

KARL POPPER'S PIECEMEAL SOCIAL ENGINEERING  
OR TECHNOLOGY: THE TRUTH, THE FICTION

Columba Mgbokwere Department of Philosophy  
University of Gent  
Blandijnberg 2  
9000 GENT Belgium  
e-mail: cuulala@yahoo.com

Karl Popper argues that piecemeal social engineering is the gateway to social reforms. It is through criticisms and a piecemeal approach that we discover result of a particular social policy or action.

According to Dr D. Ucheaga in her unpublished notes "technological problem according to Popper may be of private or public character." For instance investigation into the techniques of business administration belongs to the first group while investigation into the affairs of prison reforms or trade circles etc belongs to the second group. This means that public problems are more general than private problems, which are particular in character. The piecemeal social engineer attempts to solve his problem from the private angle or piecemeal manner knowing the dire consequences of an unexpected result; he never attempts to solve his problem from the public angle or in a holistic manner.

Of these two methods namely piecemeal and holistic engineering, Popper favours the former on the ground that it involves self-criticism, tactfulness and certainty and is therefore more scientific in character, while the latter lacks self-criticism and involves much of speculation as it often leads to unexpected surprises.

Popper's piecemeal social engineering promotes peaceful reform and social stability as it rejects violent holistic social change. It is true that a violent public approach to socio-political issues often leads to unbargained-for mistakes, as was the case with the first Nigeria military coup d'état of 15th January 1966. The French Revolution of 1789, however, has shown that violent holistic change is sometimes inevitable in a deviant government

Therefore, the truth of the matter is that piecemeal social engineering is more relevant and practical in the contemporary period than the holistic redesign of the society with its attendant problems.

On the contrary, it is more of a fiction to think that Popper's theory is absolute in the face of a government of extreme tyranny and injustice.