

From Ex Cathedra Legislators to Dialogic Exemplars? Popper, Rorty and the Politics and Sociology of Knowledge

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I would like to thank Raphael Sassower for [his response](#) to [my article](#) on Popper and Rorty. Sassower argued that ‘if we contextualise the writings of Popper and Rorty we could easily understand their respective difference in focus or attitude rather in substance’ (58), with this standing in contrast to the ‘partisan politics of the academy’ which produced dogmatic and superficial readings of their work (57-58). For Sassower (2006a, 2006b, 2014) it is the case that politics can legitimately influence philosophy, not only with normative commitments influencing the solutions proffered for problems, but with normative commitments influencing the construal of what constitutes a legitimate and interesting problem. So, whilst it was the case that Popper and Rorty were engaging in different ways with different traditions in different historical contexts, they nonetheless shared a similar normative motivation which shaped their philosophies. Specifically, neither were conceptualising themselves as ‘disembodied’ intellectuals engaging in purely technical problems abstracted from any socio-political and historical context. Instead, both regarded themselves as engaging in a public conversation about the dialogic nature of knowledge and socio-political problem-solving, where a recognition of fallibilism or contingency precluded appeal to any source of certainty. For both it was important to avoid the authoritarian follies that lurk in intellectuals’ clerical tendency to presume a privileged access to a higher domain of reality, with this being used monologically to legislate on the beliefs and actions of others; as well as avoiding the parochialism of holding that philosophical problems, in effect, have no import for life outside technical philosophy. In place of the intellectual as *ex cathedra* legislator basing their authority on a particular metaphysical doctrine, or parochial technician, intellectuals were to move public dialogue forward by being interlocutors.

In the reply that follows the focus will be on how Popper and Rorty’s concern with establishing a dialogic community based on problem-solving was motivated by a fear of the domination of monologic political doctrines, with this resulting in them constructing science and the humanities, respectively, as idealised domains of dialogue, that is, as dialogic ethical and epistemic exemplars. These constructions misconstrued the domains of science and the humanities and misconstrued the social nature of dialogue outside these putative exemplars, which cannot approximate to an ideal domain of undistorted communication. This is not to reject their work, which is of fundamental importance. It is, though, to call for their work to be complemented by a more sociological understanding of dialogue, within which their politics and philosophies may be located. It is also to call for an approach to dialogue that eschews the need for exemplars.

Metaphysics, Time and Place

Popper followed the logical positivists by treating science as an ethical and epistemic exemplar. For the logical positivists science was an ethical and epistemic exemplar

because scientists pursued the truth, settled debates by appeal to the empirical data and eschewed any metaphysical commitment which would pervert the rational pursuit of truth. Science could thus be a model for the rest of society because an ethical commitment to the rational pursuit of truth underpinned progress in knowledge and its technical applications. By contrast, meaningless and irrational metaphysical commitments to religious or nationalist beliefs would result in the use of force to persuade other people and industrial barbarism in warfare (Hacohen 2002). For Popper the positivist conception of science not only failed in epistemic terms by turning to induction, but in ethical terms too, because it failed to embody the critical spirit that was needed for progress. As all beliefs were fallible it followed for Popper that there could be no epistemic source of knowledge, such as the authority of the senses (with empiricism) or the authority of the intellect (with rationalism) and thus no justification. Consequently all forms of knowledge had to progress through criticism. The aim of criticism was not to find the best definitive solution to a problem but to find more interesting problems to tackle. Once a problem had been solved the solution needed to be criticised until it yielded more interesting problems. As far as Popper was concerned, the sciences embodied this critical spirit. Science, for Popper, was an ethical exemplar because scientists would be not only critical of orthodoxies held by others but open to criticism of their most cherished ideas and happy to see those ideas replaced, with this facilitating epistemic progress. For Popper, science thus embodied the perfect epistemic liberal ‘open society,’ where a free market of ideas based on criticism drove progress. With such a conception, the ethical progress of individuals growing through changing their ideas was as – if not more – important that the practical outcomes that criticism of theories and ideas could produce.

As for actual liberal democracies, suffering was the problem, and the solutions argued for by Popper included: broadening welfare; programmes to remove dogmatic and harmful attitudes such as racism; and improved education. These reforms were good in themselves and good as facilitators of a genuinely democratic dialogic society. With science the free market of ideas facilitated ethical and epistemic progress and in liberal democracy a reformed market economy coupled to a free market of ideas would raise people as moral beings. The closer actual liberal democracies, with a reformed market economy, came to the exemplar, the greater the possibility of a virtuous circle operating where educated citizens valued participation in public life to solve problems as good in itself, with this valuation further raising citizens as ethical beings. Both science and politics ought to be domains of open problem-solving without dogmatic commitments to theories with falsified predictions or prejudices and policies that caused harm.

If the internal threat to science as an exemplar was positivism, the external threat to actual liberal democracies and science as an exemplar, during the time Popper was writing, was the creation of totalitarian communist and fascist ‘closed societies’. For Popper (2002) there was a tradition in western metaphysics stretching from Plato to Hegel, Marx and fascists, whereby elites engaged in metaphysical speculation about some domain of ultimate reality, such as the forces of history or a hierarchy of races, with

knowledge of this domain then being used to support *ex cathedra* legislation on social and political matters. Within a closed society, an elite would claim the right to rule based on knowledge of the forces that control history. Communists and fascists may claim that their positions were scientific but, for Popper, they were pseudo-science because they eschewed fallibilism for claims to authority in knowledge and had unfalsifiable positions which could configure data in any way necessary to verify the authority of the doctrine that was claimed to be scientific.

This did not mean that Popper was necessarily opposed to metaphysics though. He argued for metaphysical realism which simply held, *contra* idealism, that there existed a reality independent of our representations of it (Popper 1972). Neither metaphysical realism nor idealism could be justified – because no position could be justified – but metaphysical realism was to be preferred because idealism was an arrogant philosophers’ conceit that made the world our construct, whereas realism encouraged the humble view that reality would always ultimately exceed our knowledge. Metaphysical realism could thus function as a psychological motivator for doing science especially when it was accepted that knowledge was fallible with every theory thus being ‘strictly speaking false’. This took on especial relevance with Popper’s argument for verisimilitude. Here the removal of false theories was held to get us closer to the ultimately unattainable realm of absolute truth, with a belief in this absolute truth being the motivator for endlessly seeking more interesting problems through falsification. Perfect knowledge of reality was not possible but constant striving towards a reality we could never know absolutely ‘in itself’ was possible and desirable, because this striving raising us as ethical beings and furthering epistemic progress.

Popper’s work turned on a dualism between rationally held positions which are open to critical dialogue and dogmatically held positions which are monologic and closed to critical dialogue. Given this, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that Popper’s commitment to metaphysical realism is dogmatic. To be sure, he is clear that he is not seeking to justify it, but he is clear that this is a useful and important position which ought to be held, as far as Popper is concerned, even though it is not amenable to development through criticism. It is a monologic position that is either accepted or not. As there are no substantive claims, dogmatism here does not entail any authoritarian legislation on substantive socio-political or scientific issues. Nonetheless it is still the case that the psychological motivator behind doing science, which is the exemplar for liberal openness, is itself dogmatic.

So, in contrast to closed societies, Popper constructed science as the perfect or exemplary open society. This of course misconstrued the myriad of pressures and mediating influences upon science, including individuals not being quite so delighted to have a cherished theory falsified (with defence of theories possibly helping, *contra* Popper, the search for better explanations), funding pressures and the intersubjective conventions which Popper admits shape perception of the data. Just as an idealised scientific open community was constructed in opposition to the threat of totalitarianism so too was

Popper's argument for methodological individualism, as Sassower (2014) argued. Popper drew a sharp dichotomy between defining social reality purely in terms of individuals and defining social reality solely in terms of supra-individual forces that determine history and agents' behaviours. Whereas liberals will have to be inclined to the former, those who favour the imposition of totalitarian utopian blue print will have to claim knowledge of the moving forces that determine the course of history. This individualism is rather problematic not least because Popper's discussion of 'situational logics' indicated an awareness of some form of supra-individual factors conditioning and mediating individuals' agency.

If the central idea for Popper was fallibilism, the central idea for Rorty was contingency. Read one way the emphasis on contingency can be a metaphysical position which entailed a postmodern celebration of flux and the recognition of the impossibility of engaging in meaningful agency. Such an approach to contingency would undermine Rorty's political-philosophical vision of the dialogic problem-solving community though. The alternative is to treat Rorty's recognition of contingency as a recognition of fallibilism and a denial of any notion that knowledge is a matter of arriving at certainty by observing empirical phenomena or having definitions correspond to essential properties. As with Popper, Rorty regarded dogmatism as the antithesis of progress. For Rorty, people need to recognise that their values and beliefs are contingent and not fixed by 'nature' or underpinned by some form of epistemic or methodological guarantee. As ethical and political beings we progressed through dialogue and a dialogic problem-solving community was needed to realise this, with such a community being liberal democracies with reformed market economies. It was the humanities, as far as Rorty was concerned, and not the sciences that were to be the ethical and epistemic exemplar. The humanities would embody the spirit of open dialogue, where the process of open dialogue was more important than the contingent outcomes of this dialogue.

Science, as an exemplar, was threatened for Popper not just by intellectuals turning to metaphysics but by logical positivism misconstruing what science was and denying its dialogic nature. In Rorty's (1980) early pragmatist work, the humanities, as an ethical and epistemic exemplar, were seen to be threatened by philosophers seeking to create a general theory of representation. The legislative urge here concerned epistemology rather than metaphysics and legislation was based on philosophers' claim to provide epistemic guarantees for other domains. The upshot of this for Rorty was that philosophy undermined the humanities by focusing on an elite eschewing dialogue for a monologic approach to knowledge, based on the attempt to construct and impose a general theory of representation. Moreover, this monologic approach to knowledge was based on trying to solve pseudo-problems (concerning how ideas or language mirrored objects) and which, contrary to its legislative urge, ending up becoming a purely inward looking technical pursuit. Rather than contribute to a dialogic public based on problem-solving, philosophers sought professional advantage by dealing with technical matters separated from wider concerns. Professional philosophy, or at least Anglo-American philosophy, became an anti-exemplar. Whilst Rorty had more sympathy for continental philosophy

his sympathy and interest lay more with thinkers such as Derrida and Foucault and not their followers who ended up also creating a philosophical debate-stopping anti-exemplar.

Rorty's later work engaged with the attempts by intellectual elites to use metaphysical speculation as the basis for legislative authority. Like Popper, Rorty argued that there is a tradition in Western metaphysics, exemplified by Plato, Hegel and Marx, where intellectuals wanted to gain knowledge of a domain of ultimate reality that would give them the authority to legislate on socio-political matters. Whereas those concerned with epistemology had sought validation by providing guarantees for others to arrive at knowledge, those philosophers engaged in metaphysical speculation sought out an object around which to 'weave their fantasies', starting with the Forms and moving on to 'History', with the story spun having a redemptive ending. Post-Nietzschean philosophies, such as post-structuralism, may deny the existence of any objective moving force and seek to deconstruct all forms of privileging. However, as Rorty perspicuously argued, although they turned from 'History' and a redemptive ending to 'Language' or 'Discourse' and the replacement of redemption with the endless re-construction of subjecthood in power relations, they nonetheless presented another case of an intellectual elite seeking authority to legislate on socio-political matters (Rorty 1998, 1999). Whereas Marxism saw capitalism as 'The Great Bad Thing' with History redeeming humanity, post-Nietzscheans saw Language or Discourse as the next Great Bad Thing and, rather than legislate on the passage to redemption, they sought to assert their authority by deconstructing the positions of others and exposing them as manifestations of power. In other words, post-Nietzscheans engaged in metaphysical speculation about Language or Discourse being the domain of ultimate reality that shaped agents with the post-Nietzschean elite having a privileged access to this domain. Here legislation took the form of exposing other positions as expressions of a power-knowledge nexus. In all cases, the intellectual elite's monologic urge to legislate on knowledge and socio-political life is debate-stopping. Whereas Popper was concerned with elites imposing totalitarian rule, Rorty is concerned with the way post-Nietzscheans have influenced not only the humanities and social sciences but also those engaged in leftist politics to such an extent that the USA left is removed from concrete issues concerning poverty and only engages in technical debates about identity, otherness, alterity, etc. Unlike the hermetic world of Anglo-American philosophy's technocratic withdrawal from public life, the post-Nietzscheans have had some positive impact on reducing discrimination through identity politics but overall they have muted critical voices in the public sphere. The upshot of this is that the political right and their plutocratic funders are free to define problems and their solutions.

For Rorty, the re-invigoration of the humanities turned on literature not philosophy, with literature having the power to make people see things differently, by expanding their normative-emotional horizon for understanding others and their suffering. This ought to motivate people to engage in public dialogue to reduce 'socially acceptable sadisms' such as stigmatising others on the basis of, for example, their ethnicity, class or sexuality.

Prejudice and dogmatism would be avoided because people would not only be open to understanding others but open to realising that their own values were ‘contingent’, that is, derived from a particular socio-historical context and not absolute. People should take an ‘ironic’ or ‘poetic’ attitude to their ‘final vocabularies’: they should maintain an attitude of critical openness combined with a creative urge to rework their values so as to better understand others and the problem of suffering (Rorty 1989, 1999).

To overcome the domination of the political right and corporations, who sought to privatise social problems by presenting them solely as matters of individual failure, a more dialogic and engaged public was required. This could be created, in part, by the left abandoning post-Nietzschean theory in favour of engaging in substantive problems concerning systemic poverty, inequality and a failure by many to recognise the suffering of others different from them. The humanities, freed from all metaphysical speculation and technical parochialism, could help create the conditions for such a public by creating an educated citizenry. This treatment of the humanities, freed from the nefarious influence of philosophy, is as idealised as Popper’s conception of science as the perfect open society. Thus, in literature departments, debates can rage about the texts to teach with — these being informed by concerns that are external to a conception of pure dialogue undistorted by theoretical, social, political, etc., factors concerning, for example, gender and colonialism. Further, the use of persuasive rhetoric in literature may well not be connected to progressive causes.

Contingent Dualisms and the Search for Closure in the Open Society

Exemplars ought to be non-contingent because, by definition, they ought to embody an idealised ethical and epistemic domain, once purged of false legislators in the form of positivists and analytic and continental philosophers. However, the exemplars that Popper and Rorty constructed are contingent upon their socio-historical and political concerns as well as the intellectual traditions they were familiar with. This makes both exemplars backward looking in the sense that the supposedly pure domains of dialogue are actually constructed in reaction to a specific set of problems. The backward looking construction may not be an issue if those domains did manage to transcend a particular political and intellectual problem-situation. However, the exemplars are not only defined in opposition to a particular set of debates but also constructed or applied in such a way as to limit dialogue and limit it in a way that fixes the range of dialogue in reaction to the problems Popper and Rorty tried to transcend. This indicates a pessimistic doubt about dialogue which undermined the very argument for exemplars. For even once purged of positivism, technical-parochial philosophy and a legislative metaphysical urge, there was still the worry that open dialogue within these domains may nonetheless go awry and undermine their exemplary status. Embracing fallibilism and contingency is meant to be sufficient for dialogue to be ethically and epistemically progressive. Yet doubts are present about its progressive ability and guards are put in place to protect it from deviating into non-progressive areas. This brings us to a dualism between form and content.

For Popper the methodological rules of science constitute the form of science and the prevailing inter-subjective conventions and empirical data they shape constitute the content. This is a problem for the natural sciences where it is moot to say the least to argue that the history of science is based on the application of the hypothetico-deductive method combined with a ‘permanent revolution’ of theories being falsified. And it is especially problematic for the social sciences where problems may well not be amenable to quantitative explanation and the H-D method. Indeed, given Popper’s view that the acceptance of fallibilism entails the view that progress is marked by the discovery of more interesting problems, the delimitation of problems to fit the form of scientific method is distinctly unPopperian.

Moreover, it is not just the case that the form delimits the range of problems but is itself beyond critical dialogue and is thus, given Popper’s dualism between critical dialogue and dogmatism, an example of dogmatism. Underpinning this is the tacit view that the H-D method is justified because of the authority of logic. Justification requires a source of authority for Popper and that source, in this case, would be logic: induction was vitiated by the logical problem of induction whereas the H-D method would be justified by being congruent with logic, and thus beyond criticism. Whilst all views were meant to be fallible, the H-D method was justified by an appeal to the authority of logic. Further, as noted earlier, the psychological motivation for engaging in science, namely a commitment to metaphysical realism, is also a dogmatic position which cannot be part of critical dialogue, because there is no basis for it to be subject to criticism as it is metaphysical not empirical and logically coherent.

This justification of the H-D method as the form of science is one instance of the use of dualisms to protect exemplary knowledge and its correct application from counter-exemplary knowledge and its application. Popper gives us a number of dualisms which demarcate: science from non-science; the form from the content of science as the exemplar; rational (critical) perspectives from dogmatic (authoritarian) perspectives; piecemeal / reformist improvement of open societies from utopian social engineering and the creation of closed societies; metaphysical realism from idealism; and liberal individualism from totalitarian holism and historicism. All of these dualisms are taken to be either beyond critical dialogue or, changing the criteria for assessment, beyond useful dialogue, making them dogmatic. Thus one could, for instance, engage in critical dialogue of the benefits of reformism over violence and death in the imposition of a utopian blueprint, but this would not be deemed useful given the obvious problems with repression, terror and violence. Similarly, one could not seek to find problems with methodological individualism because the only alternative was held to be totalitarian holism and historicism which, in effect, placed criticism of methodological individualism beyond useful dialogue. The reference to useful dialogue does undermine one dualism of Popper’s which is the dualism between criticism and dogmatism. This is because such positions are formally open to criticism but substantively closed off from it given the negative implications. In which case, rather than a dualism, there are now three

categories, with the inclusion of ‘in effect dogmatic’. The upshot of all this is that the exemplar and its applications are protected from dialogue going into areas and reaching conclusions that may destroy or subvert the exemplar and the liberal democratic societies it is meant to improve. What this indicates is a lack of trust of the dialogic process despite its foregrounding in Popper’s work for ethical and epistemic progress, based on openness, which is meant to include the growth of individuals as self-critical beings. The exemplary open society is defined in a closed way.

With Rorty’s work the content is the exemplar, that is, it is the humanities, or at least an idealised version of the humanities. The form is the liberal public-private framework that the exemplar is meant to be applied to. For Rorty, the humanities could stop culture ‘freezing over’ by enriching public debate and removing blocks to dialogue such as prejudice. Underpinning Rorty’s conception of transformative agency is a tamed and democratised Nietzscheanism which regards all people as fundamental creative. Given this, a dialogically rich culture is not only good as a means to the end of solving problems with inequality, but good as an end in itself. As people are deemed to be innately creative the worst form of harm is humiliation, that is, the imposition of an identity upon someone, which replaces an ironic or poetic attitude to a final vocabulary and the change of that final vocabulary, with a dogmatically enforced identity (Rorty 1989). The problem thus arises that a dialogically rich culture which re-works ideas and values, challenging old prejudices along the way, may well come to humiliate some who want to self-define in a static and dogmatic way. Freely defining as a liberal is one thing but being told to be a liberal is another.

Rorty (1989) deals with the problem of one person’s creativity being imposed on another by drawing a sharp dualism between the public and private spheres. In the private sphere one could re-create one’s values in any way one pleased but in public one’s creativity could not be imposed on others. The liberal public-private dualism is thus the form for the application of the humanities *qua* content. This form is, like Popper’s methodological rules, beyond critical dialogue. Whilst liberalism may be historically and economically contingent, meaning that it could be replaced by, for example, fascism or theocracy, it is the case that within liberalism the form is not contingent: the public-private dualism is fixed and not open to dialogue and change through ironic or poetic creative-transformative agency. In private one is Nietzsche and in public one is Popper. For without this, the worst form of harm could ensue and the exemplar would be rendered redundant by dialogue being replaced by illiberal Nietzschean poets taking a monologic approach to creativity and its imposition on others. Furthermore, unlike Popper, but like the positivists, Rorty sought to reject all metaphysics, or at least all metaphysics from the exemplar and its public application. One could hold religious beliefs in private but not use these for public dialogue (Rorty 1999). They may motivate certain commitments but those commitments would have to stand or fall on their own merit. The problem here is that the liberal form is itself metaphysical, because it is an abstraction and not empirical. Thus the form is beyond dialogue and Rorty’s emphasis on creative agency, together with

being in opposition to his prohibition on metaphysics and what he takes to be its intrinsically authoritarian applications.

Epistemology as Ideology

Bloor's (1991) sociology of scientific knowledge holds that all beliefs, true or false, are caused. He thus rejects the asymmetry position, common to much philosophy of science, which holds that the truth explains itself whilst error is to be explained causally in terms of ideology etc. causing a person to have incorrect beliefs. For Bloor there is a symmetry between true and false beliefs in terms of causation.

Discussing Popper, Bloor drew a distinction between 'mystifying knowledge' and 'naturalistic knowledge'. The former pertains to criteria that are presented as timeless, universal, asocial and beyond appraisal, such as methodological rules. The latter pertains to the social conventions. Bloor argued that writing under the threat of totalitarianism Popper was caused to err towards mystifying knowledge by making his criteria timeless to protect them from the contingencies of time and place. The law that is presented by Bloor is that groups with low power which feel threatened will use mystifying knowledge. Applied to Rorty, the argument could be that he too felt threatened, in this case as a marginalised intellectual in a context where a plutocratic elite, the politicians who served them and a mass culture that was dumbed down, threatened all notions of the culturally enriched non-dogmatic interlocutor who sought to reduce suffering and closed minded attitudes. Consequently, he too sought mystifying knowledge in the timeless form of the public-private distinction which was meant to act as a filter for the public domain to be kept clear of dogmatism and fundamentalism.

For Bloor, the sociology of knowledge can explain how ideas are caused and received whereas philosophy cannot: philosophy would hold that philosophical problems, or logical problems, concerning knowledge and method are autonomous, and thus it would fail to grasp the causal processes at work in the construction of problems, their solutions and the reception of solutions. This means that philosophy, left to its own devices, would result in 'propaganda' whereby epistemologies unwittingly reflected ideologies. By contrast, the sociology of scientific knowledge can avoid this, by making philosophers aware of the social causes at work in the construction of all beliefs and theories.

Popper (2002) rejected the sociology of knowledge, targeting Mannheim's work. He argued that this 'sociologism' held that all agents had their beliefs socially determined by 'total ideologies', with the task being that of 'socio-therapy' to disabuse agents of their determined beliefs and arrive at a state of subjective certitude about being able to see the facts freely without distortion. For Popper this was another example of an intellectual seeking to engage in legislation based on their privileged access to a higher domain of reality not known to others, in this case, the realm of 'total ideology' that controls agents. Once again, metaphysical speculation was connected to an authoritarian and dogmatic endeavour. For Popper, there could be a sociology of error, which could explain how dogmatic adherence to ideologies distorted people's perceptions, but not a sociology of

knowledge, because knowledge was a matter of increasingly verisimilitude irrespective of social influences.

Two points can be made about Popper's critique of the sociology of knowledge. The first is that Popper's work obviously offered a social account of knowledge because of the strong reference to inter-subjective conventions influencing what is perceived, contrary to Popper's reliance on the form. The second is that his critique is designed for the hermeneutics of suspicion approach to knowledge, which holds that whilst an elite can see the truth, the majority are duped by ideology, with this not being applicable to the approach developed by Bloor. For Bloor there could be no privileged elite arriving at knowledge that floats free from determination. The argument for symmetry is thus quite different from the hermeneutics of suspicion approach to knowledge.

Problem-Solving and the Sociology of Knowledge

If we accepted Bloor's argument, Popper and Rorty's work would need to be rejected, because the search for timeless criteria beyond dialogue to define and defend the exemplars would make their work ideological. Against Bloor, it can be argued that an alternative approach to the sociology of knowledge is required which is based on the problem-solving dialogic philosophies of Popper and Rorty.

Bloor's position sought to be progressive in the sense that it removed mystification without the asymmetry presumed by elites who present themselves as escaping the social determination of belief. Whilst it sought to avoid elites legislating on knowledge from an epistemically privileged position arrived at through asymmetry, the problem arises that it is not clear how it could motivate a dialogic approach to changing ideas about science or society. This is because the entire focus was on the causal chain behind ideas, which included the ideas concerning the construction and reception of problems, with there being no basis for the open, creative, fallibilistic and dialogic appraisal and development of ideas. Bloor's position motivates a subjectless closure to dialogue, meaning that even without monologic elites, genuine debate would not be possible, because all the focus is, ironically, backward looking, as with the construction of exemplars. The emphasis is on where ideas came from with there being no basis to understand creative adaptation. For Bloor, what was termed here as the form in Popper's work was held to mystify knowledge and thus be illegitimate in itself, with any use of this also being taken to be illegitimate because any use would necessarily entail mystification too, even though applications of the H-D method may produce knowledge. Conversely, positions with non-mystifying origins would be acceptable and, by extension, the knowledge they produced would be acceptable. If different positions with different acceptable origins produced different acceptable outcomes there would be no position to decide between these. Trying to seek a position outside the different positions offering different legitimate (non-mystifying) knowledge claims would of course be to return to mystification, because it would be seeking some form of meta-criteria that transcended specific substantive positions. Given this, Bloor's position would entail paralysis and as

paralysis would serve vested interests as much or more than mystification, it too would have to be rejected as a form of ideology, if Bloor's standards are applied to his own work.

An alternative is to develop a problem-solving sociology of knowledge based on the work of Popper and Rorty. Such a position could explore the multiple mediating influences on the construction of problems, their solutions and the reception of those solutions, including conventions, interests, ideologies and socio-political problems, such as the threats from totalitarianism or neo-liberal plutocracies. Taking such an approach, the construction of exemplars could be explained and criticised as the wrong solution to the problems facing Popper and Rorty. It would be the wrong solution because it failed to recognise that no domain of dialogue can escape the multiple influences on knowledge production noted above. Therefore, rather than conceptualise dialogue as needing to approximate to an exemplar and form of 'pure', asocial, undistorted communication, it had to be recognised that dialogue was always 'messy', that is, that dialogue and the production of knowledge is always mediated by a myriad of factors. Instead of trying to abstract exemplars and the form of knowledge and problem-solving from the socio-historical and intellectual problem-situations facing them, Popper and Rorty needed to comprehend dialogue in terms of such problems, as well as other more positive factors, such as the situated opportunities to take political and philosophical debate forward to reform society.

Sassower is correct to argue that the philosophies of Popper and Rorty stemmed from their politics. The partisan politics of the academy tended to latch onto the aspects of their work that sought out exemplars for dialogue. Whilst these exemplars can be criticised, this does not vitiate the politics and philosophies of Popper and Rorty because a problem-solving approach which is broadened out to include a sociology of knowledge, different from Bloor's, can situate, criticise and transcend the search for exemplars. The sociology of knowledge can explain how politics informs philosophy in specific problem-situations that never need to approximate to any notion of 'pure' dialogue.

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