

The Open Society and Its New Enemies

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Diogenes

2015, Vol. 62(2) 26–31

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DOI: 10.1177/0392192117703044

journals.sagepub.com/home/dio



Abstract

This paper elaborates on two classical theories of “Open Society,” i.e. Henri Bergson’s and Karl Popper’s. It outlines their differences, qualities, and limits. It provides some suggestions about the new enemies of open society in a globalized world, that these new enemies are identified in fanaticism which appears as religious fundamentalism, closed nationalism and political populism. Open society is characterized by the critical use of reason, freedom and tolerance.

The concept of an “open society” was initially discussed by Henri Bergson and Karl Popper, and is considered to be an important social philosophical concept. Bergson classified society types into open societies and closed societies, defining an open society as one that was based on open morals and dynamic religion, whereas a closed society was based on closed morals and static religion. In other words, an open society, as insisted upon by Bergson, is one emphasizing the morals of love and mysterious religious experience, leading to the unification of all mankind into one. However, Karl Popper argued that an open society is one that is governed by reason and is democratic, giving first priority to an individual’s independence and reasonable decisions. Popper’s open society became the ideological foundation for advocating for a liberal society in the twentieth century when liberal society ideologically fought against totalitarian society.

As the twentieth century progressed, liberalism’s victory became certain, especially with the collapse of the Russian Socialist System. Liberal democracy has become the dominant ideology governing today’s world. Can we now say with conviction that an open society has already been realized? As the enemies of open society have disappeared, has the concept of an open society come to an end? If an open society is still a valuable concept, what foundation is there for such an opinion? These questions are based on the logic that the allies’ roles have ended because the enemies have disappeared.

While bearing these questions in mind, this paper insists that the concept of an “open society” is still useful socially and philosophically, and reconstructs the concept in order to make it suitable for a twenty-first century situation. Its purpose is also to demonstrate that “fanaticism” has emerged as a new enemy against an open society. My opinion is based on the fact that, even though totalitarianism, an enemy of open society, has almost disappeared, the concept of an open society has not

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been completely realized. Furthermore, a new type of enemy has emerged. Additionally, the view that totalitarianism conceals itself, rather than completely disappears, may be right, because it can reappear at any time, embodied in a new look.

Reconstruction of an open society

In broad terms, Bergson's open society is one based on love, Popper's on rationality. However, both are in agreement that an open society is a democratic society, not one that is totalitarian. Their perspectives on an open society illustrate two unique types of open societies. Yet, both have limitations: Bergson's open society maximizes excessively the concept of an open society, while Popper's open society excessively minimizes it. Both models need to be addressed and examined.

What foundation is there for Bergson's opinion and concept of an open society that the maximization model is based upon? It is based on love and intuition. Love is a concept beyond any duty, and intuition is a concept beyond intelligence. Bergson's open society is not only a society uniting all people under love beyond an individual's calculation of gains and losses, but also a society where all people directly experience God. However hard we pursue this version of an open society, I seriously doubt whether we would be able to attain such a level.

I find it difficult to agree with Bergson's opinion that the moral of love is the only moral for an open society, and that all social customs are the morals of suppression and duties. The reason for Bergson criticism of morals of duties is because it is eventually the moral of collective egoism and coercion. It is correct that any duty is compulsory, but it is difficult to consider the opinion that all duties are involuntary. The custom can imply a form of spontaneity. Bergson also emphasizes the qualitative jump in order that the morals of duties can be transformed into the morals of love. In other words, as far as we are controlled by collective egoism, morality is not improved even though the group's size where morality can be applied, becomes wide, because the selfish instinct remains regardless of the group's size.

Bergson's claims are difficult to sympathise with. Let us assume that we have Group A and Group B. If each group treats its members humanely, but not the members of the other group and then changes its attitude in humanely treating the members of the other group, why can we not consider that the group's morality level has improved? The reason why we consider the mercy of Buddhism as higher love may be because Buddhism considers other living things beyond humans as targets of mercy. Even though such a kind of mercy cannot eventually overcome the collective egoism pursuing humans' profits, the mercy found therein can be considered to improve human beings' sense of morality.

Bergson's classification of religion types as static type and dynamic type can be regarded as an excellent idea. He insisted on a dynamic religion in order to support the morals of love, but I think that dealing with religion is beyond the bounds of social philosophy. Indeed the relationship between religion and an open society should be dealt with within the context of accepting religious pluralism.

In comprehensive terms, I believe that Bergson was overwhelmed by the thought that any war should be prevented. Such thought reflected the atmosphere of the age, after World War I. Bergson thought that materialistic civilization would continue to expand, but that the advancement of materialistic civilization did not mean moral change. On the insight that the first thing discovered after stripping away civilization's cover was a war instinct, he suggested the concept of an open society should be based on the morals of love and Christian mystical experiences in order to control this instinct. "Humankind should decide whether he uses a large means or a small one. Mankind groans under the pressure of progression which he has made. Mankind does not fully recognize the fact that his future depends on himself" (Bergson, 1958: 338).

By way of contrast, Popper's open society was the concept suggested in order to keep liberal society in confrontation with a totalitarian society. As such, Popper's open society is based upon freedom. This freedom is based upon rationality. In this context, an open society is a reasonable society governed by critical reason.

I completely agree with Popper's claim that an open society should be governed by critical reason, not dogmatic reason. However, I think that it is problematic that the function of critical reason only focuses on controlling dogmatic reason. Critical reason should prevent anarchic states of reason to the extent that it controls dogmatic reason. The open society to be reconstructed by us should also be the community of truth. Why does an open society require the community of truth as its necessary condition? The reason is that, however free a society is, a society where the truth is not differentiated from falsehood, a society in which uses of deliberate propaganda and manipulation of public opinion are common, cannot be the open society we are pursuing. We have entered an information society where the media's deliberate use of propaganda and manipulations of public opinion have become common. Our perception of the real world can be easily distorted and instrumented by electronic engineering and cognitive science. In this situation, a democratic political debate does not necessarily lead us into a better understanding of the real world. The situation where populism is rampant makes an individual's autonomous judgment more difficult to attain.

As Isaiah Berlin claimed (1969), liberal society is basically based upon negative – i.e. freedom from constraints. Overemphasizing upon positive freedom, i.e. freedom for something, increases the possibility infringing upon negative freedom. Yet, if people insist only upon the negative freedom, they cannot prevent the polarization of society with an increasing gap between the rich and the poor. If society is polarized, social unrest will increase. In such a society, passive freedom is hard to maintain. Popper also considered this problem, and warned that a liberal society should not be interpreted as a *laissez-faire* society or a society of minimal state interference. The *laissez-faire* society is hard to keep in place because of the paradox of freedom (Popper, 1966: 202): if the freedom is not limited, it eventually destroys itself. Popper also stressed that state protectionism should also be applied to the field of economics, so that the state could protect its people from the misuse of economic power.

I define an open society as one that realizes positive freedom to some degree in light of current situations. However, I do not insist that we should return to the north-European welfare state model. The open society I suggest is a welfare society with sustainability. In our current age, where democracy wins against a totalitarian society, the freedom of an open society needs to be expanded.

Popper's open society considered negative utilitarianism as its ethical standard. The reason he refused to accept utilitarianism was because he thought that such ethics could eventually bring about totalitarianism. At the same time, he advised people to make efforts in removing a specific evil, not in realizing a lofty, abstract good. We can agree that the strategy that solves the most urgent problem among our problems is an easy one. In this respect, it is a good strategy and has a low burden of conflict. However, such a strategy may be criticized in that it is very fragmentary and passive. We know that problems are entwined and new problems will happen in the near future. If we prepare for them, we can solve them with less cost, but if we do not prepare for them, we cannot solve them. That is the reason why we cannot completely focus on the problems we currently confront. Therefore, I intend to define an open society as a society that properly utilizes utilitarianism, if utilitarianism harmonizes with fundamental human rights, rather than a society that completely refuses to consider utilitarianism. As far as fundamental human rights is the first principle, I do not think that we should worry that utilitarianism would bring about totalitarianism.

So far I have to some extent supplemented Popper's reason and expanded the contents of an open society by expanding upon the range of freedom. Finally, I should add toleration. The more conflict a society has, the more necessary the virtue of tolerance becomes. Should one decide not to add this last factor, conflict may induce violence and violence may lead to further destruction.

When different civilizations come into contact with each other, more serious conflict than one that occurs within a civilization may emerge. Huntington diagnosed: “the most serious conflicts in the future that will certainly appear will do so in the form of a clash between different civilizations” (Huntington, 1993: 25). An unconditional acceptance of Huntington’s opinion is clearly limited. His opinion contains the political implication that the Western world should take precautions against the possible clash of civilizations. Nevertheless, his opinion justifies my assertion that we should seriously consider attitudes like toleration in making the convergence of civilizations possible.

Consequently, I reconstruct an open society as a society of reason, freedom, and toleration. My open society is stronger than Popper’s open society, but weaker than Bergson’s.

New enemies of an open society

In his book *The Open Society & Its Enemies* (1945), Popper continually criticized the origin and development of historicism. Popper found the origin of historicism’s error to originate from ancient theistic historicism based on the doctrine of a chosen people. The feature of theistic historicism is based on the doctrine of a chosen people. I will not discuss here why historicism causes political totalitarianism, the enemy of an open society. My current discussion notes that while historicism was the enemy of open society in the twentieth century open society, it is fanaticism that is the enemy of twenty-first century open society. While historicism caused political totalitarianism, fanaticism has erupted in the guise of religious fundamentalism, closed nationalism, and political populism.

Fanaticism is the attitude where someone blindly believes and endorses one man’s religion or preferred thought. “Fanatic” originated from “fanaticus,” a Latin derivative from “fanum” meaning a temple. The fanatic believer is bewitched by some evil spirit and raves like a madman. The fanatic believer attacks temples, damages relics, and profanes the name of God by allowing taboo behaviors. As such, the word has had an inherent negative meaning from the beginning.

The features of fanaticism are as follows: first it starts from believing a certain religious doctrine. Fanaticism itself does not possess a certain religious doctrine nor possess any specific content. It does not matter whether it is a religious, racial, or ethnic doctrine. Second, fanaticism has the believer blindly believing and practicing it, so it does not allow any critical attitude. Third, it does not accept any other doctrines. The world is viewed in a dichotomous way, with its doctrine being the only good and all other doctrines evil.

We can categorize fanaticism into three types. The first type boasting the longest history is religious fanaticism; the second type is racial and ethnic fanaticism; and the third type, political fanaticism. I will refer to the three types as religious fundamentalism, closed nationalism, and political populism respectively. Why does fanaticism become the enemy of an open society? As RM Hare (1963) suggested, fanaticism does not admit any critical discussion on certain assertions, and unconditionally refuses mutual understanding and compromise. Fanaticism is typically a dogmatic decision type, and especially when it appears in a group, it causes the creation of a fanatic society that completely loses rationality. Germany led by Hitler’s Nazi government is a case in point.

Religious fundamentalism stresses the prototype of a certain religion and its fundamental spirit. All religions have their own fundamentalist fractions. The reason why religious fundamentalism is the enemy of open society is because it considers different religions evil and gives high praise to militant missionary work. An open society is one of religious pluralism, guaranteeing freedom of religious expression. It admits that all religions have their own paths to salvation, and does not allow any militant missionary work. Freedom of religion implicitly includes the freedom of not having a religion if one so chooses.

Nationalism, also called a new tribalism, is a modern ideology and a social culture movement focusing on ethnicity. As an ideology, nationalism insists that the people exerting sovereignty

should be from a specific ethnic group, and only the ethnic group based upon national self-determination principles is legal as the nation-state. Nationalism considers ethnic groups as the basic category for all human beings. That is to say, all individuals must belong to a certain ethnic group.

As a cultural movement, nationalism stresses an ethnic group's identity and insists that in a nation-state, its people's language should become the official language, and all citizens should use this language. Nationalism considers most human activities as having ethnic features. That is, each ethnic group has its ethnic symbols and culture, its own music, literature, myths, and even religion.

Nationalism has sometimes manifested itself in imperialistic invasions, or as the liberation of oppressed people. Sometimes nationalism joins with liberalism or with totalitarianism. The classification of nationalism is varied. I divide nationalism into closed nationalism and open nationalism, and intend to prove that closed nationalism is an enemy of open society.

Closed nationalism essentially has two characters. One is exclusive, and the other is totalitarian. Contrary to closed nationalism, open nationalism has opposing characteristics. Being exclusivist, closed nationalists do not admit other ethnic groups as being equally valuable beings. They only accept their own people and objectify other ethnic groups. The objectified group can be changed into an instrument for "our" people at any time. Totalitarianism considers the individual as an instrument for the state's development. The individual who leaves his people cannot be guaranteed his dignity and rights, so the individual's liberty is still restricted.

Many people are at times lenient in their criticism of resistant nationalism. They consider such an acquittal inevitable because the ideology of resistant nationalism is noble even though it shows some characteristics of fanaticism. Yet this reasoning is similar to the logic that the end justifies the means.

Populism can be divided into agrarian populism and political populism, but the area I will discuss is political populism. Political populism is the doctrine that something wanted by the public should immediately become policy, and it was a political type popularized in certain parts of Latin America from the 1920s to 1960s. Latin American populism can be said to be a political doctrine where pseudo left-wing politicians advocating reforms seized, or extended, their power by mobilizing the public who were confronted with a critical situation.

Populism lacks essential values. Therefore, it can be used as an instrument for progressive or reactionary purposes, or as the instrument for a democrat, a dictator, a left-wing party or a right-wing party. Contrary to other ideologies that tacitly or clearly insist upon values of freedom, equality, or social justice, populism has no values. That is why we are reminded of far-right McCarthyism, or Fascism, or far-left Bolshevism, or the Maoist Red Guards forms of populism.

Why is populism evaluated so negatively? If it merely insists on the public's rights, then what is wrong with it? Why should we object to the temptation of populism? The key point of populism is that something wanted by the public should immediately become law and policy. At first glance, that seems to be a reasonable insistence. However, populism has a fatal flaw: it personifies the public as a unified body. It identifies one part of the public as representative of all people. This concept is similar to Rousseau's "General Will." Rousseau's Social Contract Theory created "a moral and collective body" possessing life and will (Rousseau, 1964, b. I, 6: 361). This governing body is the famous "General Will," the integrated folk people's will along with that of the sovereign. For Rousseau or populists, an individual's freedom means participation in such a sovereign-led nation.

If all citizens choose the public interest and do not completely pursue private interests, the sum of the individual citizen's choice will be that of the sovereign's will – the great, artificial human (Rousseau, 1964, b. II, 3: 371). Yet, if we pursue something with only limited interest, the general will may never appear. It has long been established that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Rousseau maintained that the general will was always right and that it set out objective goodness for society. Just as Rousseau placed tremendous authority on the general will, the populists

empower public opinion with the same authority (Riker, 1982: 11). However, where is the assurance that the public always pursues the public good?

Another problem with populism is that it denies any institution. Populism tries to directly solve all matters according to the public's wishes, but does not try to develop political creeds and policies, and establish relevant institutions. Therefore, populism is not a stable, formalized political movement, but an inconsistent, ill-prepared political resistance. Populism with such an inconsistent attitude makes it difficult to solve complex problems in modern society. There is no institutional device to utilize accumulated wisdom and to guarantee fairness. Populism is not a reasonable system, and the public can be mobilized into foolish masses. Mobocracy may be the worst form of a corrupt democracy.

Here we need to remind ourselves of the fact that Popper pegged Plato as the main culprit regarding an open society. Of course, our interest lies in Plato's excellent analysis of a democratic system, not his totalitarian political philosophy. What is the essence of a democratic system? Why does democracy fail to continue and fall into tyranny? In Book 8 of *Republic*, Plato says: "When the democratic state selects a bad manipulator as its leader and gets drunk by excessively drinking wine of freedom without adding some water, the political system will criticize and punish the rulers" (562c7–d3). Getting drunk by over-drinking the wine of freedom without adding some water means the state of freedom is excessive. An "[e]xcessive state of freedom makes the citizens' souls sensitive, so the citizens become dissatisfied and cannot endure any form of submission requested by anyone, and eventually they do not care about all laws whether they are statute laws, or customary laws" (563d4–e1). At this time, a bad manipulator emerges before the public and lures them. He is a tyrant who is unqualified but has his eyes focused on the position of ruler. He fools the public with all kinds of honeyed words and finally grasps power with the public's wholehearted support. With the commencement of tyranny, the public becomes slaves and the nation is ruined.

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I have attempted to reconstruct an open society suitable for the twenty-first century age of globalization. In the reconstruction process, I critically reviewed Bergson's society of love and Popper's liberal society. The open society reconstructed by me is a society of reason, freedom, and toleration. Although my reconstruction of an open society was based on Popper's open society, I supplemented the function of reason, expanded the range of freedom, and added the concept of toleration. Such alterations were done because the specific contents of an open society were considered to change partly depending on our current age and times.

It is natural that there are obstacles in realizing an open society. Bergson thought collective egoism was the main obstacle, Popper targeted historicism. However, I have pointed out that fanaticism is the new enemy. Collective egoism has appeared as invasion and historicism as political totalitarianism, but fanaticism has appeared in the various guises of religious fundamentalism, closed nationalism, and political populism. The common features amongst them are dogmatic decision making and exclusion. Both features are fatal obstacles threatening mankind's civilization in the twenty-first century.

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