

ON SOME CONCEPTUAL BACKGROUND OF IMRE LAKATOS' THOUGHT

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This paper comments on some problems accentuated in William T. Lynch's work on the Marxist roots of Imre Lakatos' history and philosophy of science. This is quite a significant and still debatable issue relating to the adequate interpretations of Imre Lakatos' complete intellectual growth. Accordingly, any further exploration of the "deep structures" of his conceptual background may help gain a better understanding of his legacy. In this comment, I make a brief review of the studies on the pre-English roots of Lakatos' theoretical schemes.

Keywords: Imre Lakatos, Marxism, Hungarian heuristics, practice

О НЕКОТОРЫХ КОНЦЕПТУАЛЬНЫХ ОСНОВАНИЯХ ИДЕЙ ИМРЕ ЛАКАТОСА*

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В данном комментарии предпринимается попытка рассмотрения некоторых проблем, затронутых в статье У.Т. Линча о влиянии марксизма на историю и философию науки Имре Лакатоса. Это весьма серьезный и до сих пор дискуссионный вопрос, освещение которого способствовало бы более адекватной интерпретации интеллектуальной биографии Лакатоса. Представляется, что дальнейшие исследования «глубинных структур» его творчества позволят прийти к более объективному пониманию его наследия. В данном комментарии предпринимается краткий обзор работ по проблеме влияния на мировоззрение Лакатоса различных мыслителей и философских направлений.

Ключевые слова: Имре Лакатос, марксизм, венгерская эвристика, практика

William T. Lynch's article tackles quite a significant and still debatable issue relating to the adequate interpretations of Imre Lakatos' ideas in view of his complete intellectual growth. As a scholar, Lakatos has had immense influence on the philosophy of science and a visible impact on some other research areas. According to Google Scholar, by the 25th of January 2015, that is, twenty-five days into the new year, thirty-three papers cited him, which is over one paper per day [Musgrave, 2016]. More than half of these publications are from non-philosophical disciplines, such as educational theory, international relations, informatics, clinical psychology, social economics, mathematics, etc.

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As is known, Lakatos gained prominence, foremost, as a follower and critic of Karl Popper. In the meantime, scholars have uncovered other philosophical and scientific sources that might have influenced his reasoning. In recent decades the Marxist inheritance of Lakatos' later philosophy of mathematics and science has become the subject of studies by a number of scholars, such as John Kadvany, György Kampis, László Ropolyi, etc. [For more details, see Dusek, 2015]. In Russia, this aspect of Lakatos' scholarship is explored to a much lesser extent – mostly by Valentin A. Bazhanov [Bazhanov, 2008; Bazhanov, 2009] – and his evolution in many ways remains somewhere on the periphery of Russian philosophers' attention. In fact, Lakatos' intellectual biography is quite thrilling. It includes two distinctly separate “lives” referred to as the Hungarian and the British periods. He came to the UK with partially formed viewpoints but kept quiet about his former practices in Hungary, and in his writings on the philosophy of science in the mid-1960s disassociated himself from Marxism (Anglo-American philosophy of science, in general, did not maintain any expressed sympathies for communism). Nevertheless, it turns out that in his British works Lakatos frequently concealed the Marxist-Hegelian elements of his thought, which, as V. A. Bazhanov rightly puts it, complicates any reconstructions of the “deep structures” of his later research [Bazhanov, 2008, p. 151].

Here, speaking of influence, we should bear in mind a complicated character of such reconstructions, which frequently enable only plausible, rather than strong, unconditional conclusions. Another issue to consider includes different types of impact that might be exerted by one thinker or philosophical trend on the others. It may be a kind of “imprinting” when certain provisions once captivate or are even adopted by someone but later are rejected and even forgotten; a methodological transfer from one scientific field to another, for example, by analogy; borrowing a conceptual toolkit and its subsequent fine-tuning to a new subject area, etc. [Bazhanov, 2008, p. 148]. In Lakatos' case, there is likely a variety of such influence types.

As known, Lakatos got an orthodox Marxist education and defended a dissertation, written in line with the Marxist tradition. In course of time, he changed his standpoint and emigrated to Britain, where he completed a Ph.D. dissertation and came to the London School of Economics to work under Popper. Along with it, he kept following the new Soviet literature on his themes and, according to V. A. Bazhanov, had quite an active correspondence with Soviet philosophers [Bazhanov, 2009]. Nowadays, it is becoming more evident that in Lakatos' mature thinking, some apparently contradictory influences have merged with Marxism as a significant one. Furthermore, as Kampis, Kvasz and Stoelzner claim some of his major themes, such as the idea of research programs, are anticipated already before his emigration, for instance, in his paper “Modern physics, modern



society” published in Hungarian in 1947 [Kampis, Kvasz, Stoelzner, 2002, p. xii]. Actually, Lynch’s paper gives a good coverage of the Marxist roots of his thought.

Overall, contemporary researchers of Lakatos’ legacy refer to a number of figures and traditions as sources of his thought. Among them there is Hegel, Marxism, György Lukács, as well as the Hungarian tradition of mathematics to which Lakatos is indebted through György Polya, Alfred Renyi, Arpad Szabo, László Kalmar, etc. [Kampis, Kvasz, Stoelzner, 2002; Dusek, 2015; Motterlini, 2002, etc.]. Additionally, V. A. Bazhanov mentions Vladimir I. Lenin and Sofya A. Yanovskaya (Lakatos studied in Moscow for a while) [Bazhanov, 2009]. Thus, we can see a ‘synthesis’ (V. A. Bazhanov) or a ‘peculiar mix’ (M. Motterlini) of conceptual and methodological sources. Speaking in words by V. Dusek, “Lakatos surreptitiously used Hegelian Marxism in his works on philosophy of science and mathematics, disguising it with the rhetoric of the Popper school” and also “less surreptitiously incorporated, particularly in his treatment of mathematics, work of the strong tradition of heuristics in twentieth century Hungary” [Dusek, 2015, p. 61]. In his characteristic manner, his friend Paul Feyerabend expressed it in a stronger way, though without referring to Lakatos’ Hungarian influence – a ‘philosophical bastard’: “a ‘Pop-Hegelian’ born from a Popperian father and a Hegelian mother” [as cited in Motterlini, 2002, p. 488]. Along with it, Lakatos, possibly, was not always aware of the fact that he had been influenced by the above sources; consequently, an “imprinting” is also involved here (on the other hand, such type of influence is likely to be found in any case).

Speaking of Marxism, I, however, should mention that, being an extremely influential ideology and mode of thought, it has differing interpretations among different traditions and followers, as well as their comprehension which version is authentic. Here, actually, it is not always easy to grasp which version of Marxism was adapted by Lakatos himself. According to Dusek, the Marxism of Lakatos shows the influence of G. Lukács: “It was this Lukács, who returned from the USSR to Hungary after WWII and exercised a direct personal influence on Lakatos” [Dusek, 2015, p. 66]. Apparently, the latter might have experienced the Marxist influence from a variety of sources; along with it, we should significantly consider Marxist-Leninist philosophy here. As for the principle of practice as a major tenet of Marxism, the idea of a dynamic nature of science as activity might have influenced Lakatos from two sources. According to V. Dusek, both the Marxist tradition and the Hungarian heuristic tradition shared a view that contrasted with the mainstream of Anglo-American philosophy of science – a dynamic view of science and an emphasis on practice as opposed to static, formal representations of scientific theories [ibid., 2015, p. 62, 71–72]. Lakatos similarly rejected the formalist conception of the structure of scientific theories dominant in Anglo-American philosophy



of science in the middle of the twentieth century (for instance, Richard Braithwaite, Lakatos' PhD advisor, depicted theories as finished formal structures [Dusek, 2015, p. 62]).

According to Dusek, Lakatos' use of rational reconstruction in his account of history has a strong resemblance to that of Marx's account of economic development as not a simple narration of history but rather a schematic model [ibid., 2015, p. 64]. Lakatos similarly does not claim to be simply narrating the actual history of science, but to be presenting a "rational reconstruction" of the sequence of changes not exactly matching the peculiarities of real happenings. In other words, as Georgy P. Shchedrovitsky puts it, Lakatos suggests a kind of situational logic [Shchedrovitsky, 1968, p. 154], which to some extent refers us to the social studies of science. Actually, Lynch's assertion that Lakatos has to be seen as one of the forerunners of a general sociology of scientific knowledge seems a noteworthy idea. In addition to Lynch's arguments, we might refer to Kalmar's works (one of the figures who influenced Lakatos), in which the latter gives some examples of extra-mathematical influences on mathematics; even so this evidence is indirect. In any case, if Lakatos somehow has to be considered through the sociological perspective, his sociology of knowledge would definitely be quite peculiar.

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