is given as to who should found these parties and on what basis. To imagine that they could simply be conjured into existence is rather utopian. Even if European parties could be established they would then need a political system in which to operate. A European Parliament made up of European political parties would not take the political system much closer to that of nation states since as the EU currently operates the parties would still not be competing electorally for the privilege of governing.

It is clear that the European Union, as currently constituted, does not and cannot function as a state. This is fine up to a point and there is no reason why the EU need necessarily aspire to the status of a state but the essential problem that lies beneath the democratic deficit, the lack of accountability and the legitimacy gap remains power unchecked. Democracy is a safeguard against such a danger and the EU has become enormously powerful without being adequately democratised. The congruence between those who participate in decision-making and those whom such decisions affect is a pivotal feature of democracy and one that is by and large missing at the level of the EU.²²

²¹ Nentwich. *Opportunity Structures*, p.136

²² Abromeit. *Democracy in Europe*, p.96.

It is not simply that EU institutions are unaccountable for the most part to EU citizens but also, as discussed above, that member states, acting in the Council of Ministers for example, can also to some extent evade being held to account for their decisions and actions. Democracy it must be acknowledged is an imperfect device for checking power and holding political officials to account. Within nation states citizens do not necessarily have much say or influence over the decisions taken by government but they do at least have an opportunity to remove that government come the next election should they so wish. It is worth recalling at this juncture that for Popper, ‘democracy, the right of the people to judge and to dismiss their government, is the only known device by which we can try to protect ourselves against the misuse of political power’.²³ This right is available to citizens at the national level within the EU but not at the supranational level. The existence of national public discourses is a further insurance against the abuse of power.

To ask if the EU may be emerging as an alternative to, or replacement of, national forms of political community is instructive in that the nature of this organisation can be explored and compared to that of the nation state along with the boundaries that it may aspire both to surmount and entail. A couple of questions are consequently prompted on this basis. Firstly, ‘are we to think of European political identity as something to be made or found?’ Secondly, ‘can we reason ourselves out of the bounded identities that we have inherited from the past, and, if so, what sort of relationship is thereby presupposed about the relation between individuals and the political communities of which they are a part?’²⁴ European political identity insofar as it can be thought to exist at a supranational level is a complex phenomenon, not least because attempts to construct it are undertaken in the context of pre-existing national identities.

The questions posed here do raise matters at stake in the broader debate covered by this thesis: whether a universal concept such as open society is compatible with

²³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.127.

²⁴ Lehning and Weale ‘*Citizenship, Democracy and Justice in the New Europe*’ p.13. and p.5. respectively.

bounded forms of political community such as the nation state. From a Popperian perspective however, a more fundamental question may be considered to underlie those posed above. Just as Popper sought to replace the question of who should rule with that of how can bad rulers be prevented from doing too much harm, so here it is reasonable to ask whether the politics of identity, albeit at a supranational level in this case, offers a viable route to strengthening and spreading the principles of open society globally?²⁵ Popper, as has been discussed, was unimpressed by identity politics and philosophy.²⁶

The nation state places a boundary around a people who, however loosely, form some kind of community in terms of living, working, debating and taking collective decisions together. Bound in this way, communities have shown themselves to be capable of governing themselves, that is to say democratically. The construction and reinforcement of national identity continues in a myriad of subtle ways each and every day, via the media, political parties and elites and other national institutions such as those of education and sport. 'The fact that 'national democracy' is a social construction does not mean that it is easily toppled by secular processes such as globalisation or integration'.²⁷ Social construction though it may be, national democracy has proved reasonably durable and has neither ceased to exist nor function in the face of processes of globalisation and integration. To a Popperian concerned with addressing democratic deficits, this is an important point to consider when examining supranational entities such as the EU.

The benefits of European integration have already been acknowledged and the EU can and should continue to play a major role in European political life but the nature of that role requires consideration and reflection from a Popperian perspective in order to enhance the prospects of the European Union shrinking its democratic deficit and becoming a more powerful defender and promoter of democracy globally. In defending the nation state the arguments developed here are offered

²⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.121.

²⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.41.

²⁷ Christiansen, *Legitimacy Dilemmas*, p.104

simultaneously to protect democratic politics, the locus of which is at the national level, from being subverted by supranational processes that can potentially threaten national democracy without demonstrating the viability of supranational alternatives.

‘Abraham Lincoln’s famous call at Gettysburg (1863) for government of the people, by the people, for the people is instructive: it reminds us that collective decisions need to be made in circumstances of fallibility (i.e. things can go wrong), and that the best way to make sure that this happens both fairly and in a way which allows mistakes to be rectified is to ensure that everyone has access to, and a role to play in, the decision-making process’.²⁸

The best way to promote collective decision-making of this kind, in this way, is to protect our national democratic heritage and restore it. Such a task of restoration could be approached in the manner of Popperian piecemeal social engineering just as readily as that of developing the EU.

Social Justice and the European Union

The choice facing Europe in respect of social justice concerns the appropriate circumstances in which to attempt to achieve it and the nature and scope of the EU’s involvement in this aim.

‘On the one hand, the claims of social justice within an integrated Europe would indicate common standards of service provision and social protection; on the other hand, the existence of cultural and historic diversity indicates the need for a domain of collective choice in which diverse preferences can be developed’.²⁹

Fortunately Europe has just such domains of collective choice: nation states. Any endeavour to initiate common social provision and protection is likely to be difficult to implement amidst the plurality of models of social and welfare provision that already exist across Europe amongst different member states.

The European Union cannot make social provision for citizens directly; it can and must do so through member states. This is in fact what happens via mechanisms

²⁸ Warleigh. *Democracy in the European Union*, p.5.

²⁹ Lehning and Weale. *Citizenship, Democracy and Justice in the New Europe*, p.12.

such as the Social Charter which lays out the general social goals of the EU in areas such as working hours, maternity leave and employment benefits from part-time workers.³⁰ The Charter is a guide to policy for member states but Europe remains a very long way from standardised common social provision. Social policy and social justice is the preserve of national governments and is determined primarily by resource allocation decisions. Since the EU does not have or constitute a European government it does not raise revenue from the collection of direct taxes, on income for example, and so does not enjoy the range of resource allocation or redistributive opportunities that national governments do.

The European Union is a unique international organisation in terms of the authority that it has over sovereign states even although that authority is conferred by the states themselves. The EU has become a powerful economic and political actor in international politics and is undoubtedly a world power but it is not a sovereign power. It lacks the cohesive political community and identity that remain the preserve of nation states and this seems to have impaired attempts to embed democracy and social justice at the supranational level. Popperians in particular should therefore think twice before consigning the political community that is the nation state to the historical scrap-heap since we risk losing with it a valuable forum for the effective practice of democratic politics.

It is on this basis that I can only agree with the second part of the claim that 'little chance of effective governance seems to be left for nation-states and little chance of democracy for supranational governance'.³¹ The process of European integration has seen the gradual piecing together of national government and supranational governance. It has proved difficult to achieve a balance between efficient and effective governance on the one hand and EU-level democratisation on the other. Whilst there is much to admire in the development of the EU from a Popperian perspective, its outstanding democratic deficit is sufficient to invite both critical scrutiny and an inclination, for the moment, to preserve national democratic politics.

³⁰ McCormick, J, *Understanding the European Union*, p.167. MacMillan Press Ltd: London, 1999.

³¹ Abromeit. *Legitimising Politics*, p.169.

The potential for democratic governance at a supranational level has been theorised by Jurgen Habermas and it is to his work that the chapter now turns. He seeks to confront what he terms a ‘disturbing problem’; that of the ability of democracies based on the social welfare state to survive beyond national borders.³² The context of the EU is regarded by Habermas as a useful framework for exploring this problem and indeed he sees in the EU a potential means of solving it.

‘In the national context ... it is harder than ever for politics to keep pace with global competition. I see the only normatively satisfactory alternative as a socially and economically effective European Union, constituted along federalist lines – an alternative that points to a future cosmopolitan order sensitive both to difference and to social equality’.³³

The nature of Habermas’s proposed cosmopolitan order warrants scrutiny here from a Popperian perspective, especially as the concerns of democracy and social equality with which he begins are central to Popper’s conception of open society. The philosophical basis of Habermas’s cosmopolitanism, or post-nationalism, are examined below with a consideration of the post-national constellation that he perceives to be emergent in place of the nation state.

5.3 The Postnational Constellation

The Postnational Constellation is the title of a collection of political essays written by Habermas that address issues of post or trans-national democracy. In this collection Habermas argues that the nation state is no longer fit for purpose as a form of political community and locus of political power and authority. He suggests that the time is ripe to take a further abstractive step in the process of democratic will formation, a step beyond that of the nation state and into a postnational or

³² Jurgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.xviii

³³ *Ibid*, p.xix.

cosmopolitan political world.³⁴

In the essay 'What is a People?' Habermas contends that the nation state can be viewed as a stepping stone in the development of an ever more inclusive form of political community and discursive practice but that it is on the verge of being overtaken and subsumed by supranational developments, most acutely as has been occurring over the past half century or so in Europe with the development of the EU. 'By expanding the parameters for the implementation of human rights and democracy, the nation state made possible a new, more abstract form of social integration beyond the borders of ancestry and dialect'.³⁵ It is clear that Habermas does not consider the nation state as a political form to be antagonistic to human rights or democracy. Indeed he views the establishment of nation states as having generally been expansionary steps that have abstracted beyond the borders represented by ancestry and dialect. This shows that for Habermas a) expansionary steps are feasible and b) that national borders created by nation states do not necessarily signal the limits of possible democratic participation.

In observing what he perceives to be the pattern of an emergent postnational constellation Habermas posits globalisation as not only the backdrop but also the central challenge facing the political and social orders that are present day nation states. He suggests that politics finds itself playing catch up to global markets that have moved beyond the reach of nation states and that national governments face an increasingly complex task of guiding economic policy.³⁶ In the threats and opportunities exposed by economic globalisation Habermas sees the potential for the opening up of a political space that expands to occupy similar territory to that conquered by global markets. Such potential is also identified by Soros but he envisages more pronounced barriers to its realisation.³⁷

³⁴ Habermas, "What is a people?" in *Postnational Constellation*, in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.18.

³⁵ Jurgen Habermas, *What is a People?*, p.18.

³⁶ Jurgen Habermas, '*Learning from Catastrophe?*', in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.49.

³⁷ Soros, *Open Society*, p.305.

In tandem with the opening up of participative political space has gone the development of regimes, some more comprehensive than others, of democracy and social welfare. The welfare state required a relatively advanced bureaucracy to administer it and just such a bureaucratic apparatus was created within the confines of the nation state.

‘Over the course of the nineteenth century, now in the form of the nation state, the modern state began for the first time to open itself to democratic forms of legitimation. In some privileged regions of the world, and under the favourable conditions of the post-war period, the nation state – which had in the meantime established the worldwide model for political organization – succeeded in transforming itself into a social welfare state by regulating the national economy without interfering with its self-correcting mechanisms’.³⁸

Habermas describes the interconnection between the nation state and democracy and their concurrent trajectories of development. He also acknowledges the dominant and hegemonic position that the nation state proved able to establish as a form of political community. The question that Habermas implicitly poses is whether the hegemonic position of the nation state as a worldwide model for political organisation is now in peril or at least in serious doubt. Moreover he seeks to anticipate what may come to replace it.

The nation state came to prominence in Europe initially and was subsequently exported, forcefully or otherwise, across the globe. On this basis, and in conjunction with two savage world wars fought on its territory, it is quite straightforward to understand that it is in Europe that nation states have come under most scrutiny and begun to work towards deep and wide ranging mechanisms of cooperation. However successful or otherwise the European integration process is taken to be Habermas recognises that giving birth to the EU was an often painful labour for European nation states and attempts to recreate it globally are fraught with even more potential complexities and complications.

³⁸ Habermas, ‘*Learning from Catastrophe?*’, p.52.

‘Given all the difficulties of creating a European Union, an agreement for the creation of a worldwide order – especially one that would not simply exhaust itself in creating and legally institutionalizing markets, but would introduce elements of a global political will-formation, and would work toward redressing the undesired social consequences of global commerce – would be much more difficult’.³⁹

Integrating European nation states is one thing, and not a particularly easy one at that, globalising politics or instituting a form of cosmopolitan democracy is quite another and far harder. It is interesting to discover Habermas’s readiness to concede the obstacles that stand in the way of taking politics beyond the nation state and creating global institutions that can wield legitimate political authority and in which individuals can participate as citizens.

Difficult and precarious though the alternatives may be the status quo does not present itself as a viable option for Habermas not least because he refers to nation states as being ‘increasingly overwhelmed by the global economy’.⁴⁰ Like Popper before him, one of Habermas’s principle political concerns is the (re)establishment of political control over economic power⁴¹ and he takes the view that if economics has gone global, or at least trans-national, then politics must do likewise. Habermas also recognises the tentative steps that have been taken along this path with the network of institutions that subsist below the level of the United Nations and which loosely bind together the world’s sovereign states.⁴² It does not escape his attention however that there is a lack of capacity and authority at this level to exercise positive political coordination.

Essentially the international state system is stratified, fragmented and prone to conflict. Or at least, according to Habermas, it can appear so but such perceptions are possibly misplaced.

³⁹ Habermas, *‘Learning from Catastrophe?’*, p.53.

⁴⁰ Habermas, *‘Learning from Catastrophe?’*, p.54.

⁴¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.126.

⁴² Habermas, *‘Learning from Catastrophe?’*, p.54.

‘In a stratified world society, unredeemable conflicts of interest seem to result from the asymmetrical interdependencies between developed nations, newly industrialized nations, and the less developed nations. But this perception is only correct as long as there are no institutionalized procedures of trans-national will-formation that could induce globally competent actors to broaden their individual preferences into a global governance’.⁴³

Habermas perceives the faint contours of trans-national politics developing in institutions such as the EU, the UN and the WTO. There is certainly intergovernmental negotiation occurring within such institutions and particularly in the case of the EU substantive areas of cooperation have developed underpinned by a legal order that regulates both individual and member state conduct. Via the process of actors engaging with each other in trans-national forums the prospect of broadening preferences does arise as a consequence of increasingly intricate relations of interdependence but the shift from that circumstance to one of global governance remains a considerable and profound one and is by no means inevitable.

Habermas is conscious of the scale of such a task as well as that the onus on achieving it continues to rest with nation states.

‘The incorporation of each individual state into binding cooperative procedures of a cosmopolitan community of states would have to be perceived as a part of states’ own domestic policies. Thus the decisive question is whether the civil society and the political public sphere of increasingly large regimes can foster the consciousness of an obligatory cosmopolitan solidarity’.⁴⁴

On this account the domestic and the international have to become as interdependent as to almost merge. From a Popperian perspective it might be asked whether critical rationalism could serve as the basis for cosmopolitan solidarity.

It is not to be denied that such a possibility, however remote, exists at some future point in the historical trajectory of humankind as a political species but it is difficult to perceive at present the sort of sustained shifts of perspective from the national

⁴³ Habermas, ‘*Learning from Catastrophe?*’, p.54.

⁴⁴ Habermas, ‘*Learning from Catastrophe?*’, p.55.

polity to a would be cosmopolitan one that Habermas himself accepts as a necessary prerequisite for its emergence. For all the different and shared perspectives that globalisation can shed light on so too can it illuminate difference and in so doing sharpen boundaries that separate insiders from outsiders. Moreover, for all the subtle shifts that globalising processes can initiate it should not be forgotten that they coexist with a plethora of processes, institutions and mediums that serve to reinforce, consciously or otherwise, national consciousness and the nation state as the pre-eminent political form of political community.

However much Habermas may welcome the coming of cosmopolitan consciousness and solidarity he is far from blind to the distance that remains to be travelled before arriving even anywhere close to such a socio-political destination. He accepts firstly that at this moment in time cosmopolitan solidarity is ‘still lacking’ and secondly, but of greater consequence, that cosmopolitan solidarity ‘would certainly be weaker and less binding than the civil solidarity that developed within nation states’.⁴⁵ Soros, as we have already established, takes a very similar view from a Popperian perspective.⁴⁶

Habermas does not ignore the Hobbesian problem – that of how to create a stable and secure social order. A shift from national to cosmopolitan democratic consciousness does not negate this problem and it provides a further obstacle to the construction of communities of solidarity beyond those that we know to have been achieved. The importance of this point cannot be overstated in terms of a Popperian defence of the nation state. Habermas accepts that national communities tend to be communities of solidarity but he hopes that this can be replicated at a trans-national level albeit in a diluted form. Even in diluted form he considers it worthwhile in order to achieve ancillary benefits such as a greater democratic control over global economic forces. The cosmopolitan consciousness shift offers only projected benefits whilst imposing considerable risks. That is a trade that Popperians should be reluctant and hesitant to countenance.

⁴⁵ Habermas, ‘*Learning from Catastrophe?*’, p.56.

⁴⁶ Soros, *Open Society*, p.113.

In view of the question of solidarity and the challenges that it poses, Habermas takes account of the relationship between democratic procedures and what we might call regimes of solidarity. The concurrence of democracy and the nation state does not go unnoticed.

‘The phenomena of the territorial state, the nation, and a popular economy constituted within national borders formed a historical constellation in which the democratic process assumed a more or less convincing institutional form. And the idea that one part of a democratic society is capable of a reflexive intervention into society as a whole has, until now, been realized only in the context of nation states’.⁴⁷

The nation state and democratic procedures are both reliant on trust amongst citizens and participants for their maintenance. In other words, a degree of solidarity must be constructed amongst community members if citizens are to recognise each other as fellow nationals (or members of a national community), and legitimate co-participants in the democratic process that regulates debate and decision-making within their society. By reference to the conservative element of Popper’s thought it is possible from a Popperian perspective to place a value on the nation state as a form of political community and institutional mechanism that is already known to be supportive of and compatible with democracy. Trans or post-national democracy may or may not be possible but it cannot simply be assumed to work in practice prior to its attempted engineering.

The national democratic constellation that Habermas describes is put at risk, he argues, by a range of developments that can be summarised under the term globalisation. In particular Habermas suggests that global economic forces exert a pressure of ‘de-nationalisation’ whereby societies constituted as nation states are compelled, whether they wish it or not, to open themselves to ‘an economically driven world society’.⁴⁸ Habermas is focused here more on the undermining of the

⁴⁷ Jürgen Habermas, ‘*The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy*’, in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001, p.60.

⁴⁸ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.61.

concept of the sovereign nation state itself whereby it is left so open and exposed that it cannot defend the solidarity that made it a viable locus of community in the first place.

The challenge that Habermas identifies and sets for himself is that of articulating a political response to the challenges posed, as he sees them, by a postnational constellation driven by a global regime of (primarily neo-liberal) economics. In accepting this challenge Habermas barely pauses to consider whether or not the nation state might be redeemed, whether it is sufficiently and irretrievably in crisis to warrant its replacement by a different form of political community. Habermas does however recognise the continued primacy of the nation state as a communal political form in the contemporary world albeit with the caveat that a number of states continue to exhibit features of other political forms such as empires (China), city states (Singapore), theocracies (Iran) and tribal organisations (Kenya). Nevertheless, Habermas suggests that the members of the United Nations ‘form an association of nation states’.⁴⁹ As was highlighted in the previous chapter, the starting point for any consideration of international politics, including a Popperian one, should be that, for now, the international system remains one comprised of and underpinned by nation states. Whatever the level, if any, of crisis that nation states find themselves in they have persisted and continue to persist even in the face of global economic pressures that can constrain their room for manoeuvre.

That the process of communal abstraction (the creation of abstracted communities in which most fellow members will be strangers to any given individual but a communal identity is retained regardless such as in most nations) has come to rest presently at the level of the nation state does not mean that it is inevitably destined to continue beyond it. It might take another step at some future point but it may not. Another option is that a postnational age turns out to be a sub-national one. This is the broad position articulated by communitarians such as Michael Sandel and

⁴⁹ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.62.

Michael Walzer for example.⁵⁰ The significance of this point should not be lost on Popperians: national solidarity is an achievement, and the opportunity exists to defend the nation state as a form of political community that has been proven to be compatible with democracy and open society.

To attempt at this stage to rationally conceive and initiate a conceptual shift of abstraction in terms of political community and consciousness is necessarily a step into the unknown. A more modest, but less risky, proposal would be to attempt to repair that which already exists, the nation state, rather than respond to shifting patterns of economic development by attempting to engineer a radical reconstruction of political community at a postnational or trans-national level. The rush to replace can be tempered by a commitment to repair on the basis of piecemeal social engineering.

Habermas retains little faith in the nation state because he perceives it to have lost control of effective economic decision-making, and hence coordinated social policies, as well as the ability of national political communities to be the collective authors of their own futures.

‘While the state’s sovereignty and monopoly on violence remain formally intact, the growing interdependencies of a world society challenge the basic premise that national politics, circumscribed within a determinate national territory, is still adequate to address the actual fates of individual nation states’.⁵¹

It is not particularly clear what Habermas is referring to when he uses the term world society or on what basis the basic premise of national self-determination is challenged by it. It would be somewhat strange to argue for example that the interdependence of individuals brought about by national economies (beyond their individual control) and national political communities challenges the basic premise of individual self-determination within those communities. Considered in this way

⁵⁰ Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998. Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, Basic Books Inc, 1984.

⁵¹ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.70.

the argument of economic interdependence serving to undermine the viability of nation states is overstated.

Postnational for Habermas, as we have seen, can only mean trans-national and to some extent (more) cosmopolitan. He does not conceive of a sub-national possibility or the merit that could attach to salvaging the nation state as a normatively desirable political form. This is in spite of the fact that he recognises the nation state as representing a significant achievement. Habermas however questions:

‘whether globalization also affects the cultural substrate of civil solidarity that developed in the context of the nation state. Regarded as the institutionalized capacity for democratic self-determination, the political integration of citizens into a large-scale society counts among the undisputed historical achievements of the nation state. But today signs of political fragmentation betray the first breaches in this façade of the nation’.⁵²

The large-scale political integration of society is an achievement of the nation state that is not only beyond dispute according to Habermas but is also historic. Is that political integration and civil solidarity put at risk by processes of globalisation? That such things should come under pressure does not automatically mean they are incapable of withstanding it; Habermas appears to have written off national political integration before a proper assessment can be made of its robustness in the face of global economic forces.

Whilst Habermas argues the necessity of embedding democratic procedures in a common political culture he does not imply that they have to be embedded in national political cultures. National political cultures have shown themselves to be capable of embedding democratic procedures and processes however, and moreover, this capability has not yet been lost by nation states. Democracy not only can still be practised in nation states, it is still practised in them. That being so, if democracy is viewed as normatively desirable then there is a significant element of risk in any attempt to dissolve nation states and the national solidarity that they can give rise to

⁵² Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.71.

when we can have a degree of confidence, based on past experience, that this form of community and solidarity is compatible with democratic practice. Cosmopolitan community and solidarity, insofar as such things exist, have not as yet demonstrated such compatibility and thus should be approached with caution by Popperians.

It is suggested by Habermas that the process of multiculturalism is operating alongside and partly as a substrate of, that of globalisation to both shake and shift the foundations of civic solidarity. He points to the difficulties encountered by nation states with their particular national histories in trying to develop a politics of coexistence that gives recognition to different cultural groups. This process, Habermas describes as often being ‘as precarious as it is painful’.⁵³ The majority culture in a political state, according to Habermas, has to renounce its claims to being the general political culture as such if all citizens are to be permitted and able to identify on equal terms with *the* national political culture. It is not quite as clear cut as this however because the majority culture is likely to remain the dominant partner in any cultural coalition, as it were, that emerges out of multicultural processes and pressures. It may not remain undiluted or unaltered but minority cultures are more likely to have to integrate into it at least to some extent rather than expect recognition that is instant and equal.

Multicultural integration does open up possibilities though as far as Habermas is concerned for changes to be made to the basis of civic solidarity within a state and extend its conceptual boundaries to make it less exclusionary along national lines. Even in circumstances where integration proves difficult or stalls it serves to rupture the commonalities upon which the nation state is constructed.

‘To the degree that this decoupling of political culture from majority culture succeeds, the solidarity of citizens is shifted onto the more abstract foundation of a ‘constitutional patriotism’. If it fails, then the collective collapses into subcultures that seal themselves off from one another. But in either case it has the effect of undermining the substantial commonalities of the nation understood as a community

⁵³ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.74.

of shared descent'.⁵⁴

Although Habermas does talk in terms of degree he essentially posits a binary opposition between the success or failure of the decoupling project with success leading to constitutional patriotism and failure resulting in the rather apocalyptic collapse of civic solidarity within a state.

Of more significance is the concept of constitutional patriotism itself that Habermas perceives to be constructed on the foundations of successful multicultural integration as well as being a normatively desirable abstractive step in the development of civic society. From a Popperian point of view the crucial uncertainty concerns the elasticity of the concept of civic solidarity. The confidence that Habermas holds in constitutional patriotism is in part borne from a realisation that the development of the nation state, and the constitutions it brought in its wake, was itself an abstractive step in terms of solidarity from previous forms of political community such as the tribe or city state. That does not mean however that the next development of civic solidarity will be one of greater abstractness. Indeed Habermas concedes this point himself in acknowledging that failures of multiculturalism have the potential to prompt a collapse in civic solidarity leaving a variety of distinct subcultures that share little by way of commonalities.

It appears to be the case that Habermas is only distantly cognisant of the logic of his own position in terms of the constructed nature of both communities and identities. By this I mean that the reconstruction process could result in sub as easily as postnational communities and identities. At the core of this question is the relationship between individual citizens and their communities as well as the ability of those citizens to be active participants in communal political life.

'The tendency of supposedly homogenous subcultures to seal themselves off from one another may be due in part to attempts to reappropriate real communities, or to invent imaginary ones. One way or another, this tendency is related to the

⁵⁴ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.74.

constructive differentiation of new collective forms of life, and new individual life projects. Both tendencies strengthen centrifugal forces within the nation state, and will sap the resources of civil solidarity unless the historical symbiosis of republicanism and nationalism can be broken, and the republican sensibilities of populations can be shifted onto the foundation of constitutional patriotism'.⁵⁵

This highlights the central thrust of the Habermasian project which is indeed to break the symbiosis of republicanism and nationalism. A newly reconstructed symbiosis of republicanism and constitutional patriotism is what he seeks in its place. If all communities that go beyond face-to-face communities are to be considered imagined communities however, with the nation representing an imaginary exemplar, then a postnational community founded on constitutional patriotism cannot avoid having to be imagined.

Habermas makes two major assumptions that warrant closer scrutiny than he gives to them. The first is the assumption that processes of economic globalisation are terminally undermining to national civil solidarity and the second is to assume that any fracturing of national civil solidarity will result in the reconstruction of that solidarity at a trans-national or supranational level. It is obvious that the second flows from the first in Habermas's schematic in that supranational politics is offered to check, balance and hopefully exert control over global economic forces. The continued existence of nation states suggests that the nationalism-republicanism symbiosis is far from broken even if it may be somewhat frayed. The unintended consequences that could potentially attach to an attempt to radically redesign the nature of political community are wont to make Popperians wary of embarking upon such an initiative.

The postnational constellation, in Habermas's view, is made up of both the processes that can be loosely grouped under the heading of globalisation and some of the subtle shifts, patterns and implications that flow from those processes such as migrations of labour and a cautiously developing regime of international regulation over economic units and practices. The question relevant both to this work and that of Habermas is

⁵⁵ Ibid, p.76.

how the nation state has responded to the alignment of this constellation and furthermore how it should respond to it.

‘Under the changed conditions of the postnational constellation, the nation state is not going to regain its old strength by retreating into its shell. Neo-nationalist protectionism cannot explain how a world society is supposed to be divided back into pieces, unless through a global politics which, right or wrong, it insists is a chimera. A politics of self-liquidation – letting the state simply merge into postnational networks – is just as unconvincing’.⁵⁶

Before disregarding neo-nationalist protectionism as he terms it Habermas would do well to explain what he means by a world society and give evidence as to its actual existence. It cannot simply be assumed as a foregone conclusion.

Similarly, whilst I concur with Habermas that the politics of self-liquidation (whatever that may mean in practice) is not a convincing possibility for nation states there is again an assumed quality to the ‘postnational’ networks that he suggests to have come into view beyond the nation state. Habermas does not detail what these networks consist in and although it is easy to conceive of an array of international networks as they pertain to politics, economics, commerce, social organisations and academia for example it is more difficult to envisage postnational networks that are close to representing viable repositories for national identities and solidarities. In short, a complex range of networks have developed primarily between nation states or between organisations such as multinational corporations that remain, to a greater or lesser extent, regulated and controlled by particular nation states.

This issue is especially acute for Habermas when considered in the context of European integration and the development of the web of relations, connections and networks, not to mention legislative competency that is the European Union. A political postnational constellation can only respond effectively to the challenges posed by globalisation if ways can be found to develop new forms of democratic

⁵⁶ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.81.

self-steering for societies.⁵⁷ Habermas considers the European Union to be an exemplary case in which to test the conditions for a democratic politics beyond the nation state. He admits to being interested less in the ‘motives for or against the further development of the political union, and more in the strength of the reasons that can engage both supporters and sceptics; reasons for and against the gamble on a postnational democracy’.⁵⁸ It is complicated to fully separate out these two issues and facets of the debate but nonetheless Habermas makes a valid point that whatever views are taken of European integration the arguments are underpinned by notions of democracy and the conditions conducive to it. For Popperians, the EU as an institution can and should be assessed on the basis of the contribution that it makes to promoting and defending the concept of open society. This is precisely what Soros attempted to do in setting out a vision of the European Union as a prototype for a global open society.

5.4 Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society

In November 2006 George Soros delivered a speech in Brussels entitled ‘Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society’ and argued that Europe was in search of a political identity.⁵⁹ He sets out his view that ‘the European Union embodies the principles of an open society and it ought to serve as a model and motive force for a global open society’.⁶⁰ At the outset Soros draws a contrast between tribal and universal sources of morality and claims that the former leads to closed societies whilst the latter gives rise to open societies ‘guided by universal human rights’ that seek to ‘protect and promote the freedom of the individual’.⁶¹ What is interesting about this formulation is that although the contrast could be used to denote different types of political community – tribal versus cosmopolitan for example – it could also

⁵⁷ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.88.

⁵⁸ Habermas, *Postnational Constellation*, p.88.

⁵⁹ George Soros, *Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society Speech*, 2006. The speech can be found at http://www.georgesoros.com/brussels_speech

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

indicate different principles to underpin a particular form of political community such as the nation state. Particular nation states could be animated by either tribal or universal morality. This is a point that Tamir also makes in her defence of liberal nationalism.⁶²

The process by which the European Union was formed is hailed by Soros for establishing laws and institutions which have facilitated the peaceful coexistence of people with divergent views and interests. In this regard, he considers the EU to be a 'textbook' example of the open society.⁶³

'It consists of a number of nations and nationalities, none of which occupies a controlling position and all of which are pledged to maintain democratic institutions and protect individual freedoms and human rights. Even this may be appropriate to an open society because, as Karl Popper argued, our imperfect understanding does not permit permanent and eternally valid definitions of social arrangements. The arrangements must reflect the will of the participants and they must be open to adjustment and improvement'.⁶⁴

The most striking aspect of Soros' reflections here is his acknowledgement that it is nations that have created the EU and in doing so, have created a cooperative process that is not only conducive to open society but is to be considered a textbook example of it. This is conclusive evidence that a Popperian such as Soros is content to accept that the nation state is compatible with open society but moreover that the expansion of open society principles, above and beyond the nation state, can be achieved by nation states working in concert with each other.

Soros makes the claim that no single nation occupies a controlling position in the EU and whilst this is a reasonable interpretation it can still be argued that a significant differential of influence is to be found amongst member states. A small state such as Luxembourg is hardly likely to be as influential in shaping the direction of European integration as a large one such as Germany. In a similar vein, although a large

⁶² Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993, p.79.

⁶³ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

⁶⁴ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

member state, and substantial contributor to the EU budget, the United Kingdom's influence within the European Union is at least potentially hampered because it has not adopted the Euro currency.

Slightly more contentious however is the fact that Soros argues the European Union to be a textbook example of open society but then also notes that in an open society the arrangements must reflect the will of the participants. It is at best debatable as to whether or not this applies in the context of the EU and the rejection of the proposed European Constitution in France and the Netherlands suggests that the will of participants is not entirely reflected in the arrangements that are the present day European Union. It does of course depend to some extent as to who the 'participants' are considered to be in this regard given that it was the governments of France and the Netherlands that were actively participative in the process of agreeing and then signing the Constitution prior to its rejection by their respective electorates. This returns us to the democratic deficit of the EU and seems to highlight that there remains aspects of the European integration process and the operation of EU institutions that are at odds with open society principles of democratic accountability and participation.

Soros does accept that the process which has created the European Union 'was driven by an elite and the population at large has felt left out'.⁶⁵ If this is so, then the claim that European integration has been a textbook example of open society in action appears rather more dubious since for Popper, giving the population a degree of control over political power was absolutely central to the concept of open society.⁶⁶ Soros is far from convinced of the merits of referenda determining the future direction of Europe, believing them to be raw and capricious devices.⁶⁷ Whilst Popper did not specifically advocate direct democracy it is likely that he would have been concerned at the 'population at large' being excluded from decision making and, more significantly, by elite driven processes.

⁶⁵ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

⁶⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume I*, p.111.

⁶⁷ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

Indeed it is particularly unlikely that Popper would have been reassured by Soros's description of the political elite directing European integration as 'far-sighted and purposeful'.⁶⁸ Irrespective of the accuracy or otherwise of that description, the Popperian concern is with the prospect of bad leaders and seeking to limit the damage they might be able to inflict on a state and its people.⁶⁹ By describing the elite in the manner that he does, Soros conveys the impression of them being almost Platonic Philosopher King-like figures. The whole thrust of the open society stems from Popper's insight that the far-sightedness and purposefulness of leaders cannot be guaranteed nor indeed that such qualities would be employed benignly. The process of European integration and the development of the EU has brought considerable benefit when viewed from an open society perspective but it is possible that it has been beneficial despite being an elite driven process rather than because of being driven by an elite. From a Popperian point of view, the successes of the European Union, such as enhanced peace and prosperity, can be celebrated with Soros whilst still raising concerns about the procedures by which they have been achieved. The overriding flaw of the European Union in open society terms remains the concentration of political power in an institution such as the Commission which lacks democratic accountability in the Popperian sense – that is, the ability of the ruled to remove their rulers.⁷⁰

What is perhaps of most interest to Soros however in relation to the EU is that he considers it to have been 'brought into existence by a process of piecemeal social engineering, the method Karl Popper considered appropriate to an open society'.⁷¹ Soros regards the process of European integration as an example of piecemeal social engineering because it proceeded step by step whilst setting limited objectives with limited timetables.⁷² He also argues that the integrative process was aided first by the threat from the Soviet Union and then by globalisation which tended to favour

⁶⁸ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

⁶⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.121.

⁷⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.127.

⁷¹ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

⁷² Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

larger economic units and worries about a loss of momentum following the defeat of the Constitution in the French and Dutch referenda.⁷³ It is Soros' hope that the future development of the EU need not rely on perceived threats but rather can be inspired by the concept of open society and serve as 'the motive force for a global open society'.⁷⁴ He envisages the European Union setting an example to the world in international cooperation and regards it as already having begun to do so.

'Member states have delegated some aspects of their sovereignty in order to create a common market and they have kept the prospect of membership open to others. This has been a powerful tool in turning candidate countries into open societies'.⁷⁵

The issue of sovereignty is raised again here by Soros and he regards what he terms the delegation of various aspects of sovereignty as practised in the EU as an instructive model for cooperation on a more global scale. This notion is not quite as clear cut as Soros might assume though.

Firstly, it is worth reiterating that whilst sovereignty may have been extensively delegated in some spheres – most obviously the economic – there has been far less delegation in others such as foreign and defence policy. This is something that Soros recognises and laments but he offers no indication of how delegation might be achieved in these areas where hitherto it has been rejected. Secondly, it is not inevitable that the delegation of sovereignty will inevitably continue and increase even in those areas that it has reached an advanced stage in currently. If sovereignty has merely been delegated by nation states to the European Union then it points at least to the possibility that it may in future be repatriated. It also raises the question of who is doing the delegating. In 'The Bubble of American Supremacy' Soros argues the case that sovereignty belongs to the people.⁷⁶ It is not entirely evident then even from his philosophical perspective, that political elites are entitled to delegate sovereignty such as has occurred in the EU whilst leaving out the

⁷³ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

⁷⁴ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

⁷⁵ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

⁷⁶ George Soros, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, London: Phoenix, 2004, p.102.

population at large.

Soros makes clear that he sees little prospect for the moment of the European Union taking on a global leadership role to rival that of the United States.⁷⁷ It is interesting to note however the extent to which he views the EU as having reshaped political order and structures in Europe. Most important in this sense has been the prospect of EU membership serving as a powerful tool to turn candidate countries into open societies. This highlights from a Popperian perspective that the European Union can play an important part in promoting and entrenching liberal democracy within nation states, particularly those states that seek membership of the Union. Soros understands the key contribution of the EU here as being to create national open societies that are prepared to cooperate and delegate aspects of their sovereignty. In this sense the European Union is not creating an alternative post-national form of political community but rather is facilitating the emergence of national open societies and providing a cooperative forum for those societies to tackle common issues.

For Popperians seeking to foster open societies the EU represents a considerable opportunity but also a potential threat. Insofar as the EU can encourage members to become and remain open societies then it can be a powerful force in support of Popper's conception of liberalism. The democratic deficits that it exhibits cannot simply be ignored or wished away however because they threaten to undermine the openness of the societies that comprise the EU. It is for this reason that Popperians should give more thought to protecting and defending liberal democratic nation states as exemplars of open societies. This need not entail the adoption of a euro-sceptic position but it would suggest looking anew at the EU's subsidiarity principle for example to ensure that decision making is indeed taken at the level closest to those whom it affects and, more importantly, that effective scrutiny can take place.

There is no disputing the many challenges and problems that transcend national

⁷⁷ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

borders, from climate change to international drugs trafficking, instability in global financial markets to terrorism. Such challenges do require concerted and cooperative international responses, and they also require that power be exercised. The questions that Popperians should keep in mind are who wields such power and how can it be limited in order to prevent damage arising from its potential abuse? Such questions could usefully guide the future development of the European Union and help it further enhance a role as a promoter and guardian of open societies. These questions do not prompt immediate or simple solutions to the democratic and accountability deficits from which the EU suffers but they can focus attention on open society principles and serve as a reminder that nation states continue to have great influence over European integration. Defending the nation state need not be an attack on the EU and it can be done with a view to protecting democracy and open society.

On the account provided by Soros, the EU has made a significant impact on the European continent in terms of engineering open societies but substantial untapped potential remains for it to be a more active engineer on the global stage.⁷⁸ He points to the ample resources possessed by the European Union that could be utilised for the purpose of promoting open societies. These resources include half of the world's overseas development assistance, the world's biggest single market, 45,000 diplomats, almost 100,000 peacekeepers and the prospect of using trade, aid and the prize of membership as catalysts to encourage neighbouring states to become open societies.⁷⁹ The EU does aim to protect human rights, promote pluralist democracy, and consolidate the rule of law as fundamental objectives and regards promoting these objectives as an overarching principle in addressing itself to external relations.⁸⁰ Soros does not suggest in any detail how the EU should use its resources in promotion of open society but it would appear as though he seeks the attachment of more stringent criteria to trade and aid agreements.⁸¹ The most important point here though, and indeed of the speech as a whole, concerns what Soros means by 'a

⁷⁸ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

⁷⁹ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

⁸⁰ http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/index_en.htm

⁸¹ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

global open society’.

In setting out what he means by this concept Soros posits only a very limited cosmopolitan ambition and that it is highly unlikely that the European integration process could simply be extrapolated to a global scale.

‘A global open society emphatically does not mean global government. Government inevitably interferes with the freedom of the individual. A global government could not avoid being repressive even if it were built on liberal principles. A global open society could not even be as closely integrated as the European Union because the affinity among the member states would be less pronounced. What a global open society does stand for is the rule of law on an international scale’.⁸²

It is apparent from this description that when Soros speaks of a global open society he means a society of states that abide by some form of international law in their relations with each other. Such a vision could potentially be a trans-national one comprised of various regional blocs, along the lines of the EU, forming a global society of supranational states. Significantly though, there is absolutely nothing in this vision that is at odds with a world comprised of democratically constituted nation states that cooperate and adhere to international law.

The political world we inhabit in the early part of the twenty first century is not a global open society. How to proceed then for those who wish to make it so, or at least advance in the direction of that goal? However we might proceed, Soros is adamant that any global society that can be engineered into existence will be only loosely integrated with member states sharing perhaps a broad but in all likelihood thin affinity. The choice that Soros implies but does not explicitly confront revolves around what to do with the form of political community that is the nation state. Should Popperians support it as a tried and tested forum for the practice of democracy and focus theoretical and practical effort on democratising those nation states that are undemocratic and seek to strengthen international law that governs relations between (nation) states? Alternatively, is the nation state to be viewed as an

⁸² Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006

impediment to the development of a global open society and thus support given to post-national initiatives that seek to overcome the national basis of political community?

To be fair to Soros he has at least given some indication as to what he means by a global open society and in doing so has addressed the ambiguities in Popperian philosophy between open society (universal) and open societies (plural) to a greater extent than Popper himself did. Popper held that the move from tribalism to open societies was necessarily a move away from nationalism and the nation state as an essentially tribal form of political community.⁸³ Soros does not make this assumption and appears quite content to conceive of the prospect of a global open society that is at the same time a world comprised of nation states. Of course Soros is no nationalist and his interest is in democratic communities, and expanding their number, rather than national communities. It just so happens that many democratic communities, that is communities who share and participate in a particular democratic system of self-government, also happen to be national communities.

Popper did not speak of global government and he spoke rather in passing and dismissively of the nation state without articulating any particular post-national or supranational alternative. Even more remarkably, he managed to dismiss the nation state and yet continue to assume it in his theorising since it was western democratic nation states that he praised as providing a better and more just order for individuals than any other in recorded history.⁸⁴ In pursuing a global open society Soros is attempting to spread the democratic state, be it western or not, across the globe. His philanthropy has this task as its aim and his Open Society Institutes have been set up to facilitate piecemeal social reform of pre-existing (national) state structures and nudge them towards democracy and adherence to the principles of open society.

Soros considers the European Union a potential ally in such a task, albeit a hitherto tentative one. The task that he sets the EU, as that of his institutes, is not the

⁸³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.9.

⁸⁴ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.13.

replacement of the nation state but the reform of particular nation states that are to varying degrees closed societies. Popper viewed the nation state as tribal and therefore a closed form of society. Soros takes a more nuanced look and sees that nation states can be either open or closed and regards the immediate task as not to speculate as to their possible demise but to try and bring a greater degree of openness to those that remain closed. In laying out his hopes and fears for the future development of the EU Soros refers to the world being in need of ‘a more united Europe committed to the principles of open society’.⁸⁵ The further uniting of Europe that Soros envisages is not designed to eclipse the nation state and so he conceives of a Europe of open democratic nation states setting an example for the application of the rule of law on an international scale.

5.5 Conclusion – Open Society and the Nation State in Europe

This thesis has argued that those of a Popperian persuasion who believe in the concept of open society as a normative political model cannot afford to ignore the enduring influence of the nation state as a form of political community and framework for international politics. If open societies are to be pursued and instituted at the present time then it is in such a context that they must be so. In the continent of Europe however that context is complicated somewhat by the extent to which twenty seven nation states cooperate in a structure of political and economic integration. Nation states have not been replaced or rendered redundant in Europe but they have become enmeshed in an intricate cooperative web that has changed the political landscape and created a supranational institutional structure. In this chapter an attempt has been made to ascertain the implications of such developments for the prospects of advancing the cause of open society in Europe and beyond.

As discussed in the case of Soros the EU represents an opportunity for the further development of the concept of open society. Indeed it could even serve as a

⁸⁵ Soros, *Europe as a Prototype Speech*, 2006.

precursor to some form of global, albeit modestly conceived, notion of open society. Soros holds the development of the EU to be an exercise in piecemeal social engineering and whilst the process of its creation may bear some relation to that methodology it has not been straightforwardly so. Piecemeal social engineering suggests the planning and testing of a system by a recognisable body or group but the process of European integration has been a slightly more complicated process of negotiation amongst increasing numbers of national governments, each with varying priorities, concerns and degrees of influence. This makes it difficult to trace clear relationships between European integration and its contribution to the development of the concept of open society.

European Union member states are open societies themselves in terms of being democratically constituted and upholding individual and human rights. What is significant though is that those member states are open societies as nation states and it would be rather a stretch to argue the existence of a European open society at a supranational level. Where supranational institutions hold power that is difficult to check, balance and make democratically accountable then the prospect arises of open society being undermined and marginalised at a national level. Whilst democratic deficits at the EU level have thus far proved hard to overcome it is certainly not inevitable that they will remain so. Such a future prospect is not disputed here but for as long as they exist they cannot be ignored by Popperians. In this sense, a defence of the nation state, and the democratic politics it facilitates at the moment, can be interpreted simultaneously as a defence of open society.

An intriguing prospect is prompted by the recognition that EU member states are nation states as well as being open societies: that prospect is that national open societies are capable of considerable cooperation with each other and of relating to each other on a primarily legal basis, underpinned by a supranational judicial system. If Europe is to serve as an example to the rest of the world in terms of the development and maintenance of open societies then the global lesson to be drawn is not for any need to replace the nation state as a form of political community but to

strive to render nation states open forms of society. Achieving this in Europe has been neither quick nor easy and we can only anticipate that on a global scale the process would be markedly slower and more difficult owing to the great diversity of political, economic and social circumstance to be found in different countries around the world. A world comprised entirely of open societies remains a distant aim but for Popperians that seek to bring it closer now is not the time to abandon the nation state. Nation states remain capable of sustaining democratic politics and open societies and are deserving of continued support from Popperians in Europe and beyond. If, in time, supranational entities prove capable of greater democratisation and display an enhanced ability to sustain social solidarity then advocates of open society will have little reason to mourn the passing of the nation state. Until the arrival of such a day however, the best prospects of promoting and defending open societies are to be found in the frameworks provided by nation states.

6

Promoting Open Society and Defending the Nation State

6.1 Open Society in a World of Nation States

Karl Popper professed himself to be ‘in search of a better world’¹ and the nature of his search is revealed in his philosophies of science and politics. For Popper, a better world was a more rational world, a world in which the individual is freed from the perceived strictures of the tribe, and a world in which the fundamental purpose of the state is the protection of individual.² Politically and philosophically Popper held that these sorts of developments accompanied transitions from closed societies to open societies. Such transitions are not particularly easy to bring about or indeed, somewhat more surprisingly, come to terms with as Popper concedes in suggesting that western ‘civilization has not yet fully recovered from the shock of its birth’.³ The civilization that Popper seeks to defend is one that aims at ‘humaneness and reasonableness’, at ‘equality and freedom’.⁴ Popper’s purpose in defending open society from its enemies is to counter ‘those reactionary movements which have tried, and still try, to overthrow civilization and to return to tribalism’.⁵ As far as he is concerned, nationalism is one such reactionary movement and thus a threat to the civility of open society.⁶

My aim in this thesis has been to argue that Popper significantly overestimates the extent to which nationalism is necessarily a reactionary movement and danger to open society. Even more importantly, there is no reason why the form of political

¹ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, Routledge, London, 1992, p.12.

² Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1-The Spell of Plato*, Routledge, London, 1984, p.110.

³ *Ibid*, p.1.

⁴ *Ibid*, p.1.

⁵ *Ibid*, p.2.

⁶ Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2-Hegel and Marx*, Routledge, London, 1986, p.49.

community that is the nation state cannot aim at humaneness and reasonableness, at equality and freedom. Insofar as they can and do, nation states can be open societies. This is something that Popper implicitly acknowledged when praising the openness of the social order of western democracies.⁷ The western civilization that Popper commends is a civilization that is not only comprised of nation states but one that has also had to confront within itself some of the darkest forces of nationalism.⁸ Negative or closed nationalism is undoubtedly a threat to open society but positive or open nationalism need not be and there is scope to defend open societies at a national level.

Popper does not recognise any distinction between different types of nationalism and so for him it is inherently a negative and closed force, an enemy of open society. Popper judges nationalism hostile to open society on account of its tribal appeal to passion and prejudice as well as for its attempt to replace individual responsibility with a collective or group responsibility.⁹ One of the reasons that Popper's attack on nationalism lacks nuance is that the dichotomies he sets up are exaggerated. Thus, for Popper, responsibility must either be individual or be collective rather than some combination thereof, society is ruled either by reason or by passion rather than a balance between the two, and instincts must be civilised and universal or else must be regarded as tribal. Popper himself defends open society passionately and so it is difficult for him to maintain that passion should be marginalised in political life.¹⁰ After all, he would surely not object to an individual's passion to combat poverty for example.

Popper suggests that the fundamental problem of political theory is the problem of checks and balances, and of trying to create institutions by which political power can

⁷ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.13.

⁸ Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World*, London: Penguin Books, 2007, p.76.

⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.49.

¹⁰ In the preface to the second edition of the *Open Society and its Enemies* Popper writes that 'the fact that most of the book was written during the grave years when the outcome of the war was uncertain may help to explain why some of its criticism strikes me today as more emotional and harsher in tone than I could wish'. Karl Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.xi.

be controlled and tamed.¹¹ Popper appears not to fully appreciate that this fundamental problem remains whether or not politics is conducted in nation states. Moreover, it is a problem that can be addressed within the framework that is the nation state; solving the problem of checks and balances does not necessitate a search for a new post-national form of political community. Power held at any level can potentially be abused, including at a supranational level such as in the context of the European Union. Even in the case of the EU however, checks and balances could be instituted at a national level in order to ensure greater scrutiny and oversight of EU legislation by national parliaments. This would have the potential to offer greater protection to citizens affected by power wielded at a supranational level.

It is noteworthy that whilst Popper attacks nationalism and clearly regards it as an enemy of open society his overriding attitude towards it is dismissive. It is almost as though he does not consider nationalism to be a worthy adversary and so he derides Hegel for example more as a historicist than a nationalist.¹² Popper considers nationality to be an opaque concept and expresses bemusement that it has found acceptance as a fundamental political category.¹³ He suggests that it is not at all clear why nationality should be deemed more important as a political category than religion for instance, or loyalty to a dynasty, or, more importantly, to ‘a political creed like democracy’.¹⁴ Popper’s advocacy of open society can be read as an attempt to defend a particular political creed, deemed to be rational, individualist and universal in potential scope against what he contends are tribal creeds such as nationalism.

There are two key oversights however that detract from the clarity of Popper’s defence of open society against the tribalism of nationalism and the nation state. The first, as already mentioned, is the dismissal of nationalism prior to a consideration of its complexities and varying interpretations. This oversight can partly be explained

¹¹ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.219.

¹² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.27.

¹³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹⁴ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

by the circumstances of the period in which Popper wrote his 'Open Society and its Enemies' with the outcome of the Second World War still hanging in the balance but such an explanation does not prevent the oversight from skewing Popper's attitude toward the nation state as a concept. Popper is content to simply write off the national state as not only 'inapplicable' but also as never having been 'clearly conceived'.¹⁵ Although it is readily apparent that Popper found no philosophical merit in the principle of the national state it is altogether more difficult to understand his seeming refusal to recognise the political reality of the nation state and its foundational role in the structure of international politics.

Popper heaps scorn on the nation state by referring to it as 'an irrational, a romantic and utopian dream'.¹⁶ Even if he means this in a philosophical sense it cannot be denied that the nation state is a dream that has become a political reality. Indeed it is owing to the continued reality of the nation state that advocates of open society today should be prepared to engage with it as a concept. Are nation states and open societies really incompatible? Can an individual be both a nationalist and a Popperian liberal? These questions have been interwoven throughout the thesis as part of a reconsideration of Popper's philosophy. No major incompatibility has been found between the nation state and open society and so taking up a position as a Popperian nationalist is not ideologically incoherent.

Popper's own somewhat incoherent position on the nation state, whereby he dismisses it as a utopian dream whilst expressing his admiration for the arrangements constituted by western liberal democracies, can be further explained by his second oversight in defending open society. The oversight at issue here is that in formulating his theory of open society Popper paid only passing attention to the nature and boundaries of political community that it might be thought to encompass. Most obviously the extent to which Popper intended open society to be a cosmopolitan concept is left ambiguous and unresolved.¹⁷ He speaks in very general

¹⁵ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.51.

¹⁷ Vincent suggests that on this point Popper did not really work his idea out in any detail and that it

terms about reason, supported by imagination, enabling ‘us to understand that men who are far away, whom we shall never see, are like ourselves, and that their relations to one another are like our relations to those we love’.¹⁸ This is far from a clear and explicit endorsement of cosmopolitanism however. It is, as discussed in chapter five, far less clear than the explicitly post-national position outlined by Habermas for example.¹⁹

Popper also expresses ‘faith in the rational unity of man’ which he views as having a Christian basis in the belief in the ‘brotherhood of all men’.²⁰ He makes no mention though of how far the brotherhood of open society is to extend. Does the rational unity of humanity entail a political unity of humanity, and if so of what sort? There are two fairly obvious ways in which a degree of political unity might be achieved. The first is via some form of cosmopolitan global governance arrangement.²¹ Popper makes no attempt to articulate or defend such an arrangement however and this suggests that although Popper may have based his philosophy on a broad moral cosmopolitanism he did not see a need to translate that into a systematic political cosmopolitanism.

An alternative way of achieving a degree of political unity for humankind as a whole is to ensure that all political communities across the world are constituted on a similar basis.²² This would appear to be Popper’s preference but he does not make it clear and so to some extent leaves his position open to a range of interpretation. Constituting open societies in all parts of the world is at least a plausible interpretation of Popper’s intent and his support for western democracies (plural) is evidence that it was the spread of liberal democratic states that was the primary

is not clear exactly what he had in mind. Andrew Vincent, “Popper and Nationalism”, in Jarvie, Ian, Karl Milford and David Miller (eds), *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006, p.169.

¹⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.240.

¹⁹ Jurgen Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001.

²⁰ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.243.

²¹ See Brian Barry, *International Society from a Cosmopolitan Perspective*, in Nardin, Terry and David Mapel (eds), *International Society – Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.

²² This is the method detailed by Immanuel Kant in *Perpetual Peace*, New York: Cosimo Inc., 2005.

concern of Popperian political philosophy. As discussed in the previous chapter, it is in this way that Soros interprets and applies Popper's philosophy to guide his philanthropy. Soros is demonstrating through his Open Society Institute that liberal democratic open societies can be encouraged and spread in the framework and context of the nation state. To recognise as much is not to posit any kind of symbiotic relationship between the nation state and open society but merely to acknowledge that the nation state is not necessarily or intrinsically inhospitable to the concept of open society.

This sort of insight matters to someone such as Soros because he is attempting to apply Popper's political philosophy and the notion of open society in particular, in a very practical sense. His task for the moment remains that of attempting to open up national societies such as in the countries of the Balkans. Where efforts to extend the principles of open society have been slow or hampered, as was the case following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Soros lays the blame at the door of existing open societies that failed to recognise the available opportunities and seize the moment.²³ It is interesting that he does not blame nationalism or the framework of the nation state. This thesis has sought to provide some theoretical ground to underlie the kind of practical effort being undertaken by Soros. He instinctively grasped that furthering the concept of open society required the re-engineering of existing political communities to make them more open and further, that the nation state as a form of political community is not an impediment to that task.

It is worth reiterating the two distinct but related tasks that Soros views as being necessary to create the conditions for a global open society. The first of these is to foster the development of open societies throughout the world and the second is to establish rules and institutions that would govern the behaviour of states toward their own citizens and one another.²⁴ This thesis has focused attention on the issue of fostering open societies in a world of nation states. The argument that has been

²³ George Soros, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, London: Phoenix, 2004, p.164.

²⁴ George Soros, *Open Society – Reforming Global Capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000, p.308.

defended is that the conditions of an open society at the present moment in history, as set out by Soros, can be accommodated in the political community that is the nation state. The conditions that Soros outlines are (1) regular, free, and fair elections, (2) free and pluralistic media, (3) the rule of law upheld by an independent judiciary, (4) constitutional protection for minority rights, (5) a market economy, (6) a commitment to peaceful resolution of conflicts, and (7) laws that are enforced to curb corruption.²⁵ This is a more comprehensive list than any provided by Popper but it is unlikely that Popper would have objected to any of the conditions that Soros sets. Most crucially of all however is that each of these conditions can be achieved, and indeed have been achieved, in nation states.

It is entirely possible that in the future these conditions will come to be achieved at a supranational or post-national level. The development of the European Union has in fact seen some of these conditions met at a supranational level. At the present historical juncture though it remains liberal democratic nation states that meet these conditions most fully and straightforwardly and it is on such a basis that a defence of the concept of open society in the early part of the twenty-first century can be undertaken in conjunction with a defence of the nation state. The very fact that nation states are capable of being constituted as liberal democracies undermines Popper's argument that they are inherently closed societies based on tribal collectivism. The central aim of this thesis has been to illustrate that, contrary to Popper's view, open society is not incompatible with the nation state.

6.2 Popper's Conservative Liberalism

The starting point for the work of this thesis was to examine Popper's philosophy of science. The particular importance of doing so is because Popper theorised science prior to turning his attention to politics and his philosophy of science very much informs his subsequent political philosophy and the significance that he attaches to the concept of open society. The key aim of chapter two was to come to an initial

²⁵ Soros, *Open Society*, p.133.

understanding of the ideological orientation of Popperian philosophy that would inform subsequent analysis of Popper's approach to political reform and political community. The chapter sought to uncover both the liberal and conservative elements that influence the nature of Popper's philosophy, and his political philosophy in particular.

The comparison between Popper and Kuhn's philosophies of science was broadly speaking a comparison of a liberal and a conservative understanding of science. Popper's falsificationism methodology stresses that science proceeds by a process of trial and error with the propounding of hypotheses that are subsequently subjected to empirical testing. It was suggested by Fuller that it is more precise to characterise Popper's deductivism as anti-inductivism and similarly that his liberalism is more accurately characterised as anti-authoritarianism, just as his individualism encapsulates an anti-holism.²⁶ Kuhn, by contrast, posits that scientists work for the most part in secure paradigms that guide and contextualise their everyday research. The key difference that distinguishes Kuhn's conservative account of science from Popper's more liberal one is that for Kuhn the establishment of scientific fields of inquiry comes via the abandonment of critical discourse whilst for Popper precisely the opposite is true.

This divergence helps to establish Popper's approach to rationality and what he terms critical rationality. Popper considers all human beings to possess at least the potential to employ critical rationality and it is this that underpins his faith in the rational unity of humankind. An element of conservatism is to be uncovered in Popper's thought however if critical rationalism is itself viewed as a tradition that Popper seeks to defend. Popper goes so far as to suggest that traditions are needed to link institutions and the intentions and valuations of individuals.²⁷ The role that Popper is prepared to accord to tradition also has significance for the defence that he makes of open society. Popper traces the origins of western civilization and open forms of society to Ancient Greece and regards Socrates as something of a father of

²⁶ Steve Fuller, *Kuhn v Popper*, p.142.

²⁷ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.156.

critical rationalism.²⁸ He is thus defending a civilizational tradition, and seeking to conserve a particular form of social and political organisation: that of open society. I have suggested that can best be done currently in the context of the nation state.

In terms of the nature of political change, Popper advocates what he calls piecemeal social engineering. This is a means of conducting political reform that attempts to be alert to mistakes and unintended consequences by concentrating on relatively small-scale tightly controlled reform experiments. Popper's concern is to minimise the potential for damage that he perceives often to flow from large-scale revolutionary projects. He says specifically that the piecemeal engineer 'will avoid undertaking reforms of a complexity and scope which makes it impossible ... to disentangle causes and effects'.²⁹ In terms of fostering the development of open societies it would make sense, on this basis, for piecemeal engineers to continue to work with the familiar framework of the nation state rather than seek to circumvent the nation in a bid to construct a post-national open society. Even although Soros regards the development of the EU as an experiment in piecemeal social engineering it does not currently, as a political entity in its own right, fulfil the conditions of an open society.

Chapter two explored the extent to which there is a conservative aspect to Popper's liberalism and did so without denying that Popper is indeed a liberal. He defines a liberal as someone who values individual freedom and is alive to the dangers inherent in all forms of power and authority.³⁰ Popper fits his own description of a liberal and the normative thrust of his political philosophy aims to emancipate individuals from closed societies and find institutional checks and balances to minimise the ability of power to do harm. Opening up closed societies is a potentially revolutionary undertaking however, as Soros readily admits.³¹

This poses a challenge for contemporary Popperians and advocates of open society,

²⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.185.

²⁹ Popper, *Poverty of Historicism*, p.67.

³⁰ Popper, *Search of a Better World*, p.160.

³¹ Soros, *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.164.

is revolutionary action designed to transform a closed society into an open one an acceptable risk to take? The conservative element to Popper's philosophy invites caution in answering this question and Soros is perhaps even more cognisant of that with his insight that chaos, be it revolutionary or otherwise, can be as much an enemy of open society as authoritarianism.³² His philanthropy has focused on attempts to gradually engineer the opening of societies from within and by employing such methods pays heed to Popper's warnings of the dangers of revolution and large-scale utopian planning. A further cautionary note is struck by this thesis with the proposition that for the moment to try to engineer post-national forms of political community to replace the nation state would be to undertake reform of a scale and scope that is unlikely to be able to remain piecemeal and gradual for long.

6.3 Open Society and the Nature of Political Community

Having explored the ideological orientation of Popperian philosophy in chapter two, the third chapter of the thesis took a closer look at the institutional requirements of open society as well as addressing the nature of political community entailed by it. A fuller understanding of the notion of open society was sought by examining it in relation to the communitarian critique of liberalism developed by Michael Sandel. An additional comparative framework utilised here to assess the nature of political community represented by open society was that of the pluralist perspective outlined by John Gray.

One significant conclusion drawn in chapter three from a close study of Popper's defence of open society is just how little he has to say as regards the nature or boundaries of the type of political community that he defends. With his repeated stress on the value of the individual over and above the collective, Popper does not

³² Soros, *Open Society*, p.107.

really define an open society as a community in any systematic way.³³ In Sandelian terms Popper's open society can be categorised as a procedural republic but not in an altogether straightforward manner. Sandel suggests that whilst liberty can be 'understood as a function of democratic institutions and dispersed power, liberty in the procedural republic is defined in opposition to democracy, as an individual's guarantee against what the majority might will'.³⁴ Popper's conception of open society understands liberty in both of these respects.

Popper does consider democracy to be a necessary check on the power of rulers and as such a central aspect of an open society.³⁵ We recall that he also takes the view however, which is in no way contradictory, that 'majorities often arrive at mistaken decisions, and we must insist that minorities have rights and freedoms that no majority decision can overrule'.³⁶ Sandel would likely view this claim as indicative that Popper's open society is at least to some extent a procedural republic and thereby 'must draw on a sense of community it cannot supply and may even undermine'.³⁷ As was pointed out in chapter three, Popper does not envisage open society as binding individuals into a tight form of community but his procedural account of politics does have a sense of unity that is central to it with an attendant morality. Popper's open society is not to be regarded then as devoid of communal bonds. As far as instituting open societies goes the nation state offers at least the prospect of communal solidarity to underpin Popper's procedural liberalism.

John Gray's pluralist philosophy is also employed in chapter three as a challenge to Popperian liberalism and the concept of open society. Gray's argument is that the real agenda for political thought is to be found amidst the conflicting claims of communities and diverse ways of life.³⁸ In contrast, the political morality of

³³ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.101.

³⁴ Michael Sandel, The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self, *Political Theory*, Volume 12, Number 1, February 1984.

³⁵ Karl Popper, *Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2*, p.160.

³⁶ Karl Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.221.

³⁷ Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self", *Political Theory*, Volume 12, No. 1, February 1984, p.91.

³⁸ John Gray, *Enlightenment's Wake*, Routledge, London, 1997, p.129.

Popper's open society is rooted in individualism. The vagueness of the common ways of life to which Gray refers is more pronounced than the relatively vague account of political community that Popper provides. Gray proposes a tolerance of non-liberal regimes that Popper would not be prepared to countenance but the key insight of Gray's work as it applies to attempts to engineer open societies is that grand projects of liberal transformation are likely to encounter a multitude of barriers in a world comprised of a plurality of regimes and political communities. This adds further weight to the fairly cautious and modest approach that Soros has taken in his attempts to institute open societies in formerly closed states. In this sense, the promotion of open society is only a tentatively global project and is most productively pursued on a (nation) state by state basis.

Chapter three concluded with a sketch of the importance of critical rationality and the manner in which it bridges Popper's philosophies of science and politics. The notion of frameworks was introduced as significant at this point, with reference to the work of Lakatos, in a bid to establish the extent to which Popperian liberalism can accommodate the coexistence of multiple frameworks such as different nation states but still find common ground for inter-subjective testing and communication between them.

6.4 National Open Societies

Chapter four began with a discussion of liberal nationalism. It served as a useful comparative framework for assessing Popperian liberalism given that Popper found little or no affinity between liberalism and nationalism as political ideologies. With his description of nationalism as irrational it has been suggested that Popper regarded nationalist ideology as more a pathology than a legitimate theory of politics.³⁹ The initial task of the chapter was to explore the general compatibility of liberalism and nationalism as a precursor to further examination of the compatibility of open society

³⁹ Vincent, *Popper and Nationalism*, p.159.

and the nation state.

Tamir draws from liberalism a commitment to personal autonomy and individual rights and from nationalism the importance of community membership for individuals whilst highlighting the status of national community membership in particular.⁴⁰ As we have seen, Popper's normative individualism is such that individuals are the fundamental political category that matter to him. It is interesting however that Tamir does not dispute normative individualism and finds it can be accommodated by liberal variants of nationalism which simply seek to respect such a principle within the framework of a national state. It is here that Popper's oversight in failing to distinguish amongst types of nationalism becomes apparent and serves to weaken his case against the nation state.

Both Tamir's account of liberal nationalism and Popper's conception of open society face a similar challenge in respect of attempting to balance the universalism implied by upholding human rights and the particularity entailed by different cultural forms. Tamir suggests that liberal nationalism, and by implication the nation state, seeks to simultaneously recognise the particularity of culture and the universality of human rights.⁴¹ Popper is more ambiguous on this issue since he does not address in any significant detail the prospect of pronounced cultural difference between open societies. Soros is more sensitive to such a possibility however and makes clear his view that no single design exists for open society since different countries have different traditions.⁴² He also makes plain that whatever plurality may be permissible democracy is a non-negotiable component.⁴³ On this point Popper and Tamir can surely agree because for Popper a non-democratic society is a closed society whilst it seems unlikely that Tamir could endorse an undemocratic nation state as liberal.

⁴⁰ Yael Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, p.35.

⁴¹ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, , p.79.

⁴² Soros, *Open Society*, p.345.

⁴³ Soros, *Open Society* , p.345.

A further point of agreement between Popper and Tamir concerns the aversion that they hold in common toward organic forms of political community in which individual identities are virtually entirely constituted by some sort of communal membership. Tamir contrasts her liberal version of nationalism with alternative organic interpretations and considers liberal nationalism to cherish both 'reason and the open society'.⁴⁴ There is no theoretical reason to suggest that nation states are incapable of being constituted as open societies so long as they are liberal. This is crucial because Popper's primary concern in relation to the state is that it should be liberal rather than whether or not it is national.⁴⁵ This permits the drawing of the conclusion that the commitment to liberalism that unites Popper and Tamir appears more robust and significant than differences stemming from her simultaneous embrace of national forms of political community. Popperian liberalism can be interpreted as capable of tolerating the nation state but liberal nationalism, as the name suggests, can only be intolerant of illiberal forms of political community, national or otherwise.

The question arises for Popperians as to what to do about closed societies. Is there a basis in Popper's philosophy to justify some kind of liberal interventionism that aims at the spread of open society and the principles underpinning it? Chapter four sought to address this question via reference to a particularly high profile attempt to build a case for liberal interventionism - that put forward by former British Prime Minister Tony Blair in a speech which he delivered in Chicago in April 1999. At a fundamental level Popper's political philosophy held that institutions of the state can and should be judged on the humanitarian basis of the protection that they offer to individuals.⁴⁶ Couched in this way, Popperian philosophy does appear to hold out at least the prospect of some form of external intervention in circumstances where a particular state is inflicting substantial harm on its citizens.

It was noted that Blair's doctrine of liberal interventionism is predicated on a world

⁴⁴Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.80.

⁴⁵ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.215.

⁴⁶ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.110.

order comprised of nation states and indeed that it was just such a world order that formed the backdrop to Popper's theorising. Blair mentions open society in his speech when proposing that liberal democracies can make themselves safer and further their interests by establishing and spreading the values of liberty, the rule of law, human rights and open society.⁴⁷ For Blair, a safer and more just international order requires the spread of liberal democracies and his speech makes the case that there are circumstances in which the international community can and should intervene in the domestic arrangements of a sovereign state in order to protect individuals.

As we have encountered throughout, the protection of the individual is a fundamental Popperian concern. Chapter four revealed the extent to which 'existing democratic states', as Popper puts it, represent a considerable achievement of social engineering.⁴⁸ Popper goes on to express confidence that ways can eventually be found to uphold the rule of law and administer justice in relation to international conflict just as democratic countries have increasingly come to maintain civil peace and protect human rights.⁴⁹ Here Popper shows himself to be in alignment with Blair's general world view that suggests the enhanced protection of individuals on a global scale is best achieved by trying to extend the reach of liberal democracy across the world to those states where it is lacking or absent.

This brings us to one of the most significant conclusions of the thesis: Popper is content to support and promote a world comprised of open society states even where those states take a national form. Democratic nation states which apply the rule of law impartially and defend human rights within their respective jurisdictions can be interpreted as positive examples of Popperian social engineering. The further development of this model is thus a viable theoretical and practical option for contemporary Popperians who seek to advance the cause of open society. Exactly how that might be done is addressed cautiously by both Popper and Blair.

⁴⁷ Tony Blair, *Doctrine of the International Community Speech*, Chicago, 24th April 1999.

⁴⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

⁴⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.113.

Tony Blair suggests that identifying the appropriate circumstances to justify intervention in the domestic affairs and arrangements of a sovereign state presents a pressing foreign policy problem for the international community. He recognises the difficulties of utilising war and military force as an instrument to right humanitarian distress but concludes that it may on occasion be the only way to deal with dictatorial and authoritarian regimes.⁵⁰ For his part, Popper is prepared to accept that violence can be justified against tyrannical regimes but only if it has as its purpose to bring about a state of affairs that makes non-violent reform possible.⁵¹ Although Popper framed this argument in a domestic context it does allude to the potential for Popperians to support instances of liberal interventionism.

A further crucial conclusion from this section of chapter four concerns Popper's warning against the nation state seeping deeper into political thought stealthily in being unconsciously accepted and taken for granted. Popper fears the nation state increasingly becoming an 'implicit assumption' of political thought, and a 'basic postulate' of political ethics.⁵² The analysis of Popper's approach to open society in this thesis suggests that he did not heed his own warning in according a more or less taken for granted status to the nation state as the context of his political theorising. Perhaps more significantly however, the compatibility that has been demonstrated between the concepts of open society and the nation state are such that Popper's liberalism is not undermined by being placed in a national setting.

Having utilised Blair's doctrine of the international community to tease out the extent to which Popper tends to assume the nation state in his political philosophy, focus subsequently shifted to the work of George Soros and his bid to institute and engineer open societies throughout the world. Part of the value for this thesis in examining Soros's conception of open society is that he provides a more detailed account of the institutional framework that he deems necessary to support open

⁵⁰ Blair, *Doctrine Speech*, 1999.

⁵¹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.150.

⁵² Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.50.

societies. In noting that open society must be anchored in the universal human condition rather than in tribal belonging Soros takes up a position that actually has considerable affinity with the liberal nationalism that Tamir theorised.⁵³ This is because Tamir holds that for nationalism to be at all liberal then it must also have its basis in the universal human condition and that this does not preclude the simultaneous recognition that individuals can be socially and culturally embedded in particular nation states.⁵⁴ The significant point is that advocates of both liberal nation states and open societies are shown here to be similarly opposed to notions of tribal belonging.

It is striking that the account of open society that Soros provides takes seriously the question of national sovereignty and the extent to which it could represent a barrier to achieving notions of the common good at an international level.⁵⁵ More significantly, Soros regards it as utopian to think that anything other than national sovereignty serves as the basis of the current world order.⁵⁶ It is with such a world order that attempts to promote open society must contend. Whilst that may pose challenges for developing international cooperation and for determining legitimate grounds to pursue liberal interventionism, it also provides opportunities to seek democratic reform, where necessary, of a type of political community – the nation state – that is capable of being constituted as an open society. Whatever barriers may be entailed by the concept of national sovereignty it cannot be considered a fundamental impediment to the development of open societies since the two concepts have been shown to coexist in national states.

The final section of chapter four outlined a distinction between positive and negative nationalism and reiterated that Popper dismissed the latter without conceiving of the possibility of the former. It was argued that this oversight on Popper's part permits a reassessment of the relationship between open society and the nation state. The

⁵³ Soros, *Open Society*, p.115.

⁵⁴ Tamir, *Liberal Nationalism*, p.79.

⁵⁵ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.114.

⁵⁶ Soros, *Bubble of American Supremacy*, p.101.

nation state can serve as a vehicle for spreading the liberal democratic principles of open society because many nation states are liberal democracies.

Positive nationalism is described by Saul as ‘a belief in the positive tension of uncertainty and the central importance of choice’⁵⁷ and with this line encapsulates Popper’s liberal political philosophy. Popper advocated open society as a form of political community that had its foundation in the positive tension of uncertainty as a principle of politics.⁵⁸ Democratic states can deal positively with the tension of uncertainty because democracy ‘provides the institutional framework for the reform of political institutions. It makes possible the reform of institutions without using violence, and thereby the use of reason in the designing of new institutions and the adjusting of old ones’.⁵⁹ This thesis has highlighted that the nation state provides a framework within which such democratic reform can take place and so the nation state is shown to be a capable and durable host of open society.

6.5 Open to Supranationalism? Open Society and the European Union

Chapter five considered the concept of open society in the context of the development of the European Union. It began by pointing out that the process of European integration has been one of nation states cooperating and constructing common institutions together. The issue of sovereignty was again central to this discussion with particular emphasis placed on the extent to which sovereignty is being re-conceptualised as nation states share power and authority with supranational institutions. The important point to emerge from this is that whilst national sovereignty may be in the process of being reengineered it remains accurate to describe nation states as sovereign, including those that are member states of the EU, not least because they have shared or pooled sovereignty voluntarily and retain the ability to reclaim it exclusively to the national level. The development of the EU has

⁵⁷ John Ralston Saul, *The Collapse of Globalism*, Atlantic Books, London, 2005, p.270.

⁵⁸ Popper, *Open Society Volume 2*, p.197.

⁵⁹ Popper, *Open Society Volume 1*, p.126.

been a profound change in Europe's political landscape and circumstance but it has not resulted in the transcendence of the nation state as a form of political community.

It was noted that of primary interest and concern to Popperians should be the perceived democratic deficits pertaining to the European Union. Recalling Popper's contention that the fundamental problem of political theory is the problem of checks and balances, the nature of governance at the supranational level of the EU makes this problem all the more pressing.⁶⁰ Whilst the EU provides governance in areas delegated to it by its member states it does not really have a recognisable government in the way that a nation state does. This makes power somewhat more elusive to check and hold to account which is concerning from the point of view of Popper's open society. The development of the EU can be welcomed for encouraging the spread and entrenchment of liberal democracy across Europe but a cautionary note should be struck by Popperians in respect of the democratic and accountability deficits that it exhibits. In doing so however it must be remembered that the nation state is not immune to such difficulties but perhaps just a little less susceptible relative to the development of supranational accountability to this point.

Having raised the issue of supranational democratisation the chapter turned to a consideration of the account of the post-national constellation put forward by Habermas. Here we encountered the Habermasian argument that the nation state is placed under increasing pressure by processes of globalisation that have extended decision making beyond national borders.⁶¹ That said, Habermas accepts that cosmopolitan solidarity remains lacking and more significantly, that we can never expect such solidarity to develop the strength and binding quality of national solidarity. This need not present a problem as far as Habermas is concerned because he both posits and seeks the emergence of a more abstract form of solidarity to underpin political community, that of constitutional patriotism.⁶² As we have seen,

⁶⁰ Popper, *In Search of a Better World*, p.219.

⁶¹ Jürgen Habermas, "Learning from Catastrophe?" in *The Postnational Constellation*, Polity Press, Cambridge, 2001, p.49.

⁶² Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*, p.60.

both Popper and Soros conceive of the foundations of open society in a similar manner. It remains to be determined the extent to which a concept such as constitutional patriotism, or indeed open society, can serve as a basis for some form of post-national solidarity. Whilst that discovery is awaited however, Popperians and Habermasians alike can console themselves with the recognition that both open society and constitutional patriotism are concepts that can be developed in the context and framework provided by the nation state.

The final section of the previous chapter examined George Soros' views on the development of the European Union as a process of piecemeal social engineering.⁶³ Soros regards the EU as having been instrumental in helping to encourage societies to become more open, particularly candidate countries seeking membership but argues that the EU could be a more proactive engineer of open societies on the global stage.⁶⁴ Most significant in this section of the chapter however is the description and understanding that Soros offers as to what is meant by a global open society. He is clear that it does not mean global government and that owing to the likelihood of less pronounced affinity among members it would not be as closely integrated as the European Union. Global open society, as conceived by Soros, is indicative of the rule of law applied on an international scale.⁶⁵ By conceiving of open society in this way he opens up the prospect of it being engineered by nation states because there is no theoretical impediment to nation states cooperating in the development of international institutions to uphold an international rule of law. It is in this sense that the nation states of Europe have created a prototype for a global version of open society through the model of European integration.

6.6 Popperianism in the Twenty-first Century

My thesis has endeavoured to provide an account of the compatibility between Karl

⁶³ George Soros, *Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society Speech*, 2006. www.georgesoros.com/brussels_speech

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

Popper's concept of open society and the form of political community that is the nation state. The nation state continues to structure and frame political circumstance for many, perhaps most, people around the world and so advocates of open society would be negligent to ignore the nation state or assume that it has faded into irrelevance. I have argued that in his defence of open society Popper was indeed somewhat negligent in this regard. He dismissed nationalism without any great reference to its nuances and complexities as a political ideology. In particular, he ignored any prospect that nationalism could be conceived and manifested in a liberal form. Tamir's account of liberal nationalism highlights a version of the ideology that has very similar foundations to Popper's own liberalism.

Given the haste with which he dismissed nationalism it is rather surprising that Popper proceeded to then assume the context of the nation state in much of his theorising of open society. He made no systematic attempt to envisage or develop a post-national or cosmopolitan form of political community as a host for open society. Part of the work of this thesis then has been to illustrate that Popper had a vague awareness that open society and the nation state are compatible but he declined to make this explicit. George Soros, in seeking to foster the development of open societies through his Open Society Institute has generally accorded a greater recognition to the framework of the nation state as the systemic backdrop to his efforts.

The case that Popper makes for open society as a form of political community is compelling and one aim of my work here has been the advancement of that case in a contemporary context. The focus has been on highlighting that those who would advocate open societies can do so without needing to renounce the nation state. The continued existence of the nation state does not present a fundamental impediment to the development of open societies in either a practical or theoretical sense. In defending open society Popper is defending liberal democracy. My argument is that on this basis, those nation states that are liberal democracies warrant a Popperian defence. Those nation states that are not liberal democracies and are closed societies

in one way or another can and should be the focus of Popperian attention in any bid to engineer a world comprised of open societies.

If such a situation is ever to be achieved it is not likely to be a quick or easy process and this point is well acknowledged by Soros. Popper's own approach to political reform suggests that we should not expect it to be quick or easy however and moreover that it is far safer to proceed gradually on the basis of piecemeal social engineering. The point is that Popper's vision of a world of open societies can potentially be achieved by reengineering particular nation states to transform them from closed to open societies. It does not require the reengineering of political community to find an alternative to the nation state.

Bibliography

- Abromeit, Heidrun *'Democracy in Europe – Legitimising Politics in a Non-state Polity'*, New York: Berghahn Books, 1998
- Anderson, Benedict *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, London: Verso Books, 2006
- Barry, Brian "International Society from a Cosmopolitan Perspective", in Nardin, Terry and David Mapel (eds), *International Society – Diverse Ethical Perspectives*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998.
- Beitz, Charles *The Idea of Human Rights*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009
- Berlin, Isaiah *Four Essays on Liberty*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975
- Blair, Tony "Doctrine of the International Community", *Speech given to Chicago Council on Global Affairs*, 24 April 1999, from <http://tonyblairoffice.org/speeches>
- Bobbit, Philip *The Shield of Achilles*, London: Penguin Books, 2003
- Burke, Edmund *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993
- Caney, Simon *Justice Beyond Borders – A Global Political Theory*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006
- Chalmers, Alan F. *What is this thing called science?*, Open University Press, 1982
- Christiansen, Thomas *'Legitimacy dilemmas of supranational government'*, in Nentwich, Michael and Albert Weale (eds), *'Political Theory and the European Union'*, London: Routledge, 1997
- Community of Democracies, Warsaw Declaration, June 27th 2000.
- Dunn, John *Contemporary Crisis of the Nation State?*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1995
- Evans, Peter "The Eclipse of the State? Reflections on Stateness in an Era of Globalization", *World Politics*, 1997, 50: pp. 62-87.
- Ferguson, Niall *The War of the World*, London: Penguin Books, 2007
- Follesdal, Andreas "Democracy, Legitimacy and Majority Rule in the European Union", in Nentwich, Michael and Albert Weale (eds) *Political Theory and the European Union*, London: Routledge, 1997

- Forst, Rainer "Towards a Critical Theory of Transnational Justice", in Pogge, T (ed.) *Global Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001
- Fukuyama, Francis *State Building – Governance and World Order in the Twenty-First Century*, London: Profile Books, 2005
- Fukuyama, Francis *The End of History and the Last Man*, London: Penguin Books, 1992
- Fuller, Steve *Kuhn v Popper – The Struggle for the Soul of Science*, Cambridge: Icon Books, 2003
- Gray, John "The era of globalisation is over", *The New Statesman*, 24 September 2001.
- Gray, John "The Moving Target", *New York Review of Books*, Volume 53, Number 15, October 5, 2006.
- Gray, John *Enlightenment's Wake*, London: Routledge, 1997
- Gray, John *False Dawn – The Delusions of Global Capitalism*, New York: The New Press, 1998
- Gray, John *Liberalism*, Buckingham: Open University Press, 1995
- Gray, John *Liberalisms – Essays in Political Philosophy*, London: Routledge, 1989
- Gray, John *Post-Liberalism – Studies in Political Thought*, London: Routledge, 1996
- Guehenno, Jean-Marie *The End of the Nation State*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995
- Habermas, Jurgen *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001
- Habermas, Jurgen, 'The Theory of Communicative Action – Volume 1', Cambridge: Polity Press, 1986, p.10.
- Habermas, Jurgen, "Learning from Catastrophe?", in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001
- Habermas, Jurgen, "The Postnational Constellation and the Future of Democracy", in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001
- Habermas, Jurgen, "What is a People?", in *The Postnational Constellation*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001
- Hobbes, Thomas *Leviathan*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001

Holton, Robert J *Globalization and the Nation-State*, London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1998

Hume, David *A Treatise of Human Nature*, London: Penguin Books, 1985

Huntington, Samuel P *The Clash of Civilizations*, London: Simon & Schuster, 2002

Hurrell, Andrew "Global Inequality and International Institutions", in Pogge, T (ed.) *Global Justice*, Oxford: Blackwell, 2001

Jarvie, Ian, Karl Milford and David Miller (eds.), *Karl Popper: A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2006

Kant, Immanuel *Perpetual Peace*, New York: Cosimo Inc, 2005

Kuhn, Thomas S. "Logic of Discovery or Psychology of Research?", in Lakatos, Imre and Alan Musgrave (eds) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970

Kuhn, Thomas S. "Reflections on my Critics" in *The Road Since 'Structure': Philosophical Essays, 1970-199, with an Autobiographical Interview*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Road Since 'Structure': Philosophical Essays, 1970-199, with an Autobiographical Interview*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000

Kuhn, Thomas S. *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1970

Kymlicka, Will *Contemporary Political Philosophy – An Introduction*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1990

Lakatos, Imre and Alan Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Volume 4 Proceedings of the International Colloquium in the Philosophy of Science*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970

Lehning, Percy and Albert, Weale 'Citizenship, Democracy and Justice in the New Europe', London: Routledge, 1997

Magee, Bryan *Popper*, London: Fontana Press, 1985

McCormick, John 'Understanding the European Union', London: MacMillan Press Ltd, 1999

Mill, John Stuart *On Liberty*, London: Penguin Books, 1974

- Miller, David *On Nationality*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997
- Miller, David *National Responsibility and Global Justice*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007
- Mulhall, Stephen and Adam Swift, *Liberals and Communitarians*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1996
- Nentwich, Michael 'Opportunity Structures for Citizens' Participation', in Nentwich, Michael and Albert, Weale (eds), 'Political Theory and the European Union', London: Routledge, 1997
- Nentwich, Michael and Albert Weale. A, 'Political Theory and the European Union: Legitimacy Constitutional Choice and Citizenship', London: Routledge, 1997
- O'Hear, Anthony *Karl Popper: Philosophy and Problems*, Cambridge: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1995
- Oakeshott, Michael *On Human Conduct*, Oxford: Clarendon Paperbacks, 2003
- Oakeshott, Michael *Rationalism in Politics and Other Essays*, London: Methuen and Co, 1962
- Pogge, Thomas *World Poverty and Human Rights*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2005
- Popper, Karl "Normal Science and its Dangers", in Lakatos, Imre and Alan Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, Vol. 4, 1970.
- Popper, Karl *In Search of a Better World*, London: Routledge, 1992
- Popper, Karl *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, London: Routledge, 2002
- Popper, Karl *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 1 – The Spell of Plato*, London: Routledge, 1984
- Popper, Karl *The Open Society and its Enemies Volume 2 – Hegel and Marx*, London: Routledge, 1986
- Popper, Karl *The Poverty of Historicism*, London: Routledge, 1972
- Popper, Karl "The Aim of Science", in Popper, K *Objective Knowledge*, London: Oxford University Press, 1972
- Popper, Karl "The Myth of the Framework", in Notturmo, M (ed.) *The Myth of the Framework – In Defence of Science and Rationality*, London: Routledge, 1994

Popper, Karl “Epistemology and Industrialisation”, in Notturmo, M (ed.) *The Myth of the Framework – In Defence of Science and Rationality*, London: Routledge, 1994

Popper, Karl “Towards a Rational Theory of Tradition”, in Popper, K *Conjectures and Refutations – The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1969

Popper, Karl “The History of Our Time”, in Popper, K *Conjectures and Refutations – The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, London: Routledge, 1969

Popper, Karl *Unended Quest*, London: Routledge, 1992

Quinton, Anthony *The Politics of Imperfection*, London: Faber and Faber, 1978

Raphael, Frederick *Popper*, London: Phoenix, 1998

Ravetz, Jerry *Ideological Commitments in the Philosophy of Science*, *Radical Philosophy*, Issue 37, Summer 1984

Rawls, John *A Theory of Justice*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971

Raz, Joseph, “National Self-Determination”, in Raz, J (ed.) *Ethics in the Public Domain*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994

Sandel, Michael J “The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self”, *Political Theory*, Volume 12 No. 1, February 1984

Sandel, Michael J *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998

Saul, John Ralston *The Collapse of Globalism*, London: Atlantic Books, 2005

Scruton, Roger *A Political Philosophy*, London: Continuum, 2006

Scruton, Roger *The Meaning of Conservatism*, London: MacMillan, 1984

Soros, George “The rulers of the United States have embarked on policies that violate the principles of open society”, *New Statesman*, 16th December 2002

Soros, George “Europe as a Prototype for a Global Open Society”, *Speech delivered at EPC-OSI Policy Dialogue, Brussels*, 2006.

www.georgesoros.com/brussels_speech

Soros, George *Open Society: Reforming Global Capitalism*, London: Little, Brown and Company, 2000

Soros, George *The Bubble of American Supremacy*, London: Phoenix, 2004

- Tamir, Yael *Liberal Nationalism*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993
- Tan, Kok-Chor *Justice Without Borders – Cosmopolitanism, Nationalism and Patriotism*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004
- Tsinisizelis, Michael J and Dimitris, Chrysoschoou ‘The European Union – Trends in Theory and Reform’, in Nentwich, Michael and Albert, Weale (eds), *Political Theory and the European Union*, London: Routledge, 1997
- Van Creveld, Martin *The Rise and Decline of the State*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Vibert, Frank *Europe Simple – Europe Strong*, Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001
- Vincent, Andrew “Popper and Nationalism”, in Jarvie, Ian, Karl Milford and David Miller (eds), *Karl Popper – A Centenary Assessment*, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2006
- Walzer, Michael *Spheres of Justice*, New York: Basic Books, 1984
- Warleigh, Alex ‘*Democracy in the European Union: Theory, Practice and Reform*’, London: Sage Publications, 2003
- Watkins, John “Against Normal Science” in Lakatos, Imre and Alan Musgrave (eds.) *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge: Volume 4*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970

http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/human_rights/index_en.htm

www.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/business/7929820.stm

www.demcoalition.org

www.makepovertyhistory.org

www.newamericancentury.org