On tolerance

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Abstract

In this paper we consider the doctrine of 'open society' popularised, in a book of the same name, by the philosopher Karl R. Popper.

Key Words: Tolerance, Open Society, Stanley Milgram, Totalitarianism

Socrates had already pointed out that we know very little or even, as he put it, nothing at all: "*I only know that I know nothing, and I barely know that*". This Socratic attitude is particularly important, above all in the present day. The author firmly believes that it is crucial for intellectuals to renounce any kind of intellectual claim to certainties or absolute truths.

Plato, another of the great Greek thinkers and disciple of Socrates, posed a fundamental question which remains pertinent even today: "*Who should rule?"* Many answers have been offered to this question over the course of history. Some suggest the wisest, others the best, but in reality, in the author's judgment, the predominant answer today is: 'the people must rule'. In this respect, Popper says that *the question itself is mistaken*. It is not necessary to ask who should rule, but rather: "What can we do to shape our political institutions so that evil and incompetent rulers cause the least possible harm and we can depose them without bloodshed?" The central issue is thus not so much the dogma of "popular sovereignty" and "democracy", but rather that of "limits to power", even that of the people.[1]

The question arises: "*Can we do something for the future?*" Popper's response is positive: "Perhaps not much, but something…We cannot be pessimistic. It makes no sense to say that everything is bad…*Perhaps we can do very little. But the little we can do, we must*".[2]

In this regard, *what makes a political system strong is not rigidity but flexibility, the possibility of a government facing contradiction and accepting criticism. "A weak system seeks to avoid criticism and escape into contradiction".*[3]

So, *a good system is capable of condemning its mistakes.* Popper states: "A good system must remain constantly alert to the mistakes it makes, because we always know very little and so we always make mistakes….we have to discover our mistakes as quickly as possible, to learn from them and correct them, rather than covering them up or denying that they are mistakes…*Mistakes are inevitable. The important thing is what we learn from them.*"[4]

Does this imply a favourable stance by Popper towards anarchist tendencies? Does he think that the absence of government is the most fruitful hypothesis? In a sense, "everyone that is in favour of freedom must be in favour of being governed as little as possible and having the minimum possible government; hence approaching the absence of government, anarchism…. [requires being ruled]…as little as possible and as little as remains compatible with our ideas of justice and our ideas of equality and of freedom….a very apt formulation, which I believe emanates from America, is the following: someone who has hit another argues that he has only moved his fists with freedom; but the judge replies:

[1]Popper, K. R. (1983). Sociedad abierta, universo abierto. Conversación con Frank Kreuzer.(5th. ed.). Madrid: Tecnos. SpanishtranslationbySalvador Mas Torres and Ángeles Jiménez Perona, 20-22.
[2]Popper, K. R. Sociedad abierta, universo abierto…, op. cit., 25.
[3]Ibid., 27.
[4]Ibid., 27-28.

'the freedom of movement of your fists is limited by the nose of your neighbour'….the strength of a government is in its capacity to reconcile this double problem: uniting maximum effectiveness with maximum respect for personal freedom".[5]

A key concept for this matter is that of *tolerance*. In this respect, Popper describes the Nazi concentration camps as a "terrible destination for innumerable people, people who loved other people, who tried to help other people, who were loved by other people and who other people tried to help. They were families that were destroyed, annihilated." But the horror does not end there. Refugees from Vietnam, the victims of Cambodia, of the Iranian Revolution, of the Iraq war, refugees from Afghanistan, "people, children, women, and men always become victims of fanatics drunk on power". The question Popper poses is: "What can we do to prevent these indescribable events? Can we, in general, do anything? And can we in the end prevent anything? My answer to these questions is: *yes, I believe we can do a great deal*".[6]

On this point, it is interesting to review the experiment conducted by Stanley Milgram at the University of Yale concerning the limits of obedience to authority and how these broke down under the experience of National Socialism.[7]

The explanation for such happenings would be in the lack of an existing critical sense in the face of authority, which prevents us from reacting deliberately and voluntarily in disobeying such authority, as we should when it is unjust, rather than obey it.

The experiment in question consists of the following. An announcement placed in a newspaper and personal requests by post resulted in the recruitment of over a thousand volunteer participants. Having been selected, the person was invited to an elegant 'laboratory' at the University of Yale where two other subjects were present: the 'experimenter' and the 'victim', in reality an actor, but presented as another individual who had voluntarily offered to participate in the experiment. The experimenter then explained the aim of the experiment: to study the influence of fear of punishment on the teaching and learning process. The actor – the 'victim' – occupied the position of 'learner' in the experiment, and the volunteer – in fact the real subject of the experiment – that of the 'teacher'. The student was tied to an 'electric chair' and an electrode attached to their wrist. The teacher was placed in another room in front of an apparatus designed to produce electric shocks of different intensities – from 15 to 450 volts – scaled by degrees: slight, moderate, strong, very strong, intense, extreme intensity, and danger: severe. It was then explained to the person playing the role of teacher that they must press the switch to administer a shock to the learner each time they made an error in responding to the test to which they were subjected, the intensity of the shock increasing with each new error and progressively rising to a shock of 450 volts, the moment at which the experiment would be completed.

During the first shocks – which, obviously, the actor did not actually receive – the actor did not make any complaint, but from 120 volts the 'victim' shouted at the experimenter, who was in the other room together with the teacher, emitting cries and moans of increasing intensity and even begging for the experiment to be stopped. The truly interesting part was observing the capacity of subjects to continue administering electric shocks when submitted to external pressure from someone with authority – the 'experimenter'. If the subject administering the shocks refused to continue, the experiment was concluded.

Before obtaining results, the research team undertook a survey among a group of psychiatrists, students, and middle-class adults in general, seeking to discover the kind of behaviour that could be anticipated in such an experiment. In every case, it was predicted that only a very small group of subjects, no greater than 1 or 2% and classified as pathological, would be capable of reaching the end of the experiment. It was remarkable to observe, then, that in the real results of the experiment, a large proportion of the participants – 62.5% - were capable of administering shocks until the final discharge, the pressure of the 'experimenter' ordering the subject to continue until the end in the interests of scientific progress being sufficient to achieve obedience.

[5]Ibid., 28-29.

[6]Lecture by Popper, K. R. Tolerancia y responsabilidadintelectual, delivered the 26th May 1981 in the Tübingen University.

[7]Milgram, S. (1974). Obedience to Authority.New York: Harper and Row. Tezanos, J. F. (1976) Los límites de la obediencia. Consideraciones sobre el experimento de Stanley Milgram.Sistema, 12, 99-114. Falcón y Tella, M. J. (2004).Civil Disobedience. Preface by MarttiKoskenniemi. Leiden-Boston:MartinusNijhoff, 8-14.

The research team prepared different variations of the same experiment to see whether the results were the same. First, it was sought to observe whether physical proximity to the 'victim' and their reactions – complaints, cries, and gestures – would influence the behaviour of the person administering shocks. To that end, alongside the basic model of the experiment, another was undertaken in which the complaints were eliminated and every administration of a shock was met only by silence. Third, the same base experiment was repeated but with the 'victim' placed in the same room as the 'teacher' and in close proximity. The results of these new experiments showed that "the degree of proximity to the victim, in addition to direct physical contact, were the factors that most influenced the behaviour of the subjects".

Nevertheless, Milgram does not rest satisfied with an analysis of the past, and affirms that the social structures upon which fascism was based not only have not disappeared, but rather have been modernized and have increased in efficiency. So that the exercise of free will, as much intellectual as practical, would be healthful.

In effect, in contemporary industrial societies the growth of population and technology itself increase the loss of autonomy and of the critical sense, which is the right breeding ground for the exercise of authoritarian power: Modern technology, putting within man's grasp the means of aggression and destruction that may be employed at a certain distance from the victim, without the need to see him, nor to suffer the impact of his reactions, has created a certain distancing which tends to weaken human inhibition mechanisms of aggression and violence.

Thus Man converts all into a thing. Subjects are reduced to the condition of mere agents. We might define the state of being an agent as that in which the individual stops seeing himself as responsible for his own actions and considers himself a mere instrument through which others realize their wishes. Thus, the behaviour of the subject is compelled by authority pressure. This is due to every child has been strongly socialized in the principle of obedience from birth, from the school, the family, or military service, to the company where he is first employed.

In this respect, it is worth noting that there is a greater tendency to disobedience insofar as there is an increase in educational level; amongst doctors, lawyers, and teachers more than amongst technicians and engineers; and amongst protestants and jews more than amongst catholics. To this, should be added the decisive influence of industrial capitalism. A further important variant in uncritical obedience turns out to be the influence of the group. Thus, when responsibilities are shared, it becomes diluted.

Today, societies have set up a disjunction between encouraging the critical sense of a conscious and voluntary dis/obedience or fostering submissive and automaton-style obedient beings.

Along the same lines as study of the mechanisms for inhibition and disobedience of the law one finds the *analysis of Erich Fromm*[8], who argues that it is not the case *that all disobedience is a virtue and all obedience is a vice.* Such a view would ignore the dialectic relation between obedience and disobedience: *An act of obedience to a principle is necessarily an act of disobedience to the opposing principle*, and vice versa. The classic example is that of Antigone, who in disobeying the laws of the state obeyed the laws of humanity. Obeying and disobeying are always disjunctive. *If a man can only obey and not disobey, he is a slave; if he can only disobey and not obey, he is a rebel.*

In turn, Fromm distinguishes between *'heteronomous' obedience* to an institution or power external to the subject, which implies submission and the abdication of personal autonomy, and *'autonomous' obedience* to one's own convictions, as an act not of submission but of *affirmation of one's own self*, of which one's own beliefs form part. This distinction must be nuanced by some further clarifications with respect to conscience and authority.

The word 'conscience' is expressed in two ways: *'authoritarian' conscience*, which is the internal voice of an authority that we are afraid to disobey, described by Freud as the 'super-ego', such as the orders and prohibitions of a parent accepted by the child; and *'humanistic' conscience*, that is, the voice present in any human being regardless of external sanctions and rewards, based on the feeling every person has for what is human and inhuman, of what benefits life and what goes against life. Authoritarian conscience – the 'super-ego' – involves obeying a power outside of ourselves, though this power has been internalised.

In turn, *authority has two possible meanings: 'irrational' and 'rational' authority.* An example of rational authority is that which occurs in the relationship of a student with their *teacher*, while irrational authority would be that which occurs between a *slave* and their master.

[8] Fromm, E.(1984). On Disobedience and Other Essays. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 3-8.

While the interests of the teacher and the student point in the same direction, at least in the model case, and the teacher is satisfied if the student is successful as this represents success for the teacher too, the interests of a slave and master are antagonistic, such that what is beneficial for the one is detrimental to the other, and the master wishes to exploit the slave – the more, the better. The first example – rational authority – is based on reason. The second – irrational authority – is based on force or the suggestion thereof, since in principle nobody would allow themselves to be exploited if they were free to prevent it.

Fromm asks: *why is man so prone toward obedience and so reluctant to disobey*? The answer to this question lies in the fact that *obedience creates a feeling of security and of protection in the obedient.* Obedience makes us a party to the power we obey, and we hence participate in its omnipotence. It makes us feel as if we were not committing mistakes, since the power decides for us, and as if we were not alone, since the power protects us. *To disobey requires courage* to withstand being alone and the possibility of being mistaken. But courage is not all. A sufficient degree of personal development is also required, the umbilical cords with the mother and with parental authority having been severed. *Being free is also required*. Freedom is as much the effect of disobedience as a requirement. If we have *fear of freedom* we do not venture to say no to the established power. But there is a further reason for which saying no is so difficult: because throughout the history of humanity, *obedience has been identified with virtue and disobedience with sin.* There is a simple reason for this identification: *only in this manner can an empowered minority force the majority to obey*. Since there are only enough resources for the enjoyment of a few, it is necessary for the remaining mortals to give their approval and submit, this submission being greater and more durable if, instead of merely being based on force, it is the object of some form of consent.

Against this gregarious obedience, disobedience proposes a critical attitude governed by two mottos: seek knowledge – '*sapereaude*' – and question everything – '*omnibus estdubitandum*'. People in society have lost the ability to disobey, and perhaps would not even be capable of realising that they are obeying. At this stage in history, the future of humanity depends in large measure on the capacity to question, criticise, and disobey injustices.

When Popper states that we can all do something, he is thinking specifically of '*intellectuals*', those interested in ideas, who read and perhaps also write. *Because intellectuals, for millennia, have caused the most terrible harm through people killing in the name of an idea, of a rule, of a theory.* Ideas such as those of nation, race, political orthodoxy, and religion have given rise to terrible events. For example, the latter has led to religious wars when the most important of the Ten Commandments orders "do not kill", and the entire essence and ethic of religion is contained in the rule: "do not harm anyone, but help everyone as best you can".

At least at first glance it appeared that a *war for religious or ethical motives* would be more justifiable. But on further consideration: what legitimacy is there in seeking to impose by force something which should in essence be free? "*Religion, interest, or love, as with so many other beautiful things, should never be imposed by force*". It is the old maxim that the end does not justify the means: an ethical end is not sufficient to excuse the use of physical force and violence. The line of religious wars includes biblical wars, the medieval *crusades* of the Christians to recover Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Turkish rule, and the '*Jihad*' or Islamic Holy War, which promises paradise to those who die fighting for Allah and for the victory of Islam over the infidels.

In short, *one must be tolerant*. Voltaire asks: "What is tolerance?" And responds: "It is the consequence of humanity. *We are all formed of frailty and error; let us pardon reciprocally each other's folly*".

Does this imply embracing *relativism* and the idea that all theses and intellectual stances are more or less justifiable, that anything goes? In moral relativism, also known as emotivism or subjectivism, the only moral imperative for human beings to obey is their own conscience.

The inadequacies of the relativist justification lead Popper to counter with a stance almost always confused with relativism but which is nonetheless distinct. We are referring to pluralism, and more specifically to *critical pluralism.* Popper states that while relativism, emanating from lax tolerance, leads to 'anything goes' and in brief to anarchism and the rule of force, critical pluralism may avoid this fate. According to relativism, *one may accept anything or almost anything, and hence nothing*. Everything is correct – or nothing.

On the contrary, critical pluralism opens up a *kind of debate or rational competition of ideas*, a rational confrontation between arguments, in which the best theory is that which appears *rationally to best reflect the truth, and the best theory defeats the weaker theories.*[9] This is *Jürgen Habermas'* idea of *discourse ethics*.

For Popper, "*truth is the correspondence of what I say with the facts, whether or not I know that the correspondence exists*". In this regard it is necessary to distinguish between '*truth*' (objective) and the subjective '*certainty*' of knowledge. We can rarely if ever be completely sure that we are not mistaken. There is hence only '*conjectural*' knowledge, but in this conjectural knowledge there is a *progression toward the best*, the best knowledge being the best approximation to the truth, though the knowledge always remains conjectural.[10]

Returning to the idea of conjectural knowledge, of the difficulty of learning the absolute truth, we derive the need for 'intellectual modesty' along Socratic lines: the only thing I know is that I know nothing. *The only wise man is he who knows he is not wise*. This attitude regarding the little we know leads to tolerance, to the idea that one must question everything. It is the '*methodic doubt*' of which Descartes spoke. On many occasions, conclusions are false because the premises are wrong. It is thus necessary to be dubious of accepting without questioning certain preconceptions which are often plagued by *prejudices*. All that is achieved by an uncritical attitude is perpetuating prejudice from generation to generation.

Popper speaks of "fallibility", that is, the stance according to which *I may be right, but perhaps you are, or, as a third possibility, maybe we are both wrong*. Alongside, he places the principle of 'rational' debate of theories, along the Habermasian lines. Finally, he emphasises the idea of "*approximation to the truth", that is, that through rational debate we can approach the truth, though perhaps we will never reach it in absolute terms. Along the way, we can learn from* others if we wish to. For this reason, others are on an equal plane as we are, and must be not only tolerated but also recognised as our potential equals. We can always learn much from debate, even when the final outcome does not involve agreement. This is the idea of intellectual honesty and fallibility.

As opposed to the *old professional ethic, based on the idea of 'authority'* and maintaining that something is defensible because it was put forward by someone with authority, Popper proposes a *'new' professional ethic, based on the rational force of the arguments themselves* and, in summary, on the following principles:

1.-*"Our objective conjectural knowledge always goes beyond that which one person may have. There is hence no authority"*. This is the idea of the transmission of knowledge from *generation to generation*, represented in the statue found on the campus of Complutense University in Madrid, opposite the Faculty of Medicine, which represents an elder laying on the ground and lifting his arm to pass the torch of knowledge to a youth, who accepts it from the steed on which they are mounted. Over the course of a lifetime one person alone, however long their life may be, cannot achieve all knowledge. Hence the importance of education and training, in which we are shown how to think, naturally, but also exposed to previously espoused theories and doctrines. *To be able to progress one cannot start from nothing, as if the mind were a 'blank slate'*. Progression is taking a step forward after understanding the previous thoughts of others regarding a particular matter, and hence arises from generation to generation.

2.-*"It is impossible to completely avoid mistakes"*. The idea that errors must be avoided is itself erroneous and ought to be revisited. Further, we must change our attitude to mistakes. *Rather than avoiding and hiding error, as if it were something evil or shameful, we must learn from it. The greatest intellectual sin is seeking to cover up errors*. *Self-criticism* and *honesty* become, in this regard, a duty. Furthermore, if we must learn from our mistakes, we must also learn to accept that others will make us aware of them. *We need others and others need us*, especially people who have grown up with other ideas, in other environments, and can help us to become aware of the weaknesses and errors that may exist in our lives. The idea of tolerance is once again relevant here.[11]

In this respect, ancient societies were closed and walled, societies in which one was born in a particular place and remained there for practically a lifetime. Fortunately, the current horizon is far broader. In fact, *we are born in one place, study in another, settle in another, enjoy the food and music of distant societies and cultures*, can use the internet to connect to the remotest corners of the planet in a matter of seconds, and perceive ourselves as living in a '*global village*'.

[9]Popper, K. R. Sociedad abierta, universo abierto…, op. cit., 140-143.
[10]Ibid. 147-148.
[11]Ibid. 152-157.

All this cannot but contribute to creating a '*cosmopolitan*' spirit as opposed to the old '*provincialism*' – a cosmopolitanism that leads us, paradoxically, to affirm: "*I am a citizen of the world, I am a foreigner in the world*". There are contrasts and paradoxes in the present era, making modern man "*the most caring being and, at the same time, the most solitary*".

Karl R. Popper's book *The Open Society* was written in this atmosphere. The central theme of the book is *the fight against the totalitarian ideal*. A product of the era in which it was written, it is a book of war. But it is also a book of peace, containing a philosophy for rebuilding. *It describes the great ideological dangers of the time*, grouped into three large blocks: *historicism*, or the myth of destiny; *collectivism*, with its disregard for the individual, and its corollary, nationalism; and *anti-rationalism*, with its dream of the creation of a Kingdom of Heaven on Earth, and its outcome: the creation of a hell. In Popper's judgement, it is these false ideologies that contribute to war. These three philosophies, these three isms, are the great ideological dangers for the current era and must, therefore, be rejected.

For Popper, 'closed societies' may include tribes or clans – the natural closed society – or artificially closed societies, consciously maintained by force. *'Civilisation' consists precisely of the dissolution of the closed society or of the tribal clan.* In this respect one may observe that the three previously outlined enemies are reactions to the decomposition of tribal society. Historicism calls to the idea of the prophet or leader, the promised land, the new millennium, utopia; collectivism relates to the community, the lost tribe; and anti-rationalism to the community of the chosen few.[12]

In "The Open Society and the Democratic State", *Karl R. Popper returns to the theme that men are not wise* and that the closest we can come to knowledge is, as affirmed by Socrates, knowing our own limitations. *What are the consequences of this well-trodden claim in the political arena?*

In the political sphere, there are essentially two attitudes. One is the *politician who thinks that everything he does is correct* and that none of the evils of society are due to his errors, but rather to unavoidable external circumstances – such as in the present case, the ever-cited world economic crisis – or to the machinations of his opponents. The other diametrically opposed attitude is that of the *politician who knows himself to be fallible*, who recognises, admits, and learns from his errors, and, even better, who trusts his political adversaries to help him and uses their criticisms to better understand his own failings.

Another question is: *What is the reason for failure in politics?* The conventional response is that *man is 'intelligent, but bad'*. In this regard one may turn to the classic debate over whether man is by nature good or bad. *Jean-Jacques Rousseau* advocated the former in his writings, presenting an idyllic view of nature in which the evils of man only arise as a result of culture. The latter position is exemplified in the theories of *Thomas Hobbes*, of man as man's wolf, '*homo homini lupus*', and of a state of nature in which anarchy would reign, with everyone fighting each other ('*bellum privata*'), and the strongest would impose their will on the weakest. To avoid this situation of anarchy, he proposed a 'social contract theory', by way of which a society would move from a state of nature to a state of civil society, or a State, through the concession of a considerable degree of its original freedom in the interests of achieving greater legal security.

It has also been said that *in the recent evolution of man, our intellectual development has not been matched by a similar moral evolution*; that we are sufficiently intelligent to manufacture atomic bombs, but not sufficiently ethical to agree on when and how to use them.

Popper makes clear his disagreement with this view. In his opinion, we ought to *replace the doctrine of our malign intelligence with its precise opposite, the hypothesis of our well-meaning stupidity. It is not that man is so perverse as to plan evil in a cold and calculated fashion; it is more appropriate to see man as sufficiently foolish to commit errors and, what is worse, not to learn from them*. One of the hardest tasks each generation faces is learning from the errors – and the successes – of previous generations. Each generation must seek to understand history and to improve, reflecting the idea that the future is progressive rather than retrogressive.

[12]Popper, K. R. (2010). La sociedad abierta después de cinco años..Preface for the American Edition of La sociedadabierta, in Karl R. Popper.(2010).Después de La sociedad abierta. Escritos sociales y políticos.(1rst. ed.)Edited byShearmur, J.– Turner, P. N. Translation into Spanish by FerranMeler-Ortí..Madrid: Espasa, 228-242.

If we turn our gaze toward history, we see that it is, in short, plagued with mistakes: great wars, revolutions, persecution of all shades including on religious grounds. We may take Hitler and Mussolini as examples. They subordinated all in the service of what they considered to be a supreme idea: race (Aryan), and nation (Italian), respectively, giving rise to Nazism and to Fascism, two forms of totalitarianism in which hundreds of thousands of people genuinely submitted to the aforementioned ideas, even using violence when necessary for their defence.

In fact, *totalitarianism exerts an awful fascination over the wills and minds of many people, who feel they belong to a group,* to a strongly united tribe or community that protects them and shares their ideals, that makes them feel secure, led by a saviour and offering the individually weak the strength and solidarity of a group – or, better said, of a blind mass. *This is the opposite of the free and open society described by Popper, a society of thoughtful and critical individuals, from which tribes have long disappeared*. Set against the pack of totalitarian wolves that blindly follow their leader are democratic societies, the ideal melting pot for the critical spirit to flourish. *Against the idea of climbing and thriving by submitting to a leader, like the "voluntary servitude" of Etienne de la Boètie, in the free and open society one must 'compete' to flourish.*

It was in *Greece,* in the terrible war between Sparta and Athens, where the idea of the free society open to competition began to take hold. During the*Middle Ages* in Europe the idea was almost forgotten, until it was rediscovered through the religious wars that followed the Protestant Reformation. Thinkers of the time such as John Locke formulated the theory, which in turn influenced the *American Revolution*. It was then evident, once and for all, that the idea of using force to convert people to a cause, however good or noble that cause may be, lacked legitimacy. *Against absolutism and totalitarianism stand the ideas of tolerance and, a step beyond, of 'respect'* for different opinions, though respecting opinions does not imply abstaining from criticism along previously mentioned lines.

Dissent is preferable to uniformity and homogeneity, which are forms of monolithic and not pluralistic thought. And only in an open society, capable of tolerating and respecting many points of view and ideas, can we aspire to 'learn from our mistakes'. *Only a society open to the free debate of ideas can advance without difficulties.* Freedom is always a good, though it may sometimes in reality be misused, giving rise to crime and other negative consequences or *deviations in the use of such freedom.*

We must only be intolerant of intolerance itself. The only thing we must fight is someone seeking to impose their ideas by force. *Some think that any idea, even intolerance, deserves respect.* Here, Popper provides a graphic and illustrative image of the dangers this idea may entail. He says: "On one occasion, I read a touching story of a community that lived in the jungles of India and had disappeared due to its *belief in the holiness of life, including that of tigers. Unfortunately, the tigers did not reciprocate the behaviour of the community*". "In similar manner, the German Republic before 1933, *the so-called Weimar Republic, tolerated Hitler; but Hitler, in contrast, did not do his part*". This is one of the errors from which, in Popper's view, we must learn: "The tolerant cannot face any obligation to tolerate the intolerant, to whoever does not respond by doing the same as is done to them".[13]

Bringing this argument into the political arena, the implication is that democracy must respect any opinion expressed by democratic means, however far it may be from our ideas, but when the holder of the opinion questions the principles of democracy itself – the *basic rules of the democratic game* – such as freedom of expression, and seeks to impose their ideas by non-democratic means – such as terrorism – we must then know that the limits of freedom have been reached and things have gone too far.

The limit is the use of violence. One may tolerate any or 'almost any' words, but when one seeks to use the sword in place of the pen, it is then necessary to proclaim: *"Pas de liberté pour les enémies de la liberté"*. Otherwise, "in our loyalty to the idea of tolerance, we run the risk of destroying freedom and, along with it, tolerance",[14] because *"tolerance must be mutual: based on reciprocity, and not unlimited"*. The problem is that intolerant minorities must be respected; the answer is only until those minorities begin to act in a violent fashion. However, *in practice it is not always easy to delineate where rational discussion ends and violent actions begins, because the latter starts with acts such as 'incitement to violence' or 'conspiracy'*. This is the same problem one encounters in distinguishing killing by murder or, for instance, by an incompetent saboteur.

[13]Popper, K. R. La sociedad abierta y el Estado democrático, in Id., Después de la sociedad abierta, op. cit., 299-318, esp. 308.

[14]Popper, K. R. De la tolerancia, in Id., Después de la sociedad abierta, op. cit., 389 ff.

Against the foregoing is the claim or *counter-argument* that our democracy and our tolerance are a sham, since *"we too, supposedly tolerant, at times resort to violence"*. This is similar to saying that "capitalism claims more victims daily with its violence than will be claimed by the entire social revolution".

In response to this claim it must be said that *some violence is necessary*, that "*only through violence can the use of even greater violence be avoided"*. So, for example, war involves violence and destruction on a grand scale, but sometimes *'defensive' wars* are justified, provided they respect '*ius ad bellum*' and '*ius in bello*', that is, provided that diplomatic avenues are exhausted, a legitimate authority declares war, and appropriate means of warfare are observed. To say anything else would be too simplistic. Along the same lines, the sanctions and punishments that a State imposes imply violence, to the extent that they deprive persons of such precious goods as freedom, property, and, less justifiable in any case, even life. But, leaving aside the problem of capital punishment, perhaps in the other two circumstances of '*iuspuniendi*' we ought to punish less and better, *but a minimum of punishment is inevitable* at all levels: *the minimum sufficient.*

Popper argues along similar lines when responding to the previously formulated argument that "*our Western democratic societies are the freest, the most tolerant, most just and the least violent of the societies of which we know*, perhaps with the exception of the pre-twentieth century Inuit societies. The truth is that, while our Western democratic societies are far from perfect, they are the only societies in which there is great freedom, in which much is done for the welfare of the needy, in which *there is considerable equality before the law*, and in which broad tolerance exists".[15]

"If one understands by social inequality that some people have more money than others, I would say that, as long as the rest can live reasonably well, I don't mind".[16] Here it is apt to refer to the theory of the '*Walrasian auction*' and the '*envy test*', as means of showing when social inequalities are tolerable or otherwise.

And democracy is the lesser evil of which we know, because through democracy and through the influence of public opinion it was, for example, impossible for the US government to use nuclear arms in the Korean and Vietnam wars, even though had they been used, they would possibly have led to victories in both wars and not to partial or complete defeats as in fact happened. *This is why democracy is not, at least not totally, a sham.*

Popper also argues against *the Marxist claim that capitalism was an "alienation" of our natural way of life*, maintaining that "lamenting alienation in general is simply foolish: *it is like lamenting glasses, dentures, and vaccines", which also "alienate" us from our natural way of life*, instead of being grateful for such things.

Though it is certain that absolute truth is difficult to attain and that the same is true of the perfect form of government, we can get closer to it, there are truer truths and better forms of government, such as democracy. We cannot always avoid taking sides, since even inaction is an action by omission and amounts to taking a side. *What we must never do is stop our search for truth and for the perfect society* in a kind of foolish complacency about reality.

Democracy is the best system today. *It reflects the principles of the open society. But this must not lead us to confuse the two concepts.* Popper understands by *open society* a way of social life based on a series of *values* such as freedom, tolerance, justice, the free pursuit of knowledge, ideological freedom, and the free pursuit of happiness. By *democratic State*, the philosopher in question understands a collection of *institutions*, such as Parliament, the courts, the government, and the Constitution, which serve the ideals of the open society. But these ideals are valuable in themselves, and the democratic State is only "*a means to achieve those ends*, a very important means but nonetheless a means, *not an end in itself*".It is for this reason that *if the democratic State does not pursue the ends of the open society* entrusted to it, the citizen has *the right, even the duty, to exercise the right of criticism and dissent.* We must remain *vigilant* to avoid the abuse of power, a possibility not only in totalitarian systems but also, though to a lesser degree, in democratic ones.

An open society needs, in Popper's view, the protection of a *State*, on one hand *sufficiently strong* and powerful not to succumb to attack, whether internal or external, and, on the other, not so strong that it becomes unlimited and beyond criticism. A *system of weights and balances, such as democracy*, is necessary. One may say in favour of democracy that it is today the best form of safeguarding freedom. As Winston Churchill said: "Democracy is the worst form of government, except, of course, for all the other forms of government that we have tried".

[15]Ibid., 393-394.
[16]Ibid., 394.

Democracy may contribute to preserving freedom, but it will never create freedom if the individual citizen does not take care of it. It is the citizens who are responsible if democracy does not work, for not having exercised their right to criticism. The Western society we know is far from perfect but, despite all its imperfections, has much to offer and is the best society that history has known: the free societies of the Free World.[17]

The term 'open society' is charged with emotional connotations. It may even cause fear in all those too weak to stand up for themselves. For Popper, the *expression* occurred to him because when he left Vienna and Austria and arrived in England, and later New Zealand, in his own words it was "as if moving from prison into open country". For this reason he named his book "The Open Society and its Enemies", a work he began in New Zealand in 1938 and completed in 1942 though it was not published until 1945 in London. At the outset Popper believed that the term 'open society' was his invention. He later discovered that the French philosopher Henri Bergson had also used it, though in a different sense. He also later found out that, in the middle of the 19th Century and long before Bergson, the poet and historian of ideas Heinrich Heine had used the term in describing Prussian society as a closed one and French society as open.[18]

In brief, Bergson used the expressions 'open society' and 'closed society' in *Two Sources of Morality and Religion* (English edition published in 1935). But the Bergsonian meaning of these terms was different. In Popper's work, the expressions indicate a 'rationalist' distinction: while the closed society is characterised by the belief in 'magical taboos', in the open society people have learned to advance 'criticisms' with respect to these taboos, basing their decisions on 'intelligence'. In contrast, Bergson appears to have in mind a form of 'religious' criteria for the distinction.

It is also appropriate to recognise a certain similarity between the 'open society' expression and *what Graham Wallas would call the* '*big society*', with the sole difference that the former term may also be applied to a 'small society' such as the Athens of Pericles, and, at the same time, a 'big society' may also conceivably be a 'closed' society.There is also a certain parallel between the 'open society' expression used by Popper and the expression used in the title of the admirable Walter Lippmann book *The Good Society* (1937).[19]

Popper's book contains the idea that "*the future depends on ourselves, and we do not depend on any historical necessity.…We may become the makers of our fate* when we have ceased to pose as its prophets".[20]

The book describes how our Western civilisation originates in *Greece*. It appears to have been there that *the first step was taken from tribalism to humanitarianism.* In this regard, the closed society is defined as magical, tribal and collectivist in character, while the open society is that *in which individuals must take personal decisions.* The open society, conceived in this way, may gradually become an '*abstract*' society, that is one in which the character of a single particular group of people is lost, a society *in which people practically never meet face to face, an impersonal society*, in which binding ties are barely formed between its members. The transition from closed to open society may be defined as one of the greatest revolutions experienced by humanity. This revolution was begun by the Greeks. Perhaps the most powerful cause of the fall of the closed society was *the development of maritime communication and commerce.* The political revolution begun by the Greek breakup of tribalism reached its peak in the 5th Century, with the outbreak of the *Peloponnese War* between the two great Greek populaces, *Sparta – warriors – and Athens – humanists.*[21]

The *rise of Greek philosophy* is interpreted by Popper as a possible reaction to the collapse of closed society and its magical beliefs, with an attempt to replace faith in magic with faith in reason, *changing the tradition of passing on theories and myths for a new tradition: that of contrasting theories and myths and subjecting them to critical analysis.*[22]

[17]Ibid., 318.
[18]Popper, K. R. La sociedad abierta hoy, in Id., Después de la sociedad abierta, op. cit., 471.
[19]Popper, K. R. (1981).La sociedad abierta y sus enemigos. Barcelona-Buenos Aires: Paidós Ibérica. The Open Society and its Enemies. Princeton –New Jersey-: Princeton University Press – London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. Spanish translation byEduardo Loedel, note to the Introduction.
[20]Ibid., 16, 17.
[21]Ibid.,182.
[22]Ibid., 184.