
What could be the motives for producing a Popperian half-life such as the present volume? This work, which takes as its subject Popper right up to his debut on the world stage with the assumption of his position at the London School of Economics, displays no inclination to follow up with the complementary second half of Popper's life sometime in the future. Indeed, the author admits that the omitted subsequent "public Popper" was frequently an embarrassment. Here is truncation with a purpose: this book is written to recommend the work of the early Popper to the "academic left" and to "historicize the postmodern predicament [as] an antidote to current false consciousness" (p. 262).

Since this is a work in social/political theory masquerading as biography, I shall respond in kind. There have recently been a spate of attempts to revisit the major figures of the philosophy of science in the twentieth century, primarily for the purpose of explaining to ourselves what it was that provoked such an efflorescence of ingenuity, only to result in the subsequent letdown we now confront or enjoy: Cartwright et al. on Neurath, Fuller on Kuhn, and Kadvany on Lakatos. Malachi Hacohen admits that this constitutes his motive as well: he is impressed with the early Popper's political leftism and anti-foundationalism, regarding the later Cold Warrior as a sad retrogression. It seems to me, however, that he has missed the major lesson of all these retrospectives - what emerges from the exercise of re-examining the ongoing intellectual discourse of science in the mid-twentieth century (as opposed to their current irrelevance) was fact that they were doing social theory all along under the guise of describing science. Their question of the true nature of legitimate science was seen as a crucial preliminary to determining which politico-economic system would dominate in the Great Depression, World War II, and the Cold War.

From this perspective, I strongly doubt that Popper's social significance ever derived from his durable "solution" of any pressing philosophical problem: Did he really propose a usable "demarcation criterion" for science, or rectify the problem of induction, or adequately describe probabilities as propensities, or banish "subjectivism" from physics, or even really demonstrate that Marxism was untestable? That is not the way we view the world (yet). No, during the Cold War it turned out that the very best apologists for Western society were leftists and anti-foundationalists; and one can observe this in the history of postwar social sciences like economics (vide the Cowles Commission) and psychology, as well as the philosophy of science. Kuhn et al. then took the next logical step in the sequence: something like "critical rationalism" was widely deemed a thoroughly implausible account of social organization in an anti-foundationalist context (certainly Popper himself never presided over an "Open Society" of scholarship, as Hacohen ruefully admits). Social order had to be reconceptualized and reimposed, be through "normal science," "progressive" programs, whatever.

To understand where political-economic systems would come to dominate in the Great Depression, one must first understand the nature of legitimate science was seen as a crucial preliminary to determining which politico-economic system would dominate in the future. Furthermore, the current failure of the global economy is in large part due to the neglect of the lessons of science. The ongoing intellectual discourse of science is therefore of crucial importance in understanding how we got here and what we should do about it.

Hence, banishing the half-life of the Cold Warrior from the biographical account is to parade a pointless Popper in a plotless Punch-and-Judy show. Hacohen rightly cautions the reader about the unreliability of Popper's autobiography Unended Quest, but he should have taken more to heart Popper's assertions therein that although he knew almost no social theory, that didn't prevent him from seeking to dictate good "scientific method" to the social sciences (p. 121); and furthermore, that his vaunted method of "situational analysis" was little more than a repackaging of neoclassical economics (itself a physics imitation) as a general methodology for the social sciences (p. 117). This is the way science is done in the real world today, and it is a tragic commentary on the state of social science that most of our "social scientists" are so unaware of these constraints. From this perspective, I strongly doubt that Popper's social significance ever derived from his "solution" of any pressing philosophical problem: Did he really propose a usable "demarcation criterion" for science, or rectify the problem of induction, or adequately describe probabilities as propensities, or banish "subjectivism" from physics, or even really demonstrate that Marxism was untestable? That is not the way we view the world (yet). No, during the Cold War it turned out that the very best apologists for Western society were leftists and anti-foundationalists; and one can observe this in the history of postwar social sciences like economics (vide the Cowles Commission) and psychology, as well as the philosophy of science. Kuhn et al. then took the next logical step in the sequence: something like "critical rationalism" was widely deemed a thoroughly implausible account of social organization in an anti-foundationalist context (certainly Popper himself never presided over an "Open Society" of scholarship, as Hacohen ruefully admits). Social order had to be reconceptualized and reimposed, be through "normal science," "progressive" programs, whatever. Hence, banishing the half-life of the Cold Warrior from the biographical account is to parade a pointless Popper in a plotless Punch-and-Judy show. Hacohen rightly cautions the reader about the unreliability of Popper's autobiography Unended Quest, but he should have taken more to heart Popper's assertions therein that although he knew almost no social theory, that didn't prevent him from seeking to dictate good "scientific method" to the social sciences (p. 121); and furthermore, that his vaunted method of "situational analysis" was little more than a repackaging of neoclassical economics (itself a physics imitation) as a general methodology for the social sciences (p. 117). This is the way science is done in the real world today, and it is a tragic commentary on the state of social science that most of our "social scientists" are so unaware of these constraints. From this perspective, I strongly doubt that Popper's social significance ever derived from his "solution" of any pressing philosophical problem: Did he really propose a usable "demarcation criterion" for science, or rectify the problem of induction, or adequately describe probabilities as propensities, or banish "subjectivism" from physics, or even really demonstrate that Marxism was untestable? That is not the way we view the world (yet). No, during the Cold War it turned out that the very best apologists for Western society were leftists and anti-foundationalists; and one can observe this in the history of postwar social sciences like economics (vide the Cowles Commission) and psychology, as well as the philosophy of science. Kuhn et al. then took the next logical step in the sequence: something like "critical rationalism" was widely deemed a thoroughly implausible account of social organization in an anti-foundationalist context (certainly Popper himself never presided over an "Open Society" of scholarship, as Hacohen ruefully admits). Social order had to be reconceptualized and reimposed, be through "normal science," "progressive" programs, whatever.

Hence, banishing the half-life of the Cold Warrior from the biographical account is to parade a pointless Popper in a plotless Punch-and-Judy show. Hacohen rightly cautions the reader about the unreliability of Popper's autobiography Unended Quest, but he should have taken more to heart Popper's assertions therein that although he knew almost no social theory, that didn't prevent him from seeking to dictate good "scientific method" to the social sciences (p. 121); and furthermore, that his vaunted method of "situational analysis" was little more than a repackaging of neoclassical economics (itself a physics imitation) as a general methodology for the social sciences (p. 117). This is the way science is done in the real world today, and it is a tragic commentary on the state of social science that most of our "social scientists" are so unaware of these constraints. From this perspective, I strongly doubt that Popper's social significance ever derived from his "solution" of any pressing philosophical problem: Did he really propose a usable "demarcation criterion" for science, or rectify the problem of induction, or adequately describe probabilities as propensities, or banish "subjectivism" from physics, or even really demonstrate that Marxism was untestable? That is not the way we view the world (yet). No, during the Cold War it turned out that the very best apologists for Western society were leftists and anti-foundationalists; and one can observe this in the history of postwar social sciences like economics (vide the Cowles Commission) and psychology, as well as the philosophy of science. Kuhn et al. then took the next logical step in the sequence: something like "critical rationalism" was widely deemed a thoroughly implausible account of social organization in an anti-foundationalist context (certainly Popper himself never presided over an "Open Society" of scholarship, as Hacohen ruefully admits). Social order had to be reconceptualized and reimposed, be through "normal science," "progressive" programs, whatever.

Hence, banishing the half-life of the Cold Warrior from the biographical account is to parade a pointless Popper in a plotless Punch-and-Judy show. Hacohen rightly cautions the reader about the unreliability of Popper's autobiography Unended Quest, but he should have taken more to heart Popper's assertions therein that although he knew almost no social theory, that didn't prevent him from seeking to dictate good "scientific method" to the social sciences (p. 121); and furthermore, that his vaunted method of "situational analysis" was little more than a repackaging of neoclassical economics (itself a physics imitation) as a general methodology for the social sciences (p. 117). This is the way science is done in the real world today, and it is a tragic commentary on the state of social science that most of our "social scientists" are so unaware of these constraints. From this perspective, I strongly doubt that Popper's social significance ever derived from his "solution" of any pressing philosophical problem: Did he really propose a usable "demarcation criterion" for science, or rectify the problem of induction, or adequately describe probabilities as propensities, or banish "subjectivism" from physics, or even really demonstrate that Marxism was untestable? That is not the way we view the world (yet). No, during the Cold War it turned out that the very best apologists for Western society were leftists and anti-foundationalists; and one can observe this in the history of postwar social sciences like economics (vide the Cowles Commission) and psychology, as well as the philosophy of science. Kuhn et al. then took the next logical step in the sequence: something like "critical rationalism" was widely deemed a thoroughly implausible account of social organization in an anti-foundationalist context (certainly Popper himself never presided over an "Open Society" of scholarship, as Hacohen ruefully admits). Social order had to be reconceptualized and reimposed, be through "normal science," "progressive" programs, whatever.
well fit his data to a generic maximization model. History should make us rather more self-conscious about our scholarly and political options, not less.