**Karl Popper’s Account of Piecemeal Social Engineering**

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**Abstract**

In this essay, the problem of violence, its causes, and how eternal peace in a society can be attained shall be discoursed. Violence is illegitimate torture which may be either psychological or physical. Mostly violence is the product of irrational actions which cause destruction in society. Reason is the only solution to the problem of violence. In the paper, I will use Karl Popper’s theory of Critical Rationalism to argue that rational deliberation can resolve the conflicts which often cause violence in society. The practice of unreason primarily causes violence in society which is one of the gravest hindrances to human development. For example, in Pakistani society, an orthodox mind easily gets inclined toward intolerant behavior. The first and foremost aim of this thesis will be to give a proper analysis of why unreason occurs in society. Secondly, it will attempt to propose a viable solution to the problem of violence. However, it will also consider the alternative solutions presented by other theorists. In this regard, Karl popper’s theory of Critical Rationalism could be promising. Being a problem-oriented philosopher, Popper argues that societies advance through trial and error underpinning critical rationality.

**Keywords:**Critical Rationalism, Critical Rationality, Piecemeal social engineering, Utopian social engineering, Violence, Reason.

**Intorduction**

Having a rational and critical mind is the only or at least a noble way to lead a good life. In this paper, the problem of violence, its causes, and how eternal peace in a society can be attained shall be discoursed. Violence is illegitimate torture which may be either psychological or physical. Mostly violence is the product of irrational actions which cause destruction in society. Reason is the only solution to the problem of violence. In this paper, I will use Karl Popper’s theory of Critical Rationalism to argue that rational deliberation can resolve the conflicts which often cause violence in society. The practice of unreason primarily causes violence in society which is one of the gravest hindrances to human development. For example, in Pakistani society, an orthodox mind easily gets inclined toward intolerant behavior. The first and foremost aim of this paper will be to give a proper analysis of why unreason occurs in society. Secondly, it will attempt to propose a viable solution to the problem of violence. However, it will also consider the alternate solutions presented by other theorists. In this regard, Karl popper’s theory of Critical Rationalism could be promising. Being a problem-oriented philosopher, Popper argues that societies advance through trial and error underpinning critical rationality.

The main aim is to explain the method and fundamentals of Popper’s political philosophy to sideline violence with reason. Popper being a solution-oriented philosopher gave solutions and practical suggestions for a better society. In his work Open society and its enemies (1945) and After the Open Society he gave and elaborated his concept of piecemeal social engineering. Violence can only be ended by a rational mindset. If one owns a rational standpoint the question of violence never arises there. I shall be using Popper’s concept of piecemeal social engineering and would defend it as a way forward. Piecemeal social engineering is more of a mindset than an approach. It gives the very fundamentals of how a state should be. Popper explained piecemeal social engineering as “it is the approach which I think to be methodological

sound” (Popper 1944, 148) This elaborates the mindset and the motive of Popper behind this. This approach, for him, is methodologically sensible and practically relevant to day-to-day life. He referred to his political work as the “war effect” which means the time and area in which he was living made him think of such solutions (Popper 1976, 115).

A state which is ruled by irrational rules and laws is a product of Utopian social engineering. Moreover, utopianism is a mechanism in which individuality is ignored. It rules the state from a holistic point of view compelling each of its members to act according to the state’s will. Such an approach for Popper is dangerous and hazardous for a living. In any aspect, the dogmatic and the scholastic mind get inclined toward the idea of utopianism. Making an ideal scenario in our minds and then working towards it is a flawed way to do things. The very determinant of rational choice theory gets neglected in such a position. It is a human need to use his reason and act according to it. Even when we are not making any decision of our own we are still choosing something and that is; taking no action. The “blueprint” which Popper disowned has a very major role when it comes to utopianism. Terrorism and fascism are one of their finest examples. A fascist regime has a pinpoint focus on the ultimate aim. To achieve that aim they use all of their powers and people at any cost. The state is at stake in such a situation.

To bring “revolution”, catastrophes take place. The term revolution, for Popper, is a negative phenomenon (Popper 1945). The aim is not to bring some kind of reform or revolution by the use of reason but to maintain harmony and stability in a society.

Popper in one of his political works After the Open society explains that the work Open society and its enemies (1945) is a fighting book. This shows that most of his political works are a collaboration of his efforts in search of a better world. Three fundamentals are enough to mess up any state. Those are holism, essentialism, and historicism. Historicism is the view that history is governed by historical laws or principles and, further, that history has a necessary direction and end-point. According to the theory of holism, it is necessary to understand certain types of entities in their entirety to comprehend them adequately.

**Piecemeal Social Engineering**

Piecemeal social engineering is an approach which is proposed by Karl popper, precisely in his work, Open society and its enemies (1945). Popper tried to give different problem-solving methods for a better society. Piecemeal social engineering is a problem-solving method that Karl Popper has anticipated to solve the issues of the state. A state is a combination of different institutions and every institution necessities a proper way of functioning. Karl popper has viewed two ways of social engineering by which any political or social issue can be unraveled. The one is, of course, piecemeal social engineering, which is, in his opinion the best kind of social engineering and a problem-solving method. The second kind is Utopian social engineering, which he is strictly contrary to. The piecemeal view does its work in pieces to bring reforms in society. It works by dividing the problem into different parts and then understanding it from a bird's eye view. By doing so, the prevailing problem seems much clear and easy to tackle. One important aspect of this kind of social engineering is that the piecemeal social engineer is always in a vulnerable situation for criticism. In this way, there would be much more space for improvement and enhancement in that particular dimension. It is through the key of criticism that one can built-up a more valuable and justified policy or action. (Popper 1945)

 As Karl pooper has explained that a leader who decides to adopt this method does not have what we may call, a blueprint of society in front of him (Popper 1945). He is aware of the fact that every time has its aims and definitions. Everyone would have a claim of his own so having a mindset of some ideal state would not work. For a piecemeal engineer, it is clear that perfection and ultimate happiness are not what he is about to give to his citizens. There is no such thing as institutional happiness. Perhaps the claim would not be to make the man happy but to avoid unhappiness in society. Therefore, the job of a piecemeal engineer would be to find and investigate the prevalent evils of society.

**Utopian Social Engineering**

The utopian approach is holistic in nature. Such social planning “aims at remodeling the ‘whole of society’ following a definite plan or blueprint,” as opposed to social planning that aims at gradual and limited adjustments. Popper admitted that the alliance between historicism and utopian engineering was “somewhat strange” (Popper 1957). The utopian methodology, he asserts, is much more fascinating and attractive than that of the piecemeal one. It may attract several minds but it is dangerous (Popper 1976). The leaders who adopt this form of government turn it into totalitarian and fascist regimes. There is a link between historicism, utopian engineering, and utopianism. The goal of utopians is to create some form of an ideal society in which all social disputes are addressed and fundamental human rights like freedom, equality, and happiness are fully attained. According to Popper, totalitarianism was not unique to the 20th century. Rather, it “belongs to a tradition which is just as old or just as young as our civilization itself” (Popper 1945, 1).

In addition, the utopian system takes the institutions of a state as a whole. This holistic outlook wants the state or society to act on a central rule. “ The greater the holistic changes attempted, the greater are their unintended and largely unexpected repercussions, forcing on the holistic engineer the expedient of piecemeal improvisation” or the “notorious phenomenon of unplanned planning” (Popper 1957, 68-69). In a utopian environment, readjustments cannot be made. Trying to give a jolt of revolution to society might lead to violent activities.

**Popper’s Implementation of Scientific Method into Politics**

Being a philosopher of science, Karl popper has always wanted the execution of the scientific method into politics. Indeed, his most important political texts, The Poverty of Historicism (1944) and The Open Society and Its Enemies (1945) offer a kind of unified vision of science and politics. As explained below, the people and institutions of the open society that Popper envisioned would be imbued with the same critical spirit that marks natural science, an attitude that Popper called Critical Rationalism. Piecemeal Social Engineering is that tool through which one can achieve scientific methodology in politics. After all, the reason for the advancement and development of science is; learning from mistakes (Popper 1934). If we look keenly to understand what is it the scientists are doing then we must see that all they are doing is experimenting and learning from their mistakes. “This—and no Utopian planning or historical prophecy—would mean the introduction of the scientific method into politics, since the whole secret of the scientific method is a readiness to learn from mistakes” (Popper 1945,163). Even if we just try to understand the method of falsification, it is all about leaving space for understanding and improvement (Popper 1934). Putting this scenario in politics, society as a whole would improve on a higher level only if the people in power started to learn from their mistakes. According to Karl popper, this is only possible through the application of the piecemeal method. Its clemency is what makes it beneficial. Piecemeal engineering is all about giving a chance to readjustments (Popper 1994). The Utopian method however has its emphasis on a blueprint experiment that may lead to violence.

**Piecemeal approach as a pacifist approach**

It can be said that a piecemeal approach is a pacifist approach. Not wanting war at any cost is what it is all about. The element of pacifism in piecemeal thinking has made it vast in nature. Social reforms are far better than social revolutions. Piecemeal application in a society does not require some massive change. Revolutions, on the other hand, result in a war-like situation. Be it the holocaust or any dreadful happening in the course of history.

**Political enhancement Through Piecemeal Engineering**

One thing that a piecemeal social engineer would know is that perfection cannot be achieved. It

can be on some initial pre-mature level but not fully. Rejecting the question Who should rule? as the fundamental question of political theory, Popper proposed a new question: “How can we so organize political institutions so that bad or incompetent rulers can be prevented from doing too much damage?” (Popper 1945, 121). If the politicians of the time start to work on a piecemeal methodology, the state and the government would be on a higher pace. This means if they start to accept their mistakes and wrongdoings rather than just justifying them, the world would be a better place. If each institution starts to work on it and starts to make little modifications within it, nothing can stop them to attain the highest good. “Under such a system parties are from time to time forced to learn from their mistakes” (Popper 1994, 97)

When solving any problem, the best way is always to solve it in pieces (Popper 1945). Just when solving a puzzle, the proper way is to do it in pieces. The piecemeal approach does the same to social issues. To sustain equilibrium in society, this one step is essential. It makes it very clear and easy to identify where the problem is laying. Taking the prevailing problem as a whole and then adding more fuel to the fire by trying to solve it from a holistic point of view creates nothing other than fuss. The piecemeal view tries to make it go easy and problem-solving. The utopian outlook makes it totalitarian in nature. Utopianism is closer to the act of violence. We can see reason is being used superficially in such a scenario but deeply it has no concern with it. All it does is make the people suffer. The piecemeal approach can somehow attain the ideal conception of society. “We are democrats,” Popper wrote, “not because the majority is always right, but because democratic traditions are the least evil ones of which we know” (Popper 1963, 351).

**A piecemeal mind is equal to a peaceful mind**

The piecemeal approach has been mentioned and explained a number of times now. What is it, how it can be developed, and what consequences it will give? All of it has been addressed already. The question is what makes it fascinating. A piecemeal approach is straightforwardly a problem-solving approach. But what is the reason behind all this positivity this approach gets? What I have come across from my research is that the power of positivity it spreads and the way it tries to build harmony in a society is what makes it special. Not only is this but there is more to the table. It is directly connected with peace. A peaceful mind is a piecemeal mind. The relationship between piecemeal engineering and peace is inevitable. As the piecemeal approach is a peace-making approach it is obvious its application will lead to a better society and a better government. Piecemeal engineering knows its boundaries. He is aware that happiness is a state of mind. But to work towards it is in our own hands. The little modifications done by every institution would be sufficient. Piecemeal engineering does not promise a massive kind of revolution. Revolution itself is not a suitable word for Popper. Moreover, a piecemeal engineer is an empath. He lets his people and himself grow. The greater the holistic changes attempted, the greater their unintended and largely unexpected repercussions, forcing on the holistic engineer the expedient of piecemeal improvisation” or the “notorious phenomenon of unplanned planning” (Popper 1956, 68-69).

A state that is piecemeal in nature does not demand unrealistic blueprints. A ruler can make or break a state. Looking at the course of history it can be observed that it was the Utopian mindset that crushed so many dreams and potential states. The effect of the human factor is that utopian social engineer inevitably is forced, despite themselves, to try to alter human nature itself in their bid to transform society. Their social plan “substitutes for [the social engineers’] demand that we build a new society, fit for men and women to live in, the demand that we ‘mold’ these men and women to fit into this new society” (Popper 1956, 70). We have seen that a utopian approach has a link with violence and it gives rise to totalitarian and fascist regimes. While the “piecemeal engineer knows, like Socrates, how little he knows. He knows that we can learn only from our mistakes” (Popper 1956, 67).

For an elaborative example of the wonders piecemeal engineering can do, we can concern Aristotle. Recalling the political philosophy of Aristotle where he gave his six forms of government. Three of them were the normal and real forms and the other three were the perverted or corrupted forms of them, as said by him. Now if we look closely and distinctively we get to see that fundamentally the first three forms were the kind of governments that were going on the right path. That is, on a piecemeal approach. Here the ruler or leader or even a monarch is not doing anything in self-interest. Everything is done by having a mindset of a collective good. This intention of bringing out the collective good through good governance is what makes it beneficial and successful. In this form, the institutions of a state are working individually but for a collective outcome. If one function goes wrong, it would not destroy the whole society. But if we look at the perverted form of it, it is dangerous and it gives society a torturous environment. The element of self-interest is very much involved here. The monarch here becomes the tyrant. This results in the manufacturing of totalitarian regimes. It is because the leader is now a dictator. He will not allow his people to exercise their reason and if the people of a particular society cannot exercise the right of their reason they will end up frustrated which will cause violence. The “far-reaching historicist consequences” of Aristotle’s essentialism “were slumbering for more than twenty centuries, ‘hidden and undeveloped’,” until the advent of Hegel’s philosophical system (Popper 1945, 8).

 Only one move can make or break the whole society. Popper knew that every time will have its new demands and outcomes (Popper 1994). One cannot preach dogmatic teachings over and over again. The philosophy of utilitarianism does not always seem to be right and able to apply. Popper was on the same page as Aristotle that the main purpose and goal of an individual is to achieve happiness, or what he called eudemonia. Man is born to be happy and to experience happiness is his right. The state of Aristotle was just for the sake of his people to be happy. He believed that a human being can only practice happiness if he is under a state. It is somehow similar to what Karl Popper asserts. Popper wanted to make a society free from violence and destructive behavior. That path, for him, was the piecemeal path (Popper 1994). Every individual should be his own piecemeal engineer. Only and only then can a society achieve the higher level of a state. To ameliorate the prolonged issues in any field of society it is essential to adopt the piecemeal mindset.

**Open Society vs. Closed society**

Studying Popper’s explanation of society one realizes how a simple rule can have drastic results. Talking about a piecemeal approach as all glittery is not the aim. Without knowing what an open society and a closed society are, we would not know the real difference. Let us take a look at a closed society. A closed society is a society in which the role of an individual is static. This means he cannot exercise reason to make his own decisions. It is rather a dogmatic environment where an individual feels stuck. It is one dangerous state because here the capabilities of an individual get rusty. It is, of course, a utopian mindset’s result.

In contrast, the individualism, freedom, and personal responsibility that open societies engender leave many feeling isolated and anxious, but this anxiety, Popper said, must be born if we are to enjoy the greater benefits of living in an open society: freedom, social progress, growing knowledge, and enhanced cooperation. “It is the price we have to pay for being human” (Popper 1945, 176). Popper charged that Plato emerged as the philosophical champion of the closed society and in the process laid the groundwork for totalitarianism. The state of Plato is a utopian state for Popper. The very fundamentals of Plato’s state make it totalitarian in nature. For Plato “only a stable whole, the permanent collective, has reality, not the passing individuals” (Popper 1945, 80).

Popper was one great critic of Plato. In his book After the Open Society and its Enemies (1945) he even compared Plato with Hitler. He wrote an equation that goes like Plato=Hitler.

The rage Popper has for a utopian mindset can be seen here. He was also of the view that he respects Plato for his objective idealism but was quite against his conception of the state. When talking about the philosophy of war there must raise a question of the philosophy of peace. On one hand, it is the utopian mindset that creates violence and unease in society while on the other hand what gives it a source of relaxation is the piecemeal method.

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