

RECOVERING POPPER:
FOR THE LEFT?

ABSTRACT: In his biography of Karl Popper, Malachi Hacoheh brilliantly reconstructs the development of Popper's ideas through 1946, correcting many errors regarding the sequence of their emergence. In addition he recreates Popper's Vienna and provides insights into Popper's complex personality. A larger goal of Hacoheh's narrative is to show the relevance of Popper's philosophical and political thought for the left. Unfortunately this leads him to neglect and distort certain aspects of the story he tells, particularly when it comes to the relationship between Popper and F.A. Hayek.

The philosopher and polymath Karl Raimund Popper was born on 28 July 1902 in Vienna. He lived there until early 1937 when, after a number of false starts, he obtained a position at Canterbury College in Christchurch, New Zealand. He and his wife Hennie spent the war there; then in early 1946 they emigrated once again, this time to England. With the help of the economist F. A. Hayek and others, Popper secured a position at the London School of Economics. He taught there until the early 1970s, then enjoyed an intellectually active retirement while living in the English countryside. Popper died on 17 September 1994. His body was cremated and his ashes buried beside his wife's body in her family plot in Austria.

Early on in his masterful account of Popper's many odysseys, intel-

lectual, political, personal, and physical (*Karl Popper: The Formative Years, 1902–1945*; Cambridge University Press, 2000), historian Malachi Hacohen addresses what he terms a “post-structuralist” question: Is biography itself a worthwhile, or even a possible, exercise? Was there a stable identity for us to discover behind the actor whom we know as Karl Popper? Or was there rather such “a plurality of directions” and “multiplicity of contexts” that deconstruction might seem “a more promising strategy than biographical assemblage” (13)? Hacohen’s answer mediates between extremes:

Historiography, biography included, moves between stability and change, unity and dispersal, determinance and indeterminance, either radical position rendering it impossible, or superfluous. The poststructuralists have appropriately put the fear of premature coherence in the heart of every methodologically aware historian, but they have also rendered problematical, even illegitimate, modes of scholarship, intellectual biography among them, that I am eager to recommend. (Ibid.)

Hacohen ultimately argues for the value of the biographical enterprise, but he is fully cognizant of the dangers inherent in biographical reconstruction.

As an historian of economic thought who has recently published an intellectual biography of Popper’s friend Hayek, I agree with Hacohen. But as an economist who has struggled for many years to understand Popper’s ideas, I also have considerable sympathy for the problems that motivate the post-structuralist question.

For his English-speaking audiences in particular, Popper poses what can seem at times insurmountable interpretative problems. This is due in part to the curious publication history of his work. It was almost 25 years before the book that launched his career, *Logik der Forschung* (1935), was translated into English as *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (1959). The translation contained new material, including numerous footnote references to work that had appeared in the intervening years, and though these were carefully asterisked, it still required no small amount of labor to separate out the old from the new. Then, following the *Logik*, came two major works in the methodology of the social sciences and political philosophy, *The Poverty of Historicism* and *The Open Society and Its Enemies*. Though *Poverty* was first published in parts in 1944–45 in the British economics journal *Economica*, *The Open Society* found the wider readership when it was published as a book immedi-

ately after the war. *Poverty* also eventually appeared as a book in 1957, but by then it included additional footnotes as well as sections that had not been incorporated in the original.

In 1963 a number of previously published articles were gathered together in the collection *Conjectures and Refutations*, and again there were additions and alterations to the originals. To complicate matters further, Popper wrote a *Postscript* to the *Logik* in the 1950s, galley proofs of which circulated among his students for decades before it was finally published, in three volumes, in the early 1980s. As you might by now expect, the final version contained new materials. Once one knows this history, the very idea of trying to answer the question “What did Popper think, and when did he think it?” becomes chimerical.

Interpretive difficulties were compounded even further among economists, due to multiple readings of what was supposed to be “most important” to them in Popper’s massive oeuvre. The dominant early reading was provided by historians of economic thought like Mark Blaug and T.W. Hutchison, both of whom emphasized *falsifiability* as a demarcation criterion that could be employed to separate scientific from unscientific research programs (see Caldwell 1991). Two unscientific research programs, according to Blaug and Hutchison, were Ludwig von Mises’s apriorist “science of human action” and classical Marxism. The early reading of Popper was also used to chastise mainstream economics for its “formalist” pretensions, which came at the expense of the empirical testing of economic theories (Blaug 1980a, 91–93, 127–28, 253–60; 1980b; Hutchison 1981, 18; 1988, 176; 1992).

Then a conference sponsored by the Latsis Foundation was held in 1974 in Nafplion, Greece, and the conference volume that followed served to introduce to economists the ideas of Popper’s follower (and, in the minds of some economic methodologists, competitor) Imre Lakatos. Again, Mark Blaug (1976) led the charge. The debate heated up further in the 1980s when Wade Hands (1985) pointed out that certain tensions existed between the writings of what Hands termed “Popper_N” (the natural-science Popper) and “Popper_S” (the social-science Popper). Specifically, in his writings on situational logic, Popper claimed that the rationality assumption should never be rejected, which seemed to contradict his bedrock claim that all non-analytic statements in science should be falsifiable and, if falsified, modified or replaced. Meanwhile, Larry Boland (e.g., 1982) had long derided virtually every other alternative reading of what Popper was up to as “conventionalist.”

The legion of competing and sometimes contradictory interpreta-

tions of Popper's implications for economics can be explained, in part, by the simple fact that when economists read philosophers and try to apply their works to new contexts, multiple interpretations invariably result. But it also seemed that in some matters Popper, despite his apparently transparent and precise prose, might reasonably be held responsible for producing certain ambiguities.¹ As with Slim Shady, one longed for the real Karl Popper to please stand up.

If one were seeking a candidate for a post-structuralist reading, then, Popper would surely make the short list, if for no other reason than that a biographical treatment seemed too difficult to execute. It is for this reason that Malachi Hacohen's achievement is such a great one. Hacohen has written a book both systematic and daring. He straightens out the sequence of events, he tells us what Popper thought and wrote and when he thought and wrote it, he corrects mistaken interpretations; he does, in short, everything that an intellectual historian could want. But amazingly, he does even more. Hacohen is not content merely to report on the development of Popper's ideas. He seeks to explain Popper, to place him in his times, to unmask his personality, to reveal why he made the moves he did when he did. Some of this obviously involves speculation, but Hacohen is a good enough historian to make it clear whenever he reaches beyond the evidence at hand.

I do not think Hacohen has completely succeeded in the much more ambitious part of his undertaking, but his accomplishment is nonetheless remarkable. His book demonstrates that a careful biographical treatment can correct the record, but also that it must always, in the end, be an act of interpretation.

The Development of Popper's Thought

It is appropriate to begin with some background on how Hacohen came to write the book. His Columbia University dissertation, completed in 1993, was titled "The Making of the Open Society," and in it Hacohen traced the origins of Popper's *Open Society and Its Enemies*. Soon after finishing his dissertation, Hacohen began investigating the contents of the then-recently opened Popper archives, and this allowed him to check hypotheses from his dissertation against newly available documentary evidence. The archives, it turns out, are immensely rich ("a dream come true," Hacohen [12] reports), filled with manuscripts that were not elsewhere available, early drafts of papers, and much of

Popper's professional correspondence. In the 1990s the archives of a number of people who had known and corresponded with and about Popper also opened. Hacohen's is the first Popper biography to make use of these new archival materials.

Some of the most fruitful of the materials were early drafts of Popper's autobiography, especially the bits and pieces that never made it into *Unended Quest: An Intellectual Autobiography* (1976). Popper had written an essay to accompany the papers in the 1974 Library of Living Philosophers volumes dedicated to his work, and a slightly revised version of it became *Unended Quest*. When Hacohen compared the archival material against what Popper had said in the published autobiography, he confirmed a suspicion that had first arisen when he was doing his dissertation: on a number of issues relating to the development of his ideas, Popper had misreported things. The early drafts for the autobiography provided clues as to how this might have happened.

Though it was 1963 when Popper first began to prepare the autobiography, he made many starts but little progress on it until 1969. Its writing was apparently a painful process; as Hacohen puts it, "There are signs that his undertaking to write an autobiography gave occasion to introspection that he found unpleasant" (15). Ultimately, Popper decided to keep personal references to a minimum, and to fashion instead a life history that mirrored his vision of science as a succession of problem situations and attempted solutions. In short, he "latched onto a narrative of philosophical problems" (18). The outcome was an anachronistic and "dehistoricized" life history that was told from the perspective of Popper's mature thought.

Only the theories that withstood the test of time and criticism—above all, Popper's own criticism—made it into the *Autobiography*. He projects a coherence of philosophy and life that seems almost unworldly. It conceals the plurality of directions in which his thought developed, the intellectual impasses, the options foreclosed, and the decisive turning points. (13.)

One of Hacohen's many contributions is to correct the chronology of Popper's intellectual development and to revise the weights that Popper attached to various episodes and events. Most of the corrections concern the early years in Vienna. Thus, Popper did not formulate the problems of induction or demarcation in 1919, but some eleven years later; his interactions with philosophers from the Vienna

Circle were more important in the development of his ideas than his autobiography suggested; his ultimate rejection of Marxism took longer than he reported; and so on (14; 85; 96; 186ff; 208). One of the most fascinating of his reconstructions is Hacohen's description, in chapters 8 and 10, of the emergence of *The Poverty of Historicism*, a draft of which was completed in one period, then revised in another, then substantially revised once more midway through its actual publication—because Popper had just read and corresponded with Hayek.

In each instance, Hacohen meticulously traces, step by (sometimes painful) step, the evolution of Popper's ideas. He includes not just his triumphs, but also the theories that Popper would later discard, the latter being notable for their absence from the autobiography. In the process Hacohen ably addresses the question of "what Popper thought when." In the opening of chapter 5, he even promises to answer the question that post-structuralists disdain and that has doubtless occurred to anyone who has grappled with Popper's work: "When did Popper become Popper?" (171). For those who cannot wait to read the book, I'll add that the title of the chapter is "The Philosophical Breakthrough, 1929–1932."

Recovering Interwar Vienna

Hacohen reconstructs Popper's intellectual development through a close reading of the texts and of contemporaneous correspondence, but another virtue of his book is that he goes considerably beyond the usual textual exegesis. He provides for the reader a richly detailed portrait of Vienna during the interwar years, a period that until recently has gotten much less attention than the earlier *fin-de-siècle* era. Hacohen recaptures the period, from the sclerosis of Vienna's school system to the complexities of its party politics to the pervasive and increasingly virulent anti-Semitism.

Anti-Semitism plays an important role in the story that Hacohen tells about Popper's development. Popper's family was Jewish, but his parents converted to Lutheranism two years before his birth. In Catholic Vienna, this was less an act of religious fervor than one aimed at assimilation into anticlerical, progressive German culture. Karl adopted his parents' religious views, but their hope of entering a more progressive and cosmopolitan community went largely unrealized.

Neither acculturation nor religious conversion broke . . . the barriers of ethnicity. The assimilated Jewish intelligentsia constructed bridges to progressive secular Austrians opposed to anti-Semitism, but there were relatively few of these. Together they formed the utopian visions of a secular commonwealth that became the hallmark of fin-de-siècle Viennese progressivism. In such a state, free of religious superstition and ethnic prejudice, the assimilated Jewish intelligentsia hoped finally to find their home: No one there would probe their ethnic origin or challenge their claims to be German. But reality defied utopia. Secular progressive Germans were marginal to their own ethnic group. German-Austrians did not accept Jews into their social networks. The Poppers spent much of their life in the company of other Jews. (24.)

I must say that though I knew of its presence, I was still stunned by Hacohen's account of the ubiquity of anti-Semitism in Austria before and between the wars. His nuanced reporting on this, and on the Jewish community's reactions to it—for instance, their devotion to the Austro-Hungarian Empire, because Jewish participation or assimilation in a multinational and multi-ethnic empire was less difficult than in a national state; and the emergence, too, of progressive socialist politics among many Jews—and on the ultimately impossible position that Jewish intellectuals confronted, makes for compelling (though occasionally horrific) reading (25–53; 299–309).² Hacohen's account provides essential supplementary background for historians of economic thought who would want to understand the milieu in which so many important Austrian economists, from Ludwig von Mises and Hayek to Joseph Schumpeter and Oskar Morgenstern, were formed.³

In addition to describing the world in which Popper lived, Hacohen tells us about those with whom he interacted, particularly the members of the Vienna Circle. Later on, Popper never tired of criticizing the Vienna Circle philosophers—in his autobiography, he answered his own rhetorical question of who killed logical positivism with the quip, "I fear that I must accept responsibility" (Popper 1976, 88). But because he shared with the logical positivists a concern about demarcating the scientific from the unscientific, Popper was often identified with them, an association that was promoted by at least some of the Vienna Circle philosophers themselves (208–13). Hacohen shows how Popper's battles with the Vienna positivists helped him formulate his ideas more clearly, and makes the telling point that Popper's later fame was itself, in part, a result of these battles (186). Drawing on letters sent to each other by such Vienna Circle philosophers as Moritz Schlick, Rudolf Carnap, and

Otto Neurath, as well as fellow travelers such as Carl Hempel, Hacoen is able to provide the intimate details of their relationships, both intellectual and personal.

Hacoen's discussions of Otto Neurath (e.g., 261-75; 360-62; 372-74) are of particular interest. Neurath was the social-science representative of the Vienna Circle. A socialist and a political activist, he is known among students of the Austrian school of economics as the man who "provoked" Ludwig von Mises into initiating the socialist calculation debate.⁴ As Hacoen notes, there has been a rash of new interest in the Vienna Circle, but in the process, "scholars have used ingenious but strained interpretations to turn the Vienna Circle into post-structuralists of a sort. In Neurath's case especially, they have imposed coherence on an imaginative but unsystematic mind, making him voice each scholar's preferred alternative to traditional scientific philosophy" (262).

Why has Neurath, in particular, attracted recent scholarly attention? He makes an attractive figure, catering to current tastes: an imaginative thinker, political radical, and philosophical iconoclast who berated (Western) metaphysics (263-64). Neurath employed a boat metaphor to describe his theory of knowledge, and his later protagonists use it to show that he was an antifoundationalist. Nancy Cartwright, Jordi Cat, et al. (1996, 89) quote Neurath's own description of his epistemology as follows: "We are like sailors who have to rebuild their ship on the open sea, without ever being able to dismantle it in dry dock and reconstruct it from the best components." Hacoen's thesis, however, is that while both Popper and Neurath were antifoundationalist philosophers (rather incredibly, some of Neurath's defenders paint Popper as a foundationalist), Popper's work provides a more coherent base for antifoundationalism than does Neurath's. To put Hacoen's point baldly, Neurath's "protagonists," such as Cartwright, spend too much time with the boat metaphor and too little with the fact that in his day, Neurath was principally known as an unyielding advocate of eliminative physicalism.

Eliminative physicalism is the doctrine that Neurath's opponents (such as Hayek and Popper) associate with him. It calls for the elimination from science of all claims that make reference to unobservable states. As Neurath (1973, 325) once described it, "Physicalism encompasses psychology as much as history and economics; for in it there are only gestures, words, behavior, but no 'motives,' no 'ego,' no 'personality' beyond what can be formulated spatio-temporally." This position is

very hard to reconcile with Neurath as a post-structuralist before his time.⁵

Popper the Man

Hacoen's final biographical contribution is to unveil Popper as a person to his readers, and the phrase "warts and all" could hardly be more appropriate. Hacoen expertly blends together many sources to compose his portrait. He looks at what others had to say about Popper; he examines Popper's correspondence; and again, he turns to the unpublished drafts of the autobiography to see what its author (sometimes inadvertently) revealed.

It is not an attractive picture. As W. W. Bartley, III (1990, ch. 9)—one of the few students of Popper who was able to make up with him after they had their (one is tempted to say, inevitable) break—once put it, Popper was "a difficult man." As a child he hated discipline; Hacoen cannot help adding that, "if his future behavioral patterns were any indication of his youth, he had been used to getting his way, and threw temper tantrums when he had not" (63). Popper's own recollection was that he was "a puritanical and somewhat priggish child" (64). Throughout his adult life he was always complaining; that others had stolen his ideas, that he didn't have enough money, that his health was poor (217; 323; 340; 450-51; 459-60). Many contemporaries suspected that in reality, he was hypochondriacal; Hacoen's own wry comment is that "he ended up outliving all of his peers, most of his doctors, and some of his students, enjoying bad health to the ripe old age of 92" (460). He worked demonically, "morning to night," 360 days a year (17). His behavior in seminars and at professional meetings was often bad and at times was atrocious (209-10; 219; 318).

All this will make sense to anyone who has heard the jibes about Popper's personality traits (one of the funniest: A better title for one of his books would have been *The Open Society . . . by One of Its Enemies*). But Hacoen's portrait also serves to humanize Popper at the same time that it exposes him. Popper was usually aware, at times acutely so, of his own faults; it seems that he just couldn't help himself.

Hacoen's account goes beyond (and sometimes far beyond) the documentary evidence. Thus we find Hacoen speculating about whether Popper's lifelong attraction to Selma Lagerlöf's books were tied to feelings he had as a boy towards his mother, or whether an un-

published fragment about Kierkegaard's relationship with his father might have had more to do with Popper's own family relations (62; 84–85). Even more provocatively, Hacohen asserts his belief that sex was one of the vices, along with smoking and drinking, that Popper disavowed, even in marriage (63; 179–81).

This last conjecture—Hacohen cites no direct evidence for it—really surprised me. Why, in such an otherwise carefully constructed history, would Hacohen take such a leap? To answer that I must advance some conjectures of my own about Hacohen's larger aims in writing his biography, and about their effects.

Hacohen's Political Aim

Hacohen makes one of his goals clear in the beginning of the book: it is to recover Popper for the Left (2).⁶ There are a variety of reasons why this might be necessary. As Hacohen notes, though both *The Open Society* and *Poverty* were written with the problems of socialism in interwar Vienna as a backdrop, they both were read within the context of the Cold War as liberal anti-Communist manifestoes. Popper encouraged these misreadings in his *Autobiography* and elsewhere, not least because he became more conservative as time went on and so was inclined to distance himself from his youthful enthusiasm for radical thought (8–11). When one adds to this the role of Popper and Popperian philosophers in opposing radical student demands during the late 1960s at the LSE, and his still later (from Hacohen's perspective, unwarranted) appropriation by elements of the New Right, Popper has more often than not been a target for, rather than a icon of, the Left.

Hacohen is intent on changing all of this. He laments that, following the collapse of the student movement, the 1960s Left retreated into the politics of cultural identity and the non-politics of post-structuralism. From Hacohen's perspective, the former movement ignores the manifold benefits of a reconstituted and culturally sensitive cosmopolitanism, and the latter signals a loss of political will and of any hope of constructing a philosophy on which to ground social activism.⁷ But Hacohen thinks that Popper's philosophical analyses, and his advocacy of "piecemeal social engineering," can provide a way out of the cul-de-sac.

Hacohen lays all this out on the second page of his book:

I have little to say to the right. My major audience is the academic left that has been, in my view, on the wrong track since it took the post-structuralist turn in the late 1970s. I hope to convince them that Popper saw more clearly than they have through the philosophical and political problems preoccupying them and that he provides a more promising direction in the search for answers. In short, I hope that Popper can help the academic left set out a new progressive liberal agenda that will seek to recoup the social losses of the last two decades. (2.)

On the final page of the book, Hacohen restates his position succinctly: "I offer Popper as an alternative" (551).

Hacohen never tires of reminding us that, in the good old days at least, Popper was a radical living in an epoch of revolutionary fervor, an idealist who was willing to devote at least a portion of his life to work for progressive reform. He urges his progressive reader to join with him in recovering that Popper; as he writes in conclusion,

historians cannot directly address contemporary problems and can rarely make a major theoretical contribution, but they can call attention to historical moments that represent unfulfilled promises, ready to be recovered, appropriated, and drawn again into the struggle for a better world. Fin-de-siècle progressivism and Red Vienna represent such moments, and Popper represents one of their greatest accomplishments. Looking over a century that knew two world wars and put the survival of civilization in question, I have sought to rescue, from amid the ruins, hope and vision for the next century. Popper is their embodiment. (551.)

Popper's youthful radicalism (for a time he was a Communist, and for a longer period a social activist) obviously can be used to support Hacohen's political rehabilitation of him. But that course poses problems for Hacohen, since the young Popper also held views that Hacohen finds unpalatable. One of these was Popper's reaction to anti-Semitism. The other was that Popper blamed the socialists for the fascist takeover of Austria in the 1930s. If Hacohen is to have any success in his mission to recover Popper for the Left, he will have to explain (what he views as) Popper's unseemly reactions to Austrian anti-Semitism and to the Austro-Marxists.

Hacohen's strategy is to link the two responses and to locate their origins in the same source, deep in Popper's psyche. Hacohen's willingness to speculate about the very farthest reaches of Popper's psyche,

then, seems to be part and parcel of his mission—to reveal every dimension of the man—for if one is diagnosing why a patient fell into certain mental lapses, one must understand his whole being.

Popper's Inner Life

Let us see how Hacoheh *qua* Popper's analyst proceeds. His first three chapters examine Popper's life through age 23. The milieu in which Popper came of age was not, as many histories have described *fin-de-siècle* Vienna, one of cultural crisis and the emergence of modernism, but one of social reform. "The Vienna he knew—progressive, optimistic, reform oriented—[has] virtually disappeared from accounts of modernism. Social reform, not cultural crisis, prevailed in his Vienna" (23).

Popper, raised as a child of the late Enlightenment in a progressive, unreligious, and cosmopolitan household, was radicalized, along with many of his friends, by the First World War. Popper ultimately rebelled against the education system (and his parents, Hacoheh cannot help but add), which he felt represented the crumbling old order, by quitting school (77). He joined various left-wing organizations and finally became a Communist in April 1919, though he broke with the party two months later when a failed coup attempt resulted in government troops firing on a worker's street demonstration. For the next six years Popper remained a socialist and an activist, living in communal quarters in the Grinzing barracks and experimenting with many possible callings, though working for the reform of the school system stands out as a dominant concern. His radical period lasted until 1925. After that date "he had no active political engagement, and participated in no social reforms," focusing instead on intellectual pursuits (131). He continued to hold socialist views, but had become disillusioned about the prospects for activism. "Only when politics failed did he withdraw into philosophy and science" (71).

Hacoheh's next step is to link Popper's retreat to science with his response to anti-Semitism: namely, his repudiation of all nationalist and ethnocentric movements, the better to assimilate into a cosmopolitan community of science.

Popper regarded the dissolution of the Habsburg Empire as an unmitigated disaster and held nationalism, especially German nationalism, re-

sponsible. His response to the Jewish liberal and progressive syntheses of German nationalism and cosmopolitanism was to reject both German and Jewish nationalism in favor of uncompromising cosmopolitanism. This was an extremely rare response. It required an individual to give up both Jewish and German identity. Such radicalism left Popper a permanent exile, a citizen only in the imaginary Republic of Science. (53.)

From Hacoheh's perspective, Popper's response solved nothing. While Hacoheh admires Popper's cosmopolitanism, he is dismayed that Popper thought that the only way to practice it was to demand that Jews assimilate. Popper

presented his views on the Jewish question as flowing from his cosmopolitanism. He thought that anti-Semitism disclosed the natural hostility of an indigenous community towards strangers. Assimilation was a moral imperative, and Jewish nationality and religion were impediments to cosmopolitanism. He got the relationship between assimilation and cosmopolitanism wrong: Assimilation under threat violated cosmopolitanism. (304.)

In an unpublished fragment of his *Autobiography*, Popper sank deeper into pathology. Here is Hacoheh's summary (307) of Popper's position:

Jews were not to expect fulfillment of cosmopolitanism's promise, but to accommodate themselves to anti-Semitism. They were wrong to take advantage of openings in society and stupid to draw attention to their wealth and success. Popper reversed the roles of persecutor and victim. Jews infiltrated Austria, invaded politics and journalism, attacked assimilationists, provoked anti-Semitism. . . . Popper's discourse descended from cosmopolitanism dangerously close to anti-Semitism.

Though Jewish himself, Popper was prepared to lay the problem of anti-Semitism at the feet of the Jews.

Hacoheh's next step is to show that Popper had an analogous reaction to another group with which he had a natural affinity, but who likewise had disappointed him: the Austro-Marxists of "Red Vienna." Their lethal mistake was to take seriously Marx's claims about the inevitability of the socialist revolution. This was disastrous for the socialist cause, for it kept them from taking action. That allowed their enemies to decide when and where to engage them, and ultimately to prevail. In Hacoheh's account, Popper's critique of "historicism"—the view held

by Marx, among others, that history obeys laws of development—was that of an unconventional and disappointed socialist who saw Marxism as abetting the rise of fascism and dooming all hope for progressive reform in Vienna. While not denying the astuteness of some of Popper's antihistoricist arguments, Hacohen also sees in them the tendency he had displayed in his reaction to anti-Semitism. His "criticism of the socialists repeated an unattractive pattern in Popper's life. Once again, he made the victims of aggression the target of criticism" (319).

The Hayek Problem

Popper's assimilationism and his anti-Marxism provide only two of the hurdles Hacohen must overcome in pursuit of his political agenda. A third problem, one that is not adequately tackled in this fine book, and one that cannot be disposed of psychologically, is the possible influence on Popper's thought of Austrian economist F. A. Hayek.

Although both men hailed from Vienna, Popper first met Hayek just before presenting a paper in the mid-1930s at Hayek's seminar at the LSE. Hayek, too, was a formerly left-leaning critic of Communism, but by the 1930s he was emerging as a spokesman for classical liberalism. And to Hacohen's evident horror, Popper seemed to be taken with some of Hayek's arguments.

The Popper we have met so far in Hacohen's narrative may be a disillusioned Communist, but he is still a man of the Left, and one notorious for holding strong views and arguing tenaciously. So why was Popper such a pushover for Hayek?

Hacohen never answers (or asks) this question. This might be justified by the fact that he more or less ends his portrait of Popper with the publication of *The Open Society* in 1946. The last half of Popper's life is treated only in his final chapter, which Hacohen labels "Epilogue," and he explains in a long note that it is intended as only a sketch. Hacohen also says that he looks "forward to future biographies of [Popper's] life in England," but one cannot help but get the impression that, if one is intent on rescuing Popper for the Left, the less said about the latter half of his life, the better (521).

One can forgive Hacohen for stopping at 1946, but that was a decade after Popper met Hayek; his treatment of the Popper-Hayek relationship is deeply disappointing. Hacohen freely acknowledges how important this relationship was. Popper once said that he had learned more

from Hayek than from anyone else besides Tarski (486), and an important part of Hacohen's narrative is the tale of how reading Hayek's "Scientism and the Study of Society" and other essays caused Popper to revise the second half of *The Poverty of Historicism* extensively. Hayek nonetheless emerges as a one-dimensional figure. Virtually every time he is mentioned he is labeled (as a "libertarian") (365; 370; 381; 477, 478; 484–85), and at one point (perhaps inevitably, given Hacohen's preoccupation with recovering Popper for the Left), he is identified as the prophet of the New Right (519). In the few places where Hacohen goes beyond labeling to describe him, Hayek comes across as pleasant enough but also as a bit of an operator: on two separate occasions Hacohen uses the same uncharitable phrasing to describe Hayek as "tolerant of differences of opinion as long as they served his vision" (318; 456).⁸

According to Hacohen, Hayek's principal impact on Popper was that he "stymied the growth" of Popper's "political philosophy" (486), a political philosophy that could have been of use to the Left. Perhaps Hacohen's best summary of Hayek's influence may be found on p. 450:

Hayek ended up influencing the direction of Popper's political philosophy. . . . [Popper's] political shift was not radical, but it was noticeable, and it became pronounced in the postwar years. Hayek convinced him that both socialism and the enthusiasm for scientific planning could undermine liberty, and he lost some confidence in his progressivism. From 1942 to 1944, he referred to his war project as a comprehensive, unified, political philosophy, founded on a reform of the "methodology of the social sciences." By 1945, he expressed regret that upon his return to London, he would have to continue to focus on social questions. He actually never did. His long-term interests were in natural science methodology, but Hayek, too, contributed to his political timidity.

"Hayek's influence," however, Hacohen assures the reader, "was not all negative." (450).

Hacohen occasionally seems aware that he may not have done Hayek justice. Thus, he admits in a footnote that only after reading Jeremy Shearmur's *Hayek and After* (1996) did Hayek become "an interesting thinker for me for the first time" (482). I suspect that Hacohen came across Shearmur's work rather late, because his main text does not reflect Shearmur's insights.⁹ Thus, while Hacohen's notes acknowledge Shearmur's point that Hayek was not properly described as a "libertar-

ian" when he was influencing Popper in the 1940s, Hacothen's text is unmoved. It also appears that Hacothen has not read much of Hayek's later work.¹⁰

As a result, this otherwise excellent biography suffers considerably. We get none of the nuance of earlier chapters when it comes to the question of how Hayek might have influenced Popper, even in the specific fashion (political "timidity") upon which Hacothen insists. Hayek remains to the end a stick figure, a bogeyman of the Right, a corrupter whose seductive powers are never explained.

An Alternative Account

Hacothen's incomplete treatment of Hayek is only one example of how his larger interpretive framework, that of recovering Popper for the Left, may have skewed the story he tells.

For example, Popper's flirtation with Communism came when he was only 17 and appears to have lasted only two months. His period of social activism was over by the time he was 23. In short, Popper's youth recalls the normal developmental path that many young people concerned about social issues might follow. Thousands or millions of middle-aged doctors, lawyers, and college professors of today went through the same process in the late 1960s—a time less eventful than those Popper endured. Their turn from the radicalism of their youth to concern with their professions happened just as seamlessly as did Popper's, and many would now view their early political beliefs as naïve.

Hacothen's description of interwar Vienna also contains a hidden premise: that the socialists held the only acceptable blueprint for the necessary rebuilding and reform of a shattered society. Red Vienna was the blueprint, and the fact that some of it was actually put into effect makes it a sort of Nirvana for Hacothen, an example of what the idealism of youth when coupled with political power and the will for reform can accomplish. The presence in Vienna of intellectuals who pressed an alternative vision of societal reform goes unmentioned and, indeed, seems almost unimaginable for Hacothen. Yet not only was Hayek there; he was among an illustrious group of Austrian economists, including Ludwig von Mises and Joseph Schumpeter, who interacted fruitfully if disagreeably with the likes of Otto Neurath.

Like Popper, Hayek started out in this milieu as a socialist. There were other similarities: Hayek was as cosmopolitan, internationalist, and

nonreligious as Popper (although Hayek was not Jewish). The biggest difference between them is that when *he* was 23, Hayek read Ludwig von Mises's book *Socialism*—a comprehensive refutation of the possibility that any of the varieties of left-wing Utopia then on offer could achieve the promised results. Hayek's transformation under Mises's influence did not happen overnight, but the interaction between them gradually weaned Hayek from his youthful enthusiasm, and by the 1930s had begun developing a critique of its epistemological presuppositions.

Popper did not read Mises, so any similar influence on him probably would have had to come from Hayek. By the time Popper came to England in the 1930s, virtually every intellectual he encountered would have shared his non-Marxist socialism, so similar to the vaunted and ubiquitous Middle Way that dominated elite opinion in England and elsewhere in the 1930s (Marwick 1964). Hayek and Robbins, the LSE economists, were among the few who saw things differently. While not contesting Hacothen's thesis that *The Open Society* is a disgruntled socialist's attack on Marxism written in the context of interwar Austria, then, one should note that since nearly every intellectual considered himself a socialist back then, Popper's socialism needs no explaining. What is much more mysterious is whether, and to what extent, Hayek's influence led Popper to reconsider some of his views.

Hacothen serves up some interesting tidbits suggesting that Popper may have begun changing his mind independently: there are "liberal" elements, for example, in his 1940 paper "What Is Dialectic?" (Popper 1963, 352), and in 1943 he was admitting to Alfred Brauthal that "I do not know enough about Russia, and some views I have held have been proved wrong" (397). When Popper read Hayek, perhaps he heard voice being given to problems he had begun to recognize in his own political views. And this, in turn, may have affected his social-scientific ideas.

In this account, the critical period for Popper's politics lies not when Popper was experimenting with radicalism in the immediate postwar years, but when, possibly with Hayek's help, he began to learn more about the history of the social sciences. Hayek was unquestionably helped by Popper's ideas in return. It was a fascinating relationship, and one that may be crucial if one purports to deliver a full explanation of Popper's intellectual development, even if one wants to stop the narrative at 1946. Hacothen's larger project of recovering Popper for the Left may have placed such possibilities in a blind spot, diminishing an otherwise magnificent accomplishment.

NOTES

1. As an example, Caldwell 1991, 17-22, argues that Popper 1985 can be used to support three different interpretations of the logical status of the rationality principle.
2. Hacohen's comment that "nowadays, one walks the streets of Vienna with unremitting dread. They are a constant reminder of the erasure of a culture and the genocide of a people" (551) indicates the depth of his own reaction to Austrian anti-Semitism.
3. It also sheds light on the controversy in the pages of *History of Political Economy* over whether Hayek was guilty of "ambivalent anti-Semitism," as Melvin Reder (2000 and 2002) claimed and Ronald Hamowy (2002) denied. Viennese culture was shot through with anti-Semitism in the interwar period, so Hayek's references to this in interviews need not be taken as evidence of his own anti-Semitism. If anything, Hacohen's history suggests that Hayek was among those "marginalized" types whom Popper and other Jewish intellectuals hoped would join them to form a cosmopolitan community of progressives (Hayek did not know Popper in Vienna, but in interviews he reported that he moved in both non-Jewish and "mixed" circles.)
4. I will here take exception to Hacohen's passing remark that the socialist calculation debate was quickly forgotten after the war and thus had few consequences (87). Philip Mirowski (2002, ch. 5) argues that many who contributed to the development of neoclassical economics in the 1950s were sympathetic to the market-socialist position in that debate, and that their theoretical models reflected, at least in part, their political preferences.
5. Thus Uebel 2000 claims that Hayek's "Scientism and the Study of Society" and Popper's "Poverty" essays were not really about social-science methodology, but were covert, politically motivated screeds whose principal target was Otto Neurath. Uebel also says that both of them misinterpreted Neurath. Hacohen's biography contains evidence that both supports and contradicts Uebel's claim that Neurath was a principal target in "Poverty" (361-62; 372-74). Regarding Hayek, in my view Neurath was only one of many of his targets; Hayek was anything but covert in linking bad social science to bad societal outcomes, as the last portion of the essay on social engineering makes clear; and Hayek's reading of Neurath's position is suspect only if one accepts that current revisionist interpretations of Neurath's work (those that downplay his adherence to eliminative physicalism). For more on this see Caldwell 2004, Appendix D.
6. As will be clear in the extended quotation that follows soon in the text, Hacohen insists on defining positions using the left-right terminology; it is his choice, not mine.
7. This helps to explain why Hacohen spends so much time criticizing the rehabilitation of Neurath by his post-structuralist "protagonists." Neurath is an antifoundationalist (which makes him attractive to post-structuralists), but so is Popper. Hacohen feels that Popper's early philosophical and political writ-

ings provide a more stable grounding for piecemeal social engineering than does Neurath's call for full "socialization." In a sense, Hacohen is carrying on a dialogue with the Left at the turn of the millennium, just as he claims Popper did some 60 years before.

8. Sometimes Hacohen's willingness to share his own opinions borders on the gratuitous: Do we really need to know that Hacohen feels that Popper was not only "the more important and capable thinker" but also "wiser" (501, 506)?
9. He gets the title of Shearmur's book wrong, and refers to an e-mail from Shearmur dated May 1999, both of which suggest that the footnote was a late and perhaps hasty addition.
10. Thus Hacohen appears to confuse Hayek's *The Constitution of Liberty* (1960) with his *Law, Legislation and Liberty* (1973-79), where Hayek actually made the constitutional proposals to which Hacohen refers (540).

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