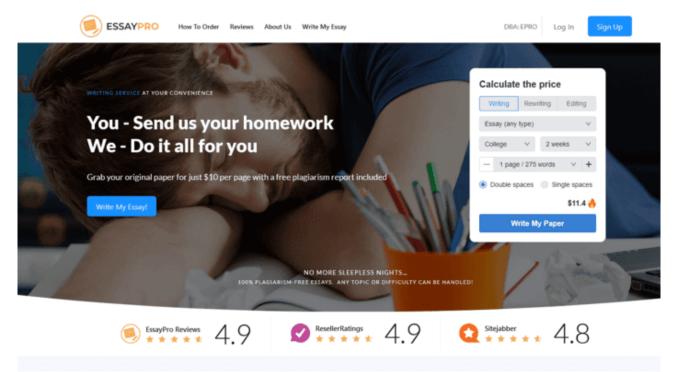
Sir Karl Popper



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Sir Karl Popper

Sir Karl Popper's intent in "Science: Conjectures and Refutations" from Klemke's Philosophy of Science is to fortify distinctions between the classes (and, we suppose, the quality) of intellectual discourse in his era, distinctions which were far less precise then than they are today.

<u>Popper</u>'s argument, in essence, maintains that a number of scientific theories are pseudoscientific at best, owing to the "anything goes" nature of their power to explain. The broad acceptance of such theories owes much to the satisfaction derived from their proponents in using them to justify a <u>preferred</u> response, whatever the data or observations truly imply.

The argument presented by Popper seems, ironically, to be driven more by sociological factors (and even emotional ones) than any other. The irony here is that these same factors are what drive the disciplines he is striving to refute: Marxist Theory of History, Freudian psychoanalysis, and Adlerian individual psychology.

Living in the times when these theories emerged, Popper is well-positioned to guage their impact first-hand, and understand the social dynamics underlying their acceptance and proliferation. It is arguable that the pseudoscience of which Popper writes (based on readings of <u>Kuhn</u> in "The Copernican Revolution") owes something to the philosophically-flavored efforts of the Greeks. Kuhn points out that the ancients tended to de-emphasize mathematical precision in favor of philosophical comfort; that is, the "satisfaction" offered by a theory (or perhaps its elegance) took precedence over more empirical factors.

This is certainly true of the cases Popper cites. Marxist theory and psychoanalysis have both offered their advocates a high degree of emotional and aesthetic satisfaction (and one is led to wonder how Freud would have fared among the Greeks). Moreover, there are far greater satisfactions in store for the Marxists and Freudians: there are very positive political and professional consequences to their discourse, leading to a natural preference for the aesthetics of their theories over the empirical.

It is easy to wonder if Popper has a similar motivation. Faced with a style of discourse he finds uncomfortable, he undertakes to set those theorists whom he respects (and himself) apart from the pseudoscientific style. Pure empiricism cannot be his motivation, for that is what he is seeking to define, in an age when the definitions were not altogether clear. There is an unquestionable tone of dissatifaction to his essay - his distaste for the pseudoscientists is politely expressed but unmistakeable - and it can be argued that he, too, is seeking to route out the inelegant in a quest for the elegant.

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