

## KARL POPPER'S CONCEPT OF 'WORLD 3'

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### ABSTRACT

*Karl R. Popper (1902-1994) was a great philosopher of 20<sup>th</sup> century best known for his Political Philosophy and his contribution in Philosophical Epistemology. His concept of 'World 3' is basically an extension of his Epistemological views. According to Popper there is not one single world in front of us but three. 'World 1' is the world of material objects. 'World 2' is the world of human perception, conception, a disposition to act or react etc. 'World 3' is the world of all possible human creation. Popper considers Plato as the first discoverer of 'World 3.' Popper considers World of Ideas or Forms as the first attempt in the history of Western Philosophy to locate the Ontology of Knowledge. In the World of Forms of Plato every Idea is perfect, every idea is a Substance and objectively existent. But according to Popper the 'World 3' is Manmade and not divine. He is also of the view that with the interaction of 'World 1' and 'World 2', 'World 3' comes in to being but after its coming to existence, it liberates itself from the previous worlds. It becomes objective, self-existent but Popper claims that it is not divine as Plato and Hegel think of it. This article is an attempt to critically discuss that is it possible for any world to be Manmade in nature and yet totally independent of any human mind at the same time?*

**Keywords:** World 3, World of Forms, Objective Spirit, Epistemology, Ontology.

### INTRODUCTION

Karl R. Popper presented a Pluralistic view of the world. (Miller, 1983) Unlike Idealism (of any kind) and unlike Materialism (of any kind) and unlike Dualism of any kind, Popper presented a Cosmological Philosophy which has three worlds. 'World 1' is the world of Material Objects (in this World the unseen material objects can also be included). 'World 2' is the world of Human perception, conception, imagination, intellectual intuition etc. 'World 3' is the sum total of Human creations in the fields of Science, Art, Social Science, Medicine, Engineering and Mathematics etc. As stated above, according to Popper the first discoverer of 'World 3' is Plato (Popper, 1967). In the Philosophy of Plato we come across two Worlds. The one is the world of material objects and the second is the World of Ideas or Ideal World (Stace, 2010). From common sense point of view the ideas cannot exist independent of minds or Mind. Ideas cannot be self-existent. The Philosophy of Plato cannot be considered as against common sense; it should be regarded as a philosophy beyond common sense. For Plato the world of knowledge (World of Ideas) is perfect, objectively existent, beyond common sense and divine. In this way for the first time in the history of philosophy Plato gave an outstanding account about the ontology of knowledge and the complete objectivity of knowledge. Now the question arises how did Plato reach his outstandingly new and creative concept? Plato gave the world of philosophy some outstanding philosophical arguments for them. They are as follows:

- i. The world of material objects is temporal, spatial, imperfect, and changing while the World of Ideas is perfect, unchanging, divine and beyond space and time. How can the imperfect world produce the perfect one? (Russell, 2003)
- ii. The second argument of Plato is quite different. According to Plato every Man has sense perception and these senses do have a corresponding world around (objective world). In the same vein, Plato argues that every Man has clear ideas about things so there should be corresponding World of Ideas.
- iii. Plato argues that if Ideas are nothing but the general impression of things than there should always be resemblance within the things of one category but actually it is not the case. We can label a child, a lady and a man as beautiful but a beauty of a kid is quite different from the beauty of a female and the beauty of male is quite different from the beauty of a female (Stace,

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2010). There are many shades of blue which always be categorized under the idea of blueness but apparently they do not look like the same. In this way Plato tries to prove that World of Ideas cannot be a product of a world of material objects; on the other hand world of objects is the imperfect copy of the World of Ideas or Forms. According to Plato we are born with these ideas and in this way Human Knowledge is not an invention but a discovery or rediscovery. Philosophically Plato should be considered Rationalist (Epistemologically) and Idealist (Metaphysically) as well.

According to Popper the second major attempt in Philosophy to locate the Ontology of Knowledge is of Hegel (Popper, 1962). According to Popper, Hegel himself is a Platonist but his Objective Spirit is not static like Plato's but changing and developing in the course of History. For Hegel, the movement in History is not Hap hazard. History moves in a specific direction and its movement is dialectical in nature. Popper has many objection against the point of views of Plato's and Hegel's.

- i. The World of Ideas (or forms) and Objective Spirit (Absolute Spirit) of Hegel are divine in nature and not Manmade while the 'World 3' of Popper is not divine but a human product.
- ii. Like the Objective Spirit of Hegel his 'World 3' is changing and developing.
- iii. In order to explain his 'World 3' Popper presents a concept which can easily be criticized and negated.

My arguments in this regards are as follows:

- i. If 'World 3' is objectively existent than it cannot be a Manmade.
- ii. If 'World 3' is a human creation than it cannot be that objective and self-autonomous. Perhaps Popper himself knows these inconsistencies in his thoughts but he does want to establish two things at the same time which cannot be established simultaneously (in humble opinion).

### Research Objectives

The research objectives of this article are:

- i. To critically examine the Ontology of Knowledge.
- ii. To critically examine the 'World 3' of Popper.
- iii. A comparative analysis among Plato's World of Forms, Hegel's Objective Spirit and Popper's 'World 3.'

### Research Questions

The research questions of this article are as follows:

- i. If mere observation or experience cannot produce any knowledge then where does it come from?
- ii. If deductive knowledge cannot give any new information about the world and induction cannot be considered as a method of Science (according to Popper) then from where does the creative idea come from?

### Popper's Rejection of Modern Philosophical Epistemology

Popper rejected Modern Philosophical Epistemology considering it subjective and irrelevant for the development of Science and Philosophy (Miller, 1983). Before Popper Continental Rationalism and British Empiricism were supposed to be opposite of each other and rival schools of thought. If Continental Rationalism was of the opinion that knowledge was basically innate, according to British Empiricism it was acquired. For Continental Rationalism, Reason was the ultimate source of knowledge but for British Empiricism it was sense perception. Interestingly Popper rejected both of the schools and highlighted the similarities between them. According to Popper, both of the schools have been interested to reach at the ultimate source of knowledge while the basic question of epistemology should be how to scrutinize thoroughly the date given by any source of knowledge. According to him both of the schools were authoritarian in nature. Popper is of the opinion that every source of knowledge should be welcomed but none should be given the sole authority (Popper, 1960).

The second major objection of Popper on Modern Philosophical Epistemology is that it is subjective in nature and quite irrelevant to the growth of Philosophy and Science (Popper, 1972). For searching the complete objectivity and independence of human knowledge, Popper proposed the concept of 'World 3.'

### The inconsistencies in the concept of 'world 3'

He considers 'World 3' as objective but it cannot be if it is really a human product. Popper wants to get rid of any divine elements in his Philosophy but it cannot be possible either. According to him nothing

can be produced or developed from mere observation and experience (Popper, 1992). In order to produce or develop knowledge first of all we have to have a conjecture in the form of a theoretical framework. Now again the question arises from where does this creative conjecture come from? Is it from God or from gods or goddess or from some divine agencies? Popper does admit the existence of intellectual intuition and imagination but does not seem ready to admit any divine element. His approach does not seem to me consistent and strong. It is quite unusual for any philosophy student to come across a philosopher who admits intuition and imagination but strongly rejects that they are from God. A philosopher who wants to present his 'World 3' as objective and self-existent like of Plato's and Hegel's but rejects the impression that it is divine in nature.

#### **The Standard Example of Mathematics Given by Popper**

For the proper explanation of his 'World 3' Popper takes the example of Mathematics. According to Popper the Number series (1, 2, 3...) is Manmade but the existence of odd, even and prime numbers is the unintentional consequence of it. In my humble opinion this is a weak explanation. If the number series is really Manmade than odd, even and prime numbers should also be considered as human inventions and if the number series are not human inventions but only a discovery of human beings than the questions of intentional or non-intentional consequences cannot arise. Considering number series is Manmade and odd, even, and prime numbers as un-intentional consequences of it seems an arbitrary point of view. In my humble opinion all mathematical knowledge and all the fundamental concepts and ideas are not the products of Human mind. We are born with these ideas as rationalist think. We do not invent knowledge but discover it and Mathematical knowledge is a great example of it. Neither number series nor odd, even or prime numbers are Manmade. The manmade thing is only numerals and not numbers (Klemke, 1979). In the case of different languages, the basic concepts are not Manmade, we are born with them but the existence of many languages is because we can create different words for the same concept. By admitting the divine element and inborn ideas in their philosophies Plato and Hegel seem more consistent than Popper.

#### **The Ambivalent Relation of Popper with Darwinism**

As a philosopher 'World 3' creates many difficulties and solves very little. As stated earlier, Popper considers Plato as the first discoverer of 'World 3'. In other words Plato's World of Forms is the first major attempt to locate the ontology of human knowledge and to give this ontology an independent and objective status. But Plato pre-supposes many things before presenting before the world his World of Forms. First of all Plato believes in innate ideas and according to him Man is born with these ideas. His ideal world exists beyond time and space but participate in the material world and Man discover or rediscover the ideas and cannot invent them. Plato is Rationalist Epistemologically and Idealist Metaphysically. Hegel is not very different from Plato in many respects. Hegel is also a Rationalist. He is also an Idealist. His Objective Spirit and Absolute Spirit both are divine in nature. Popper's position as a philosopher is quite different from both of the philosophers. It is quite natural for Popper to trace his 'World 3' as an evolutionary process on the direction given by Darwinism.

The relationship between Popper's philosophy and Darwinism has always been ambivalent. At the beginning Popper admires Darwinism but after sometimes he considers the Creative Evolution as non-falsifiable but useful assumption and in the third stage he considers Darwinism as falsified many times (Cambier, 2016).

In order to justify his 'World 3' as an evolutionary epistemology he considers 'World 3' as an unintended consequence of some intentional acts. He gives two examples in order to explain his point of view.

- i. He considers 'World 3' like a bird's nest (Radnitzky & Popper, 1993). Birds usually make nest for some practical reasons but in this process the product of this intention seems unintended in many ways.
- ii. Popper gives the second example and considers 'World 3' as path in a jungle which is the product of many unintentional acts of different animals.

In my humble opinion 'World 3' cannot be explained through the above mentioned examples. A bird's nest or a path in jungle are too simple examples to explain the examples of the complicated phenomenon of human knowledge. The theorems and equations of mathematics, the scientific and philosophical theories and the theories of social sciences etc. cannot be explained by the above mentioned two simple examples.

The problem of Popper as philosopher is that he very well knows the validity and value of the World of Forms of Plato and its effectiveness in philosophy of mathematics especially. Popper knows

the importance of Hegel also in this respect. Objective Spirit is an outstanding explanation of the existence and development of human knowledge in the course of History. The basic difference between Plato's World of Forms and Hegel's Objective Spirit is that former is permanent and unchanging and later is changing and developing. But both of the philosophies consider human knowledge as divine and do not consider any human being to be the inventor of his or her knowledge. Popper tries his best to avoid any kind of divinity in his philosophy on one hand and tries his best to consider Human knowledge as Manmade. But by considering 'World 3' as totally self-autonomous and self-existent, his concept becomes inconsistent and weak.

## CONCLUSION

Popper's concept of 'World 3' is actually an endeavor to discover the real ontological status of human knowledge. Popper rejected Modern Philosophical Epistemology that it is subjective in nature and irrelevant to the growth and development of science and philosophy. Now the logical question arises that if human knowledge is basically Manmade then it cannot be considered as completely objective and self-autonomous and if human knowledge is Manmade in nature, then we cannot avoid the subjective element in it. Popper tries his bet to explain his theory by considering it 'the product of human animal' and by giving the above mentioned simple examples. My humble opinion in this regard is that 'World 3' is inconsistent in many ways and it is not even important in the overall philosophy of Popper like World of Forms is important in Plato's Philosophy and Objective Spirit is important in Hegel's Philosophy. Popper severely criticized Plato and Hegel in his book *Open Societies and Its Enemies*. Popper is original and outstanding so far his contribution in Philosophical Epistemology and Political Philosophy is concerned but in my humble opinion he has not been successful in giving the world an outstanding explanation of the nature of human knowledge as Plato and Hegel did in his philosophies.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

My recommendations relating to the Popper's concept of 'World 3' are as follows

- i. The phenomenon of human knowledge is not only an important issue for philosophy but for all subjects. The experts of all forms of knowledge should ponder upon and try to understand the ontology of knowledge.
- ii. For the proper understanding of the phenomenon of human knowledge scientists, mathematicians, artists and social scientists should interact with each other and should benefit from the findings of each and every subject.

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