

Introduction: Against Actually Existing Open Society

Most people, one can say without being uncharitable, are neither terribly wise nor particularly famous. They're just normal people. Most normal people remain bound to a land, to a country, and to the people of that terrain, people borne from – for the most part – that same land. And just as true, therefore, is that the whole world, because a person's connections are only to a small parcel of it, is neither that person's home nor their final resting place, not in any meaningful sense anyway.

Even if we allow that Democritus and Pericles had quite a different understanding of the “whole world” than ours, their claims still amount to hyperbole. This is quite normal because most people, as we have said, are by definition normal people in this way: neither terribly wise or famous. We are simply women and men, bound to a time and place, to a community that is rooted in that time and place. The community is not related in *any ontological* sense by connections of what people refer to as blood. Such ideations are fantasies with no grounding in anything like reality. It will, however, most certainly be based on connections to the land, but more simply and prosaically, on people knowing each other, on sharing knowledge about the place, its past

and theirs, on beliefs about life and perhaps even the afterlife, on having similar values and goals. This is a book for such people, which means it is a book for most people. At least that is what I hope.

In this book, based on the reality I have just sketched out in the broadest of terms, I will argue that open society must no longer be defended, for I believe it goes against the dreams and hopes and interests of normal people. I will argue that we need to overthrow, to be precise, *actually existing* open society and fight for, in its place, our own, independent ... open societies. Please note the plural. The current form of open society, oppressive open society, what we can, given its current extension, call *global* open society, derives from the thinking of Sir Karl R Popper, as found in his book *The Open Society and its Enemies*.¹ I will refer to the book using the shortened title, *The Open Society* from here on in,² and I will engage with it deeply. While there is much that is good in it, there is much that is not, but it is a fundamental book, a touchstone even, for the issues which we will consider. The reader might not have heard of Popper, but she (or he) will likely have heard of his concept of open society, and, more likely still, of Popper's most famous acolyte, George Soros, who points out in his Foreword to the cited edition of *The Open Society*, that "Popper argued that universal ideas can also lead to a closed society if they are adopted by a one-party state".³

I bring up Soros' comment because I believe that open society has become one of those universal ideas about which Popper (and then Soros himself) warned us. Perversely, the pursuit of open society itself, adopted universally by political, economic and cultural

elites with no concern for the inherent significance for their own localities and societies, is leading us with ever more momentum towards closed society. I believe that it is being imposed upon us in a totalitarian fashion by a network of supranational elites and institutions⁴ that amount to a one-party state. Its adoption by the most powerful people on earth, means that those people, in terms of their actions, constitute something like a single party – what we can think of as the Open Society Party – despite their differences, which end up being mostly negligible. They all promote an economics that favours the wealthy and an immigration policy that hurts the middle and working classes, and these policies amount, together, to an actively anti-family policy, despite any pro-forma family-values rhetoric to the contrary. Their activity, therefore, insofar as its result is global open society, suggests that we conceive of their activity as the activity of a state, for a state, as I have argued elsewhere⁵, is a complex entity, but we can theoretically surmise its existence on the basis of its effects.⁶ Global open society, what we can also think of as actually existing open society, is both the evidence and the result of the fact that we are all – most of us, anyway – living today in a one-party state, under the ruling ideology of open society, a situation towards which we have been ushered in line with a vision that has been adumbrated on the basis of Popper’s book. Combined with the active intolerance to the criticism of the ideology and its values and goals, I believe it is more than fair to say that open society has, quite ironically, become, or is fast becoming, closed. This is not good, not for democracy and not for freedom, for in closed society such goods no longer exist in any meaningful way.

My argument in this book is that to stop global open society we need open societies, plural. Moreover, I make the argument that the best way to nurture and sustain open societies (real freedom and democracy) is through the nation form. In other words, my argument is that the best way to have *an* open society is to have a national society. It is an argument, therefore, in favour of what I will call, distinctively, nationism (to distinguish it from nationalism, the taint of which seems to prejudice – to prejudge, negatively – our ideas of the nation, making fruitful discussions of it difficult if not impossible). This argument is significant because it runs directly counter to one of the central truisms of the thinking of Karl Popper, whose ideas about what an open society is and should be nonetheless inspires much of my own, as it inspires most of the people concerned with this subject today. Popper's vision, which we can conceive of as post-nationalist global open society (GOS), is of a planetary singularity in which nations surrender their sovereignty and their uniqueness to the neo-liberal dictums of globalism, which are oppressive to most people on earth. We are on our way to achieving his vision; but actually doing so would be insufferable. We should change course; we should pursue nationism: national open societies, each one sovereign, unique, and free in its own particular ways.

In arguing for nationism, in defence of nations as open societies, I will confront Popper's criticism of the nation, which is part and parcel of the ideological defence of GOS. Though Popper is explicitly antagonistic – quite hysterically so, in fact – towards the nation, I will show that this antagonism is, in fact, incoherent, and the hysteria uncalled for. Most supporters of open

society, following Popper, reject the nation in axiomatic fashion. It is an article of faith for them that the nation is an outdated social form that impedes the full development of open society. And as a matter of fact, it does. The nation as a democratic form does impede, or would impede, the full development of *the* open society, or of open society as such, in the singular.

And this is a good thing. Because global open society is in fact a form of closed society. More dramatically – but no less accurately – it is a totalitarian societal form; it is the form the revolt against freedom and civilisation (to use Popperian expressions) takes today. Why? Because it suppresses democracy, by suppressing the only form – the nation form – in which democracy can flourish today. Therefore, it must no longer be defended. To the contrary, it must be opposed. In opposing it we are not seeking, of course, closed society⁷, but open societies, plural, and to be more exact national open societies.

I am arguing, then, for national societies that are open. This is a normative argument. It is an argument for how societies *should be*, the goal towards which we should work, about how to be better. We should, to put it plainly, be guided by the goal of national open societies. But my argument's normativity is rooted in normalcy. Normalcy refers to the condition of being normal, which is to say, it refers to what is usual, typical, or expected. It is what we see when we look about us. My argument about how we *should be* is, then, rooted in an argument about how we in fact (still) are. My argument about national open societies as a goal is rooted in national open societies as a fact that is observable if we look hard enough; but we don't have to

look too hard. Many of us lived in them up until quite recently. So my argument offers us a guide as to who and what we should be (normativity), but it does so on the basis of a description of who we are and what we are (normalcy). In this way, this book is decidedly anti-utopian. The national open society is not perfection. (In the same way democracy is not perfect either, but is still our best option for freedom.) It is simply the best option for organizing our security and our freedom—and our difference. Recognizing this, my book does not make impossible claims upon us. It simply tells us what we are like, and on that basis, suggests how we could be better, if better is what we want to be.