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Review

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As an Analytical Marxist and an admirer of Cohen's earlier work, I found myself more than a little disappointed with *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality*. Cohen conceives this book as an argument for the desirability of an egalitarian socialist society, but many of his discussions are so narrowly focused they achieve neither political relevance nor intellectual persuasiveness. The attention he lavishes upon the ideas of Robert Nozick is not warranted by either their intrinsic merit or their salience for current controversies. Cohen's earlier writings used the methods of analytical philosophy to reconstruct historical materialism. *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality* uses these same methods mainly to score debating points against other philosophers. Without saying so directly, Cohen drops numerous hints that he no longer considers himself a Marxist, but his introductory remarks indicate a strong commitment to green politics. I found myself hoping the book would use the methods of philosophical analysis to establish a theoretical link between ecological crisis and egalitarian politics. These perhaps unjustified hopes were not satisfied.

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***Karl Polanyi on Ethics and Economics.* By Gregory Baum, Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 1996. xvi, 192 pp. \$32.95 hardcover, \$12.95 paperback.**

This small work on the key concepts of Polanyi's thought on ethics, culture and economics is an excellent introduction to social as contrasted to mainstream, scientific, neoclassical economics. The author is the Canadian professor emeritus of theological ethics and sociology of religion at McGill University.

To compile a short, even incomplete, list of Polanyi's principles from Baum's book and mostly in his words gives a compositional definition of an effective social economy:

- Ethical behavior plays an essential role in the making of the economy and in the scientific endeavor to understand it (xv).
- Attempts to implement the "self-regulating market" system has dehumanizing consequences as it tears apart cultural bonds, traditional values and the inherited institutions by which people constitute their industry; it does this by transforming labor and land into market commodities. In industrial capitalism, both labor (human beings) and land (the natural endowment) are bought and sold, used and destroyed, as if they were simply merchandise, even though they are in no sense the products of human industry (4).

- The self-regulating market, full blown in England by 1834 when a competitive labor market was established, was countered almost immediately by governmental action to protect society and the land. Polanyi called this the “double movement”; it is his great contribution to history and the major theme of his classic, 1944 book, the *Great Transformation* (11). Such counter-movements will always occur, he says.
- The self-regulating market and civil society are in permanent conflict. In the long run the “free” market and democracy are irreconcilable: either the free market economy (in the self-regulating market sense) will give way to a more cooperative, social economy, or, if the free market economy remains in force it will increasingly depend on an authoritarian, even fascist, protective rule (27–28).
- A genuine free society is a participatory one. The important freedom is not the capacity to choose, but to live an ethical life. The stress is on agency not structure; the subject of history is responsible human beings opening up society and making it *transparent*, resisting the tendency of modern, industrial society to become largely *opaque* (26).
- The individual person has infinite value because there is God. All individuals have souls, are equal among themselves, belong to one another, and constitute a single human family bound together in solidarity. Polanyi calls this ethical creed, Christian individualism, but it is essentially social (32). (It is called personalism by some social economists.) The ethical conscience cannot rest until society becomes transparent, just, and participatory (32–34).
- Material poverty in itself is not a tragic event if people are integrated into a community with revival skills and a strong sense of solidarity. It is tragic if people are not integrated into such a community, then their poverty is accompanied by humiliation, the loss of self-respect, and an entry into self-destruction (43).

In the last two chapters, Baum extends the social philosophical perspective of Polanyi (1886–1964) to contemporary issues in Canada, Latin America, the USA and elsewhere and examines whether his theory of the double movement is credible in today’s pluralistic societies. It is. The book is well worthwhile for anyone who wants to understand better the continuing negative and positive influences of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment on our struggle for a more humane and all inclusive economy.

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