
REPORT

David Miller (1942 – 2024)

David Miller, a preeminent philosopher of science, logician and one of the foremost proponents of critical rationalism, passed away on 20 November 2024, at the age of 82. His academic journey began at the University of Cambridge, after which he pursued studies in Logic and Scientific Method at the London School of Economics. There, he became one of Karl Popper's research assistants – a pivotal relationship that deeply influenced his future philosophical work. Unlike some of Popper's other students and colleagues, such as Imre Lakatos, Alan Musgrave, and Joseph Agassi, who sought to moderate the radical anti-inductivism and falsificationism inherent in critical rationalism, Miller fully embraced and even extended its radical tenets. Miller's critique of justificationism significantly advanced the Popperian agenda by emphasizing that knowledge cannot and need not be justified and must remain constantly open to criticism. In this way, Miller further developed Popper's robust philosophical stance against traditional epistemology and reinforced the non-foundationalist nature of critical rationalism.

Miller is best known for his seminal work, *Critical Rationalism: A Restatement and Defence* (1994). In this book, he addressed and dismantled most common objections against critical rationalism, and formulated the key principles of his version of critical rationalism with exceptional clarity – let us mention for instance the famous thesis asserting the divorce of reason from good reasons, stating that rationality not only does not depend on good reasons but is contrary to them; the delineation of the domain within which reason operates as testing the consequences of our conjectures not in order to consolidate our knowledge, but to liquidate it; or the description of justificationism as an addiction we need to get rid of by undergoing detoxification. By defining reason exclusively in negative terms, he



brought renewed vigour to Popperian thought. While his work resolutely upheld the critical and negative definition of reason, he also confronted challenges within Popper's framework. Notably, he identified flaws in Popper's theory of verisimilitude, which aimed to demonstrate scientific progress as ever-closer approximations to the truth. And although he endeavored to develop an alternative theory, he candidly acknowledged that it left unresolved the challenge of empirically testing verisimilitude appraisals.

David Miller engaged with numerous fundamental issues in logic and the philosophy of science that he further elaborated in his second book *Out of Error. Further Essays on Critical Rationalism* (2006). During his career his research addressed, among others, the problem of the aim of science and its rational control, the problem of the empirical basis in science, the challenge of rational decision-making (including the so-called pragmatic problem of induction), the role of arguments in cognition, and various interpretations of probability (including the propensity interpretation). His work also dealt with the problem of inductive probability that culminated in the renowned Popper-Miller Theorem. In less technical terms and under the evocative title "Being an Absolute Sceptic" Miller lists the following ways in which critical rationalism could beneficially influence science: scientists should stop exaggerating the power of scientific rationality and likewise, the public should moderate their expectations of what can be accomplished in science. Further, scientists should be less harsh on their colleagues who make interesting but false conjectures and be more ready to admit ignorance. If scientists (as well as philosophers of science) cease to attribute to well-tested hypotheses a security or reliability that they do not possess yet stop short of a slide into relativism – then it is possible to pursue science as a rational enterprise par excellence. An inspiring vision, indeed.

Both authors of this obituary remember David Miller as a colleague and a friend. I, Zuzana, met Popper in the 90ies. I first came to the University of Warwick to discuss Popper's philosophy with David, holding the naive belief that some "good reasons" were necessary for theory assessment and theory choice. His curt rejection of this assumption was intimidating – more so, even, than Popper's own criticism when I visited him in Kenley. However, after further reading and reflection, and through ongoing communication with David, who displayed remarkable patience and a genuine willingness to help

me grasp critical rationalism, I found myself drawn to the “radical side” of this philosophy. Over the years, we became good friends, meeting often in Prague or the UK. David profoundly enriched my philosophical development, and I will always cherish his friendship.

I, Miloš, knew David, and will always remember him that way, as an incredibly kind and patient listener who was at the same time a tough critic with a specific sense of humour. This manifested itself not only in expert debates, but also in ordinary conversational situations. So, for example, on one of my early musings about how corroboration might be an indicator of verisimilitude, he laconically remarked that it “is just wishful thinking”, which made me realize the fallacy of my reasoning. And to my confession that I am so used to the mountains that I cannot imagine living on the plain, he replied that I have a poor imagination. David was, in short, always substantive, witty and critical, even of his own opinions or attitudes. I am extremely grateful to have had the good fortune to know him and learn from him.

Thank you, David.

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