



## **(Sir) Karl R. Popper**

(\* 1902 Wien - †1993 London)

Karl R. Popper was one of the most eminent philosophers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, who was primarily concerned with questions of epistemology and methodology. In his book “Logik der Forschung” (Logic of Scientific Discovery) of 1935 he argued that any inductive approach to science was bound to fail, and that all scientific knowledge was hypothetical and could only be critically tested (i.e. refuted, but never be demonstrated) by experience.

Later Popper became more and more involved in political philosophy – mainly due to the Nazi-occupation of his native Austria in 1938 and his escape to exile in New Zealand. In his classic book “The Open Society and its Enemies” (1945) he applied his epistemological ideas to social theory. The wholesale political construction of a society (what he

called “utopian social engineering”), Popper argued, would inevitably lead to tyranny. Instead, in a liberal society, all progress would depend on step-by-step reform (“piecemeal social engineering”), in which every step could be critically examined and corrected. With this position in mind, Popper launched a devastating (sometime even slightly unfair) attack against some major occidental thinkers – such as Plato, Hegel and Marx -, whose alleged humanitarianism he considered to be more than doubtful. In fact, they were to him prophets of totalitarianism.

After WW II Popper became professor at the London School of Economics. Many important liberal thinkers were strongly influenced by his writings, among them Friedrich August von Hayek, Hans Albert and Ralf Dahrendorf.

### **Literature:**

- Karl Popper: *The Open Society and its Enemies*, London 2002
- Malachi Haim Hacohen: *Karl Popper the Formative Years 1902-1945: Politics and Philosophy in Interwar Vienna*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, Cambridge University Press 2002

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