

The world according to Popper

The Myth of the Framework

by Karl Popper, Routledge, pp 229, £25
Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem
 by Karl Popper, Routledge, pp 158, £20

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WHEN Karl Popper died in October, the world lost a uniquely gifted individual. Apart from Aristotle and Plato, no other thinker can equal the breadth and depth of Popper's contributions to knowledge. Popper's mind grappled with problems ranging from logic and quantum physics to evolutionary, social and political theory. He opened up a new world of profound philosophical puzzles. And in a century obsessed with specialisation, breadth is astonishing.

Popper was born in the Ober St Velt district of Vienna on 28 July 1902. His father was a distinguished lawyer, his mother a talented musician. He studied mathematics, physics, psychology and music at university in Vienna, obtaining his doctorate in 1928. He wrote his masterpiece, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, in 1934. In 1936 Popper and his wife Hennie, a physical education teacher, left Vienna for Britain to work in Cambridge. They then moved to New Zealand, where Popper had a tenured position. While there he wrote his famous attack on totalitarianism *The Open Society and its Enemies*. Popper returned in 1946 to take up a readership in logic and scientific method at the London School of Economics, becoming professor in 1948. He was the dominant force in the department, and his seminars were animated by debate that was sometimes ferocious. His dominance was due not to the need to impress or manipulate, but to an urgent desire to solve real problems. Popper created an intellectual tidal wave that swept others along. He was knighted in 1965 and made a Companion of Honour in 1982. He was also a fellow of the Royal Society and a member of the British Academy.

The Myth of the Framework defends science and rationality. It is a defence of Popper's critical rationalism, the attitude that he expressed as: I may be wrong and you may be right, and by an effort, we may get nearer to the truth. Some, such as the philosopher Rome Harre, have overlooked the fact that Popper advocates not only strict

logic but also modesty, optimism, imagination and a competitive cooperation.

The myth of the framework, as Popper explains it, is the idea that a rational and fruitful discussion is impossible unless the participants share a common framework of basic assumptions or, at least, unless they have agreed on such a framework for the purposes of the discussion. Popper admits that understanding another mind or language may be difficult, but if there is a desire to understand another person's aims and problems you can bridge the gap.

The myth takes various forms, such as Thomas Kuhn's idea of incommensurable scientific "paradigms". Kuhn, or at least the popular travesty of his view, pictured scientific revolutions as the complete replacement of one way of seeing the world by another with which it could not be compared. Popper refutes this picture by

and other Middle Eastern cultures.

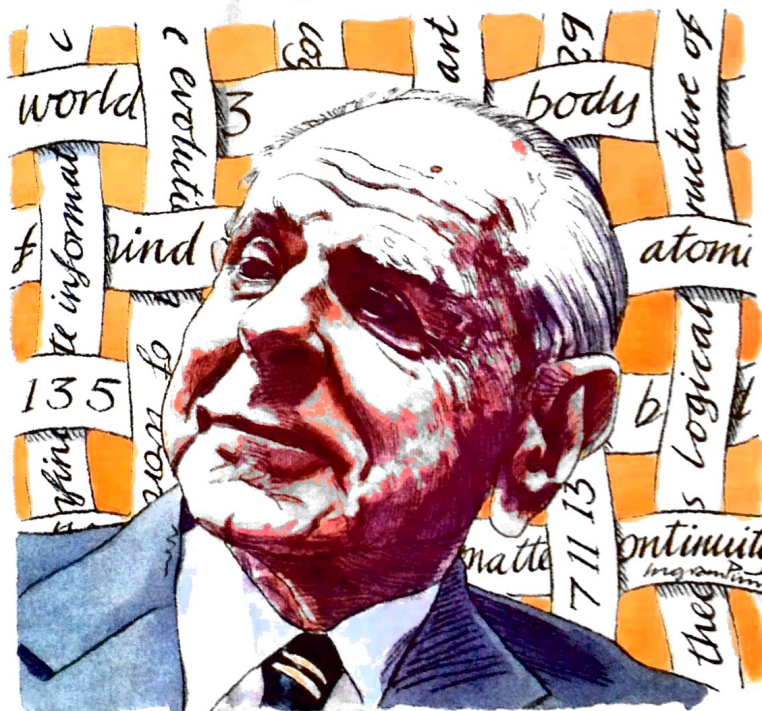
Intellectual clashes also characterise philosophy itself, despite its greater liability to fashion. We still disagree for example, on how the mind and body are related. This question is at the heart of *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem*, a book based on a series of previously unpublished lectures given at Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia, in 1969. One of the delights of *Knowledge and the Body-Mind Problem* is the exchange between Popper and the audience, which draws the reader into the scene of the debate. Of the many answers to this question, nearly all assume that there are only two domains to be related: the mind and the body.

Popper's bold idea was to introduce a third domain, world 3. This is the domain of abstract entities produced by the mind, but not reducible to either the mind (world

2) or physical states (world 1). Its purpose was to explain not only the body-mind relationship but also creativity and the objectivity of scientific clashes. Plato is famous for his third realm, the world of forms, populated by such concepts as goodness, beauty and truth. The forms were thought of as perfect, eternal and completely independent of the human world. Popper's world 3, however, is a far richer and more human world than Plato's world of forms. Plato's third realm contained only concepts, while Popper's world 3 also contains statements, arguments, problems and even works of art.

World 3 is our creation but, once created, it has

an autonomous existence, properties and relations that go far beyond our intentions or expectations. Humans invented natural numbers, but they then discovered odd and even numbers and other patterns such as the sequence of prime numbers. Most importantly, these unforeseeable properties of world 3 objects can have feedback, affecting our thinking and, ultimately, the physical world. Mathematics or computer-aided design programs, which are world 3 objects, enhance an architect's creative thoughts and buildings in unforeseeable ways that cannot be explained simply in terms of psychology. Popper takes as an example the experience of writing an essay.



pointing to the history of science, which contains many examples of several "dominant" theories struggling for centuries for supremacy. From the Pythagoreans and Parmenides, Democritus and Plato, to Werner Heisenberg and Erwin Schrödinger, for example, have been at war with one another with their atomist and continuity theories of matter.

The Myth of the Framework suggests that agreement is necessary for progress. But important intellectual progress has often come about through the clashing of two or more cultures and therefore of frameworks. Our rationalist civilisation is the result of clashes between Greek, Egyptian, Persian