

eventually led to the human capacity to reflect back and understand this panorama. He points out how subsequent cosmological discoveries such as cosmic microwave background radiation, dark matter, dark energy, quantum effects, and inflation all have been successfully incorporated into the model. Once creation is understood to be an ongoing process, theology clearly can engage in a dialogue with this picture (Rolnick, obviously, relies on a non-literalist reading of scripture). Another intriguing discovery of this theory is that the cosmic unfolding of reality as we know it needed to be “fine-tuned” to allow for the eventual emergence of physical and chemical structures that support planetary development and carbon-based life.

To support his efforts to promote a mutually enriching dialogue between religion and science, Rolnick appeals to the traditional Christian notion of the divine Logos. If one accepts that the unfolding of the universe is continually sustained by divine creativity, then something like the big bang with its fine-tuning coheres marvelously with a loving God calling humanity to the fullness of life in salvation.

While he does not emphasize this, Rolnick’s presentation is thoroughly informed by a Polanyian outlook. His sense of reality as capable of revealing itself in the future and the way our thought unfolds through antecedent frameworks permeate his presentation. And his treatment of the authority of religious tradition is grounded in the

dynamics Polanyi explored in the process of scientific breakthroughs.

In short, this is a competent, scientifically current defense of the value and importance of dwelling in a worldview where science and religion mutually support each other. Given the cultural realities of American society where many are under the sway of popular representations of scientific theories as rendering religious beliefs superfluous, this is still a valuable work and may serve as a helpful resource in college classrooms.

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**Hodgson, Geoffrey M. *Is Socialism Feasible? Towards an Alternative Future*. Northampton, MA: Edward Elgar Publishing Incorporated, 2019. Pp. 272 + x. ISBN 978-1-78990-163-4, \$39.95.**

The answer to the question which is the title of this book is “It depends on what you mean by socialism.” For Geoffrey Hodgson, our prolific author, there is both “big socialism” and “small socialism,” with the former constituted by governmental centralized planning and public ownership of the means of production (the classical definition of socialism that is unknown to a largely callow Left amidst its infatuation with “socialism” during our current election season), and the latter defined by a market economy significantly regulated by active government committed to widespread social welfare programs in conjunction with

private (but state-encouraged) initiatives such as worker cooperatives and other forms of economic empowerment of labor. Hodgson, on the basis of the historical record as well as in light of a mastery of economic and organizational theory (itself the fruit of a remarkably wide and deep acquaintance with the relevant literatures), argues vehemently that while small socialism holds great promise and ought to be the subject of frequent experimentation, big socialism has shown itself, without exception, to be an economic and political disaster as well as toxic to human liberty. Our author is eminently qualified to illuminate the ignorance and naivete regarding socialism, especially among the young, that characterizes contemporary politics in both the US and UK. He makes this point particularly in connection with Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn, both of whom are wily enough to recognize the political advantages of such misunderstanding and are thus inclined to contribute to it. (Hodgson's unmasking of Sanders on pages 10-12 and 48 is especially refreshing.) Part I of this book is an excellent remedy.

Part II of Hodgson's book is a call to adopt a third alternative to 1) big socialism and 2) an economic system of largely unfettered markets. Emphasizing that it is essential to distinguish between economic systems and systems of government, Hodgson labels his recommended approach "liberal solidarity." Under this heading he outlines social democratic governance married to an economic system of small socialism. In doing so he

points approvingly to the Nordic countries which, he is quick to point out, maintain and exploit market economies.

Making a review of this book appropriate for the present journal is Hodgson's frequent invocation of Michael Polanyi in support of his call for small socialism and liberal solidarity. Early on this is quite appropriately done through reference to Polanyi's concept of tacit knowledge. Polanyi's "social" epistemology (129-30) plays a central role in a decisive argument demonstrating the utter inability (due to cognitive limitations) of the hubristic central planning of big socialism to carry out its declared functions. (Hodgson in addition summons additional arguments against big socialism, including the problem of incentives and motivation.) Later, drawing heavily upon Polanyi's *Full Employment and Free Trade* (1945) and *The Contempt of Freedom* (1940), less so on *The Logic of Liberty* (1951) and, notably, scarcely at all on *Personal Knowledge* (1958), Hodgson dwells on the fanaticism of big socialism (where his reference to the "immunology" to fact of big socialism brings Polanyi's "moral inversion" and "dynamo-objective coupling" to mind) and finds in Polanyi explication and endorsement of the very measures that for him (Hodgson) constitute small socialism. In this vein, after directly quoting from *FEFT*, Hodgson paraphrases Polanyi in a sentence that represents the theme of this (Hodgson's) book: "Infeasible socialist doctrine has diverted our attention from building a better capitalism" (162).

Throughout this book Polanyi is frequently labelled a liberal. In what will jolt some readers, he is thus routinely associated with John Dewey (19, 44 and 182). Something here is amiss. How, for example, would Dewey react to the following powerful declarations from *Personal Knowledge*?

- “Can we face the fact that, no matter how liberal a free society may be, it is also profoundly conservative?” (*PK*, 244).

- “Respect for tradition [an essential feature of Polanyi’s position] inevitably shields also some iniquitous social relations” (*PK*, 322).

- “the absolute right of moral self-determination, on which political liberty was founded, can be upheld only by refraining from any radical action towards the establishment of justice and brotherhood” (*PK*, 245).

At numerous points in *Is Socialism Feasible?* Hodgson emphasizes the experimental nature of small socialism and liberal solidarity. We are ceaselessly to try out new measures, retain what proves productive, and abandon what is not. This approach is “pragmatic” (x, note 5; 155). In the spirit of “a pox on both your houses,” Hodgson decries the “purism” (x) of both big socialism and atomistic individualism and calls instead for the application of experience and intelligence in an ongoing process of trial and error that will move us indefinitely in the direction of a superior third alternative that will indefinitely transmute over time. In principle nothing is off the table (though experience

and hence intelligence strongly counsel against repeating certain measures). And so far, so good ... for Dewey. But this “liberal” stance is clearly at odds with the strongly traditional orientation of Polanyi which necessarily includes considerable submission to authority. It is true that Dewey was himself reviled by Marxists and communists who were disgusted with his widely successful propagation of what they viewed as a cowardly and reprehensible gradualism (non-violent in nature) that aimed to transform the capitalist order over time. Still, radicalism comes in various guises, and Dewey was second to none in his vehement call for immediate deep and fundamental change made possible by a dramatic break with the past. This sentiment is in striking contrast with the increasingly subtle, insightful and measured Polanyi that emerges in *Science, Faith and Society* (1946) and achieves full bloom in *Personal Knowledge* (1958, based on lectures delivered in 1951-2).

Because of persuasive efforts in recent decades to construe Polanyi as a traditionalist (and even a conservative) and therefore akin to Burke and Oakeshott as well as to Richard Weaver, Edward Shils, and Alasdair MacIntyre (consider, for example, Mark Mitchell’s *Michael Polanyi* and the Mars Hill audio, “Tacit Knowing, Truthful Knowing: The Life and Thought of Michael Polanyi,” and recall that *The Logic of Liberty* is published by Liberty Fund), there are readers of his work who are surprised to find him not only embracing Keynesian theory (supplemented, granted, by

extra-Keynesian monetarist policy) but also supportive of governmental support for those in need (children, the old, the sick, the systematically unemployed, etc.). As both Hodgson and Mitchell make clear, such a reaction betrays a misreading of Polanyi, who is indeed committed to public measures required for widespread human enablement and fruition. Polanyi's endorsement of such policies is entailed by his commitment to transcendent ideals—such as charity and justice. But to acknowledge that Polanyi supports ongoing state-mandated, taxpayer-funded compassionate social programs (as well as government regulation not only of the money supply but also of markets and their consequences, including redistributive taxation) does not entail that he would endorse uncritically or in their entirety the policies of Hodgson's liberal solidarity.

In principle, Hodgson's recommended program is eminently reasonable and appealing, and one can easily imagine the idealistic Polanyi nodding his head in agreement:

Liberal solidarity has to show that it can provide the politico-economic basis for human flourishing, in place of the dangerous false claims of statist socialism. Liberal solidarity can accommodate measures of small socialism, but only in a mixed economy subservient to liberal-democratic rights and principles. It can embrace elements of a Burkean experimental conservatism, but

not to sanction unwarranted privilege and gross inequality (196).

When, however, in the closing chapter of the book this statement is translated into specific policies, it becomes increasingly difficult to conceive the temperate Polanyi approving the result. This is, after all, the man who, reminding us of the need for humility in the face of human finitude and a largely inscrutable universe, states that "the elimination of the existing shortcomings of our society may bring about immeasurably greater evil" (*LL*, 246).

The chasm between Hodgson's liberal solidarity and Polanyi's mature thought appears in a variety of guises. This is because for Hodgson there are eight dimensions of liberalism (182ff.) and, in each of these, liberal solidarity moves forward aggressively, in several instances leaving Polanyi behind, with Hodgson implying, misleadingly, that Polanyi too endorses the envisioned radical reform. While it is true, for example, that for Polanyi "freedom from" (Isaiah Berlin's "negative liberty") is not by itself sufficient but needs instead, if justice is to obtain, to be accompanied by an enabling "freedom to" (Berlin's contrasting "positive liberty") secured by governmental initiative, one imagines the sensitive and subtle Polanyi shuddering at the implications for centralized state authority implicit in the "radical redistribution of income and wealth" and the vaguely defined "positive institutions . . . needed to sustain freedom and emancipation" (192) attributed to him by Hodgson. Hodgson's liberal solidarity opens Pandora's Box. In

the name of its Deweyan experimentalism (and the underlying morally charged conception of necessity), there is carte blanche for state action and intervention (anything less would be immoral). With such a license, the radical reformist mind scarcely requires assistance from the theory of big socialism.

More deeply, Polanyi's understanding of liberty is grander and more sophisticated than what is attributed to him in this book by Hodgson. In the preface to *The Logic of Liberty* Polanyi states that "freedom is not our primary consideration." He adds, "Private individualism is no important pillar of public liberty. A free society is not an Open Society, but one fully dedicated to a set of beliefs" (xviii). By public liberty Polanyi is referring to the activity within institutional settings (such as science, the market, common law, etc.) whose existence makes possible, and is the occasion for, spontaneous order. (In fairness it must be said that Hodgson is quite alert to the importance of institutions to Polanyi's epistemology, and they do in fact play a vital role in Hodgson's liberal solidarity.) Now, for Polanyi, it is wrong and dangerous to require that public liberty be justified in terms of the private or personal (*LL*, 195). And, indeed, there is little point for or impact of the latter in the absence of the former. But, as Polanyi here emphasizes (and is manifest in *Personal Knowledge*), it is belief and commitment, as well as an authoritative tradition which is their object, that make public liberty possible. In other words, the ultimate enabler for

Polanyi is not material or even practical in nature (far from it: see *LL*, 237), but rather a particular frame of mind and the traditional sources which make it possible. And it is here where we see most clearly that Hodgson has inappropriately enlisted Polanyi in his aggressively progressive program. In his discussion of the eighth dimension of liberalism ("Nationalism Versus Internationalism and Openness"), for example, he states that liberal solidarity "stresses the importance of social inclusion and the benefits of free movement" (186). This statement is, one suspects, intentionally vague, for the context suggests that it is a euphemistic invitation to unlimited immigration (i.e., open borders). Nothing could be more at odds with Polanyi's deeply traditional "calling"-based grand enterprise as it is majestically set forth in *Personal Knowledge* and presaged in the above account of belief and faith-based public liberty. Inconspicuously located in a footnote in Hodgson's book is reference to the problem of justification (181, note 3). If he had examined this matter thoroughly, in conjunction with a careful review of Polanyi's notion of "primary education" (*SFS*, 42, 71-72), he would have encountered the true essence of Polanyi's thought and, in its light, would perhaps have been less inclined to enlist him as a primary inspiration for the aggressive program (including its nod to "value pluralism") herein set forth. Indeed, given that Hodgson has already elsewhere offered a "critique of cultural relativism" and therein recognized "the need for cultural

and religious assimilation” (210, note 62), such fuller appreciation of Polanyi’s tradition-grounded theory of justification might have led to comprehensive revision of the very concept of liberal solidarity.

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