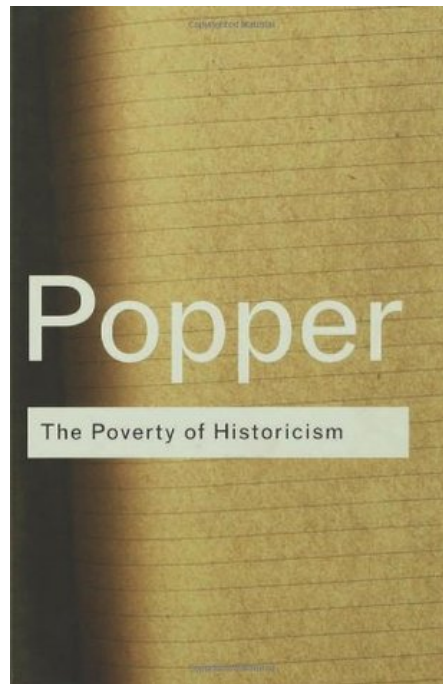




The Poverty of Historicism

Karl R. Popper

[Download now](#)

[Read Online](#) ➔

The Poverty of Historicism

Karl R. Popper

The Poverty of Historicism Karl R. Popper

On its publication in 1957, *The Poverty of Historicism* was hailed by Arthur Koestler as 'probably the only book published this year which will outlive the century.'

A devastating criticism of fixed and predictable laws in history, Popper dedicated the book to all those 'who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny.' Short and beautifully written, it has inspired generations of readers, intellectuals and policy makers. One of the most important books on the social sciences since the Second World War, it is a searing insight into the ideas of this great thinker.

The Poverty of Historicism Details

Date : Published February 21st 2002 by Routledge (first published 1957)

ISBN : 9780415278461

Author : Karl R. Popper

Format : Paperback 176 pages

Genre : Philosophy, History, Nonfiction, Politics, Sociology, Science

 [Download The Poverty of Historicism ...pdf](#)

 [Read Online The Poverty of Historicism ...pdf](#)

Download and Read Free Online The Poverty of Historicism Karl R. Popper

From Reader Review The Poverty of Historicism for online ebook

Vicente says

Encuentro el libro desorganizado, muy repetitivo, lleno de ideas ya desarrolladas en sus otros libros, incluso párrafos enteros copiados... Me esperaba más.

Muhsin Dogan says

Tarihsicilik ve bilimsel metotların comert kullanımlarının sınırlarının anlatıldığı bu kitap “Bilimsel Keşfin Mantığı” kitabından önce okunması gereken bir kitap. Çevirisi oldukça iyi olan kitap için biraz mesai harcamak şart. Bu şartlılık Popper’in mantığındaki ayrıntıları anlamak için dikkatli okumaktan ileri gelmekte. Genel olarak benim için kült eserler sınıfında olan bu kitabı şiddetle tavsiye ederim!

Camilo Rodríguez says

Very good exposition of the flaws of historicism, both in its pro-naturalistic and anti-naturalistic claims. Very clearly exposed and methodologically sound. Although it has more than half a century, its topics are now more relevant than ever.

Sarah Alabdullah says

?????? ????? ?? ??? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????????? ?? ????? ??? ?????????? ????????? ????? ????? ????? ????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????.

?????? ??????????? ?? ????? ?????? ?? ?????? ?????? ?????????????? ????? ??? ?????? ?????????? ?????????? ?? ????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ??? ?????? ?????????? ?????? ? ???.

???????? ??????? ????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??????. ????? ????? ??? ?????????? ?????? ?????????.

Fahad Alqurain says

??? ?????????? ?????? ?????? ?? ?????? ???
?????? ?????? ?? ??? ?????? ??? ????

Shidiq Thoha says

Satu abad setelah Popper mengajukan kritik pada Historisisme, apakah ilmu-ilmu sosial telah keluar dari

kenaifannya dengan melepaskan kutukan "objektivitas ilmiah". Rasanya tidak. Ilmu sosiologi berkembang menjadi teknik sosial (social engineering), ilmu psikologi sangat positivistik dan meminjam istilah Popper, tunduk pada imperialisme ilmu-ilmu alam. Pada beberapa sisi, Popper meminjam Kant untuk masalah ini, seperti hakikat objek tak pernah akan bisa diketahui secara pasti.

Historisisme adalah suatu pandangan yang menyakatkan bahwa mungkin untuk memuat satu teori besar yang bisa memprediksi sejarah dan melakukan ramalan dalam bidang sosial. Tujuan utamanya adalah ingin mencapai objektivitas ilmiah layaknya ilmu-ilmu kealaman. Dalam urainnya, Popper seringkali menyebut tokoh Comte dan Mill. Hal ini bisa dilihat dari upaya kedua tokoh tersebut untuk melakukan "imperialisme metodologis" ppada ilmu. Keinginan utamanya untuk mencapai objetivitas ilmiah. Hal ini dikritik Popper sebagai sebuah kenaifan. Layaknya kenaifan ilmu-ilmu ke alaman yang mengaku memiliki objektivitas ilmiah sendiri. Akibat kritiknya ini, muncul dua aliran dalam Historisime, yaitu ProNaturalistis dan Anti-Naturalistis. dalam pembahasan ini, kita harus hati-hati untuk memahaminya, karena popper mengajukan kritik dan juga afirmasi dalam waktu yang bersamaan. Tapi dalam doktrin Anti Naturalis, Popper mengajukan kritik pada Anti-naturalistis yang ingin mencapai Holisme dan Utopianisme dalam Ilmu-Ilmu Sosial. Kritik untuk Pro-Naturalistis terlihat lebih kasar lagi. Dengan menganggap bahwa hukum-hukum fisika bisa diterapkan dalam sejarah dan sosiologi (observasi, teori, prognose/ramalan) seperti mengukur dua hal yang berbeda dengan timbangan yang sama. Akibatnya, Ilmu-ilmu sosial tidak pernah mencapai derajat kepuasan yang memadai. Bagi Popper setidaknya objektivitas ilmiah yang ingin dicapai adalah suatu kenaifan. Apalagi objektivitas ilmiah yang disandarkan pada individualis-metodologis. Disisi ini, sangat kelihatan sekali bahwa Popper mengilhami kelahiran postmodernisme.

Hal penting dari penjelasan Popper adalah, ilmu menafikan peranan penting "institusi ilmiah" dan ilmu sebagai "teori sosial". Hal paling gawat disini adalah munculnya totalitarianisme dan otoriterianisme dalam ilmu sosial.

Alternatif yang ditawarkan oleh Popper adalah ilmu harus menghindari dari klaim objektivitas ilmiah dan universal. Karena hal itu menghindarkan dari kemungkinan adanya kritik dan membuat ilmu menjadi stagnan. Disisi lain, subyektivitas ilmuwan haruslah dengan "logika situasi "dipandang sebagai kesimpulan ilmiah yang harus diperdebatkan, dikritik dan disempurnakan dalam institusi-institusi ilmiah yang terbuka dan demokratis.

Alger says

Like many of Popper's publications, this is a careful refutation of the premise that social sciences respond to the scientific method. The degree to which this is now viewed as obvious is largely a measure of Popper's success. Finely written and closely reasoned, the key point is that history cannot be controlled to the degree that the causes of effects can be identified.

Arturo Herrero says

1. El curso de la historia humana está fuertemente influido por el crecimiento de los conocimientos humanos.
2. No podemos predecir, por métodos racionales o científicos, el crecimiento futuro de nuestros conocimientos científicos.
3. No podemos, por tanto, predecir el curso futuro de la historia humana.
4. Esto significa que hemos de rechazar la posibilidad de una historia teórica, es decir, de una

ciencia histórica y social de la misma naturaleza que la física teórica. No puede haber una teoría científica del desarrollo histórico que sirva de base para la predicción histórica.

5. La meta fundamental de los métodos historicistas está, por lo tanto, mal concebida; y el historicismo cae por su base.

Ryan says

I was hoping a lot more from this. Popper jumps around so much building up and knocking down aspects of historicism that it becomes to keep track of one from the other, and everything in between. The first chapter was supposed to avoid that, but in piling so many contrary points of view under the heading "historicism", it's not especially helpful.

I am one of the last people (I hope) that could be called a historicist, but certain ideas he labels as such seem far more valid than his arguments against them. For example, historicists reject the applicability of the scientific method in looking at history since studying society involves far greater complexities than the physical world. He calls this argument "The Variability of Initial Conditions". To this he replies that physical sciences exhibit such problems as well: for instance, the inability to ascertain whether two lengths of copper wire are really identical. Later on, he even argues that understanding society is *easier* than the physical world since you can just assume individuals are rational, and that stating the contrary to this relationship is merely a bias.

The response to this... very unscientific assumption can be found in two of Popper's handpicked quotes. He cites F.A. Hayek, his friend colleague, to state the clear relationship between natural and social sciences. This is unbelievably ironic, since well, Hayek was arguing the opposite. If you don't believe me, read some of Hayek's later works in epistemology, especially "The Pretense of Knowledge". Or just read the passages Popper cites more critically. I frankly don't quite understand how Popper so misconstrued this given his relationship with Hayek, and I realize that I'm riding on the authority of Hayek to defeat Popper's thesis, but this dissonance within the book questions its credibility.

I've centered my criticism of Popper just on that small aspect of the work, but it exemplifies the duplicity of Popper's skepticism towards social science. His reputation as a skeptic notwithstanding, his desire to meet his criteria of scientific falsifiability seems forced. The method he prefers, the idea of carefully creating falsifiable statements in sociology or economics (e.g. "absolute power corrupts absolutely" or "You cannot have full employment without inflation") are not really falsifiable; despite any future event to the contrary, anyone who does not agree with them a priori is going to come up with an excuse that something else happened that wasn't accounted for, that is, the *ceteris paribus* conditions to such statements didn't hold. And since you can't hold controlled experiments to test what's really going on [yes I know, Popper tries to dodge this by saying natural scientists have those problems too, but it's nowhere near the same degree:], there's no way of determining whether a sociological law was really falsified. While his model of determining truth is much better than that of the historicists, he has hardly demonstrated why their objections to his methodology is false.

The same exact argument applies to his "piecemeal" technology in society. It's better than the "holistic" approach of historicists, but it is by no means approaching falsifiable. Read the comments of those who support any failed government program for a few thousand quick counterexamples of such an approach.

However, while Popper does a poor job at arguing against some of these specific arguments he calls historicism, he is effective in dismissing the concept of historicism in general. It is unfortunate that the bulk of the book is spent arduously building up an tearing down tertiary views that some historicists hold rather than on the central ideas ideas of the school of thought. He presents two alternatives to aspects historicism at the last minute which seem very interesting. One, he suggests that historians in general should both move away from historicism and an attempt at ascertaining perfect, objective truth and to what calls historical interpretation, meaning that historians should state their particular viewpoint and study history with that in mind instead if pretending that they have no viewpoint. Two, he recommends an institutional approach to sociology that focuses on how institutions affect how human behavior changes rather than looking at the change itself (historicism) or the earlier historical paradigm which saw the fate history controlled by a handful of important individuals. Popper concludes, concisely and beautifully, that "it almost looks as if the historicists were trying to compensate themselves for the loss of an unchanging world by clinging to the faith that change can be foreseen because it is ruled by and unchanging law." Each of these conjectures is very intrigue and it's unfortunate that the ideas haven't made all that much headway since the book's publication.

I'm having problems recommending this to anyone. It has many passages that are downright wrong and seem to have little to do with historicism. It's too dense to expect someone off the street to read and a bit of a waste of time for those with an interest in the general subject. If you're read everything else by Popper and hungry for more, I mean, okay, but for everyone else, I'd put "The Open Society and its Enemies" ahead of it, since it's so much more tangible and clear.

???? ??? ?????? says

???? ?????? ?????? ?????? ??? ???????????

Gavagai says

pição no historicismo

Xander says

In this little book, Karl Popper worked out his earlier thoughts on the phenomenon of - what he called - historicism. This book was originally written in 1935 and revised multiple times before Popper published the final edition in 1957. In the meanwhile, Popper published his magnum opus, The Open Society and Its Enemies (1944), in which he describes the origins of the idea of historicist philosophy - he traces it back to Plato, and via Aristotle and Hegel to Marx.

I had already read The Open Society and Its Enemies, and was curious if The Poverty of Historicism had to offer any new insights. And I can recommend reading this prequel to The Open Society to anyone! Popper is one of the most clearest philosophers ever - he has the amazing gift to explain the most abstract and dry material (e.g. logic) in a clear and concise way. Compare this to such bombastic philosophers like Hegel, Nietzsche and Kant and you will never want to read continental philosophers anymore!

So what is this book exactly? The Poverty of Historicism is Popper's logical refutation of historicism.

Historicism is the idea - very old, incidentally - that the philosopher can study history to find historical laws. By using these historical laws, the philosopher of history is able to not only understand the evolution of history, but also - and more importantly - to make prophetic predictions about the future. This has to be clarified though, since it is easy to misunderstand this position.

The historicist claims that history evolves according to laws of progress; history knows different stages and each stage has its own guiding laws. The laws of one stage aren't applicable in the preceding or following historical periods. The historicist, living in a particular historical period, is therefore, by definition, not able to predict the future, only to discern a general trend of pregression and the insight that a next phase is near. This leads the historicist to two options: (1) if the next stage isn't attractive, history has to be arrested and the current stage prolonged indefinitely; (2) if the next stage is attractive, history has to be sped up by active intervention in the current stage. So, even though the historicist believes in an objective progression of progress, developing independent of ourselves (i.e. fatalism), human beings can intervene with activism to arrest or hasten the progress.

Considering the abstract ideas involved, it is good to illustrate historicism with some examples. I will mention Plato, Hegel and Marx, following Popper's own examples.

(1) Plato - according to Popper the first philosopher to truly work out the idea of historicism - observed the continuous change in nature and concluded that all change in this world is degeneration. This is to be related to his Ideas or Forms, which were perfect notions of worldly, imperfect objects. This continuous degeneration means that, if we have a particular state of society, things can only get worse. What should we do? We should postpone the future degeneration by intervening right now: the philosopher-king should dictate what society should be like and should intervene where things start to get out of control. In effect, Plato argues that we need tyranny in order to arrest degeneration.

(2) Hegel was the first to come up with a philosophy of history. He thought that history proceeds according to a dialectic process. First history proceeds in one way, then a counter-movement starts to swing history in the other way, and after this we get a sort of synthesis of both movements. This synthesis, by and in itself, is the next stage in history and the dialectical process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis repeats itself endlessly. So, like Plato, Hegel thought he had discovered a law of history, that let him understand history as a process of dialectics.

(3) Karl Marx took Hegel's notion of dialectics and fused it with his own idea of materialism. According to Marx, history is changed by revolutions, which are in a sense the prelude of a new historical phase. The period he lived in, 19th century Europe, would see the collapse of capitalism (due to internal contradictions) and the revolution in which the proletarians would take over control of the capital and would end, ultimately, in the radical equality of all people.

Marx's theory (history is class struggle), is the clearest illustration of Popper's point. Marx thought he had found, by studying economic history, historical laws. When one has discovered this historical law (i.e. dialectical materialism), one can easily apply it to the current state of affairs to come up with a prophecy about future events. Thus Marx thought that the end of capitalism would herald a new age of radical equality. This was, according to Marx, an inevitable, historical fact. As mentioned above, the historicist doesn't claim that human beings can change the future; he does claim that one can speed up or slow down the future from evolving.

It is easy to see how one can fall into the delusion of wanting to intervene in this world, in order to speed up historical progress. In other words: let's start a revolution to usher in the new time!

An important characteristic of historicism is, according to Popper, the desire to offer holistic and utopian solutions to current problems. The historicist wants to radically change society, to wipe out everything and start all over again. And this is exactly what happened in the 20th century, when Hitler and Stalin thought they had to carry out the historical laws of (respectively) race and class and bring into practice a new, utopian society - with all the horrific results this caused. Holistic and utopian idea(s) can only lead to suffering and tragedy; as a solution Popper advocates piecemeal social engineering: the scrupulous changing of one variable at a time, with the goal to eliminate the faults in the system. So, while Lenin claimed "you can't make an omelet without breaking a few shells" (i.e. anything goes), Popper argues for twiddling the knobs to alleviate suffering. A much better outlook!

But back to the Poverty of Historicism. Popper first sets out the position of historicism, clearly outlining all the issues involved and giving an honest exposition. After this, he uses the rest of the book to refute all the arguments that historicists use to defend their method. In general, it boils down to the following.

In sociology, the scientist should use the same methods as he would use in the natural sciences. He should by hypothetical-deductive systems: deducing hypotheses and then try to refute these with carefully controlled experiments. Theories should be testable and falsifiable.

In history, the historian should choose an interesting frame with which to tell the historical story, leaving all the irrelevant facts out of it. When one encounters a historical trend, one should not mistake this for a natural law: the trend of demographic growth can abruptly change, and is therefore not a universal law, valid in all time and space.

It is this last point, according to Popper, that lies at the root of the historical trend (pun intended) of historicism. Biological evolution, as well as history of mankind, are both a product of the combination of natural laws and initial conditions. This means that (for example) the biological trend of more and more complex organisms is nothing more than the interaction of (1) the initial conditions when the Earth originated (for example, the abundance of elements) and (2) the relevant natural laws (for example the laws of physics and the law of genetics/inheritance). In other words: claiming that the biological evolution on planet Earth is a law in itself is a fallacy.

In essence, The Poverty of Historicism is just another part of Popper's philosophy. I really like it that he builds a whole new system of logic and science and applies this consequently to practical life. Only truly great minds are able to come up with a consistent, coherent and interesting world picture, and Popper is one of the greatest for sure. He is original, clear, consequent and rigorous. By far my favorite philosopher!

As a last remark: a very short oversight of the connections between his three most important books. In The Logic of Scientific Discovery (1934) Popper worked out his system of logic: scientists should give up the hope of positively proving their theories; they should offer daring hypotheses and try to falsify these with experiments and observations. When theories withstand these tests, they are corroborated; if not, they are refuted and should be dropped. In other words: scientists should weed out the bad theories, and what remains is a strong body of knowledge. In The Poverty of Historicism (1936), Popper applies this scientific method to sociology and does away with the mysticism of historicism and all its inherent dangers of trying to control and dominate mankind. In The Open Society and Its Enemies (1945) he delves deeper into the origins of historicism and approaches it from a more philosophical and practical point of view, showing how the philosophies of Plato, Hegel and Marx have been decisive in historicist thought. In his later works, Popper added to these themes, but I think one can safely say that these three works are the foundation of Popper's philosophy.

Blake says

This was a remarkable little book with many interesting points, keen insights and worthy ideas. Popper writes with the clarity of thought and preciseness of meaning one would more expect of Russell.

Few of these main ideas are new to me (many of them are those I've previously defended in my own writing and dialogues), but Popper gives powerful, original and complex arguments for them.

A warning for some left-leaning readers that this book makes clear from the beginning Popper's distrust of communism. It is:

"In memory of the countless men and women of all creeds or nations or races who fell victim to the fascist and communist belief in Inexorable Laws of Historical Destiny."

Ivan says

Mah! Pensavo chi sa che, ma per carità, è abbastanza interessante. E' un po' vecchiotto, ma, in fondo, se le scienze sociali si sono evolute nel dopoguerra è stato proprio grazie all'utilizzo dei metodi di ricerca quantitativi. Lo storicismo esiste più? forse no, ma esiste ancora, e forse esisterà sempre (come è sempre esistita) la pretesa (illusoria) di vedere nella storia delle leggi di sviluppo. Non c'è alcun senso nella storia intellegibile all'uomo, a meno che non si sia credenti. Ma questa è un'altra storia (della Salvezza).

Esteban del Mal says

I'm going to rub my two brain cells together this weekend and see if I can't write something meaningful about this thing.

Hadrian says

In memory of the countless men and women of all creeds and nations who fell victims to the Fascist and Communist belief in the Inexorable Laws of Human Destiny.

-Dedication

Popper's topic here is more than a question of historiography. He views this problem of interpreting history as a moral imperative, one which must be discussed in order to prevent the spread of a more dangerous alternative.

Popper attacks 'historicism' as a view which attempts to place all of history within a single law, whereas his own view would fit more closely with a 'piecemeal' reform as outlined in [The Open Society and Its Enemies](#). It is all right to change society, but through steady experimentation and improvement and then to reduce human suffering; not by grand attempts at social engineering and means to change human nature.

'Historicism' is still a very vague and very broad term here, but it might be loosely defined as a method of finding patterns within history and then making predictions based all of them. Again, if I remember correctly from The Open Society, Marxism is a sort of historicism because it analyzes history into sorts of trends (proletariat v. bourgeoisie, etc.) and hopes to shove them into a sort of pattern. When Marx was right, however, Popper says that this was because of 'institutional analysis', or his look at the actual evidence of poor working conditions, etc.

His view of the social sciences is that they cannot predict the future with any degree of certainty - in order for them to be considered 'non-historicist', they must adhere to testable claims.

Now Popper is still very fast and loose with definitions, especially over the various types of historicism, this does not detract too much from the overall validity of his arguments. Even if we have some understanding of the past, we might only be able to make educated guesses about the future, assuming some present conditions will remain the same (which they very likely won't).

Tom says

This is a powerful critique of the popular method in the social sciences that attempts to find universal laws of history that can be used to predict how the course of society will develop. It's somewhat short, but Popper is succinct, clear, and convincing. Although I'm still not sure I agree with his position on the complete deductive nature of science, which works its way into several of his positions, it's not really a necessary point to agree with in accepting the larger arguments (which I do).

There are one or two--mostly ancillary--points he makes that I'm sure I don't accept, however. The first is that the social sciences are no more, or even less, complicated than the physical sciences. The second is that psychology is not the basis of all the other social sciences, but is just itself one of many social sciences. These points are interrelated. The reason that the social sciences are, in fact, more complicated than the physical sciences is that they *are* based upon human psychology. Popper is right, yes, when he says that we don't need to consider every desire, feeling, ability, etc. of individual persons when we analyze and try to understand various institutions and processes in the social sciences. That much is correct. But these institutions are, nevertheless, irrevocably bound to human psychology. It is the individuals that make up these institutions--both the limitations and the plasticity resulting from their evolutionarily inherited human nature--that determine the workings of the institutions themselves. No, individual desire may not need to be considered in the higher level analyses in, say, sociology, but it does need to be recognized that individual desire, prejudice, and human feelings and thoughts in general are the sole root of all our social institutions.

Ahmad Abdul Rahim says

Aku menyusuli pembacaan aku terhadap buku Poverty of Historicism dengan buku Against Method, nukilan Feyerabend. Dan itu ternyata membenarkan beberapa persoalan-persoalan dan bantahan aku yang berbangkit sekitar pembacaan buku Popper ini.

Popper adalah, sebelum apa-apa designatori yang lain, seorang ahli falsafah sains (philosopher of science). Mungkin terdapat bayang-bayang seorang ahli falsafah politik di dalam penulisan beliau yang terdahulu, yang paling ketara antaranya adalah di dalam Open Society. Tetapi itu semua adalah sekondari atau lanjutan

mantiki (logical extension) kepada tugasnya yang pertama tadi.

Kerana itu subjek buku ini yang menyentuh berkenaan pandangan kesejarahan atau pendekatan yang diambil oleh ahli sejarawan adalah unik bilamana kita merenungkan latarbelakang penulisnya. Mungkinkah buku ini ditulis dengan motif yang sama seperti motif di sebalik penulisan Open Society? Berdasarkan prolog, kemungkinan itu adalah warid.

Jika benar, buku ini sememangnya berjaya melakukan sedemikian.

Popper memberikan hujah yang sangat kuat (dan begitu bernuansakan Kantian) berkenaan falasi yang mendasari sebarang projek atau pemikiran yang bermatlamatkan holistik. Beliau kemungkinan memaksudkan antaranya ideologi ‘dialektikal materialisme’ atau ‘pergelutan kelas’ milik Marxis dalam hal ini. Ideologi Marx telah memformulasikan suatu ideologi profetik dan bukannya saintifik. Marx menyangka bahawa ideologi beliau telah merangkumkan segala kemungkinan yang berlaku sehingga beliau berani mengisytiharkan bahawa setiap masyarakat adalah sedang menuju kepada tahap kesama-taraan mutlak i.e komunisme. Idea Marx ini, sambil memparafrasakan Popper, tidak dapat disangkal dengan hujah rasional kerana sebarang hujah yang bakal dibangkitkan ke atas ideologi itu sudahpun dibingkaikan lewat lensa mereka (eg: ini adalah hujah bourgeois, berniat jahat kepada golongan pekerja etc).

Jika hujah Popper ini diterima, kita boleh katakan sosialisme dan penyelewengan-penyelewengannya lewat Lenninisme atau Maoisme tidak boleh diasingkan beban salahnya daripada sosok Marx dan Engels.

Tetapi di lembaran-lembaran lain di dalam buku ini, yang menyentuh berkenaan aspek-aspek yang membincangkan falsafah dan metodologi sejarah, tesis buku ini runtuh.

Hakikat bahawa Popper adalah seorang rasionalis degil (obstinate rationalist) dan pada masa yang sama, cuba untuk menyusupkan ‘falsifiability criterion’ yang dibangkungkannya untuk falsafah sains kepada falsafah sejarah secara umumnya, adalah menyakitkan hati. Contohnya, apabila berbicara tentang sejarah secara pandangan mata helang, berbanding dengan kita membincangkan apakah kriteria-kriteria peristiwa yang boleh melorongkan kepada kemajuan, sejarawan, menurut Popper, perlu membincangkan terlebih dahulu, apakah kriteria-kriteria peristiwa yang membantutkan kemajuan – satu cadangan yang terlalu naif bagi aku, seolah tiada sejarawan pernah terfikir untuk melakukan sedemikian.

Malah pembaca kadang-kadang terpanggil untuk mempersoalkan kompetensi Popper di dalam bidang historiografi serta falsafah sejarah. Tambahan pula bilamana beliau menemplak, di lembaran yang lain, bahawa sejarawan sering mengalami delusi bahawa naratif sejarah yang diajukan mereka bukanlah sebahagian daripada pendapat peribadi mereka sendiri – satu kritikan yang bukan sahaja dangkal malah sombong.

Dualisme sains tabie dan sains sosial juga adalah didapati di mana-mana. Yang satu sentiasa dijadikan kriteria pengukur kepada yang lain. Menyebabkan pembaca teringin untuk berteriak: “Ia tidak semudah seperti itu!”

Sungguh sekali, satu indikator kepada kerapuhan tindak kritikan Popper adalah satu-satunya penyejarah (historicist) yang disentuh oleh beliau dengan panjang lebar adalah Tolstoy (adakah penyejarahan (historicism) merupakan suatu falsafah yang dibangunkan secara sedar, dan mempunyai perintis-perintis dan pelopor-pelopor lain yang boleh disenaraikan dengan yakin?)

Adikarya War and Peace tulisan Tolstoy adalah suatu gambaran kompleksiti peristiwa-peristiwa di sebalik

tabir yang melorongkan kepada insiden Perang Perancis-Russia 1812 dan ia merupakan suatu percubaan secara sedar oleh Tolstoy untuk menidakkan naratif perdana sejarah ketika itu yang menekankan peranan kritikal panglima-panglima perang di kedua-dua pihak: Napoleon, Alexander, Kutuzov etc. Menurut Popper, karya Tolstoy itu adalah tidak kurang bercitrakan penyejarahan (historicism) sepertimana naratif sediada - versi Great Men- yang cuba dikritik Tolstoy itu.

Ia adalah satu pernyataan yang aku boleh setuju secara prinsip dan apabila membaca buku ini, pembaca boleh lihat bagaimana kritikan tersebut merupakan lanjutan kepada pengkategorian awal penulis. Di sana, Popper yang membahagikan penyejarahan kepada sisi anti-naturalistik dan naturalistik ('natural' di sini digunakan dalam erti yang sama yang difahami lewat istilah 'natural laws' atau 'naturalism').

Naratif sediada yang cuba dicabar oleh Tolstoy itu adalah Naratif Manusia-Manusia Agung. Sejarah adalah fenomena sosial yang unik (novelty). Ia berlangsung hanya sekali tanpa boleh diulang. Sejarah berkembang secara kitaran atau berepisod dengan setiap fasa tersebut mempunyai 'semangat' atau 'zeitgeist' tersendiri. Ia boleh dikesani lewat manusia-manusia yang paling gah mewajarkan semangat-semangat itu pada era tersebut. Ini adalah tindakan penyejarahan yang anti-naturalistik menurut seorang Popperian.

Tolstoy berpegang kepada logika peristiwa; bahawa perang Perancis-Rusia berlaku di atas rantaian-rantaian beberapa peristiwa yang menyebabkan kejadian Perang 1812 itu sebagai sesuatu yang tidak mampu terelakkan. Ini adalah tindakan penyejarahan yang naturalistik yang menyebabkan adiknya Tolstoy itu sebuah karya penyejarah par excellence di sisi Popperian.

Lewat suluhan tersebut, pembaca perlu berkali-kali membelek semula pendefinisian Popper di awal helaian buku sambil mempersoalkan ketepatan takrifan tersebut yang menyebut penyejarahan sebagai:

"An approach to the social sciences which assumes that historical prediction is their principal aim, and which assumes that this aim is attainable by discovering the 'rhythms' or the 'patterns', the 'laws' or the 'trends' that underlie the evolution of history".

Hal ini paling meruncingkan sewaktu Popper kemudiannya mula menerangkan ciri-ciri tindakan penyejarahan (historicism) dengan projek Utopianism serta citra holisme sambil menudingkan jari kepada pertindihan antara mereka dan betapa cara fikir penyejarahan (historicism) adalah antara penyumbang utama kepada ideologi sebegitu.

Jika kritikan Popper adalah benar, konklusi yang kita boleh dapati adalah di sana mana-mana karya seni, baik novel, filem, mahupun dokumentari, yang bermawdhu-kan sejarah tidak akan sekali-sekali mampu dihasilkan dengan erti yang sebenarnya. Di hujung hari, tiada 'Story' di dalam 'Hi-Story'.

Dan itu, bagi aku, mengisyaratkan kemiskinan imaginasi (poverty of imagination) di sisi penulis buku ini. Bisikan-bisikan dalam telinga aku mengatakan bahawa sekiranya dilucutkan daripada rangka seluruhnya, Poverty of Historicism adalah tidak lebih daripada sebuah deklarasasi marah Popper terhadap idea fasisme ala Nazisme atau ultra-nasionalisme yang telah dibalut dengan istilah skolastik serta lenggok bahasa akademik.

Hal ini tersangatlah merugikan kerana di sebalik kegusarannya yang wajar, Popper telah meruntuhkan beberapa kerja para sejarawan mahupun penyejarah yang asalnya adalah konstruktif. 'Poverty of Historicism' justeru bertindak sebagai peluru tabur dengan mencederakan juzuk-juzuk dari faham sejarah yang sepatutnya dibiarkan utuh sambil membongkarkan lokasi si penarik picu; bilamana ia seharusnya beraksi persis penembak hendap - terus ke sasaran yang diniatkan dengan kejituan yang tepat dan senyap.

Kes Studi Hipotetikal:

Berdasarkan pembacaan seorang sejarawan terhadap sejarah politik empayar-empayar, kerajaan-kerajaan serta negara-negara yang pernah wujud sepanjang sejarah beliau telah mencapai satu konklusi yang dianggapnya sebagai undang-undang sejarah, lalu membuat pengisytiharan:

Bahawa sebarang perolehan “KUASA YANG ABSOLUT PASTI KAN MENG-KORUPKAN PEMEGANGNYA” (absolute power corrupts absolutely).

Seorang Popperian akan mengatakan itu hanyalah satu kecenderungan sejarah (trend) bukan undang-undang. Ada sahaja pemerintah yang berkuasa penuh tetapi tidaklah korup sepenuhnya malah memanfaatkan kepada bangsanya seperti Charlemagne (?), Muhammad (?).

Sejarawan akan kata bahawa itu hanyalah pengecualian, dan ia tidak membatalkan undang-undang tersebut. Majoriti daripada pemerintah dengan pengaruh dan kuasa yang penuh adalah korup dan menindas rakyat jika tiada faktor pengekan. Sejarawan itu mungkin akan menghuraikan rasionalnya dengan mengatakan bahawa hal itu bahkan adalah selari dengan fitrah insan yang condong kepada kezaliman; sejarawan itu mungkin juga akan menawarkan implikasi daripada pernyataan tersebut dengan mengisytiharkan bahawa suatu beluk pembahagian kuasa adalah diperlukan.

Popperian akan membalas bahawa sejarawan itu terlalu tergesa-gesa di dalam berkeputusan. Beliau sepatutnya mengambil kira situasi-situasi prasyarat (eg: suasana pembesarannya, pergelutan kelas, pengaruh aristokrat, kepentingan golongan pedagang, ancaman luar, tribalisme masyarakat, etc) yang membawa kepada kejadian di mana pemerintah tersebut mempraktikkan tirani. Popperian itu juga tidak akan lupa untuk memperingatkan sejarawan tersebut bahawa banyak daripada situasi-situasi yang menjadi prasyarat kepada penggubalan undang-undang sejarah itu masih lagi di dalam kajian dan sebarang penemuan baharu bakal memaksa sejarawan tersebut untuk merombak semula konklusinya.

Sejarawan akan kata bahawa itu adalah suatu permintaan yang absurd lagi mustahil. Sesetengah daripada sejarah politik milik empayar atau negara yang dikajinya tidak mempunyai sumber sejarah yang kaya untuk membolehkan analisis sebegitu dilaksanakan. Selain itu, apa yang lebih penting adalah kepada beliau sebagai sejarawan adalah mengkaji faktor-faktor kritikal (final causes; cf Aristotle) yang menjerumus kepada kejadian tadi (baca: pemerintah korup). Faktor-faktor runcitan lain boleh ditilik melalui pemerhatian kepada masyarakat sediaada dan meng-qiyaskan kepada era lampau. Kerna di hujung hari, subjek kajian kita -dan kita sendiri- adalah manusia.

Popperian akan kata bahawa pendekatan sejarawan itu tidak cukup objektif atau saintifik. Kerana sejarawan itu menyangka bahawa beliau sudahpun mempunyai maklumat total tentang faktor-faktor kritikal yang relevan. Kalaupun beliau mempunyai maklumat sebegitu, ia hanyalah sah untuk satu-satu masyarakat yang hidup pada satu era (yang datanya telah dimanfaatkan oleh sejarawan untuk merumuskan undang-undang itu tadi) , tidak pada yang lain.

Sejarawan akan membalas dengan mengatakan totaliti bukanlah bermaksud gugusan-gugusan fakta yang relevan; akan tetapi ia bermaksud ‘pertalian-pertalian’ yang mendatangkan makna kepada fakta itu - peristiwa-peristiwa sejarah takkan mampu ditilik secara rasional oleh itu. Tambahan, sejarah sebagai sains sosial tidak akan sekali-sekali mencapai erti objektif atau saintifik pada takah yang sama seperti sains tabie: pemboleh ubah yang melatari peristiwa-peristiwa sejarah tidak mampu diasingkan di dalam botol tiub kaca; selain itu, dalam kes kajian sejarah, pengkaji (sejarawan) dan objek kajian (fenomena kemasyarakatan)

adalah serupa: kedua-duanya adalah manusia- dan tidak akan sesekali mampu dipisahkan.

Satu-satunya jawapan balas Popperian kepada penegasan sejarahwan ini -yang aku mampu kesan dalam 'Poverty of Historicism' - adalah beliau akan mengatakan bahawa sejarahwan tersebut telah memandang rendah kompleksiti dan subjektiviti yang tersedia wujud di dalam kajian sains tabie. Yakni bahawa alam semulajadi juga mempunyai sisi-sisi yang subjektif dan kabur kepada analisis para saintis, tetapi itu tidak menghalang mereka untuk merumuskan suatu undang-undang yang objektif yang mampu dimanfaatkan untuk kebaikan manusia.

p/s: Aku tidak tahu jika 'ujikaji fikiran' (thought experiment) ini memberikan gambaran tepat tentang sejarahwan vis-a-vis Popperian, tetapi dalam bentuk inilah ia tergambar di dalam fikiran aku. Tidak perlu dititipkan di sini bahawa bias aku adalah kepada sisi sejarahwan.

p/p/s: Bagaimana pula dengan undang-undang sejarah yang lain seperti, "MEREKA YANG MELUPAKAN SEJARAH PASTI AKAN MENGULANGINYA", atau pandangan Toynbee bahawa "SEMUA KETAMADUNAN YANG WUJUD DI DALAM SEJARAH TERBIT DARIPADA RASA KEBERTUHANAN". Mungkin sahabat-sahabat goodreads yang lain boleh berkongsi undang-undang sejarah lain yang diketahuinya.

Tom says

Methodologically, this book is a very important work. Outlining the method of the social sciences, Popper criticizes Historicism at length, and makes some good arguments. That said, he doesn't have much of a grasp on what history is, nor and overly good handle on Marxist theory. His opinions on history are laughable, and his idea of methodological individualism is so problematically ideological to almost appear as absurd that he couldn't consider the alternative. His section on institutions goes some way to alleviating this, but as Carr points out in 'What is History?', Popper's conception of the subject is so irretrievably Kantian as to be irrelevant for philosophical discourse in the age of post-structuralism and Foucauldian power analytics.

Read with care, Popper is wrong about a few very important things; also he makes some outrageous assertions about history that get dispelled fairly quickly even at VCE level.

Alex says

I found this generally compelling if slightly disorganized, even with Popper's caveats about why he was approaching certain topics outside of the nominal order declared at the outset. It certainly appears from the footnotes and references that a clearer picture of several of the arguments would emerge in a reading of The Logic of Scientific Discovery and/or The Open Society and Its Enemies, at least one of which is waiting on the shelf for me. The shorter length of this volume made some of the content feel a little more tractable, though, as those other two tomes are substantially heavier.
