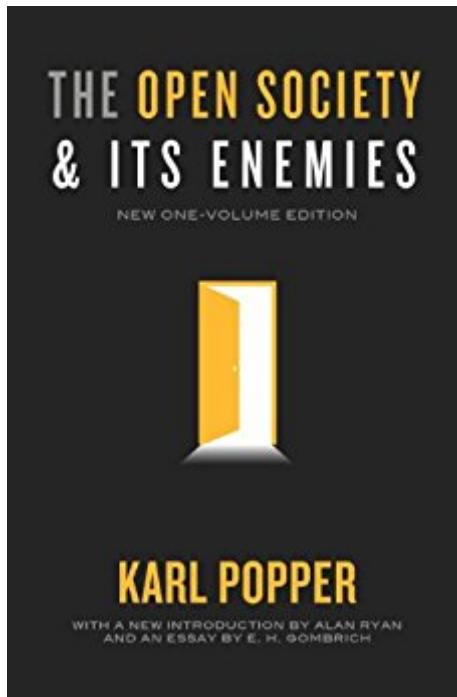


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The Open Society And Its Enemies



Synopsis

One of the most important books of the twentieth century, Karl Popper's *The Open Society and Its Enemies* is an uncompromising defense of liberal democracy and a powerful attack on the intellectual origins of totalitarianism. Popper was born in 1902 to a Viennese family of Jewish origin. He taught in Austria until 1937, when he emigrated to New Zealand in anticipation of the Nazi annexation of Austria the following year, and he settled in England in 1949. Before the annexation, Popper had written mainly about the philosophy of science, but from 1938 until the end of the Second World War he focused his energies on political philosophy, seeking to diagnose the intellectual origins of German and Soviet totalitarianism. *The Open Society and Its Enemies* was the result. An immediate sensation when it was first published in two volumes in 1945, Popper's monumental achievement has attained legendary status on both the Left and Right and is credited with inspiring anticommunist dissidents during the Cold War. Arguing that the spirit of free, critical inquiry that governs scientific investigation should also apply to politics, Popper traces the roots of an opposite, authoritarian tendency to a tradition represented by Plato, Marx, and Hegel. In a substantial new introduction written for this edition, acclaimed political philosopher Alan Ryan puts Popper's landmark work in biographical, intellectual, and historical context. Also included is a personal essay by eminent art historian E. H. Gombrich, in which he recounts the story of the book's eventual publication despite numerous rejections and wartime deprivations.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Popper's rich and convincing indictment against state religion and limitless power caught in the vacuum of historicist prophecy is unsparing, lucid and enlightening. Plato, Hegel and Marx represent the historicist tradition of social engineering, and their philosophical contributions, though of great importance, have collectively served to undermine the transparency of the open society; that is, real democracy. Of the three, Popper strikes an intriguing affection and pity for Marx, whom he distinguishes from Plato and Hegel as utterly sincere and well intentioned, but a failed prophet nonetheless. Of Plato's logical aptitude and sociological ingenuity, Popper pays due credit. Hegel, however, is a different story altogether. To Popper, Hegel was an arcane and mendacious state philosopher, one who cloaked his philosophy in impenetrable mysticism and specious reasoning. He is given the briefest analysis out of the three, but his worst tendencies echo in the impoverished corners of Marx's epistemology. Plato's legacy and intellectual foundations are not assessed on their terms, but are reviewed in context of preceding historical ideas and institutions. This is fitting for the historical and philosophical conceit of the book, for Plato, like Hegel and Marx, would stake the condition of the present moment as the natural heir to the past. At first sight this claim is perfectly reasonable; however, Plato did not conceive progression as a mere product of linear continuity, but as a thing in itself; history is a kind of living entity implicit in its tradition of chaos. In light of the travesty of Athenian democracy, of Socrates's fate, and the Tyranny of Thirty, Plato resigns himself to the role of reformer.

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