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## G. A. Cohen's political philosophy thoughts: the third interview with Pro. David Leopold

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**Abstract:** This academic interview concentrates on exploring G.A.Cohen's view on the subject matters in the realm of political philosophy such as freedom, equality and social justice. Briefly speaking, the interview aims to: (1) explain how G.A.Cohen turns to examine the normative claims from the concern of historical materialism, (2) make sense of Cohen's specific arguments on political philosophy in his series of books and journals, (3) analyze which thoughts are still on the transitional account of Marxism philosophy, which have been developed by means of Analytical Marxism. Hence this interview could be divided into three parts. Part one is **from historical materialism to political philosophy**; Part two is **making sense of Cohen's political philosophy thoughts**, according to his critical arguments on Berlin, Nozick and Rawls, this section concentrates on Cohen's view of freedom, equality and justice in his relative works such as *Self-ownership, freedom and equality, If you're an egalitarian, how come you're so rich? On the currency of egalitarian justice, and other essays in political philosophy*. We will try to make sense of his core ideas and explore why he is concerned with these political philosophy issues. Part three is **rethinking on Analytical Marxism**, which mainly focuses on how to appraise Cohen's view of political philosophy and his academic contribution to making sense of Marx and Marxism.

**Keywords:** G.A. Cohen, Equality, Analytical Marxism, Political Philosophy

### Reflexões sobre a filosofia política de G. A. Cohen: a terceira entrevista com o Prof. David Leopold

**Resumo:** Esta entrevista acadêmica concentra-se em explorar a visão de G.A.Cohen sobre assuntos no campo da filosofia política, como liberdade, igualdade e justiça social. Resumidamente, a entrevista tem como objetivo: (1) explicar como G.A.Cohen examina as reivindicações normativas a partir da preocupação com o materialismo histórico, (2) dar sentido aos argumentos específicos de Cohen sobre filosofia política em sua série de livros e periódicos, (3) analisar quais pensamentos ainda permanecem sobre a explicação de transição da filosofia do marxismo, que foram desenvolvidos por meio do marxismo analítico. Portanto, esta entrevista pode ser dividida em três partes. A primeira parte é do **materialismo histórico à filosofia política**; A segunda parte visa **dar sentido aos pensamentos da filosofia política de Cohen**, de acordo com seus argumentos críticos sobre Berlin, Nozick e Rawls; esta seção se concentra na visão de Cohen sobre liberdade, igualdade e justiça em seus trabalhos relativos, como **Autopropriedade, liberdade e igualdade. Se você é igualitário, como pode ser tão rico? Sobre a moeda da justiça igualitária e outros ensaios de filosofia política**. Tentaremos entender suas ideias centrais e explorar por que ele se preocupa com essas questões de filosofia política. A terceira parte foca em **repensar o marxismo analítico**, que

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se concentra principalmente em como avaliar a visão de Cohen da filosofia política e sua contribuição acadêmica para dar sentido a Marx e ao marxismo.

**Palavras-chave:** Filosofia Política. G.A. Cohen. Igualdade. Marxismo Analítico.

Question 1: After completed the book *Marx's theory of history* on historical materialism, why does Cohen turn to devote himself in the realm of political philosophy?

Answer 1: Yes, I think there are two explanations, there is an autobiographic one and a theoretical one. The theoretical one is more interesting, but I will just mention the autobiography one. I think Cohen has been brought up in a communist family within a communist tradition and I think he felt a sense of loyalty towards that tradition and in a way writing this defence of *Marx's theory of history* was a way of slightly repaying his personal debt, and once he had repaid that debt, he was a little bit free to think about what really interested him, ok? so I think there is an autobiographic answer to that. To do with his upbringing and his repaying those debts, but I also think there is a theoretical answer and maybe the theoretical answer is more interesting, because it is more generalizable. I think that he thinks there are two factors which made the turn to political philosophy. One of them is to do with the inevitability of socialism and I think another one is to do with Marx's account of the agent that will bring about socialism, so that both aspects of Marx's account of the relationship between capitalism and socialism, and which he thought that the 20<sup>th</sup> century had cast doubt on. So the point about inevitability is that if you think that socialism is a good thing, and you think that it's bound to happen, you don't have to think very hard about in what precise ways it's a good thing, because it's going to happen anyway. It's inevitable under some sense of inevitability. Cohen didn't think on Marxism account is inevitable no matter what people would do. He thought it's evitable because of that people(s) need of inspirations on what capitalism could deliver, so [it] is inevitable over choose to bring about socialism. Socialism would emerge just from the development of capitalism, In a kind of almost automatic way, a way Cohen talks about in terms of a spectral metaphor, metaphor in child of birth. So socialism would be born out of capitalism. You don't have to think very much about what it should look like, it is coming about almost naturally, and he thinks that is Marx's reason for thinking that was just complicated empirical reasons, but that recent history the whole of the 20<sup>th</sup> century really cast doubt on that, it's really hard in the light of the experience of 20<sup>th</sup> Century in Europe and in America to think that socialism is going to come about automatically. So now let's say socialism no longer looks as if is inevitable. It also looked to Cohen as if the agent to bring it about had no longer quite existed in the form it existed in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, so when Marx was writing, it was plausible to think that there was a kind of collective agent that the working class—the proletariat, who had a lot of characteristics just in common: they were the majority of society, they were the producers in the society, they were the most needy in the society. So they were the majority, they were the most oppressed, and they produce the wealth, and that gave them a very powerful story about why this will be agent that will bring about this inevitable outcome. So the proletariat would be the midwife, they will deliver the baby of socialism that will be developed naturally in the womb of capitalism, while just as events led him to think that may there wasn't this this natural evolution of socialist baby within the womb of capitalism, so too he begun to doubt that people in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, people also in the 21 century that those characteristics which

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cohered in the 19th century working class had now come apart. So they were still really needy people in capitalism societies, right? And they were still majority and they are still producers, but they were no longer in the same group, the producers weren't the majority and they weren't the most oppressed people in that society. The most oppressed people were not industrial working class, but people who were unemployed, and more marginal people. The industrial working class were no longer the majority in Society. Because there is growth of service sectors and so on. He thinks that that kind of break down of the inevitability, that kind of break down of the classical story about the role of proletariat meant that normative questions suddenly become much more pressive, because you no longer have a group in whose interest is to bring about socialism, You now have a group which you have to persuade and you have to give reasons; beyond their interest to bringing it (socialism) about. and that is nothing automatical about this process. It's all up for grant whether or not it happens will depend on what you do and how good your arguments are. So that he thought it's not that there wasn't a normative demension to Marx's thought; he does think there is a normative demension to Marx's thought, but Marx didn't have to think very hard about it (that normative claims), because these things were gonna happen anyway, and, there was an agent that will bring it about. And his interest was to bring it about. So normative questions were kind of there, but there are in the background, they weren't in the center stage. Where as Cohen thinks that once you let it go the inevitability, and once you stop just assuming that there is a kind of power actor who is just gonna do all this work for you, you have to think much harder about what socialism is, what's desirable about it, what kind of institutional arrangements it might require, and how you might acturally get there. So questions about values, questions about institutions, questions about transition, but now much more complicated, and much more pressing than they were under this classic. Under the classic picture, there was this powerful agent to you would deliver; and encourage the process that anyway was already happening. And he wants to say that this process isn't happening, and this powerful agent is now broken up and divided. That puts this normative questions center stage much more than they were previously. So I do think there is this autobiographic reason. That is why there is a turn to political philosophy. He repaid his debt and then could follow his interest more independently. But I think there is this more interesting theoretical reason. Once you accept that socialism is inevitable, and there isn't an agent who will just bring it about because it is in their interest (the working class's interest). You have to think much harder about whether socialism is desirable, what makes it desirable and thinks much harder about institutional questions about how you might realize whatever your conception of socialism is, but I think it's precisely striking that in his work he doesn't tend you know after *Karl Marx's theory of history: a defence*, he didn't then just go off and write a series of books about his positive vision, he always worked by engaging with the work of others. So he always worked by criticizing others, and then you slightly have to work out his positive views that were implied by these negative engagements. He was sometimes quite modest about his own status. I heard that several times he say that people exaggerated his importances because what he did is spend his time ciriticizing people who are in a way cleverer than he was, and for some people that would be a false modesty, but I think he meant it, I think he thought that he wouldn't produce the works he did, if he had't been able to engage with the works of those people he thought was really serious powerful thinkers, so obviously Marx in the first instance, but then these comtemporary thinkers such as Nozick, Rawls, and Dworkin. So he always developed his ideas by engaging in this kind of critical dialogue with the work of others', and he always recognized that probably he wouldn't be able to produce these work if he hadn't been able to do that, that was just how he worked, and I actually think that's quite

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similar to Marx, Marx also somebody who always works by criticizing others ,you know it's critique of political economy, *the Capital* is, and most of his political works were attacks on other socialists, and his philosophical works were attacks on Hegel and Hegelianism. Marx also worked in this kind of negative way, in order to get the positive results. In a funny way, they leave their own motivation, they didn't construct it independently, they only constructed it indirectly as results of criticizing others.

Q2: As you mentioned that Cohen engaged with other powerful thinkers such as Nozick, Rawls and Berlin, so broadly speaking, could you please draw a line on How Cohen criticized on their main arguments?

A2: While, in all of these cases, there are different criticisms and they are engaged with different issues. Some of the Rawls' criticism is really about community, some of the engagement with Dworkin is about equality, and the engagement with Nozick and with Berlin is really about freedom; so in that sense, you can come to understand their ideas about freedom, equality and community by looking at his attacks on these criticisms of these other thinkers. May be we can start with freedom because Nozick's engagement was chronologically first. Engagement with Berlin was even earlier because Berlin had been Cohen's supervisor and they long had thought about Berlin's view about freedom. So we can begin with freedom, and then we can talk about next and next. So I think what' really striking about Cohen's account of freedom is he wants to resist a move that lots of socialist make when confronted with non-socialism or people who are hostile to socialism, so he thought that lots of people made the move, they thought that capitalism, the private property and self-ownership principle are problematic for freedom, that's what socialists believed, but they tend to believe that it was hostile to freedom in some kind of fancy esoteric sense. So they would want to say if you understand freedom properly, private property regimes and capitalism are in some ways in conflict with individual freedom, but that always looked as if you have to buy an unusual idiosyncratic or complicated fiddly account of freedom in order to make that claim. What Cohen wanted to do was to say: no, let us except what these defenders of private property regime in Berlin's case, what they defend was private property regime. Let's see what they say freedom is and let's use their notion of freedom, and see if it generates the conclusions they think. And I think this is a very typical way in which he argues, argues by immanent criticism, he concedes some parts of his opponents' argument and then shows that what they think follow from that doesn't follow from that, so he doesn't challenge every premise, he challenges the links between the premises and conclusions, and so in the case of freedom, he wants to say: let's look how somebody like Berlin understands freedom, and the relationship between freedom and property. So Cohen thinks of freedom is to do with non-interference by others, it's just an absence of interference and since we think of laws as restrictions in freedom is liability to interference, so laws restrict our freedom because they make liable to interference by others, and Berlin wanted to say that property didn't impact on your freedom, because you are still subject to the same laws and everybody else, he just think impact on your ability to make good use of that freedom, so it's a bit like a kind of inability on the part of a person, ok? So imagine that the door is open, but of the three of us probably I can't get out of that chair because I am not able to use my legs, while I am as free as you I just don't have the resources that would enable to make good use of that freedom, I am as free as you because the door is open, but I just don't have the resources that would enable me to

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make good use of that opportunity whereas you can just walk out because you have the use of your legs and What Cohen says and responsible to that, is let's just allow Berlin's account of what freedom is, but it is wrong to think about property in that way. Property isn't something which enables you to make better or worse use of freedom, property is in itself is distribution of possibilities, there is a distribution of liabilities because of interference. So he gives a brilliant thought of experiment, he says, imagine that you live in a society where in the beginning of each week, you are giving a piece of paper, which shows you what you can do that week in terms of combinations of actions of that possible and not possible. So it will say things like you can go to the cinema or you can go to the restaurant, or you can't go to the cinema and the restaurant, ok? He says all of these would think that was the distribution of freedom wouldn't cross our mind to challenge that question, right? because that instruction would be making clear when and where you are not liable to coercive interference, right? you just go to the cinema or just go to the restaurant, you won't be coercive interfered with if you go to both you will be coercive or interfered, while Cohen says, that's just how money works, right? If you have 10 pounds, you can probably get a meal, and you can probably go to the cinema, but it's not enough to go to the restaurant and the cinema, and if you are trying to go to the restaurant and the cinema, you will be coercively interference with because within the States where those distributions of freedom are enforced by the State, so the point is making is that even on these non-socialism account of what freedom is, private property is a distribution of freedom and unfreedom, and Cohen is very careful to say, that doesn't mean it is a bad thing to have private property, but you shouldn't imagine that private property isn't already a distribution of freedom, so he thinks you can use Berlin's account of what freedom is, you can use some conclusions which Berlin wants to draw by private property and shows he is wrong, and I think it's an interesting thing which is going on, so the argumentative structure there is a kind of imminent critic, you concede initial stage and turn it against something else that's been argued, but I also think it may be an apparent "ignite example" that there is quite a powerful and political message here, Cohen isn't always thought of a kind of very directly political person, but this looks pretty directly political, what he say is that you shouldn't pretend that distributions of property don't impact on the freedom and unfreedom, and in suggesting that property is just our ability to make the good use of freedoms, that's just exactly what's going on here, it might still be the case that he allows private property is best way of distributing unfreedom, yeah? but you shouldn't deny that there is a distribution of freedom and unfreedom—permission to do this but not do that, and He thinks that on the right people tend to do that; they say the way in which property is a kind of empowering for the people who have it, they don't think the way in which it's constraining for the people who don't have it, you know if I own my office, then I can do what I like with my office, but it also means that you are excluded from that in my office. You can't do anything in my office unless I give you my permission. And Cohen is very keen that we don't lose sight of that part of the story and he thinks that on the right they tend to tell the first bit but not the second bit, they show how property might be in apparent for people who have it, they don't show how it might be freedom constraint from people who don't have it.

Q3: So I think maybe capital is a kind of social power, property means the relationship between the people, if you have the capital property, then you can impact on other people's life, you can employ them and you can decide their destiny, so it does not mean you own something, it means the social relationship between each other. Is it on the right route?

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A3: Yeah, I think that's right, I think there's a fetishistic way that people tend to think the capitalist society is about money and wealth, it's a kind of natural feature, and they don't think there is a social relation which impacts on others. I think that's a helpful point, because I think it is true not just here but throughout, although there are lots of ways in which people sometimes want to stress, they talk about Cohen moving away from Marxism in the shift towards normative political philosophy, but I think there are lots of Marx's ideas which recur and embodied in the kind of the work he did, so when he is talking about community and freedom, he is actually talking about them in ways which have quite affinity with things Karl Marx thinks, even if his language looks rather different; and it was working in the different idioms and in different kind of discipline and professional vocabulary than Karl Marx was.

Q4: Cohen indicates that "one cannot be forced to do what one cannot do, and one cannot do what one is not free to do" in his paper *Capitalism, freedom and the proletariat*. While, it puzzled me for a long time, now that one is forced to do something, we can't say that he is free to do because he is forced to do, right?

A4: OK, well Cohen thinks you can do that, ok? So Cohen thinks that there are something sounds a paradoxical school, which is if you are forced to do something you are free to do that thing, but he thinks that only sounds paradoxical, and he gives us two good argument for this, ok? One is: one of the ways you could prevent yourself being forced to do something, is by making argument that one is unfree to do it, ok? So one of the ways which I could prevent myself being forced to leave the room, would be by making myself unfree to leave the room. So if we change the radiator, I couldn't be forced to leave the room, why not? Because I am free to leave the road, while I told you you can't be forced to do something which is not free to do it. That's one argument. The other argument is before the interference of the force, you are free to do the thing and you are free not to do the thing, what the force removes is the freedom not to do the thing. Not the freedom to do the thing. Maybe you can make sense of the paradox, that really sounds paradoxical, is to Cohen (what at one point appealed) to distinguish one being free to do something and doing it freely. He is not suggesting that when you are forced to do something, you are necessary doing it freely, maybe I am dragged from the room against my will, right? I am not doing it freely, but I must be free to do it—leave the room, otherwise I couldn't be forced to do it, yeah? You can only be forced to do what you are free to do, so that's just a conceptual truth he thinks, that if you are forced to do something, you must be free to do it, but it doesn't follow from that, and you do it freely, and I think probably the reason you think it sounds paradoxical which you are thinking, well, if you are forced to do you should not be freely, he agrees with that, but he says you must be free to do it, otherwise you couldn't be forced to do it. Imagine that I can't swim when we were talking about swimming across the English Channel, there is a very good swimmer swims the English Channel, 22 miles, ok? So I can't swim, I am a hopeless swimmer, I can't be forced to swim the English Channel, it only could be forced to do the things that you can do it.

Q5: As we all know that Berlin claims two concepts of freedom, the one is negative and the other is positive, we can conclude that the proletariat is not free not to sell their labor force even with the term defined by Berlin, so can we say that the working class is lack of the negative freedom instead of the positive freedom?

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A5: Yes, I think he (Berlin) wants to say even on ordinary negative notions, so this could be back to what when I was talking about the poverty thing, I think Cohen wants to say, we can make this claims even using negative ordinary common sense notions of liberty, so using the liberal's notions of liberty, we can say that their notions what follows from that is wrong. In this instance, you are not liable to coercive interference in any straightforward way from not selling right? You are forced to but because of the economics compulsion, I think you wanted to just say force and freedom they go together, you can't be forced to do what you are not free to do, and so I think Marx doesn't want to say, Marx wants to say that workers under capitalism are free to sell their labor power, the way that isn't true of slaves or serfs, but he also wants to say (that workers are) forced to do that. That can only be true if force and freedom are compatibal with each other. That's the paradoxical thing which he is insisting on, but I think he wants to say the freedom there is still the kind of ordinary "if-you-like" negating. I am not sure how helpful the negative or positive labels are, but the negative picture, he doesn't want to do what he thinks, lots of socialist do which is reach for some fancy esoterical, complecated, controversial notion of freedom. He wants to be able to say, even on this straightforward ideas of freedom was none-interference, he wants to be able to make these claims.

Q6: Cohen also claims that Nozick purposes a definition of justice in terms of liberty, so that bases Nozick argues that what the socialist consider does not impact justice. Regardless of his wrong definition of justice, I think it is clear that in Cohen's viewpoint there is a relationship between freedom and justice. Because Nozick proposes a definition of justice based on liberty, that's why I was wondering what the relationship of freedom and justice? are there any inherent relations among freedom, equality and justice?

A6: Yeah, I mean this is a big complicated, difficult question, because there are lots of different demensions to justice. I think that there is not a simple connetion, but I think Cohen wants to think of justice as, in its distributive diamentions, much more to do with equality, and he doesn't think there is a kind of simple straightforward connection between liberty and equality. I think that he thinks it is complicated and varies and so on, so we can't simply say that they never conflict; we can't simply say that they are always going on happily together. but He thinks that, I mean: thinking about the critic of Nozick, I mean in a way what he wants to emphasize about Nozick's position is: Nozick all the time talks about liberty and libertarians suggest the proponents of liberty, but actually it turns out what they really interested in isn't freedom but is rights, so Nozick has what Cohen calls "a moralize understanding of freedom". That is: You are free when your rights aren't violated, but that's not standardedly how we think of freedom, ok? So on that definition, Cohen points out, a justly inprisoned prisoner, ok? So somebody who is inprisoned but justly inprisoned because they have done something wrong and they are fairly trailed and all the rest of it, none of the rights been inviolated ok? but they are locked up in a cell. Well, on any ordinary notion of freedom we would want to say they were unfree; we might think it was justified that they were unfree; it was right they are unfree but we would allow that they are unfree, whereas Nozick's moralized notion doesn't allow you to say that because thair rights haven't been violated. You can only be unfree when your rights have been violated. Freedom is none-inteference with rights, and what Nozick does when he elaborates that idea, he has a hugely controversial notions of rights. So, rights are always kind of negative, my rights only generate

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obligations on you to not interfere with them, they don't ever generate use on you to provide for me in any way. So, in a way what partly Cohen wanted to say in his engagement with Nozick is: Nozick pretends he is a kind of defender of freedom, understood in an ordinary conventional way. (However) when you look closely, he has a hugely controversial and idiosyncratic definition of what freedom is, and it turns out to be all to do with protecting property rights in a very negative way, rather than about how we would ordinarily understand freedom. So he doesn't want to say that Nozick is wrong to appeal to the value of importance of freedom, but he wants to say that Nozick doesn't really deliver on that. It turns out that the project is a rather different one about protecting and promoting private property rights, dressed up as if friends of freedom, but his engagement with Nozick is not just, "on va le voir" (French "we will see"), it's not just about his understanding of freedom. It's also about his account of justice. So Nozick has a complicated account of justice and acquisition which is how private property comes about and justice in transfer, which is about how you might transfer private property and justice in rectification. And Cohen talks about all these various accounts and gives really insightful and really powerful criticisms of all these steps, so it's not just saying making the appointment of freedom, he engages then center on the terrain of Nozick feels about justice and self ownership and Cohen thinks that in a way, Cohen found Nozick more troubling and than he thinks liberals found Nozick is troubling, because Cohen thinks that in Marx you could also slightly find an attachment to this principle of selfownership—this idea that we (kind of) stand in the relationship of ownership to our own powers and physical attributes. What Nozick does is to use that core idea to generate private property rights and then a vision of justice which acquires a kind of minimal state and little in a way of equality. So Cohen found Nozick particularly troubling, because he share the premise with Marx but then derive from that lots of really hostile-to-socialism arguments, so Cohen always said that lots of his liberal friends (said) why he wasting time writing all these articles against Nozick. Cohen spent a decade of his life writing these really detailed rebuttals. They (Cohen's Liberal friends) couldn't understand why he found Nozick so troubling, but I think one of the reasons was that he thought there was a kind of affinity between one (and I emphasize just one) of Nozick's foundational assumptions and Marx's assumptions. So again it is an example of how I think people who don't think of his later agenda has anything to do with Marxism are just wrong about that. Just as previously you rightly said that there are of Marx's idea of fetishism going on in the background with his reason about freedom, so here Cohen is trying to protect the the idea that might be some notions of selfownership, which doesn't have these consequences. I mean Cohen then goes on to think that might be selfownership isn't quite as attractive or plausible as we might initially think, so we goes on to question that idea, but I think that he found troubling is also related to these earlier Marxism commitments, does that make sense?

Q7: I noticed that Cohen had made a distinguish between libertarianism and liberals, so can we conclude that Berlin, Nozick and Rawls that the three thinkers to the same side of libertarianism or liberals?

A7: Yeah, I think that political theorists argue relentlessly about whether libertarians are really liberals or not, because obviously libertarians present themselves as liberals are in the way of

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true liberal this most clearly is at the point which Nozick takes the idea of self-ownership, he takes it seriously, but he allows that one of the consequences if I own myself then he thinks that the ownership just like me owning a pen, so just as all the things that I can do with the pen that I can do with myself. That includes selling myself to somebody else, so Nozick thinks you can legitimately sell yourself into slavery, whereas I don't think liberals think you can sell yourself into slavery. And in Nozick's account once you are sold into slavery, then person now owns you has all the private property rights he would have over the thing. So just as if I own my pen I can snap it into two; so if I own the person, I can snap him in two. You begin to see what libertarians are really interested in is very individualistic notion of private property rights. And, you don't have the liberal concern for separation of the person and individual rights, and for certain kinds of freedoms. So I think that it is important because in part the relationship between socialism and liberalism, Ok? so I think Cohen thinks that to some extent, socialism delivers on liberal values, right? liberals have some of the right values but they have commitment to institutions which violate these values don't enable those values really to flourish. So what you need to do is have socialist arrangements that would actually better promote some of these theoretical liberal values, so you don't abandon liberal notions of freedom, you show that maybe socialist property arrangements better promote freedom so understood than private property arrangement promotes those, whereas I think he thought of the libertarians as, hostile too, enemies of socialism. So socialists should reject the libertarian values, but they shouldn't reject the liberal values.

Q8: Despite the value of freedom, it seems to me that Cohen hold the view that the capitalist society comes with the inequality, while socialist thought seems able to construct the consist of equality, so I was wondering how to construct the consist equal society according to Cohen's view?

A8: Ok, I think at the end of his life, the last substantial thing that he wrote was the short book *why not socialism* ? He died quite young, it was the last thing he wrote. In that book, he says a number of interesting things, but one of the interesting thing is he suggested that on the issue of equality that might not be the such a gulf between socialists and left liberals, ok? So you think of those three liberals: Dworkin, Berlin, Rawls. Dworkin is the left liberal there, and he has (in way we might think) most radical demanding account of equality. And Cohen wants to say on the issue of equality, there might not be such a gap between the kind of socialist account of equality and left liberal account of equality, but he turns out that the socialists are also committed to other values that the left liberals are not commitment to it, particular the value of community, and Cohen slightly thought that if you thought hard about equality, you might end up licensing a certain level of inequality, ok? But that level of inequality, might not be compatible with community, so if you value both community and equality, the amount of equality you could allow would be much less than if you just valued the equality and not community, so in a way he thought the difference between the left liberals and socialist was these commitment to community which put further constraint on the amount of inequality they might have. So he quite liked Dworkin's idea of equality but thought it might license inequality. I mean there are aspects he doesn't like. So he doesn't agree with everything, but the picture what became called "lucky egalitarianism" is the picture that Cohen for a time was quite sympathetic to, but he thought that picture might allow , so wouldn't allow inequalities that are results of circumstance, but it would allow some of the

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inequalities which are results of some kinds of choices, but that could be to allow some equalities which might be consistent with community, because he thought you could only have meaningful community on the bases of the certain amount of economic distributive equality. We couldn't genuinely say we cared about others if we led radically different lives in terms of distributions of benefits and burdens, so if we were doing really well, and then we were doing badly, you can't really say that is compatible with caring for them. So he thought that the socialism commitment to community would limit the amount of inequality that justice might allow, so justice on its own might allow certain amount of inequality, but then community comes along and limits that still further, where the left liberals because they are not committed to community, they are just committed to justice would allow a greater level of equality, does that make sense? So the difference between left liberals and socialists on this account isn't so much on their understanding on the justice and equality, but their commitment to community, socialist have their commitment while the left liberals don't.

Q9: Yeah, on this issue I also noticed in the book *How patterns preserve liberty*, he demonstrate that people don't have to sacrifice freedom to equality if common wealth appeals to them, so can we say that freedom and equality are compatible in the socialist society?

A9: So what I said earlier was that he didn't want to say that they were always in conflict or never in conflict. I think that's right, and he thought that people. So Berlin is very keen on the idea that there is a kind of inevitable conflict between liberty and equality and somehow you have to make a tragic choice of who is involved, losing out on one rather the other. I think Cohen thinks that still misunderstands the conflicts, there might be conflicts, but they are not necessary conflicts. They are kind of arrangements and institutions that you have. Some institutional arrangements, equality and liberty are compatible with others, depends on how, you know, they organized and what the values are. So I think he thinks that you can again see here how his idea of socialism embodies this notion of freedom, but he thinks it's compatible with equality on the best contemporary understands of what equality requires, but thinks that people who are committed to those notions of equality often are committed in the way that socialists are also committed to community. So the values that socialism would end up and embody are liberty, equality and community in a kind of complicated structural ways.

Q10: I noticed that in the book *freedom, equality and selfownership*, Cohen makes a very important claim that on the libertarianism's account of freedom, whose shape is delineated by the sizes of selfownership and it's very clear that the self ownership is a very important term in Cohen's thought, so could you please give us a further explanation?

A10: The various essays on Nozick were written on different times, there is a bit of shift in his use about selfownership. So initially it looks as if Cohen wants to say the selfownership is just this idea that we stand it in relation to our own persons—bodies our characteristics—as we stand in the relationships to the objects that we own. And I think Cohen kind of earlier wants to say, because he thinks this idea is in Marx and elsewhere, and is also, maybe quite powerfully in our culture, he doesn't want to challenge that idea. He wants to allow that idea and then just deny that Nozick's conclusions follow from that, you can allow that assumption and deny Nozick's claims about what follows from that, but I think by the time you gets in the

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end of the book, you can see that Cohen actually is not so happy with the idea of self-ownership. He thinks that lots of people are initially attracted to the idea of self-ownership, because they think it protects them against certain kinds of interference by others. So if I own myself, that means there are things you can't do to me without my permission, so what we find attractive about the idea is a kind of protective of the individual, but Cohen goes on to show that actually because these ideas of ownership also allows transfer, it isn't really ultimately protective of that. Other ideas which is adjacent to ideas—what Cohen calls “the Kantian principles” of the idea that people shouldn't be treated merely as means but also as ends. And what he calls the “Autonomy Principle”, so the idea that there is value to people choosing how their own lives will go. I might think there are three competing principles: the Kantian principle, the Autonomy Principle, and Self-ownership Principle. Cohen suggests that actually we initially find attractive about self-ownership is better delivered by the Kantian Principle or by the Autonomy Principle. It is better delivered because that wouldn't allow you to abandon non-interference (self-ownership does allow you to abandon that.). The Kantian Principle wouldn't allow you to sell yourself into slavery because that would mean you would then be treated as a means and not also as an end. So that would rule out that shift. Whereas self-ownership allows that shift. Similarly, Autonomy would rule out that shift, because if you are owned by somebody else, you no longer have that control of your life. So, in a way that suggesting is I mean Cohen is a bit more cautious, he doesn't quite like to put it like this, but I think by the end of the book he thinks that actually what people find the attractive in the idea of self-ownership can be better found in these other principles, and then you should abandon this idea of self-ownership and go for one of these instead. Where as at the beginning of the book he is slightly more..... Let's grant self-ownership and see what follows from that—and what follows from that on any of the conclusion about the state or interference from others that Nozick thinks, but by the end of his book , I think he is more willing to cast doubt on the idea of self-ownership and so on.

Q11: Cohen is also quite different with the common left wings in criticizing of Nozick's dependence on capitalism, so could you please give a specific demonstration on the difference between Cohen and the common left wings' response to Nozick?

A11: Ok, I think there are a number of dimensions to it, I think lots of people thought confronted with Nozick's conclusions which are for example, you know the private property embodies freedom and the minimal state which could do nothing more than protect private property rights, and have kind of no welfare function, people looked at these conclusions and found them abhorrent and they thought that: well, we should look at these premises, we shouldn't accept the premises because they lead to these abhorrent conclusions. Whereas I think Cohen was keen at the trace of the connections and show that it wasn't the necessary connection between all of these premises and the relevant conclusions, yeah? A lot of work has been done in Nozick's argumentation, but not all of the argumentation are sound. To give an example: one of Nozick's arguments about justice and transfer use this famous example of Walter Chamberlain (he is a famous basketball player): if we justly acquire the money we have, then the only thing that would impact on the justice transfer is whether it is voluntary. So if we all pay a pound to see Walter Chamberlain. That's a just-transfer, even though that ends up with Walter Chamberlain with loads of money relative to the rest of us. So justice in transfer would generate, if people would just let to their own devices, lots of inequalities which on

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Nozick's account are just because they are voluntary, and Cohen (I think) really quite helpfully points out although there are lots of difference things going on in that in example, it's too quick to think He (Nozick) was too good to ally them all ok? So the outcome is that Nozick ends up (let's say there are a million of us; he ends up) with millions pounds, and the millions of us all end up with a pounds less, So you might license a hugely inequality, and Nozick talks as if that has come about voluntary, it was willed by everybody but Cohen I think quite helpfully points out well it is more complicated than that. There is a difference saying "I am happy to pay a pound to see Walter Chamberlan", saying "I am happy to give Walter Chamberlain", and saying "I am happy Walter Chamberlain gets a million pounds". Agreeing to the first isn't agreeing to the second and the third thing! Yet Nozick (sort of) conflates all these things together. So Cohen was in a way trying to take the argument very seriously and looked at them in great detail and to show lots of the problems were in the argumentation rather than in some of the very foundation of the assumptions although he did find faults in some of the foundational assumptions, and I think by the time, so I think he thinks the picture of freedom is wrong, and I think by the end of the book he is also a bit more cautious about the self ownership than he is in the beginning of the book. I think liberals when they looked into Nozick and said what we believe in is not selfownership, so we have to worry about this, whereas Cohen thought maybe Marx does believe in it, but they do need to worry about that, and I think he thinks that sort of unthinking socialists just thought while these conclusions are abhorrent, so the assumptions must be problematic, without been willing to carefully go through and work out where the problems were or what the arguments were, so I think he took the intellectual basis of what he also thought were abhorrent political views seriously, whereas lots of people just have reacted to how abhorrently found the conclusions, he didn't want to moralize about the conclusions, he wanted to carefully go through the arguments and work out where we should agree and where we should disagree with what Nozick was doing, and I think the disagreement ends up been a really powerful rebuttal of Nozick's view, but it's not just on the basis of finding his conclusions morally repugnant. It's on the basis of thinking there are lots of sloppy and contestable argumentations in there, does that kinds of answer the questions of yours?

Q12: Cohen also claims that justice is not the virtual of social orders and not even for the socialist society, so what kind of virtue could be regarded as the first principle or first virtual of socialism?

A12: Ok, So I think he thinks it's one of the values which socialist order would embody, but I think partly what you said there, that sounds like one of the things he thinks in response to Rawls, is that right? So what he is really writing to there is Rawls's idea that justice applies to the kind of basic social structure, not to individuals, ok? So Rawls says what you have to do if you want to promote justice is: alter the base of institutions of the society in accordance with his principles, and that is the point which justice applies, So justice doesn't apply to anything outside the institutional structure of the society, it doesn't apply directly to individual choices and attitudes, it applies to the institutional design and social structure, and I think Cohen thinks two things, first of all he thinks that maybe Rawls has the wrong principles, ok? And he argues about those, but also he thinks that Rawls is probably wrong "just limit", justice to these institutions and saying has nothing to do with individual choices and attitudes. So he gives a interesting appeal to the difference between the inequality in western europe in the 50s

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and 60s and in 80s and 90s, ok? so inequality grew hugely between in that 20 and 30 years period, and yet Cohen, I think plausibly he says where it's hard to think that the legends of institutions really change, what actually change were people's attitudes about what was acceptable and unacceptable, and that's true, and if we judge the inequalities were worse in one case than in the other case, then it's clear that the attitudes or culture has impact on that, yeah? what kept inequality down in the 50s and 60s was a certain kind of attitude and ethos, about what was appropriate permissible and right, not just the institution but also the attitudes. So Cohen wants to say although there is a difficult issue about how far justice demands. What justice demands of each individual; It is a difficult controversial issue, but he thinks it might turn out to demand something of the level of individuals, not just something of the levels of the institutions. So it might also occasionally require us not to just think that enriching ourselves is fine, not just to demand more because we want more for ourselves, and so also applies to our ethos and attitudes in our culture, not just to the institutional design, so I think part of what's going on in the thing you were referring to was in that thought. The thought that (I mean I don't think it is quite fair of Rawls but you might think that Rawls says) when you set up institutions, and then you can behave as individualistically and selfishly as you like within them, and that won't matter because justice is about the institution not about how you behave, that's the contrast here, whereas Nozick wants to say that seems wrong here, it's hard to think the justice isn't also effected and embodied in the attitudes of any ethos, and so it has the requirements beyond institutional design for the way he thinks of that towards about these, it's also relevant to Cohen's critique of the difference principle, so one of the things the difference principle says inequalities are justified when they necessary in order to make this worst of personal group better off, so if you have an inequality; this is the worst of persons, and this is the best of persons. Inequality is allowed. Right? That can go up, provided it's necessary in order to get the worse of the persons a bit better off. In that case, what makes it necessary, ok? And the sort of picture that Rawls appeals to is the thought that it's only by offering people incentives, that they can develop and deploy their talents in a way that enable them to grow the social product, that Cohen says: well, what makes that necessarily the case, why couldn't they just do that without getting paid more, it begins look a little bit like in some of these cases, It is not really that we think somebody couldn't do the thing without been paid more, It is (that) they won't do the thing without being paid more. so let's say we all under the same but I have a very special that talent you two don't, but I would say I like to deploy that talent if I earn ten times of what you both earn. Nobody really thinks I couldn't deploy the talent unless I was paid ten times more, it's just like I might choose not to do unless I was paid ten times more, but that just means the talented person is blackmailing the less talented person in order to enrich themselves. That justice can't allow that surely, Justice only allows it if I couldn't deploy the talent without been paid more, and Cohen says well, what would makes that the case other than the fact that I wasn't really committed to justice. If I'm really committed to justice in my ethos or attitudes, then I will be committed to growing the cake so we can all benefit from it, I won't refuse to grow the cake, unless I get 90% of the benefits. So again, you have seen how other particular point, he wants to say this kind of attitude or stuff is doing some of the work here and except you have to be cautious, because he doesn't want to say that there aren't limits of what you can expect people and you can require people to do it. He does think there are limits of that kind, but he thinks that's consistent with allowing the background point that the attitudes and ethos of people is also a central part of what justice is, not just institutional arrangements.

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Q13: Many commentators when they talked about Cohen, it seems to me that Cohen's political philosophy equals to equality, could you please draw us a picture or give us a conclusion on Cohen's equal thoughts?

A13: Ok, I think it's hard because I think on this issue probably more than on community and freedom, he ended up being a little bit uncertain about what he finally thought, ok? But the thoughts (that he is mostly associated with) equality, are (I guess) twofolds. One is his involvement in the debate about "what the so-called equality wants" debate, so what is it that egalitarians were trying to equalize. So egalitarians here (just assume as distributive egalitarians), what is it that they were trying to equalize, and his contribution to that debate, is to kind of make it complicated. So in a way there were two positions. One of which thought that was to do with in the jargon there gets called "welfare" which is more to do with the kind of pleasure you derive from the distribution, and then the other people were resources who thought it was not to do with the pleasure that you derive from the stuff, but just how much of the stuff you have got, so the stuff you might be income wealth, but it could be something else as well. So resources thought you need to distribute income wealth equally, welfarers thought you need to distribute a kind of pleasure or happiness or something more like that equally, yeah? Cohen's response is really complicated and says: actually you need both things. So he comes up with this access to opportunities with advantage which would incorporate both resources and that welfare, so he thought that critics of welfarism were kind of plausible, one of the problems there is that some people [are] better at converting resources into whatever the subject of welfare than others, so it is a danger that you would be rewarding people who are doing that efficiently and punishing people who aren't doing that efficiently, but he still can't get around the fact that there is a subjective dimension here. So (you know) you are worse off if you are experiencing pain in addition to having a particular distribution of resources, so he just wanted it to have a much more kind of complicated pluralistic model of what it was that have been equalized, rather than these two competing pictures, So his first contribution was complicated the equality of what debate by suggesting there was some truth in both two sides were saying and you had to try to come up with an account, which will incorporate both kinds of inequality. So, there would be a pluralistic account rather than a kind of monomaniacal account. (And) The other things which is associated with is what came to be called lucky egalitarianism, and this is the view that he felt better than Rawls' account of equality, and although Cohen I think subsequently has doubts about how you could operationalize this, so to put it into practice. He did think, for a long while, that there was, it was plausible to think, in terms of the kind of fundamental distinctions between choice and circumstance, ok? And inequalities were morally problematic when they reflected circumstances, but not always morally problematically when they reflected certain kinds of choice, so if I am getting rewarded, for something that I am not responsible for, that would be a problematic inequality, and if I am getting rewarded for something that I am responsible for, that might not be so problematic, so that's a show I was just born very clever, ok? I just did very well in the genetic lottery, and so from the birth that I was just incredibly intelligent, right? That's the show how and that will just be a natural advantage, which we shouldn't be converted as social advantage, that's not something I was responsible for, so I shouldn't receive the benefits that follow from that, but it might be, that my intelligence reflected more my application and hard work, yeah? something that I could be responsible for, and it knows circumstances it might be ok to reward application on hard work, ok? So something that the ideas about choices and circumstances could be morally found important, and in this way, Cohen thought you might go to take the idea of responsibility, which was the kind of idea of

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those on the right often appeal to, but attach it to quite a left-wing agenda because mostly inequalities clearly track people who are benefited from the natural lottery or the social lottery, getting credit and getting rewards for the things they can't really claim responsibilities for: they are doing it very well because their parents are rich; they are doing it really well because they have some natural advantage. Well that won't license the inequalities on these account, but it would allow that there might be cases where you were responsible for the relevant actions you could get differentially rewarded. So he liked that basic idea and partly because he thought it would give you a powerful criticism of most existing inequalities and that wouldn't abandon the idea of choice and responsibility completely, but what you become a bit more skeptical about was whether we can actually operationalize that idea, because in the particular case we wouldn't really be able to perhaps adequately separate out these things, so let's say that I work really hard and apply myself, and I do that because I have chosen to do that, or I just do that because I have a propensity to apply myself, that it's part of my genetic make up. Well, we don't know we can't differentiate these two in practice and in particular cases. So, I think in some moods he thought: although so good Lucky Egalitarianism articulated a kind of moral intuition which he shared, he thought the difficulties actually distinguishing between choices and circumstances might make it impossible to operationalize. And, so in a way, his views about equality involved two thoughts, first of all, he complicated the equality-what debate, and that the secondly, he kind of, he is sympathetic towards but then doubts what might follow from certain lucky egalitarian intuitions.

Q14: In the book *Back to socialism debates: G.A.Cohen's political philosophy*, you as a commentator write a paragraph to assess the author's efforts on the cover of this book, while I am curious about if you are asked to appraise Cohen's political philosophy, what would you say?

A14: Yeah, why am I hesitating? I am hesitating because it's difficult, because personally from many decades, he is my teacher and we have been colleagues together, and I held him personally in hugely high esteem. He was an incredibly kind, funny and likable person, not everybody thought this, but I thought this really strongly. I loved him dearly, and that makes it a bit hard to assess his kind of intellectual standing, but I certainly think of him as the equal of any of the post-war thinkers that he engaged with; so he is at the very least equal of Rawls, Nozick and Dworkin, which is to say that yes he is one of the very great political philosophers in the Western World of the last 60~70 years, and I think it's hard to say more than that. Also, because of the perspective, time, where at, people's status gets reassessed and settles with time; and in that sometimes, some people are unfairly promoted and some people are unfairly demoted, and I don't quite know where Cohen will end up, but I think enormously highly of his work, I think it is a model, not just of set of intellectual skills but also a model of how it's possible to engage with the kind of high philosophical level without abandoning or pretending you don't have social and political commitments of your own. You just reflect it honest about what they are and what they fit in or whether they can be defended it or not. So I think there is a kind of model of the political as well as the intellectual engagement. Does that make sense? So there are on the internet you might have seen there are lots of surviving videos, where he is telling jokes and messing around and doing he would do, you know he would perform, so he was a funny man, but he also thought of himself as a funny person, and I would occasionally perform. And I always worry slightly about those

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videos. The students often said to me they had seen those videos, and they found very amusing and funny, and I worried slightly that may make them not taking these ideas very seriously. While in fact he was intellectually incredibly sharp. There were these when I was a partly graduate student in the college, you know, he would have these big seminars with Derek Parfit, Ronald Dworkin, and he in the old library in All Souls, and he would listen and engage, and join in the discussion and also everybody realize quite what a privilege this was, and that was a relatively rare occasion when that number of smart people interested in the same regional ideas would actually being engaged with each other in the same place, I think that's quite unusual, and it makes Oxford a very exciting place that do this kind of academic work.

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<sup>1</sup> Central University of Finance and Economics & Renmin University of China, We are very grateful to Pro. David Leopold whose guidance has deeply inspired our article during the period when we were affiliated in the University of Oxford. Questions are asked by Liu Li and Luo Qian, answers are supplied by David Leopold in this academic interview.