

## Editor's Preface

---

I think I may try to publish a book of wholly unpublished material, consisting of my lectures, or some of them, on political (and some moral) philosophy, with chapters on Plato, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Marx and maybe Nietzsche. The good thing about the project is that the lectures are, if I may say so, stimulating and interesting. The bad thing is that they don't refer at all to recent scholarly literature on their subjects.

—JERRY COHEN, EMAIL (JUNE 14, 2007)

Shortly before his tragic and untimely death, Cohen discussed with Michael Otsuka his plans for producing volumes of his then-uncollected papers. They also considered how to bring that work to completion if he did not live to finish the task—a conversation that was sadly prophetic. Two volumes of his papers are now published, under Mike's superb editorship. It was suggested that I might edit a third volume, and I was honored to take on this task.

Cohen's writings in this volume fall into two parts. The main section contains Cohen's previously unpublished lectures on the history of moral and political philosophy. The second part reprints some writings bearing on the history of political philosophy and ethics that have not previously been included in collections of Cohen's work. The third part contains a memoir of Cohen that I wrote for the *Proceedings of the British Academy*, and sets out an account of Cohen's remarkable life and work.

One surprise for many readers will be that this volume does not include lectures on Marx. However, some of Cohen's lectures on Hegel and Marx were reprinted as chapters 3 to 5 of *If You're an Egalitarian, How Come You're So Rich?*, and little remaining material was found. That book, therefore, should be regarded as an essential companion to this one, as well as a brilliant work in its own right. Earlier lectures and papers on Marx led to Cohen's *Karl Marx's Theory of History: A Defence*, and the papers in *History, Labour, and Freedom*, the most important of which were included in the second edition of *Karl Marx's Theory of History*. Hence most of Cohen's writings on Marx are already widely available, with the exception of those now reprinted here. Their contents will be explored below.

viii EDITOR'S PREFACE

Of the chapters in Part One, many are based on lectures first given in the 1960s and then subsequently revised. Several, although not all, were still undergoing revision for delivery in Oxford even toward the end of Cohen's career there, and have final revision dates of between 1999 and 2004.

Taking the chapters in the chronological order in which they appear in this book, the first chapter, on Plato, is based on Cohen's lectures for a course titled Classical Political Thought. From correspondence between Cohen and Richard Wollheim, his head of department at University College London, where he had started lecturing in 1963, it appears that these lectures were first delivered when Cohen was visiting McGill in 1965–66, where he gave two lecture courses, each requiring three lectures a week. Classical Political Thought was one of these, and Hegel and Marx the other. It appears that he also gave them on his return to UCL. Cohen seems not to have lectured on Plato in the 1970s and 1980s, although he did teach this material in tutorials. However, in 1990 Cohen and Mark Philp together revived an earlier lecture course, Plato to Rousseau, that had previously been offered by Charles Taylor. This took place every second year. The Plato lectures were revised then, for that purpose, and Cohen continued to work on them. Normally Cohen lectured on Plato, Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, with Philp lecturing on Aristotle, Natural Law thinking, Aquinas, Machiavelli, Montaigne, Pascal, Montesquieu, and Rousseau, although in some years some lectures were given by others.

The central focus of Cohen's lectures on Plato is the nature/convention distinction, and how it is taken up by the pre-Socratics, and treated in more critical fashion by Plato. The lectures also contain material on Aristotle. This was not revised from the earliest version, although from the notes on the lectures it seems that Cohen did sometimes include this material in his later lectures, or at least make provision to do so.

The next three chapters, on Hobbes, Locke, and Hume, are based on Cohen's lectures at Oxford. On taking on the Chichele Chair in Social and Political Theory at Oxford, Cohen agreed to give lectures on the history of political thought, and this lecture course was devised to meet that commitment. They were certainly given in 1988–89. Shortly afterward they were incorporated into the course taught with Mark Philp mentioned above. Although Cohen lectured on Locke earlier at UCL, there his focus was private property in the context of explaining and criticizing Robert Nozick's view. This material made its way into print as part of Cohen's 1985 British Academy lecture, "Marx and Locke on Land and Labour," reprinted in Cohen's collection *Self-Ownership, Freedom, and Equality*. The lectures on Locke included here, with their greater focus on political obligation, form a natural complement to the preceding chapter on Hobbes and to the succeeding chapter on Hume on the social contract. What appear here as three separate chapters were written up as a single set of connected lectures, all of which take political obligation as their central focus.

EDITOR'S PREFACE ix

The lectures on Hegel are essentially an account of the master/slave dialectic from the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. These, according to the notes on the lectures, were first written in 1968, then revised in 1998, and “tidied” in 2004. Cohen gave classes at UCL on Hegel for those taking the finals option “Hegel and Marx,” which ran until around 1980, at which point it was split into two and Cohen concentrated on Marx. However, he taught Hegel again after his return to Oxford in 1985, and continued to run graduate classes, often cotaught with Michael Rosen.

The lectures on Kant's ethics were typed up in 1999, but almost certainly date back to the beginnings of Cohen's teaching career, perhaps as early as 1963. Cohen was engaged to lecture on ethics at UCL, and he is very likely to have included lectures on Kant at this time, as well as lectures on contemporary themes in ethics. He lectured on ethics in London on his return from McGill in 1966, and probably until the early 1970s, but not again after that as his teaching turned to political philosophy and Marxism. The lectures on Kant fall into two parts; the first is a rather general account of Kant's moral philosophy, exploring in particular Kant's account of reason. The second part is a tour de force in which Cohen identifies twelve different distinctions made by Kant, which Kant needs to be coextensive, and documents some of the most significant ways in which Kant fails to achieve his aims.

For those familiar with Cohen's work the Nietzsche lectures are the most unexpected discovery. They were given at McGill in the academic year 1965–66, and the first third or so of the material was retyped in revised form in 1970, a version that also includes later handwritten annotations. These then formed part of Cohen's early lectures on ethics at UCL. It seems unlikely that they were given again after the early 1970s. Here Cohen's task is primarily to explain Nietzsche's approach to morality, and although some important criticisms are registered, they are not pursued in detail. These are perhaps the most straightforwardly expository of Cohen's lectures, and many will benefit from reading them even now. They are remarkable for their time, especially considering that Cohen was in his midtwenties when he first wrote them.

The volume ends with a selection of previously published material, although none of the essays have been included in Cohen's other collections. The first, “Bourgeois and Proletariats,” was published in the *Journal of the History of Ideas*, and reprinted in *Marx's Socialism*, edited by Shlomo Avineri. It addresses the still-neglected question of the nature of the alienation of the bourgeoisie under capitalism. The second paper, “The Workers and the Word,” is included at the suggestion of Paula Casal. It was published in the important Yugoslavian journal *Praxis*, but as a result has been virtually unobtainable in recent years. It explores the vital question of why Marx's arguments against ideological illusion do not undermine his own theory. The third paper, “Reply to Elster on ‘Marxism, Functionalism, and Game

Theory;” responds to Jon Elster’s criticism of Cohen’s use of functional explanation in his presentation of historical materialism. It is, perhaps, the clearest defense against some trenchant criticisms, registering some dissatisfactions of its own. The fourth paper, a short review of Allen Wood’s book *Karl Marx*, is included as it contains the first published statement by Cohen of his view of Marx’s thinking about justice. The final paper, a response to Christine Korsgaard’s Tanner Lectures, takes up in more detail some of the arguments made in the lecture on Hobbes, applying them also to Kant and to Korsgaard’s own views.

The chapters present the manuscripts as they were found in the latest edition, sometimes including some handwritten or typed additional notes, often marked “not for lecture” or the like. Most of these additional notes have been included in the text, as that was clearly Cohen’s intention. In some cases a chapter is clearly unfinished, but rather than try to guess what Cohen would have liked to include, I have generally included all available material.

Corrections have been very few: the very rare occasional typo has been corrected where spotted. Wherever possible, the original source of quotations has been used, and references found. This sometimes means that more than one translation of a text is cited in a single chapter. Cohen sometimes referred to a marked passage in his copy of a text rather than type it out. In almost all cases these have been found.

Inevitably these lectures will be compared to John Rawls’s *Lectures on the History of Moral Philosophy* and *Lectures on the History of Political Philosophy*. However, the enterprises, like their authors, are very different. Rawls aims to give a fair and complete overview of the figures he discusses, identifying their strengths, and, regretfully, pointing out their limitations, though generally assuming that great philosophers do not make obvious mistakes, and so reinterpretation is called for. Cohen, in contrast, essentially discusses those things that interest him. Cohen records, in his lectures, his engagement with the figures he discusses. Yet in doing so he locates, and provides his unique perspective on, some of the central concerns in the thought of the philosophers he engages with, almost all of whom can be convicted of mistaken arguments or positions that are flawed in particular ways. Rawls talks of reverence for the texts he discusses, trying to understand the thinker in his historical context, where history includes political history as well history of ideas. Cohen shows a different sort of reverence: for him to respect a thinker is to engage with the arguments, following the logic wherever it leads. In this Cohen shows greater affinity with his teacher Gilbert Ryle than with his teacher Isaiah Berlin. Yet Cohen always seems to go to the heart of the issue. Whether you agree or disagree with the criticisms he makes, you see more in a philosopher than you had noticed before. More than anything, Cohen always makes you think.