
REVIEWS

Stefania R. Jha, ed. "Hungarian Studies on Imre Lakatos." *Perspectives on Science*, 14:3 (Fall 2006): 257-353. The MIT Press. E-ISSN: 1530-9274. Print ISSN: 1063-6145.

This recent issue of *Perspectives on Science*, edited by Stefania R. Jha, concerns Imre Lakatos (1922-1974), a protégé and long-time associate of Karl Popper. Five major articles discuss Lakatos' Hungarian background, his approach to the history and philosophy of mathematics, his subsequent work independent of Popper, and his literary remains. In her own contribution, Jha suggests that Lakatos rebelled against Popper and, toward the end of his life, in fact was moving toward Michael Polanyi's approach. Both this and the wider historical and cultural connections presented here will be of great interest to many readers of this journal.

First let me summarize the contents of the issue. An editor's introduction provides a context and a summary of the articles as well as an overview of other recent work on Lakatos. Jha suggests that a central thread of Lakatos' intellectual development was his knowledge of heuristic and mathematics in the style of George Polya, author of the classic *How to Solve It*. There are three articles by other authors, tracing various aspects of Lakatos' work in Hungary (here, dropping the Hungarian diacriticals): his connections with Laszlo Kalmar and Sandor Karacsony at Debrecen concerning their interest in the empirical character of mathematics; his friendship and shared ideas with Arpad Szabo, a historian of dialectic and Greek mathematics; and a discussion of the centrality of heuristic in both Lakatos' early and later work. Jha's own contribution is titled, "The Bid to Transcend Popper, and the Lakatos-Polanyi Connection." It carries the discussion beyond the Hungarian period to Lakatos' work with Popper at the London School of Economics, his realization that Popper's approach was inadequate to an analysis of methods of thinking,

and his subsequent work after Popper's retirement. Jha asserts in her abstract that, "Archival material shows that [Lakatos'] 'new method' struggled to overcome what he saw as the Popperian handicap, by using Polanyi" (p. 318). There is a final article discussing the contents of the Lakatos archive at L.S.E.

The issue is available in electronic form through Muse and other means. Unfortunately, the text is somewhat spoiled by many typos and incomplete application of the journal's own manual of style. In general, though, the articles provide a rich history of connections and context. They help to consider Lakatos' work and career, removing him from the shadow of Karl Popper. Evaluating Lakatos' work raises important questions about the account we give of scientific and mathematical discovery. Looking at his career, as an academic intellectual first in the political climate of Hungary 1944-1956 and then under Popper at L.S.E. 1960-1969, raises questions about the nature of the man and his circumstances.

Due to space limitations, let me just ask five questions that arise when considering this interesting material from the perspective of personal knowledge.

First: How was the thinking of middle-European intellectuals affected by living under Soviet domination? Lakatos was obviously talented at dialectic and polemic. He was interested in the philosophy of mathematics, seemingly a safe subject. He was also politically engaged within the Party, which seems to have produced rewards for his career. But he always spoke for liberty and practiced his talent for dialectic. This was not so safe, and Lakatos was imprisoned for 'incorrect' views between 1950 and 1953. Lakatos emigrated during the 1956 revolution when he could get out. His personal history provides a fascinating contrast to Polanyi's career in scientific research, starting about thirty years earlier and thus avoiding

the totalitarian regimes of Lakatos' day. Ideas and the expression of ideas had entirely different kinds of consequences.

Second: What were the difficulties of working within the sphere of Karl Popper? Popper was not a modest man. Judging by the tone of his writings, he was convinced that his many differences with predecessors, contemporaries, and successors were solely due to the great superiority and originality of his own ideas. Lakatos, exercising his talent for polemic, said that one of Popper's major contributions was "his literary masterpiece 'The Open Society by one of its enemies . . .'" (Motterlini, 89-90). Inevitably Lakatos again got into trouble with the authorities, though this time he did not go to jail. He was "excommunicated" by Popper but harmlessly, since Lakatos still ended up succeeding Popper as chair of the program at L.S.E.

Third: How do we discuss the special case of personal knowing and discovery in mathematics and mathematical logic? If there were any scholarly activity that exists entirely within a realm of propositions (i.e., within Popper's 'Third World') and separate from the physical world and the world of subjective experience, it would certainly be mathematics. As Polya remarks, "humanity learned this idea from one man and one book: from Euclid and his *Elements*" (Polya, 215). But rigorous proof and logical deduction do not get you very far if the topic is problem solving, discovery, changing research strategies, or evolving standards of proof. For that you need induction, empirical facts, the personal element, practical and disciplinary considerations, apprenticeship and mastery of subject, i.e., things that are empirical and subjective. The 'rules' of discovery, such as they exist, are first "have brains and good luck" and second "sit tight and wait until you get a bright idea" (Polya, 172). And the whole process depends upon a deep personal engagement with the problem (Polya, 198-99). Lakatos knew all this, and realized the difficulties it made for any theory of discovery in mathematics.

Fourth: What among Lakatos' unpublished manuscripts points specifically to his late adoption of

Polanyi's ideas or to a Lakatos-Polanyi connection? As attractive as this possibility might be, Jha provides little concrete evidence, nothing significant that is unpublished. She does rehash at length Lakatos' public disagreements with Popper, many of which, it is true, have some parallel in Polanyi's work. Still Lakatos never wholeheartedly adopts Polanyi. The specific evidence of a connection boils down to little more than:

1) The fact that Lakatos respectfully invited Polanyi to lecture at L.S.E. (probably 1969-70 – the exact date is not given; the lecture was "Genius in Science"). This was reparation for a previous dis-inviting of Polanyi forced by Popper five years earlier.

2) A remark by Lakatos that he was taking a 'quasi-Polanyiite' view (actually a humorously titled subtopic in an article written 1970-71: "A quasi-Polanyiite 'falsification' of Popper's demarcation criterion," Lakatos, 146-49). This is a fundamental quarrel with Popper, and there is no direct use of Polanyi's approach.

Clearly, though, Lakatos realized that the L.S.E program on philosophy of science needed to consider not just Popper (its founder), but Polanyi, and others of Lakatos' generation as well: Feyerabend, Kuhn, and Toulmin. All of them were sources of richer accounts of scientific discovery than Popper's. They, especially the younger three, were people with whom one could argue and make progress. And there is strong, published evidence that Lakatos continued his quarrels (e.g. with Toulmin). One suspects, indeed, that being adversaries was a dialectical sign of true intellectual fellowship, of taking the other scholar seriously. In sum, we only know that Lakatos was continuing to work on his research program of "rational reconstruction" till his sudden death at 51. He did this using his talents for dialectic and polemic as before. But this does not mean that he was becoming a Polyanian, or even a 'quasi-Polanyiite' (except as a joke).

Finally: Was the connection between Polanyi and the respectful Lakatos really just their shared admiration for George Polya's work? Polanyi knew

Polya since his first days at university in 1908; he knew, used, and acknowledged Polya's work on heuristic. Lakatos translated Polya's book into Hungarian in the early fifties and wrote his doctorate at Cambridge under Polya's supervision. If consideration of this material about Lakatos does nothing else, I hope that it might cause you to look (again, perhaps) at Polya's wonderful book on heuristic, *How to Solve It*. You will get both profit and pleasure.

References:

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Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles. *Christianity, Democracy, and the Radical Ordinary: Conversations between a Radical Democrat and a Christian*. Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2008. Pp. xi + 366. ISBN: 1-55635-297-2. \$39.00. Paper.

Stanley Hauerwas and Romand Coles both teach at Duke University, Hauerwas in the Divinity School and Coles in Political Science. In addition to his duties at Duke, Coles is also active in CAN (Congregations, Associations, and Neighborhoods) in Durham, NC. This book grows out of a conversation that began among Hauerwas students who took classes with Coles and then challenged each professor to learn from the other. The result was a team-taught course on Christianity and Radical Democracy that inspired this book. It is a book that defies easy summation. One reason is that it is not, on the whole, a co-authored work. Some portions, such as the introduction are, but much of the book consists of individual pieces by the authors (six by Hauerwas and eight by Coles). In addition, the chapters reflect a

variety of genres. Some chapters are formal essays while others are letters by Coles to Hauerwas or vice versa. The book concludes with a transcript of a recorded dialogue between the authors.

What emerges from the work is a sense of a dialogue that is both playful and serious, fascinating and frustrating, as any conversation about matters that matter will be. Although he is not uncritical of Hauerwas' work, Coles clearly learns from Hauerwas to appreciate how Christianity might matter for radical democracy. For his part, Hauerwas admits that while he is "less clear that he has a stake in radical democracy," he "cannot and does not want to avoid being drawn into the lives of radical democrats" in light of the sympathetic way Coles reads Christian theology (11).

Perhaps the place to begin any summary is with a description of radical democracy. The term, as Hauerwas and Coles use it, refers to those efforts to engage many people in the complex task of negotiating common goods in a pluralistic world. Radical democracy happens most clearly at local levels of community organizing where participants learn the skills needed to act democratically at higher levels (see 4, 20, 153, 277, and 341). Theoretically, radical democracy draws from the work of Sheldon Wolin and Ernst Bloch (see Chapters 6 and 12 respectively) and is seen most concretely in the work of groups like Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Industrial Areas Foundation (IAF).

One can begin to see why Hauerwas might be intrigued by radical democracy, for it emphasizes the community group the way he emphasizes the church. Hauerwas also values the way radical democracy understands that it takes time to do something substantive—"time to listen to one another and to remember the dead" (4). Both Coles and Hauerwas celebrate the "radical ordinary," i.e., attention to the complexities of everyday life that call forth a "wild patience" (4). In addition, both acknowledge the ways in which democratic institutions often betray their deepest convictions. Hauerwas' own contributions to

this volume tend toward reflections on Christian figures and communities that exemplify at least some of the traits needed to sustain radical democracy, especially the patience and gentleness required to welcome the poor on their own terms rather than as objects of charity. He focuses most on Jean Vanier and L'Arches' work with disabled people (chapters 8 and 14), but also discusses Gregory of Nazianus' writings on lepers (chapters 10). Coles provides theoretical and concrete accounts of radical democracy (chapters 3, 12, and 13), as well as reflections on the intersections between radical democracy and the work of John Howard Yoder (chapter 2), Rowan Williams (chapter 7), Vanier (chapter 9), Gregory (chapter 10) and Hauerwas (chapter 11).

Neither Hauerwas nor Coles mentions Michael Polanyi in this work, although Coles approvingly discusses Karl Polanyi's work in two places (84 and 255ff). Nevertheless, readers who are familiar with Michael Polanyi will find some affinities with the outlook found here. First, and perhaps most notable, is the attempt to locate an analysis of politics in the experiences of a particular community. For Polanyi, it is life among the community of scientists that gives rise to his account of liberty and polycentricity that he thinks should characterize society. For Hauerwas and Coles, it is life among the community of organizers and/or churchgoers that give rise to the practices that sustain authentically democratic life on a larger scale. Another affinity between Polanyi and the authors of this volume is their shared sense of the complexity of reality. Although Hauerwas and Coles do not talk about polycentricity or a reality that promises to reveal itself in ever new ways, they clearly respect how the complexities of life mean that human planning will never fully achieve Weberian rationalization (this is most explicit in Coles' discussion in Chapter 6).

Besides convergences between these authors and Polanyi, one also finds perspectives here that might stimulate contemporary appropriations of Polanyi's work. For example, Hauerwas and Coles remind readers that democratic institutions often

betray themselves—a prospect that Polanyi does not seem to contemplate in any detail. Given the time in which he writes, this is not entirely surprising, and to say this is not to say that there are not clues in his work that might guide such a reflection. To the extent that Polanyi has an articulate social philosophy, he sees a well-ordered society as one that is polycentric, not subject to the control of any single group, and which maintains a commitment to transcendent values of truth, justice, and community (e.g., LL, 35). Those commitments can be used to criticize governments, which he clearly does in his denunciations of communist nations. Nevertheless, Polanyi does not take critical aim at democracy, as practiced in England and the United States. One therefore wonders what a Polanyian criticism of democracy “on the ground” would look like and how it would compare to the insights of this volume. A second topic upon which Hauerwas and Coles' work might stimulate contemporary appropriations of Polanyi is that of authority. Although Hauerwas and Coles treat the topic only briefly (302-307 and 322-329), both call for an authority that does not become authoritarian and thereby “silence the ‘lesser people’” (328). In short, they acknowledge an ambiguity to authority that can be overlooked in Polanyi's treatment of authority, at least as exercised in the republic of science (that Polanyi is anti-authoritarian is clear from his criticism of communist societies). The perspectives of Hauerwas and Coles offer Polanyians rich concepts for articulating a fuller account of how authority should function in a community..

In the introduction to *Christianity and Radical Democracy*, Hauerwas and Coles use the metaphor of “ecotone” to describe their work (14). Drawn from ecology, the term refers to the vibrancy and creativity of life that is often found at the edges where two different environments such as a forest and meadow meet. They hope that this work likewise exhibits some of that creativity, this time to be found at the edges of theology and politics. They succeed.

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