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Morris Raphael Cohen, American Jew and Philospher

by John Taichert Feldman

Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for Ordination

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Referee, Prof. Alvin J. Reines

I would like to use this space to acknowledge my teacher Alvin J. Reines for his help in the preparation of this thesis. (I would also like to note that it was Dr. Jacob R. Marcus who suggested that I study Morris Cohen.)

This thesis is dedicated to the memory of Felix S. Cohen, who lived in the shadow of his famous father and who did more for the cause of the American Indian than any other non-Native American in the history of our country.

This thesis is also dedicated to the memory of Morris Cohen who said: "Our reason may be a pitiful candle light in the dark and boundless sea of being. But we have nothing better and woe to those who willfully try to put it out."

John Taichert Feldman

Table of Contents

In order to analyze Morris Raphael Cohen as an American Jew and philosopher, this thesis is divided into two sections with the aim of showing Cohen's background, the historical evidence of his philosophy applied to several areas of his interest, and the philosophy itself. The first section reviews Cohen's childhood in Russia with an eye toward understanding his Jewish roots and Cohen's Americanization in New York as a young man.

This section is also devoted to Cohen's path as an independent philosopher and examines the relationships he had with Thomas Davidson, Felix Adler, Felix Frankfurter and his philosophy teachers at Harvard. In addition, this section also deals with Cohen's tenure at City College of New York, including his struggles to become a professor of philosophy against a backdrop of anti-Semitism, his impact on "enlightened" Jewish students --as the "secularized counterpart of the rosh yeshiva"-- and also Cohen's role in defending academic freedom (his own and the cause in general through his involvement in the American Association of University Professors).

This first section is concerned with the organization Cohen started, the Conference on Jewish Relations, which emodied Cohen's identity as both American Jew and philosopher. Through this effort Cohen introduced the science of sociology to the field of American Jewish affairs.

The second section deals specifically with Cohen's philosophy, liberalism, and the scientific method (defined

in the thesis). There is a treatment of Cohen on Jewish subjects and on general philosophical ones. Cohen opposed several ideas of the preeminent school of American philosophy of his day. This thesis shows that Cohen's philosophy was influenced by his identity as a Jew and that his general philosophy influenced his views of Jews and Judaism.

The aim of this analysis is to present a picture of Cohen as an American Jewish figure and influential philosopher in as complete a form as is possible. In order to best accomplish this, the thesis incorporates the ideas and achievements of Cohen using his own words wherever this can be done.

Morris Raphael Cohen's contributions to general and legal philosophy as well as to American thought can be appreciated in and of themselves, but an understanding of his contributions can best be achieved by an acquaintance with Cohen as a person. Cohen was several things during his life -- American, professor, philosopher, liberal -- but his first identity was as a Jew, a frail Jewish boy from Minsk.

During his lifetime (1880 - 1947) Cohen recognized himself and was recognized by others as a Jew, this despite the fact that he was a naturalist and an outspoken critic of theism, as well as a non-Zionist. He identified himself as a liberal, then a Jew. Cohen was the first Russian-born Jew in America to teach general philosophy in a major American university,[1] and he founded the Conference on Jewish Relations (now known as the Conference on Jewish Social Studies), an important attempt to break down Jewish stereotypes and to show the world the humanity of the Jewish people. In so doing, Cohen presented and promoted sociology in the field of Jewish affairs in a pioneering effort with important ramifications for the American Jewish community. Cohen wrote basic explanations of the Scientific Method and challenged the preeminent school of philosophy of his time in America, American Idealism. He revolutionized American legal thought and practice and created histories of human thought, such as the Meaning of Human History and American Thought. At the same time Cohen was interested in Jewish life and philosophy.

In order to see the effect of Cohen's particular kind of Jewishness in the above general areas and in his Jewish pursuits, the story of Morris Raphael Cohen must start with his childhood in Europe. Much of what can be known about Morris Cohen's childhood comes from a posthumously-published autobiography entitled A Dreamer's Journey[2]. The early sections of this book were composed by Cohen himself while the later parts, including the epilogue, are reconstructions by Morris' son Felix, based upon his father's notes. "Although he hoped to extend the narrative to cover his entire life," notes David A. Hollinger in Morris Raphael Cohen and the Scientific Ideal[3], "Cohen died before he had written about his adulthood in a sustained fashion. In order to complete the volume, Felix Cohen drew on preliminary drafts and notes and also upon the scattered, random autobiographical comments published by the elder Cohen in a variety of contexts over a period of nearly forty years."[4]

Two points should be made about A Dreamer's Journey to give a sense of Cohen's Jewish identity. The first point is that the book was written for and dedicated to Cohen's granddaughter, Gene Maura, to help her orient herself in the world. An aim of this book was to provide an American-born child with a sense of her roots. In the forward Cohen told her that in order "to understand the background of your splendid American-born parents and whence they sprang, you will have to read books like the following" to recapture the "Old World" and the immigrant generation of the "New World."[5]

The other, less obvious point related to Cohen's Jewish identity (and not so much the feeling of just any immigrant to America) is the fact that Cohen does not begin his autobiography with the lives of his grandparents or even great grandparents, but with the Cohanim of the Pentateuch.

> In my youth," he wrote," I would not have mentioned this, for I then joined in the romantic and uncritical disparagements of all priesthoods to extol the revolutionary or reforming prophets. But as I grew older, I began to recognize that while the inspiration of the prophets is necessary to prevent the hard cake of custom from choking off all growth and adaptation to new conditions, men cannot live on revolutions alone.6

Cohen quickly then gives a wide-ranging lesson in Jewish history, from biblical times through his own generation, explaining how his ancestors came to settle in what became Russia. He wrote a short history of the Jews in order to introduce his granddaughter to her past. "I may here also record the fact that I have never been ashamed of being born among people who, like the Greeks, English, or Americans, did not take the rooted plant as their ideal of life but deliberately chose to change their habitat in the course of time."[7]

The exact date of Morris Cohen's birthis not known -- his parents could not remember if it had been in 1880 or 1881 (Cohen pointed out that it was the practice of Jews to avoid registering the births of male children so as to sidestep the Russian draft), but Cohen was born in Minsk. In 1893, according to Cohen's own account in his autobiography, his parents had to decide when Cohen would become "Bar Mitzvah," and by the calculations of his father, Cohen

was supposed to have been born on Tisha B'Av, the ninth day of the Hebrew month of Av.[8] Aware of the tragic events in Jewish history credited to that date as well as to its being the date on which the "Messiah" should be born, Morris Cohen picked July 25 as his birthdate (the date he thinks he reached New York to start a new life in America in 1892).[9]

Cohen was a "sickly" child and recollected being near death on "several occasions."[10] Cohen vividly remembered his family's poverty and because his father spent most of Morris' formative years in America trying to earn enough money to bring his entire family to the United States or else make a go of it in Minsk, Cohen's early life centered around the personalities of his mother and his maternal grandfather. Cohen's mother Bessie Farfel Cohen and his grandfather were his first teachers, augmented by a series of Hebrew teachers of varying degrees of competence.

Because he was "listless" (probably as a result of being undernourished) Cohen's nickname as a little boy was "Kalyelah" (loosely, "Simpleton"), but Bessie was convinced that her son would attain greatness. "Never mind," she would say when her son was chided for being slow, "some day they will all be proud that they have talked to my Meisheleh."[11]

In the years 1883-84, Cohen wrote, his mother had to peddle apples while his father, Abraham, worked in America (eventually as a clothes presser in Rochester, New York).[12]

> Hunger was thus our [Cohen, his sister and an older brother] fairly steady companion, especially vivid when we saw other people eat . . . On Fridays mother would come home earlier to do the cooking and

> cleaning ~~in~~ preparation for the Sabbath. And on Saturdays she would be with us all day. The savory Sabbath Tcholent . . . the white bread, and the tzimis . . . were the green oases in the desert of our early life. When I grew older I also enjoyed my mother's reading aloud the weekly portion of the Tzenou V'renou, a popular Yiddish free translation of, and commentary on, the Five Books of Moses.[13]

Cohen recalled that on these occasions "just before recitation of the havdalah . . . my mother used to chant a Yiddish prayer beginning, 'God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob,' asking God's mercy for the week to come. I can never forget its plaintive notes, nor resist the flow of tears when I hear any echo of it."[14]

In Cohen's first school experience he ran into trouble with the rebbe of the cheder he was to attend. The young boy thought that children were customarily awarded a coin upon starting school and so he took one from his mother which he thought was intended to be his. The rebbe found out that the boy had purchased some candy with the coin, whereupon he whipped Cohen, and the change from the coin was taken away from him, and according to Cohen, was never returned to his mother.[15] It is hardly surprising that the following was Cohen's reaction to this schooling: "For the rest of the year life and I continued to find each other dull and uninteresting, for the instruction we received was not calculated to stimulate young minds."[16] This instruction consisted of rote memorization of letters and words with no meaning (which the young Cohen resented), a process which was "interminable," to use Cohen's term.[17]

In 1887 Abraham Cohen came back to Minsk with the hope of staying and making a go of it in Europe. After a short

time, though, he and Morris' brothers went to America, leaving the mother in a difficult position financially. At this time a most important part of Morris' education began as he was sent to the small town of Neshwies to live with his maternal grandfather, Hirsh Farfel. Hollinger points out that the "circumstances of Morris' move to Neshwies are ambiguous: on the one hand, it was poverty that forced his mother to be away from home all day, yet on the other, it was the money sent from America by her husband that enabled her in 1887, to pay her own parents to care for her child."[18]

Cohen spent three years (1887 - 1890) in Neshwies in the care of his grandfather, an observant Orthodox Jew. This time was not easy for Cohen. His grandfather was often cruel. Farfel, according to Cohen, had considered disfiguring his mother, when she was a girl, to keep her from appealing to gentile soldiers stationed near them.[19] He also relates that when she was a child, his mother was once beaten by his grandfather, causing Bessie to attempt suicide by drowning.[20] "Some monks rescued her" from a pond, Cohen wrote, "and forced my grandfather to promise that he would never beat her again."

This tragedy was nearly repeated, though this time Cohen himself was the victim of his grandfather's wrath.[21] One Sabbath Cohen's mother came to Neshwies for a visit. Cohen became giddy at their family dinner, excited by his mother's rare presence, whereupon the grandfather slapped the boy. Morris was so humiliated by this that he ran to a well where

he contemplated suicide. He was found hiding by his family and was consoled by his mother.

Later Cohen was falsely accused by a boy in his cheder of striking the other. The rebbe ignored Cohen's declaration of innocence and beat him in front of the rest of the students. Soon his grandfather appeared and, after hearing the false report, insisted that Morris be whipped again.[22] This same rebbe - Reb Nehemiah -- was described by Cohen as the "most inspiring rebbe that I ever had" and Cohen even missed him when he moved back to Minsk.[23] Cohen described Reb Nehemiah as a Maskil (an advocate of some western ways in Jewish life) who taught him Torah and Rashi's commentaries with an occasional glimpse of history and the outside world.[24]

Cohen was a good student and worked with his grandfather serving as his primary teacher. "I remember," Cohen wrote "that it was from my grandfather's lips that I first heard of Aristotle as well as Maimonides."[25] Cohen's pious grandfather most certainly could not have envisaged that years later his grandchild would write an article on Maimonides analyzing the medieval philosopher and utilizing the scientific/critical method Cohen championed to do so.

Cohen's grandfather encouraged the boy's proclivity toward study and trained him in strict religious practices. After 3 years of lonely life in Neshwies, Cohen felt he had learned all the cheders had to offer and, following the death of an infant brother (in whom Cohen had a good

deal of emotional investment),[26] Cohen asked to return to Minsk. He returned to Minsk in 1890 a strictly religious youngster. As Cohen put it, "I had left Minsk in 1887 a little animal and I came back an Orthodox pietist." He looked like a "country bumpkin" in payess -- even to his family. He judged the Jews of Minsk by the small-town standards of Neshwies, prompting the youth to remark frequently about their behavior with the phrase: "This is not in accordance with the Torah."[27]

The education at the Minsk cheder did not go much beyond what Cohen had in Neshwies, but he did claim to learn a good deal about socialism from the rebellious son of his rebbe -- an area Cohen would later flirt with in earnest in America. Finally in a second cheder Cohen was able to do what he had long wanted, namely, study Talmud. His mother hired a man to teach her son more Talmud (she also had insisted that her father provide Cohen with lessons in Yiddish writing while he was in Farfel's care). Cohen "enjoyed that [Talmud] immensely, but probably more from pride at attaining the heights of pious study rather than because of any inherent interest in the minutiae of the Law of Divorce."[28]

Here in Minsk, Cohen would sell bagels his mother made so that he could pay for books checked out of a "lending library" and as a result, he was able to read Jewish history books. Cohen was most taken by the story of Bar Kochba, and he identified with that hero to such an extent that "for some days I carried a flat piece of wood under my coat picturing

it in my mind's eye as a sword with which I, too, might some day fight the armies of our persecutors."[29]

Cohen was particularly impressed by the works of Nahum Meir Shaikewich, the Yiddish writer known as "Shomer." Though Cohen agreed with the critics of Shomer's romantic style, namely that he did not find his works to be technically very good, in looking back, Cohen still appreciated the writer who "opened a door" for him to a wider variety of books.[30] He defended Shomer, saying that the criticism of Shomer's books "may have been just from a purely literary point of view, but it missed the fact that despite the cheapness of Shomer's novels he had a powerful educational and liberating influence on the Jewish people"[31] -- including young Morris Cohen. What Cohen appreciated in Shomer's work was that "the general attitude was that of the Haskalah, or Enlightenment."[32] No doubt that a personality like Cohen would be attracted to someone who "ridiculed the absurdities of the old superstitious fanaticism, and his young heroes and heroines who had taken up modern thought and education were always superior personalities."[33] This was a spirit which influenced his activities, as shall be seen later, in the Breadwinners' College.

As a youth, Cohen was able to read and then retell Yiddish stories, word-for-word, and he could, according to his admission, condense the stories. He would do this for audiences made up of boys from his neighborhood.[34]

In 1888 Cohen's father returned to Minsk with savings earned in America. After a bad investment in a small inn, the father returned to America. Bessie, left alone, soon had to come up with 300 Rubles to pay a fine imposed on the family because Cohen's brother Tom had failed to join the army. It was difficult for her, to say the least, to raise the money and to see that it reached the proper hands. The family was harassed over this by the police (in midnight visits) and this, combined with their pitiful housing, must have convinced the Cohens that life in Europe was no longer possible.

In recalling this period of his life, Cohen talked about the Hassidim he experienced as neighbors in Minsk.[35] He found the devils described in the Kav Hayosher unbelievable, as well as any possible magical power in the tetragramaton. "Many years later, when I read various essays about the Hassidim and what their emphasis on enthusiasm meant in brightening the lives of hundreds of thousands living under outer conditions of misery, I was prepared to believe it," wrote Cohen. Yet he concluded "nevertheless, I have never been able to respect those who, on the basis of ultra-modern romantic obscurantism, have tried to idealize the Hassidic combination of ignorance and superstition. That has always seemed to me to be a form of intellectual decadence and corruption."

Before the last members of the Cohen family moved to America, Cohen's mother took Morris and his sister Florence to Neshwies to spend a final month. There Cohen attended

a small yeshiva where he was apparently able to master some Talmudic text, to the satisfaction of his grandfather. Yet this was not a sustaining interest. As a matter of fact "very soon after I came to America I lost interest in Talmudic studies, and I did not want to distress my grandfather by writing him about my new interests."[36] Cohen was indeed chastised by mail when he wrote his grandfather about his progress in public school. The grandfather considered Cohen a turncoat and expected to be punished in the world-to-come for allowing the boy to come to America and be corrupted.[37]

The fear of America that young Morris Cohen anticipated was not born out since he discovered a Yiddish-speaking world upon his arrival in the United States. In the section of his autobiography called "Youth on the East Side (1892 - 1900) -- Socialism and Philosophy," Cohen describes his father's crude and taxing working conditions and also an attitude toward labor he held throughout his life. "I soon understood," he wrote, "why the unions were fighting so hard for a weekly wage to take the place of payment for piece work." Cohen continued,

> That experience made me realize what later my friends educated in economics could not see, namely, the wisdom as well as the humanity of some limitation of output . . . What good is it to a nation to increase the number of its commodities if it exhausts and brutalizes its human beings?[38]

He found little difference in religious practice between what he knew in Europe and in his new home, except that the Landsman from Neshwies rented a hall for Sabbath services

only since the men started to work too early to attend daily morning services.

It was here that Cohen's own independence of thought first was exhibited.

The conversation that Cohen relates which took place between Abraham Cohen and a friend within the boy's hearing in 1892 seems to have been a turning point in Cohen's thinking. Cohen writes that this friend

> challenged my father to prove that there was a personal God who could be influenced by human prayers or deeds, or that the Jewish religion had any more evidence in favor of its truth than other religions. To this challenge my father could only answer, "I am a believer." This did not satisfy my own mind. And after some reflection I concluded that in all my studies no such evidence was available.[39]

When Cohen wrote The Meaning of Human History and tried to explain the relativity of "morality" he used his own childhood prejudice toward Christians -- namely that they were inferior to Jews -- to show the error of egocentric or chauvinistic views of history.[40] The same spirit that urged Cohen to reject the religion of his father (and this after expressing fear in Europe that he would lose his religiosity in America) was the source of his position that

> a thoroughly objective study of human conduct in remote ages shows us the variation of customary morality and the relativity of moral judgments. If it makes us less indignant at practices abhorrent to us, it makes us more sympathetic and appreciative of the difficulties facing those who either live under different conditions or have been habituated to look at life from a different perspective.

Cohen then writes a statement which captures his attitude toward Jews, toward Democracy and toward America. "Every

one of us is properly certain that the zenith is over his own head, and the great weakness of human flesh is the failure to realize that others who live far from us have the right to say the same thing."[41] This may seem a commonplace notion today, but in its time it was a statement of pluralism which did not have universal acceptance in America. This position meant taking certain stands concerning Jews, Democracy and America, which will be explored in depth later. In brief, Cohen came to see the Jews as human beings who had a prior right to exist because they were human beings, with the right to be Jewish, just as any group of people has the right to choose and maintain its own identity. Federalist America for Cohen was the place where a person or a group of people were understood to possess this right, and for this Cohen was grateful as a person, as a Jew, and as a liberal. His conception of Democracy required a pluralistic view of society, so that the jingoistic patriotism (the kind held by many native Protestant Americans, including some of the nation's academic philosophers) was not his.

But his attitude toward the religion of Orthodox Judaism, practiced by his father, in David Hollinger's words, while far from unique for a probing young Jewish mind on the East Side,

> did place him, decisively, on one side of a barrier that existed between two kinds of intellectually oriented boys in his neighborhood: those who were considering the rabbinate, and those who were not. The seriousness with which this distinction was taken is indicated, for example, by Mordecai Kaplan's recollection that when he and Cohen met

> on an East Side street in 1893 or 1894, their differences in this particular respect quickly led them to see that they did not have enough in common to pursue a friendship. [Though they did not have "enough in common to pursue a friendship," both Cohen and Kaplan addressed the same social and Jewish questions coming from the same background and a similar position toward theism. They differed on the subject of Jewish nationalism. It appears from references to each other in their respective writings that each was well aware of the activity of the other.42] Although Kaplan and Cohen attended City College together for five years, they never spoke with each other again.43

There is some reason to believe that Cohen's distance from Kaplan's Naturalistic revision of Judaism may be due in part to Kaplan's incorporation of John Dewey's philosophy into Reconstructionism, and the relationship of Dewey and Cohen was a complicated one of two colleagues and competitors, and Cohen resented people who followed Dewey.

Cohen's abandonment of Orthodox beliefs did not, as he wrote, mean that he divorced himself from an interest in the welfare of the Jews. Two important areas of activity as a youth which augmented his public school career express this stand most acutely: The Breadwinners' College and its Thomas Davidson School, and later the Ethical Culture Society.

From 1892, the date Cohen says he "drifted away" from Orthodoxy, until 1899, he regularly went to synagogue with his father.[44] After the conversation which Cohen says crystallized his thinking, he writes that he

> saw no reason for prayer or the specifically Jewish religious observances. But there was no use arguing with my father. He insisted that, so long as I was in his house, I must say my prayers regularly whether I believed in them or not. Such is the Orthodox conception. I had to conform to it until

> I was in a position to refuse to obey and tell my father I would leave his house if he insisted. Though my father respected my independence it came as a heavy blow that I should desert the only intellectual life we had ever shared.45

Cohen writes that his father recognized that his son was "morally good (according to his view) but religiously an infidel" and the father may have even worried about Morris' portion in any life after death.[46] Lest there be any doubts on the subject, he adds that "scientific, historical and philosophical studies" led him to the same conclusions he had reached as a boy. "Although I never abandoned my interest in the history and welfare of the Jewish people, I ceased to read Hebrew, so that after many years, it became almost a foreign language to me."[47]

A rapid process of "Americanization" began in earnest for Morris Cohen when he entered the New York public schools, where he would at times find himself to be the only Jewish youth in class -- a new experience for a boy from Minsk. Starting in school in 1892, it took some time before Cohen was able to master English well enough to read in it comfortably. "My intellectual life before I could read English books with understanding would have tapered off to nothing," wrote Cohen, "had it not been for the stimulus of the little Yiddish literature at home which I devoured as one famished for food."[48] Cohen reread in English books and stories which were familiar to him in Yiddish in order to improve his grasp of the new language.

> For intellectual stimulus I turned every week to the Arbeiter Zeitung, the Jewish organ of the Socialist

> Labor Party. In its columns I read translations of Flaubert's Salammbo, and of Smolenskin's Kevuras Hamar. The former stirred me by its military narratives, the latter by the revelations of the chicanery and corruption of the old fanatical leaders of Jewish communities. I was, moreover, seriously interested in the news of the week and in Abraham Cahan's articles on Socialism, which were in the form of addresses like those of the old Hebrew preachers. The early numbers of the Socialist monthly Die Zukunft also gave me much mental nourishment.49

For Cohen the nature of Socialism was different in the New World than it was in the Old. Whereas in Russia it represented opposition to the Czar -- "Socialism was almost entirely resentment against the injustices of the Czarist regime" -- Socialism for Cohen in the New World consisted of an understanding of class struggle and the problems of labor.[50]

The Cohens moved to Brownsville and Morris managed to skip some levels in his public schooling when he transferred to a school in Brooklyn. He tricked his way into a higher grade than he had been attending in New York and was shocked the first day to find himself in English class with no command of the terms of grammar. He bluffed his way through this class and later that day mastered most of a grammar textbook, eliminating, he says, problems with the subject matter. "For the first half-year I was the only Jew in school."[51] Going to and from school Cohen would encounter children who would taunt him and call him "sheeny," and on occasion Morris was roughed up.

In 1894 the Cohens moved back to New York where Morris was told by his father that he could continue in school an

additional year if he could again manage to skip a level. Cohen, who did not want to end up a "basting puller" in his father's shop, skipped not one but two levels by dazzling the school's principal with a novel solution to a math problem.

Cohen excelled and soon was promoted to a college preparatory class, which apparently did not challenge the youth all that much. He tells of being inattentive to his teacher's lecture. This teacher once "caught me reading Emerson's essay on 'Self-Reliance.' He chased me around the room with his stick until he became somewhat winded. Thereupon he demoted me to the foot of the class, which made me much more comfortable. There I could read more freely and without his frequent interruptions, which I considered as irrelevancies."[52]

Cohen's account of his discovery that he had excelled on his City College entrance exams -- he was first in his class and had won a medal -- sounds like a classic tale from literature on the immigrant Jewish family.

> Even when I went home I could not realize that I had actually passed. My mother was bedridden at the time, and when I told her that I had passed the examination and was thus admitted to college, a flood of tears came into her eyes. She was not at all interested in the fact that I had received the gold medal. It was only later that I appreciated her discriminating wisdom. The medal made little subsequent difference, except that occasionally we were able to borrow a few dollars on it. However, my admittance to college did make a tremendous difference. When one of my aunts remonstrated with my mother, "You cannot afford to send your boy to college," she replied, "If need be I'll go out as a washerwoman and scrub floors so that my Morris can have a college education." For people who had all their

> lives been scrupulously careful not to incur any expense which could possibly be avoided, this was a lavish luxury.53

Before he entered college he had begun to read seriously (but without guidance) both poetry and philosophy, including two of Plato's Dialogues and the first two books of The Republic. But in his autobiography Cohen states that it was Benjamin Franklin's autobiography that influenced him most at that time. The evidence for this can be seen in the fact that from this time forth Cohen kept a diary -- "keeping check" on himself, he called it -- and he admits that he used Franklin as his model. This practice of writing a philosophical diary which he began at about age sixteen reveals much about Cohen's philosophical inclination, hinted at in a section of his journal dated January 1, 1897.

> A diary I take to be a history of the mind, and I am now trying to keep one for the following reasons: first, writing, as I will do, the events of every day -- a kind of report to myself of what I have done -- cannot fail to infuse new moral vigor and help me to govern myself; secondly, whenever I will read it, I hope to be benefited by the mistakes, and inspired by my own goodness, in the past; thirdly, for the practice it will give me in expressing my own thoughts in writing. I am going to write a history of my past some other time, when I will have more time for reflection, but am now going to attempt to write down what I am now. My principal characteristic is a love for books. Not only for what they contain but also to a degree for themselves . . . Every cent I can lay my hands on goes to buy some book . . . The next principal characteristic is my great desire to be good, in the full sense of the word, and my impotency to comply with this desire . . . I am not a reformer but a revolutionist. I detest customs that are shows . . . How I obtained this revolting nature, I don't know. I suppose I brought it from Russia . . . I like to think that I am tolerant . . . I am by nature averse to taking anything for

> granted -- as a law -- unless I convince myself that it is right. This is another symptom of my rebellious nature. I do not know to what extent I am either selfish or conceited. I always suspect that I am . . . Up to date I have had no ambition for life but recently have formed an ambition to become a socialistic agitator. For this purpose I have resolved to try my hardest to graduate from college, then acquire a position as a teacher or on a newspaper and from there work my way up.54

These are the words of a youth in the United States only five years! Already the Americanization has taken hold as Cohen envisions "working his way up." In the same early journal entry Cohen talks about the literary society that was to perform such an important social role in his life and also Cohen's resolution to swear off eating any candy "partly because it may be unhealthy, partly to strengthen my will-power, as the temptation is very great." (He wasn't too successful in his bout with candy.) Note Cohen's desire to be "good" -- used, it seems, in a vaguely philosophical sense.

His diary is filled with talk of philosophical matters, including the January 8, 1897 entry in which he reports that he has been dubbed a "philosopher" on Division Street. He gives this example of why two of his companions have called him this:

> Seeing a carriage with two horses, one of them remarked that if you are rich, you can enjoy yourself and are happy. I claimed that a man must not necessarily be rich to be happy . . . that a man must have his necessities but could do without riches. That the rich has greater desires than the poor, so that both wish something they can't get . . . I said that we can control our desires by habit.

He concludes this entry with a lesson in infinite desire. "The trouble is that we don't think of the things we can enjoy at present but of the things we can not, not of the things we have, but of the things we have not . . . It is better to reduce our desires and to increase whatever means we have to their gratification."[55]

The process of intellectual broadening which was accelerated for Cohen in public school was continued outside the classroom. "Cohen's teachers introduced him also to Great Authors," notes Hollinger, "the men of letters whose portraits, in the form of the popular card game, 'Authors,' entered even those American living rooms too remote from 'Culture' to have standard editions of the Anglo-American canon. It was no accident that when Cohen and his friends formed a discussion group, it was called the 'Bryant Literary Society,'" named for William Cullen Bryant.[56] These literary clubs, which introduced their members to parliamentary procedures and debate, were quite common on the East Side.

> Insofar as familiarity with Anglo-American literature and history was part of the program of "Americanization," it was an aspect the immigrants were especially eager to undergo: curious to learn about their new environment, young people like Cohen absorbed the period's vaunted "literary culture" to the extent of acting it out in their clubs. Cohen and his friends organized contests among themselves for prizes in compositon, address, and debate. So seriously did Jewish youth take the style and content of American literary life that teachers and settlement workers were often overawed by the intellectual intensity and good taste of their upright and studious charges,[57]

notes Hollinger.

It has been suggested that Cohen's enthusiasm (and that of many of his contemporaries) expressed for "secular literary culture" is in part explained by the influence of the Haskalah movement, which in Cohen's case does seem to be the case. Hollinger says that the "fully urban Yiddish ghetto of New York" permitted a process of political and literary "emancipation" begun by Jews in Russia and Poland. What was born in Europe came to maturity in America. This environment provided its residents with a "plenitude of invitations to break old traditions and take up new ways of life."[58] This meant that East Side youth knew a new freedom and an attendant lack of direction which Cohen recognized in his own life. He was open enough to be able to accept a CCNY education with fervor by age 15. ("The relative openness of discourse and tolerance for cultural diversity of CCNY c1890 contrasted sharply with the atmosphere he had found in the grammar schools, the yeshiva and the heder."[59]) But it was a different institution which gave Cohen a native Jewish environment in which to anchor himself and channel his energies in culturally acceptable ways -- the Educational Alliance.

The world of the Educational Alliance was the stage for Cohen's social development. In 1891 the Educational Alliance was set up by acculturated Jews to provide an entrance to American ways to New York's Jewish immigrants, by way of academic and vocational studies, music, religion and exercise -- all in an environment designed to provide "balance" in the lives of Jewish youths caught between the New and Old Worlds. All this was later appreciated by

Cohen, but what drew him to the Alliance originally was his desire to challenge one of the speakers at the Alliance, Thomas Davidson, with "Marxist" arguments.

During his tenure as a student at City College of New York, Cohen took an active interest in "socialist" affairs. When the Bryant Literary Society folded in 1896 Cohen joined another society, the Young Men's Literary Society, in 1897, an organization with political as well as literary interests. Cohen sided with Bryan "though he was not a socialist" over McKinley in 1896, and this led to his working for Daniel de Leon's Socialist Labor Party in 1896-97. After de Leon was defeated in an assembly race in 1897, in which Cohen was active, Cohen joined with a number of other Jewish boys to form a "Marx Circle" to meet at a settlement house to discuss "Das Kapital" and other socialist sources.

It was in a competing society, the Comte Synthetic Circle, organized by the Alliance's Edward King, that Cohen encountered Mary Ryshpan, the woman Cohen would eventually marry. In Cohen's description of Mary he provides a vivid picture of the environment in which the two of them met, courted and married. "Mary Ryshpan was in the forefront of those who, growing to young womanhood amidst the intellectual currents of the immigrant East Side, helped break the Jewish tradition that had excluded women from full participation in the highest intellectual pursuits. Throughout her life she was an ardent admirer of George Eliot, whom she took as her model of womanly courage," wrote Cohen as a description of his wife.

> Completely selfless in her relations with others for whom she sought to make real the opportunities of the New World, she was a teacher, guide and protector to a host of relatives and friends. In those days it was not normal for Jewish girls to go to college, and she saw to it that her advantage in this respect did not remain a personal one but was shared with all for whom she could help to open the gates of a wider and richer intellectual world. This indestructible urge which she and I and so many of our mutual friends had, to possess for ourselves the fruits of the Age of Reason, dominated all our activities . . .
>
> The world that we faced on the East Side at the turn of the century presented a series of heartbreaking dilemmas. To the extent that we made the world of science and enlightenment a part of ourselves, we were inevitably torn from the traditions of narrow Orthodoxy. For some two thousand years our people had clung to their faith under the pressure of continual persecution. But now, for us at least, the walls of the ghetto had been removed. We learned that all non-Jews were not mere soul-less heathens. We found that the Jews had not been the only conservators of wisdom and civilization. And having been immersed in the literature of science, we called upon the old religion to justify itself on the basis of modern science and culture. But the old generation was not in a position to say how this could be done. With all respect for our old Orthodoxy, it would not be honest to deny that it harbored a great deal of superstition -- indeed, who is free from superstition? But because this superstition was regarded as an integral part of Judaism, because no distinction was drawn between ritual and religious convictions and feelings, the very word "religion" came to be discredited by many liberal people -- who, whatever might be said about their errors, at least attempted to think for themselves.60

Note that Cohen does not believe that the term "religion" is synonymous with Orthodoxy. This can be seen in his attitude toward efforts to reform Judaism, which will be discussed in connection with Cohen's philosophy.

"We might, if we could, mask our unorthodox ideas, and use the word 'God,' with Spinoza, to mean what scientists call the system of nature, or by proper verbal camouflage,

otherwise conceal our departures from the old, pious outlook upon the universe," but this made the East Side's youth feel like "hypocrites." "No wonder that the development of religious sentiment was stunted among us and that cynicism or pessimism came so often to displace the natural idealism of youth." Into the religious "void in our lives which we tried with every fiber of our beings to fill" stepped Thomas Davidson "a wandering Scottish philosopher who had been the spiritual inspiration in England, of the Fellowship of the New Life and its more activist offshoot, the Fabian Society, as well as one of the founders of the Aristotelian Society."[61]

Thomas Davidson taught culture to Jewish youth who clamored for it. An obituary from October 29, 1900, describes memorial services for Davidson, stating that the large auditorium of the Educational Alliance

> was filled with residents of the East Side, who had benefited by the work of Professor Davidson. Professor Davidson's effort among the Russian Hebrews of the lower East Side was one which, as he himself said, attracted him more and seemed more successful than anything he had ever undertaken. His idea was to gather together the ambitious, intelligent young people of the East Side and give them a liberal culture, eventually establishing for young working people a real institution of higher education. Nearly all his pupils are now assisting in social work on the East Side. It was the Professor's aim to train them to become efficient leaders among their own people.[62]

Davidson was not a dilettante in philosophy, but a wide-ranging philosopher who, in the words of William James, was a "knight-errant of the intellectual life."[63] In the preface of Davidson's posthumously-published A History

of Education, a remarkable summary of educational practice from East and West, from the most ancient to the humanistic experiments of his day, the "Father of Adult Education" wrote some lines which could be a capsule of his stance:

> To record, even summarily, the facts and events in the long history of education, within the narrow limits of a textbook, would have been both impossible and undesirable. My endeavor has been to present education as the last and highest form of evolution -- that great process which includes both Nature and Culture. I have tried to show what it is that evolves, why it evolves, and why evolution, finally attaining to consciousness, becomes education. Seeing that the imminent purpose of evolution is the realization of free individuals, that is moral personalities, I have endeavored to mark the steps by which this has been gradually attained, and to indicate those that have yet to be taken. 64

Davidson was not only a partial filler for Cohen's "religious void," he was the model philosopher Cohen needed in his emotional life -- an encouraging mentor, a hero. Five years after Davidson's death Morris wrote Mary from his annual "pilgrimage" to his burial place: "He was the first real friend that I had."[65]

One day in 1898 word reached the Marx Circle that a fellow named Davidson was scheduled to speak in defense of "the principle of individualism," a gauntlet tossed at the young socialists. Cohen and some others decided to go to the Educational Alliance and "heckle" the speaker with Marxist arguments. "I was not favorably impressed with his gospel of salvation by education, which to me meant preaching," wrote Cohen.

> I was convinced that no substantial improvement of our human lot was possible without a radical change in our economic setup . . .completely

> convinced of my own premises, I took advantage of the question period following the lecture to heckle the speaker, which I continued to do in later lectures, on all possible and many impossible occasions. To my surprise Davidson did not resent my views or my manners but responded to my attacks in the friendliest way.66

Though Cohen was not by any means entirely swayed by this first encounter with Davidson, others were. Two hundred and fifty people attended this first lecture, 500 were there for his third in which he claimed that New York had all the resources needed to provide a "higher education" to anyone who desired it. "Let us all hope that ere the twentieth century reaches its majority there will be in every city ward and in every country township a People's University."[67]

To this someone responded: "It is all very well to talk about education for the breadwinners; but how can people like us, who work nine or ten, and sometimes more, hours a day, who come home tired, who have no convenience there for study, few books, and no one to guide or instruct us, obtain any liberal education?" Note: This statement by Julius Fine was made at the first lecture, according to Cohen's autobiography and is attributed to the third lecture in Leonora Cohen Rosenfield's account of the birth of Breadwinners' College.[68] Davidson's response was momentous and gracious. He agreed to come to the East Side one evening a week and teach if students would organize themselves into a class.

At first Cohen did not attend the class, but others who did attend urged him to come -- if only to attack the

"individualism" of Davidson with socialist arguments. Eventually Cohen did go and was pleased with the give-and-take of Davidson's class. More attractive to him than this informality was Davidson's wide-ranging knowledge -- and his casual dropping of names familiar to Cohen. "I remember my amazement when I heard him refer to 'my friend, William James.' I could not have been more impressed if I had heard him refer to Kant or Napoleon."[69]

Davidson complimented Cohen, encouraged him to "cultivate" his "fine mind" and generally showed an interest in him. This interest was so far outside Cohen's experience until then that after one chance meeting with Davidson on the street, Cohen wrote that he "came to the next meeting of the class with the ardor of a young man going to see his swain."[70]

From then on the two were close, so close that Cohen was nearly crushed when Davidson announced that he would be leaving for his camp, Glenmore, in the Adirondacks to hold his Summer School of the Culture Sciences and to work on A History of Education. For the youth, who in an 1897 journal entry called himself a "Boy Philosopher," the correspondence which ensued with Davidson, culminating with an offer to come to Glenmore, was a delight. Cohen packed his belongings in a sheet and headed for Glenmore in July, 1899, where he would work for his keep and combine outdoor activities (totally foreign to him) with study. As the summer went along they became "like father and son."[71] There Cohen was expected to study Latin, read Hume's Treatise on Human Nature and Kant's Critique of Pure Reason,

with which Cohen admits he received little help from Davidson. Yet Davidson did encourage him and even asked Cohen to deliver a lecture that August on "Common Sense, Science and Philosophy" -- at age 19.

That summer at Glenmore David Blaustein, superintendent of the Educational Alliance, came for a visit, and Blaustein, Davidson, and Cohen planned to expand the one-night-a-week course into a school. Davidson expected Cohen to deliver a thirty-lecture series on the history of civilization (this was not so strange a request, considering that this was the same Cohen who spent his college days reading Gibbon's Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire while working at his brother's poolroom). Cohen did teach such a class in the so-called "Breadwinners' College." Later, during that school year, at Cohen's behest, Davidson taught a class in general philosophy to Cohen and his friends from City College.

As close as they were -- and Davidson wanted to adopt Cohen legally and provide him with the education for a doctorate in philosophy in Germany -- Cohen always remained intellectually independent from Davidson ("Davidson . . . did non have a well-disciplined philosophic mind, as evidenced by the failure of his books to impress a scholarly world.") to the extent that when a group within Cohen's circle of friends formed a group, called "Rodfe Zedek" (Seekers of Righteousness, in Hebrew) which adopted Davidson's religious philosophy entirely, Cohen did not join. While Cohen looked on Davidson as a father-figure, a model of the philosopher in the flesh, he was unable to accept his mentor's way of thinking

in this and in other areas. Mary was also under the influence of Davidson (she spent the summer of 1900 at Glenmore reading Dante's Inferno with Cohen under Davidson's direction -- this was how Davidson taught them Italian) -- Morris and Mary spent their honeymoon in search of Davidson's roots in England and Scotland. Yet she was under Morris' influence to an even greater extent than she was Davidson's. Her letters to Cohen at school reveal her battle with supernatural theism as well as her study of "Morrisconnology." Yet for whatever reason, the Cohens were married by a rabbi. This is doubly remarkable, seeing that by the time of their marriage in 1906 Cohen had not only been exposed to Davidson, but had worked as an aid to Felix Adler as well. Just as Cohen refrained from joining Rodfe Zedek, working for and accepting a scholarship from the Ethical Culture Society never seduced him enough religiously to make Morris Cohen anything other an American philosopher and Jew.

Cohen remained identifiably Jewish, always teaching courses of Jewish interests during his formative years as a teacher, his college days, and in the face of a romantic and persuasive religious aspect to Davidson's work, an aspect Cohen assumed along with Davidson's mantle at the Breadwinners' College. Davidson described the spirit behind the Breadwinners' College group in letters to his class: "When our little knot of men and women have fully established themselves in one city . . . they will send out bands of apostles to establish settlements in other cities, just as the medieval monasteries did." [72] And from Cohen's autobiog-

raphy comes thisexcerpt from a Davidson letter:

> There is nothing that the world of today needs so much as a new order of social relations, a new feeling between man and man. We may talk and teach as long as we like, but until we have a new society with ideal relations and aims we have accomplished very little. All great world movements begin with a little knot of people, who, in their individual lives, and in their relations to each other, realize the ideal that is to be. To live truth is better than to utter it. Isaiah would have prophesied in vain, had he not gathered around him a little band of disciples who lived according to his ideal . . . Again, what would the teachings of Jesus have amounted to had he not collected a body of disciples, who made it their life-aim to put his teachings into practice . . . You will think I am laying out a mighty task for you, a task far above your powers and aspirations; but it is not so. Every great change in individual and social conditions -- and we are on the verge of such a change -- begins small, among simple earnest people, face to face with the facts of life. Ask yourselves seriously, "Why should not the coming change begin with us?" And you will find that there is no reason why the new world, the world of righteousness, kindliness and enlightenment for which we are all longing and toiling, may not date from us as well as from anybody. A little knot of earnest Jews has turned the world upside down before now. Why may not the same thing -- nay a far better thing -- happen in your day and among you? Have you forgotten the old promise made to Abraham: "In thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed."?[73]

Leonora Cohen Rosenfield noted that "before he was thirteen, Morris had skeptically renounced the devout faith in which he had been reared and remained an agnostic thereafter. Although Morris retained his opposition to supernaturalism of any kind and remained unswayed by Davidson's faith in immortality, he considered himself a member of the 'little band of apostles,' and was out to make converts."[74] While Davidson still lived Cohen said the "Davidsonians'" task was to "acquire and spread true culture. This does

not consist simply in so-called 'refined manners' or mere learning. Inspired by the personality of our beloved Teacher we are here to become and to make apostles in the cause of truth and righteousness."[75] After Davidson's death he talked about the milieu of the Educational Alliance and Breadwinners' College as representing the best aspects of "Church," "College" and "home."[76]

Much of this "religious" zeal ebbed in the years after Davidson's demise, but not the impulses or work of the Breadwinners' project.

Cohen was very successful in his effort to take Davidson's place in the Breadwinners' College. The Breadwinners' College -- still a division of the Educational Alliance -- became the Thomas Davidson School. "When some of the friends of Thomas Davidson heard of us," in the years after his death, Cohen wrote,

> they expressed surprise that the death of Davidson had not put an end to our work. But the truth was that our real labors began with the death of Davidson. So long as he lived, there was a stream of people coming and leaving our classes who had nothing but a momentary interest in his remarkable personality. When Thomas Davidson died, the nucleus of those who had a permanent interest in his work alone remained. With a few new recruits, we were soon giving courses in which the attendance had risen from about two hundred to about six hundred.77

Even though Cohen was "the most important incarnation" of Davidson,[78] he was not part of the group Rodfe Zedek, which was left in control of the Davidson school. This meant that though he taught and was intimately involved in the Davidson Society and the Educational Alliance until World War I, from 1900 -- the year he received his B.A. from

City College -- Cohen's time was to a greater degree spent on his own career development. The Breadwinners' College had been an important enterprise for Morris and Mary, who both gained valuable experience teaching in the classrooms of the Alliance. For Morris it proved to be the first arena for his general and Jewish social and political action. Responsibility for the volunteer-run college rested

> on our young shoulders. The difficulties that we had to contend with seemed insurmountable. When we began, we had no adequate rooms, no textbooks or stationery, no desks, and none of the appliances of classrooms. None of us had financial means to remedy any of these lacks. When, after a year or two, we had progressed enough to attract public criticism, we were criticized for alienating Jewish young people from Judaism, for alienating young socialists from socialism, and for making young people work too hard after their daily tasks were over . . . So, too, we were criticized, as our work expanded, for duplicating the social work of the settlement movement; but again, we felt that what we were doing, in expecting heroic devotion and sacrifice from every member of our school, was far more important than giving material things or amusements to people in need . . . we charged no fees for our classes . . . We had undertaken to pay others for what Thomas Davidson had done for us.[79]

Cohen had had his one hero and he would never have or need another.

In 1901 Cohen worked as a counselor/teacher in a Jewish school run by Rabbi David Davidson, but he was unhappy working with the affluent youth in this school. In 1901 Cohen hoped to begin teaching in the New York public schools and was given a position in a school in a rough Czech neighborhood. He was miserable in this position -- fearful of the students and for his frail health. His "one sustaining outlet" for his intellectual interests was the Davidson

Society. Cohen thought he had reached some relief from the "dreary task of teaching public school children who did not want to learn" when he was appointed to the mathematics department at City College. But even this proved "unsatisfactory" because his busy teaching regimen at City College competed with his work with the Davidsonians (as principal and harried substitute teacher of their school) and his graduate studies at Columbia. This load was even more burdensome the next year and he tried out, unsuccessfully, for a philosophy fellowship at Columbia University.

At this strained juncture in Cohen's life, he wrote, "A paper of mine on 'Aristotle's Theory of the State' made a very favorable impression on Professor Felix Adler and as he knew something of my work at the Davidson Society, he conceived the idea that I might be helpful to him at the Ethical Culture Society."[80] Though Adler actually had a substantial effect on Cohen's philosophy, it is clear from the accounts of their relationship, and of Cohen with the Ethical Culture Society generally, that the close, reverential relationship that Cohen had with Davidson was not duplicated. Still, Cohen worked hard for the Ethical Culture Society while on a fellowship to Harvard in 1904, where Cohen managed to set up a branch of the Society. Hollinger says that "Cohen pursued a distinctly Adlerian path at Harvard. While studying Kant under the direction of Josiah Royce, he organized and lectured before classes of Boston's 'breadwinners,' led the activities of the Cambridge Ethical Culture Society, and served Adler as 'a sort of an ambassador'

to the capital of American academic gentility."[81] Cohen did this despite his bouts of depression. Philosophical quagmires plagued him, he missed his fiance while at Harvard, and his health was so bad that he was frequently out of commission. At such times it fell to his roommate, Felix Frankfurter, to take care of Cohen. The life-long friendship which developed between Cohen and Frankfurter began with Cohen's introduction to Law, thanks to Frankfurter. Cohen's influence on legal philosophy will be mentioned in the section of this thesis which deals with his general philosophy. In the academic year of 1905 - 1906 Cohen even admitted skipping philosophy lectures by his professors, William James and Royce, in order to sit in on lectures at the law school. Cohen was excited by the "Socratic" style used by Harvard law's teachers, but was surprised by the seeming lack of philosophical basis for the law.[82]

No matter what influences Cohen's teachers (James, Royce, Hugo Munsterbreg, George H. Palmer and Crawford H. Toy, among them) may have had on his thinking, most of his intellectual development came directly from his intense study of the philosophy of Immanuel Kant.

Cohen's thesis, produced during his first year at Harvard, was on "The Nature of Goodness According to Kant." During his second year at Harvard Cohen was able to finance his studies by acting as a teaching assistant for Professors Munsterberg and Royce, and it was also during this year that he was consumed with writing his doctoral dissertation, "Kant's Doctrine as to the Relation between Duty and Happiness." "Though the thesis was never published," wrote Rosenfield,

> his long-term interest in Kant found other expression in his more mature years. No name occurs more frequently in Cohen's works than Kant's. Years later, he wrote . . . that his interest in legal philosophy amounted to a concern with justice through law, stemming largely from his doctor's thesis on Kant's ethics. The Kantian tradition was in the air. An underlying ethical concern stamped Cohen and his Harvard teachers.[83]

Perhaps there was such a "concern" stamped on the non-Orthodox "believers" at Harvard because "the philosophical culture of the time was still, in America, rooted in religion,"[84] but Cohen was actually rebelling against just that kind of philosophical study. Hollinger says:

> Cohen was more offended by idealism's lingering Christian theism [held by almost all of his teachers, including Royce] than were many of his otherwise more "insurgent" contemporaries; he held even Davidson at fault for not renouncing supernaturalism in all its guises. Cohen's doctoral thesis was largely controlled by an interest in reformulating Kant's ethics without making use of the God concept. Having rejected Judaism for modernity, Cohen was impatient with moderns who smuggled their own ancestral theology into their philosophy; he saw supernaturalism of any sort as an embarrassing weakness on the part of its victim.[85]

Yet Cohen was not a "Kantian," calling himself by the now-famous phrase associated with him of "a stray dog among the philosophers;" he was "unchained to any metaphysical kennel." Cohen's "religion" may have been science or reason, but Cohen was a Jew and he knew he was an outsider. Some of the earliest contacts Cohen had with Harvard's philosophers were as an East Side immigrant youth at Davidson's camp. It was not an easy transition for Cohen to go from his native Jewish culture to the Protestant one he found at Harvard, from youthful aspirant to colleague.

A diary entry from 1904 is quite telling in regard to the phrase "stray dog." He was not that only because he refused to do the common thing in philosophy, namely line up with a particular school ("affiliation was exactly what was asked of Cohen, implicitly, by the social environment of the profession . . . Never before or since has participation in a movement been more imperative for American philosophers.")[86] but because he was a Jew and hence, different. Jews were only beginning to come to Harvard in any appreciable numbers at this time.

> Have just read . . . a novel of Russian (Lithuanian) and American life when I should have continued studying Kant's Critique of Judgment. This made me realize as I have realized but little on previous occasions that after all I am a Russian Jew . The idealistic-revolutionary being ever secondary to the emotional-longing -- I know not what it is -- the Jew within me. Three peoples live on the East Side -- the Orthodox Jews, the Russified Jews and the young American Jews. Of these the last are the least attractive, having no high ideals. The Orthodox Jews are the heroes but they are dying. The Russian Jews have formed the mass of the Socialist movement but it too is losing its vitality. Zionism is a spark uniting strangely enough all the three.87

Hollinger asks how much the self-ascribed title of "stray dog" reflects on Cohen as a Jew.

> One wonders how much this obliquely arrogant, yet self-effacing characterization was a response to the anti-Semitism with which Cohen had to contend. Did he want to join one of the philosophical fraternities, only to get a cool welcome? Was the self-imposed, often postured independence of his entire career the result partially of subtle, unrecorded rebuffs received as a young man? In any event, Cohen was unable to obtain a teaching job in philosophy until five years after completion of his degree, when in 1911, thanks to the initiative of Harry Overstreet, head of the department, he was allowed to move from the mathematics to the philosophy department at City College. And

> the next Russian Jew to begin a career in philosophy -- Jacob Loewenberg -- tried persistently to conceal his ethnic and national origin, and was successful in doing so at Wellesley during the early years of World War I. 88

Cohen did not hide his origins, not that he could have. His association with the Harvard Ethical Culture Society as well as his serving as vice president of Harvard's Semitic Conference, designed for the "advanced students" of Harvard Hebrew and Oriental Languages professor Crawford H. Toy, pointed to his identity.

Graduating "with flying colors" with a Ph. D. in philosophy from Harvard -- and glowing recommendations from all his professors, including those with whom he had publicly disagreed on philosophical issues -- Cohen (naively?) expected to find doors open for him to teach in his field. It took Cohen six long years, and a good deal of struggle before he was able to leave the "valley of humiliation" he experienced while teaching in the mathematics department at City College when (in 1912) he was appointed as assistant professor in the College's department of philosophy.

Cohen himself is one of the best sources to understand the climate surrounding the teaching of philosophy in American universities in the first three decades of this century (and even earlier, though there were no Jewish test cases before Cohen -- Felix Adler excluded). It was acceptable in American universities, universities begun by religious denominations or special interests such as the military, for Jews or other non-Christians (or people outside the particular approved group) to teach a neutral subject, such

as a hard science like math. But while it was one matter to let Jews teach a hard, "objective" science, it was quite another to allow a Jew to teach philosophy. "Ethics" and "morality" as part of philosophy were so tightly linked to the religious moorings of the denomination that supported a school, that it was feared that a Jew would exert undue influence in this delicate area on impressionable students.

Cohen wrote that:

> the teaching of philosophy in American colleges had been viewed as a branch of Christian apologetics and teachers of philosophy had long been selected on the basis of piety and pastoral experience rather than on professional training and competence. Indeed, even in recent years I have had letters from highly respected ministers who, upon being appointed to teach philosophy, ask me to recommend a good book on the subject. But clearly I had not been appointed to teach philosophy at City College on the basis of my piety. 89

Sidney Hook, professor emeritus of philosophy at New York University and both student and critic of Cohen, remarked that

> his religion, his accent, and his irascibility denied him an opportunity to teach in the graduate school of a great university. That is where he really belonged and where the challenge of mature minds would have enabled him to fulfill what he professed was his overwhelming desire -- to pursue systematic philosophy. He compensated for the bitterness and deprication of his lot by playing God in the classroom. 90

While Hook charges that other reasons may have also kept Cohen out of the kind of position he deserved (such as compulsive talkativeness and his searing tongue), at the same time he notes Cohen was denied promotion from an honorary to a paid position teaching philosophy at Columbia

in 1906 - 1907 because he was perceived by the university authorities as being "a diamond in the rough."

Despite boasting glowing recommendations from G.H. Palmer, William James, Josiah Royce, Hugo Munsterberg and Ralph Barton Perry (in effect, the entire Harvard Philosophy Department) which City College President John Finley described as the "finest he ever read in his life,"[91] Cohen still could not gain entrance to a philosophy position. In desperation he attended NYU Law School with an eye toward better supporting his wife and children as a lawyer, but he came away with only a better feel of the workings of legal methods which helped him "overcome the fear that keeps so many philosophers from trespassing on the premises of the law."[92]

Each year, starting from the year 1908, Cohen submitted (and had accepted) serious papers to the American Philosophical Association, to which he belonged as a result of his degree. He loved the annual meetings of the society, and by writing for them, was able to keep his foot in the door of professional philosophy until a position might become available. Even at City College it was not without a fight that Cohen gained the right to teach in his area. Yet it was because he eventually did teach at City College that Hook believes that

> A fair number of his students have become professional philosophers, but they have not built on Cohen's work or even referred to it. Instead, they have developed on their own after initially transferring their allegiance to Dewey, Whitehead, G.F. Moore, and others . . . Perhaps the chief reason why Cohen's intellectual light seems to have dimmed in American philosophy is that he was primarily a teacher of undergraduates. [Cohen

> taught graduate students at a number of schools on a number of occasions.] After all, it is in graduate schools that students mature professionally, develop lasting interests, cluster around leading scholars, and become associated with schools of thought. The undergraduate is never specialized enough. Cohen boasted that he never sought disciples, but it would be hard to find systematic doctrines that one could identify as constituting a Cohenian philosophy. Despite his boast, it rankled when he observed his best students falling under the influence of Dewey (against whose views he thought he had immunized them). 93

(Hook also believes that

> the ambivalent feelings Cohen harbored toward Dewey may have arisen in part from disappointed expectations with respect to Columbia University. He once told me that Dewey, if he had really wanted to, could have arranged for Cohen to join the department of philosophy at Columbia. I asked Dewey about this, and it turned out that by the time Dewey had gotten to know Cohen well, he had dropped the reins of control in the department. 94)

For whatever reasons, Cohen did end up at City College teaching undergraduates for better than two decades and in this position he had a keen influence on many students not only because of what he taught, but simply because of who he was. Even if Cohen was a poor teacher, which he himself admitted and which is verified by his students' assessments, and was tyrannical in the classroom, he was a model -- students admitted to imitating him outside of class "hacking up an opponent with a display of Cohenian logic."

Hollinger said,

> Cohen fulfilled a compelling psychological and moral need for many young Jewish males . . . sociologist Marshall Sklare, in his survey of the relation of public education to American Jewish history, designates Cohen, in particular, as the "secularized counterpart of the rosh yeshiva." To those in need of a schoolmaster of a certain type -- emancipated, yet unmistakably one of the tribe; severe, yet obliquely loving -- Cohen was a nearly perfect answer. 95

Cohen himself recognized two aspects to his new appointment -- he felt that he had finally become part of the process of public education which aimed to "save liberal civilization" and that Cohen was challenged to be on the "front line of the struggle to liberalize education in a democracy." The other aspect was more particular -- namely to be that "secularized counterpart of the rosh yeshiva." Cohen said,

> As a son of immigrant parents I shared with my students their background, their interests, and their limitations. My students were, on the whole, relatively emancipated in social matters and politics as well as in religion. They did not share the Orthodoxy of their parents. And breaking away from it left them ready and eager to adopt all sorts of substitutes. Though many of their parents were highly learned, as was not uncommon among Russian Jews, my students had gone to American public schools, and the learning of their parents, being permeated so deeply with the Talmudic tradition, was in the main foreign to them. City College offered a rich variety of courses in languages, literature and science, but the curriculum allowed few courses in philosophy itself. I therefore saw no adequate opportunity for teaching philosophy along traditional lines. Instead I had to give courses primarily in related subjects, hoping to bring philosophic insight to my students through courses on the nature of civilization, the philosophy of law, and the topics covered by Santayana in the last four volumes of his Life and Reason . . . In later years when I faced more placid western students who were less interested in bringing to light their own first principles, I came to realize more clearly

> how much student attitudes at the City College had contributed to the form of my teaching and of my thought. 96

Cohen became the most important personality at City College for his time and his influence was strongly felt outside of its campus. Hook said:

> Cohen's intellectual gifts were so outstanding that he became a dominant figure in the cultural life of New York City. Not only was the range of his interest almost universal, in contrast with the narrow technical concerns of most philosophers -- concerns which Cohen never depreciated -- but he was undoubtedly the most incisive and formidable critic of his time. Especially before an audience, he could easily silence, even if he could not convince, the psychoanlaysts, behaviorists, dualists, Marxists,Spenglerians, technocrats, free-willists, necessitarians, Bergsonians, classic rationalists, Baconian empiricists, supernaturalists, anarchists, subjectivists, relativists, and natural law dogmatists who crossed his path. Dewey once remarked that the only thing he had against Cohen was his undue fear lest someone agree with him. 97

To give just one example of how Cohen stepped out of the traditional academic role and into the mainstream of society: soon after he began teaching philosophy Cohen organized an historical conference of philosophers and jurists. In 1913

> with some encouragement from my new department head, Professor Overstreet, I decided to try to bring together representatives of legal and philosophic thought. Such a match, I hoped might make philosophers

> a little more conscious of the way in which philosophy, and especially legal philosophy, contributes, for better or worse, to the life of civilization. It might also make law teachers, at least (I had no hope of reaching lawyers and judges) more aware of the unspoken assumption of their teaching, which only philosophizing could bring to light. So was born the Conference on Legal and Social Philosophy. John Dewey was chairman, and I was secretary. 98

This auspicious meeting was followed by two more such conferences featuring the country's leading (liberal) philosophers and legal scholars. For as long as he remained active, Cohen was involved in the public and academic debate which followed on the subject of legal philosophy initiated by him in 1913.

Another example of Cohen's stepping out of the role of cloistered academician and into the national political arena was his effort to combat discrimination. This can be seen in his desire to protect his students from discrimination inside the United States as well as his fight to free up immigration policy. Cohen wrote:

> When in 1902 I began to teach at City College and for thirty-six years thereafter, I naturally shared in the struggles of my students against the discrimination that faced so many of them as they sought to establish their careers. And as a citizen I could not be silent in the face of the great campaign to repudiate the declaration that all men are created equal which culminated in the racist immigration laws of 1922 and 1924. Along with Jane Addams, Isaac Hourwich, Felix Frankfurter, Father John Ryan, and other unregenerate liberals, I joined in battle to expose the false science on which this anti-semitic and anti-Catholic legislation was based. Our efforts in 1921 to raise money and to enlist scientific bodies to support studies and publications in

> this field came to naught in the face of the postwar hysteria with its nightmare of an immigrant threat to 100 per cent Americanism. 99

Cohen had shown an interest in academic freedom, of both students and teachers, during his tenure at City College which infuriated some people inside and outside the College environs. This interest also demanded time and energy that he could have devoted to scholarly pursuits. After many years at the College Cohen found himself tending more and more to "issues of administration" (even though he had turned down the position of Department Head for 1920 - 21 because he did not want to be an administrator):

> In part these administrative issues involved the responsibilities of teaching and the defense of academic freedom, especially freedom of research. As one of the founding members of the American Association of University Professors, as Chairman of its City College section and as a member of the College's first committee "to report on ways and means to stimulate constructive scholarship among members of the staff," I was naturally subject to call whenever the right of teachers to freedom of thought or speech was attacked. This responsibility might at times infringe considerably upon my own opportunities for thought or research. But such service was a small price to pay for one's own freedom -- even when it involved long and arduous efforts in fields not my own as was the case when Bertrand Russell was kept from occupying my chair after my retirement from the College by the maneuvers of a cowardly mayor and ignorant judge. 100

Other fights Cohen felt compelled to fight in defense of academic freedom centered around students. Cohen's son Felix, as editor of the College paper, waged a campaign against the program of compulsory R.O.T.C. training which was a residual of the College's military roots. Though he tried to stay out of the fray, Morris could not, and the two Cohen's were ultimately successful in their campaign

and at opposing the censorship of the campus paper that had been quashed in the process. They also succeeded in getting the younger Cohen inducted into the Phi Beta Kappa society from which he had been black-balled on account of his role in the campaign against compulsory military training, though it was not until Felix was already studying philosophy at Harvard that he was inducted into the society.

Harder still for Cohen to deal with were the challenges of Communist students who did not use "traditional American methods of editorial-writing and voting" but protested in destructive ways which brought only "repressive measures" from College President Frederick B. Robinson, who came to that office in 1926. A cycle of protest and repression made the College more and more "unacademic." Cohen recommended that a faculty-student discipline committee be formed to alleviate tension at the College. The students who came to serve on this committee insisted that Cohen serve as chairman.

> Having become thus involved in at least some of the undergraduate troubles of these years, I was promptly blamed in many quarters for all student uprisings. Prominent alumni pointed to the large number of avowed Communists who had been my pupils -- among them Bertram Wolfe, Jay Lovestone, Simon Gerson and Joseph Starobin. (They did not list all the judges, rabbis and Christian ministers who had also been my students, nor did they note the violent diatribes that the Communist magazines directed against me.) . . . Above all they blamed me for the movement for the removal of Dr. Robinson from the presidency of the College which was gaining ground year by year among thoughtful alumni. 101

A politically-charged testimonial dinner was held for Cohen in 1927 on the occasion of his 25th year of

teaching at the College. The dinner at the Astor Hotel was held as a show of solidarity with Cohen, who was considering resigning due to pressure he felt from Robinson. It was also a response to more anti-Semitism directed at Cohen. Hollinger said that:

> The dinner at the Astor was organized as a show of strength against the highly authoritarian president of City College, Frederick B. Robinson, who was known to be looking for means to dismiss, or discipline, his popular professor of philosophy. Cohen had sided with student "radicals" in their attempt to do away with compulsory courses in military science, and had opposed many other policies of the administration. Robinson's well-known contempt for Cohen was resented by some of those who understood that Cohen was an unofficial representative of, and symbol for, Jewish students and alumni. So clearly was Cohen identified as the spokesman for a particular consituency that the Manufacturer's Record, in 1925, cast its editorial on "Teaching Treason in American Colleges" in the form of an anti-Semitic attack on Cohen, personally: Cohen was one of the "Russian Jews" who had never "learned to think as an American," and who used their growing influence in American colleges to eliminate military science and thereby serve the interests of "that Jewish government that is Soviet Russia." East European Jewish immigrants and their sons were able to see Cohen "as one of themselves" commented one alumnus many years later "whose foreign accent" resembled that of their own parents, and "who seemed despite all obstacles to have pried open the doors to the sacred world of science and scholarship." 102

Better than a thousand people -- including many notable figures like Frankfurter and Dewey -- turned out in this show of support for Cohen, the same man who just a few years later would spell out an anti-Communist manifesto. In 1934 Cohen wrote an article called "Why I am Not a Communist," as much a justification of liberalism as it was an attack on Communism.[103]

Despite the pressures Cohen felt to resign at the time of the banquet in 1927, he was able to ride out this career

storm -- he even became president of the American Philosophical Association two years later -- and Cohen remained at City College until 1937. Several factors led to his resignation at the age of 57. Cohen records that a visit to Harvard in 1934 "turned out to be a stimulating plunge into quiet water" for him and a refreshing change of pace from the politically-charged campus in New York. He hoped to work with "maturer minds" by going to another university with a graduate program, but at the same time was fearful of such a change because of ill health, afraid of the physical demands he might have to face. From 1934 to 1937 Cohen's deteriorating health moved him to take stock of what he had hoped to accomplish. By 1934 Cohen had published only three books, having used the form of reviews and papers to express his philosophical position. Yet at this time in his life, Cohen had ten books planned or partially written, among them a "treatise on law and justice," a "volume on metaphysics," an introduction to logic, an introduction to philosophy, a book on liberalism designed to "help rescue the word 'liberal' from its association with laissez-faire economics, superficial politics, or mushy-minded sentimentality, and instead show liberalism as simply scientific method stubbornly at work on human problems,"[104] a volume on "Jewish problems," a philosophy of history, a history of science, a book on American thought and an account of the immigrant generation of his parents.

Even though Cohen did not live to see all that he had written in print, five books of his had been published

by the time he died in 1947: Reason and Nature: An Essay on the Meaning of the Scientific Method (1931); Law and the Social Order, a collection of some of his papers on legal philosophy published in 1933; together with his student Ernest Nagel, Cohen wrote An Introduction to Logic and Scientific Method in 1934; A Preface to Logic was published in 1945; and The Meaning of Human History, which was an expansion of Cohen's Carus Lectures prepared for the American Philosophical Association in 1940. This last work mentioned was supposed to have been read at a congress of North and South American philosophers Cohen had suggested. This was scheduled to take place in 1942, but because of "war time difficulties" Cohen's Carus Lectures were actually delivered by Felix in 1945 at American Philosophical Association meetings. Morris was present for these readings, but was in ill health.

In January of 1942 Cohen had been admitted to the hospital as a result of a coronary which affected his brain. Mary convinced a physician friend to take care of Morris as an outpatient, though at this time Morris was described as "a vegetable."[105] This doctor, Mack Lipkin, did manage to bring his patient around, thanks to rehabilitation techniques "unusual for 1942."[106] Though Cohen recovered somewhat, "his brain had been so damaged by the stroke that even Lipkin's attention was unable to restore to normal levels his patient's ability to speak, read and write; Cohen's mind went 'in and out' for the next five years, till his death

and manifested 'marked mental tension defects' even when he was at his strongest."[107] In 1942 Mary died, adding to Cohen's woes.

Reason and Nature was Cohen's earliest book and has been called his most important one by historians, philosophers and critics. It was in part a collection of previously-published papers. Throughout his career Cohen wrote reviews and papers. In fact, from 1901 to 1942 Cohen wrote over 250 published reviews, articles, editorials and books. Cohen took the role of philosopher-as-critic very seriously and his reviews and papers span the widest possible range of interests -- the full range of American thought of his time.

In the seven years which followed Morris Cohen's death, seven books of his were published, all edited by Felix. Cohen was fortunate in having a sensitive editor in his son Felix, a philosopher and legalist in his father's mold, and a creative intellectual force in his own right. Felix (1907 - 1953) was a solicitor in the U.S. Interior Department from 1933 to 1948. Felix took his father's, and his own, interest in ethical systems and law and applied it to the vast, uncollected materials dealing with the federal government's relationship with American Indians. His monumental collection and systematization of Indian law, Handbook of Federal Indian Law, which appeared in 1941, has proven to be a landmark in the protection of Indian rights. In 1951 a book which contained legal essays by the two Cohen's and others was published called "Cohen and Cohen's" Readings in Juris-

prudence and Legal Philosophy. Felix edited the following books of his father's: Preface to Logic, Faith of a Liberal, Studies in Philosophy and Science, Reason and Law, Reflections of a Wondering Jew, King Saul's Daughter and American Thought. In so doing Felix satisfied his father's desire, as spelled out in A Dreamer's Journey, to see in print his thoughts on liberalism, logic, philosophy, law, American thought and Jews and Judaism, with each subject area having its own book. Hollinger notes that the sheer amount of Cohen material, though it included "some of Cohen's strongest work," overwhelmed critics and scholars who did not refer to Cohen's work to any greater extent than before their publication because so much of the material in these books was dated or weak.[108]

An unusual foray into writing was made by Cohen in 1938 when he began to write a play based on a Biblical theme. King Saul's Daughter is a "dialogue" about Michal, an obscure figure found in 1 and 2 Samuel. This play may have been a reflection of his mother (who died in 1936) or it might be seen as vaguely autobiographical. In any event, it is the story of "someone who has suffered intense pain while being battered about by events beyond her control," Hollinger believes.[109] It may also have been a romantic reaction on Cohen's part to the sad events taking place in the Jewish world in 1938.

In 1938 Cohen left City College and began teaching philosophy at the University of Chicago, where he taught until 1941, here teaching graduate students. His best

teaching years were behind him and little of his autobiography is devoted to his time at the University of Chicago. In a letter he wrote that "the Chicago situation is a pleasant interlude in my life."[110] Not only was his precarious health a factor limiting his work at Chicago; his preoccupation with Jewish affairs gripped him there just as it had been the decisive reason for leaving City College.

In his account of why he left City College Cohen wrote:

> The longing to have more time for thinking and writing might not by itself have sufficed to break the ties that bound me to the College. I was accustomed to postponing the writing of my books. But the Conference on Jewish Relations, which I helped to start in 1933, was demanding an increasing share of my thought and energy. I had been profoundly disturbed by the rising tide of anti-semitism in the United States, which seemed to me to be part of a general decline of liberalism. The bitterness of the Roosevelt opposition during the 1936 campaign, a bitterness which gave birth to every manner of excess, had clearly revealed in America the germs of that unreason which had swept so much of Europe. The pursuit not only of philosophy but of all free learning was being crushed throughout the world by the military spirit which brooks no freedom of thought. The universities were falling before the Nazi onslaught; it had been officially proclaimed that the science of von Humboldt and Planck was dead. In Spain the progress of the rebels of General Franco was being followed by the closing of schools. In our own land elements sympathetic with Franco, Hitler and Mussolini were arrayed against the progress of democratic education. All that was precious in American liberal civilization seemed at stake. The situation was critical, but not hopeless -- the temper of the American people, unable to sustain hatred over long periods of time and inlcined to cherish the right to vote and other democratic rights even when their exercise seems to bring little gain, made the defense of American liberalism far from utopian. Teaching philosophy to youngsters would make a difference fifty years later. But issues were being joined from which I could not stand aloof, for those who were fighting on

> my side seemed so often to lack the facts and the understanding which an organization like the Conference on Jewish Relations could supply. 111

Cohen did not "stand aloof" as he had during the First World War. In 1919 A Slacker's Apology was printed in the New Republic, a magazine which was one of Cohen's chief outlets for his writing. Reprinted in Faith of a Liberal as Philosophy in Wartime -- An Apologia,[112] this "apology" was Cohen's forthright response to accusations that he was not sufficiently partisan during the First World War.

> When the Germans sank the Lusitania I could not deny the women and children starved by the blockade. As a citizen I should have been glad, if conditions permitted, to volunteer for military service. But though I could conscript my body I could not conscript my mind. As a philosopher I could never assert that the war was a clear issue between the powers of light and the powers of darkness -- or as Bergson put it, between the mind or spirit on the one side and brute matter on the other. 113

Cohen stated that "Impartial Truth is a goddess whose worship is not without its difficulties even in a bomb-proof shelter behind the lines. She is hated by the great multitude . . . But as her sworn votary I cannot deny her." [114] The charge that he "shirked" his responsibility to the "human race" by "wasting" his time with Plato,[115] Cohen accepted. But "when I look upon my professional colleagues who enlisted their philosophies in the war, who added their shrill voices to the roar of the cannons and their little drops of venom to the torrents of national hatreds, I feel that it is they who should write apologies for their course.[116] Hook wrote that Cohen

> had great wisdom about the affairs of the world, despite his emphasis upon the virtue of professional detachment, and he had a moral courage that, in the perspective of academic behavior of our time, glows more strongly with the years. Wisdom was apparent in his writings and moral courage in his stance on various controversial issues . . . His moral courage was evinced shortly after the First World War when he published his A Slacker's Apology -- and to be a self-denominated slacker during that period was an invitation to some sort of violence. [117]

But World War Two was different for Cohen.

In 1933 Cohen must have felt less of a bystander in America than he did in 1919 -- and in this war the fight for Cohen was "a clear issue between the powers of light and the powers of darkness," and he felt compelled to provide his "side" with "the facts."

Cohen was accused in the war years and later of taking an interest in Jewish affairs only as a result of a negative reaction to Nazism, allegedly showing no concern prior to the '30's. "He took offense," Hollinger writes, "when called a 'post-Hitler Jew' by those who claimed to have maintained their Jewish identity more proudly during the years when his pronouncements on Jewish affairs were rare." [118] This perception, false in light of Cohen's life-long, public association with Jews and Jewish activities, probably arose from Cohen's attitude toward Zionism. Cohen, as will be seen later when his Jewish philosophy is discussed, was a vocal non-Zionist, this as a function of his orientation as a liberal American Jew. Still as Hollinger points out:

> His post-1933 activities did not . . . entail any explicit repudiation of secular, cosmopolitan, or assimilationist ideals. What little Cohen had said about Jewish affairs before the advent of Hitler was to the effect that all minorities, including Jews, would be better off in a pluralistic, cosmopolitan setting than in an environment of self-sustained particularism. 119

Cohen did not in fact change his position in the wake of Nazism, and the Conference "was an ideal vehicle for Cohen's desire, strongest after 1933, to defend Jews as a social group without identifying himself in any way with Judaism. He remained avowedly agnostic."[120]

The Conference was created in Cohen's image. In a eulogy to Cohen written by the editors of the magazine of the organization he founded, and for which he served as founding editor, Jewish Social Studies, it says that:

> Throughout his life Morris Cohen was interested in some form or other of Jewish communal activity. In the period between the two wars he became an indefatigable worker for the ORT [Organization for Rehabilitation and Training], because he was firmly convinced that the retraining of Jewish youth for more productive work would accelerate the process of their integration into western society and eliminate at least some of the economic causes of friction. For the same reason, as soon as he organized the Conference on Jewish Relations, he called a two-day conference on economic adjustments and intensively pursued a program which ultimately led to the formation of the Jewish Occupational Council. He also realized more keenly than anyone else the major deficiency of the American Jewish community because of its inadequate knowledge of its own fundamental facts. For years he preached the need of effective communal planning based upon precise knowledge of population trends, economic and cultural factors as well as the political and religious forces operative within and without American Jewry. It was out of this recognition that the Conference was born . . . The Conference was also Morris Cohen's answer to Hitler. He perceived the depth and virulence of the demonic powers which had been unleashed

> on the world by Nazi propaganda. Against the endless lies of Goebbels, his henchmen and dupes, Morris Cohen replied by reemphasizing the quest for truth. He was a great believer in the value of discussion. What he wrote in a preface to a book published under Conference auspices could well serve as a motto for its entire program. This particular theme, he said, is of interest "not only to Jews but to all those who are concerned about the survival of liberal civilization, whose essence is tolerance of differences so that new ideas may develop by free discussion." 121

In the formative years of the Conference, now called the Conference on Jewish Social Studies, the organization proved to be dependent to a large extent on Cohen for its direction, though Salo W. Baron was a co-founder of the journal Jewish Social Studies (which began in 1939) and was with Cohen when the Conference was established. Cohen and Baron sought eminent scholars who could, through honest research, begin to produce "reliable data about the 'position of the Jew in the modern world,' for the benefit of both Jewish and general scholarship, as well as the public at large," writes Baron. He said:

> It was felt that such dependable researches would help in the struggle against rapidly spreading Nazi world propaganda with its fabricated evidence and other falsehoods. Beyond the immediate issue, however, loomed the widely felt need in the Jewish community itself to possess fuller and more precise information about the Jewish population, its economic stratification, and other socially and historically relevant aspects of Jewish life. 122

After an organizational meeting at the New School for Social Research, where Cohen lectured, the Conference was under way, with Mary and Morris Cohen doing most of the administrative work in their own apartment. Cohen was

able to enlist leading scholars of the time, including, among many other notable figures, Edward Sapir, Albert Einstein, Harry Wolfson and Felix Frankfurter.

Cohen wrote in a chapter of his autobiography significantly titled Jewish Social Studies and American Democracy, that

> we were, in fact, a continuing conference, not tied to any cause or creed less universal than the old, simple faith that the search for truth is an essential part of any progress towards a more humane and tolerant world. As a pluralist in philosophy I had long maintained that any human problem of major dimensions can be fully grasped only through a diversity of approaches and perspectives. The outcome of our efforts left me more than ever convinced of the creative significance of differences of background and interest even where men are co-operating for a common goal. Among our number were Orthodox and Reformed, religious and irreligious Jews, Zionists and non-Zionists, socialists and individualists. Yet we found it possible to work together. 123

No doubt the reason the diverse group was able to work together was that Cohen was determined from the start to make of the Conference a different kind of organization than any other Jewish organization that existed at the time. It would be the first organization in the Jewish community concerned with applying the science of sociology to the study of Jewish issues. And it would describe both the good and the bad aspects of Jews -- in order to serve truth and thereby "prove" that Jews were human beings. Hollinger wrote of Cohen and the Conference that:

> Cohen insisted that the Conference was a "scientific" enterprise and that to maintain its standing it must not flinch at the publication of information

> that might seem to be unfavorable to Jews. To a friend of the Conference who doubted the wisdom of a study of Jewish convicts, he replied that it was "silly . . . to pretend that there are no Jewish criminals . . . What is important is to establish that we are a normal people" and hence "no worse than the rest of the population" in regard to criminal behavior. Almost haunted by the fear that the Conference would be perceived as "another propaganda institute," Cohen could not declare often enough that the dissemination of even "unfavorable facts" was a surer method, in the long run, of combating unfavorable "misinformation," which was the real enemy. 124

It could be shown, believed Cohen, that "wherever we find anti-democratic forces arrayed against liberal civilization, we find anti-Jewish measures a major part of their program." Beyond this,

> those of us who are the object of the various anti-semitic movements have more opportunity than most of our fellow citizens to become aware of their character. We thus have the teacher's supreme obligation, that of sharing knowledge. We cannot contribute as we should to the common good of the larger community of which we are a part unless we are willing to say to fellow Americans in the face of dark and fateful forces that loom before us, "These are the things that threaten to destroy us -- and after us, you." 125

Cohen felt a different Jewish organization was needed because

> nowhere, in all the roster of worthy organizations fighting the rise of intolerance, did I find one that had mastered the Talmudic precept, "Teach thy tongue to say 'I do not know.'" There was not one that frankly confessed the vast ignorance that is ours concerning the position of the Jew in the modern world . . . It is easy to say, "Why bother about more facts when we know we are right?" In a world where almost everyone was an amateur physician, confidently prescribing the sovereign remedy for the ills of Israel, as for the ills, a teacher of logic and scientific method could not be sure of avoiding the fate of Socrates if he tried to call attention to the need of careful diagnosis before attempting any prescription. Discussion of Jewish problems is generally full of references

> to ideals, and it is important to remember that ideals are great motive forces in human affairs. But no solution of any difficulty is possible without thoroughly facing the actual facts. To do this is a very disagreeable task and most people not only dislike to do it themselves but they also dislike those who do it for them. Facts are messy and do not conform to what we should like them to be. But the physician or engineer who keeps his eyes on the ideal and ignores the actualities is worse than useless. [126]

It was distressing for Cohen to see "agencies of good will" operating with "makeshift data" -- and no organization was "devoting its primary efforts to the task of operating an effective intelligence service for the Jewish people in their fight against the forces which would degrade them and deprive them of their human rights." [127]

The Jews were a small minority, not responsible for the causes of anti-Semitism, but they could be held responsible for their own affairs. "Our very lack of unitary authority emphasizes the need for research in Jewish affiars, motivated by a genuine desire to get at reliable and verifiable facts that all can recognize." [128] Cohen knew that there would (and should) not be a religious consensus among American Jews, but honest sociological research could serve as a point of agreement for the Jewish community.

> We have no pope or political leader who can speak for all the Jews with any authority. No one today really believes that all the Jewish community can be united as a religious body. I happen to be one of those who do not expect the synagogue to go out of existence in any near future. It has weathered the storms of over two thousand years and it still has a great deal of vitality as a center for Jews -- just as the church is still a natural center for the social life of Christians. Nevertheless, it is vain to hope that all Jews can be united in the synagogue or Reformed temple --

> there are a great many who can not or will not subscribe to Judaism as a religion or even to any form of theism. You may read them out of the fold, as the Jewish community of Amsterdam excommunicated Spinoza, but they and others will consider them Jews and nothing will be achieved by the excommunication except to make it a little more difficult later to gloss over the fact that there was no place for Spinoza in the Jewish community. 129

The Conference had several aims while Cohen lived:

1) It would combat "misinformation," both foreign and domestic, about the Jews, in order to dispel racist conceptions about them. Cohen wrote that most Americans knew the "Jewish people only by hearsay" and though he hated to sink to the level of apologetics, he recognized that some charges against the Jews required refutation. This the Conference did at times. But Cohen thought that answering many anti-Semitic accusations could only "'add to the publicity' craved by anti-Semites, and hurt the 'morale of the Jews, who are the principal readers of such attacks and replies.'" [130] Cohen also feared that Jews would suspect anti-semitism where it did not exist -- and there was plenty of real discrimination with which to deal.

2) The Conference would help Jewish communities with communal planning by way of demographic studies.

3) The Conference felt the need to encourage the rehabilitation of Jews who needed relief by selecting places and occupations that would actually employ Jews. Out of this aim of the Conference sprang the Jewish Occupational Countil in 1939. It was sponsored by the American Jewish Committee, the American Jewish Congress, ORT,

B'nai B'rith, HIAS, the Jewish Agricultural Society, the Jewish Labor Committee, the Jewish Welfare Board, the National Refugee Service, the National Council of Jewish Women and the Union of American Hebrew Congregations, organizations which, at the time, did not cooperate too often. Cohen wrote that "I soon came to look upon the Jewish Occupational Council as my favorite child."[131]

4) The Conference placed refugee professionals in American positions.

5) To accomplish all this the Conference started to publish a sociological journal. This the Conference did in 1939, with Cohen's article Philosophies of Jewish History in the first issue of Jewish Social Studies. Cohen justified the publication's existence by saying that "such an organ was needed for the publication of detailed scholarly and documented studies [and] seemed essential if we were to make a contribution to human understanding worthy of what was becoming, by the grim processes of history, the strongest Jewish community in the world."[132] The Journal paid its respects to its founder and first guiding influence by dedicating its 1980 series to Cohen on the occasion of his hundredth birthday anniversary.

6) Perhaps the most important aspect of the Conference when it was under Cohen's leadership was its desire to influence the post-war situation of the Jews. Cohen forecast that "the responsibility for defending the survivors of Hitler's butchery would fall increasingly on American shoulders." [133] Cohen found no group interested in

> giving any special thought to the position of the Jews in the postwar world. None of them, indeed, seemed fully aware of the extent to which guarantees of human rights of European Jewry had broken down even before the outbreak of the war. Something more than a return to the status quo ante was called for, and we could not expect non-Jews to solve this perplexing problem if we ourselves ignored it. [134]

Non-Jews, said Cohen, tended not to see any peculiar need among the Jews for different treatment in Europe after the war. The hope that "the Jewish problem would solve itself if the democratic powers win the war and equal rights are extended to all citizens" seemed naive to Cohen. He pointed out that countries like Poland and Rumania had managed to "degrade" the Jews after World War I without the aid of openly anti-Jewish legislation in those countries. Cohen knew that it is "impossible to understand the actual conditions under which human beings live if we rely only on legal prescriptions" [135] -- a point that is still valid in connection with the situation of Jews in the Soviet Union.

Cohen was asked to head a Research Institute on Peace and Post-War Problems by the American Jewish Committee, which he did from 1940 to 1941. "In retiring from active management," Cohen wrote, "of the Research Institute on Peace and Post-War Problems just as its planned studies began to assume the garb of reality, I felt that I had done what a logician could be called on to do in a time of crisis." [136]

If Cohen's only contribution during his career had been to produce the first organization in the American Jewish community to base its program on a sociologically-sound

foundation, Cohen would be deserving of much gratitude from the contemporary Jew. Cohen's creation of the Conference, the Journal, and the need for factual information about Jews should long be remembered. But Cohen also counseled America's Jews to face the "grave troubles" Cohen felt were on the horizon in the United States.

> Instead of wasting our energies by concentrating exclusively on the fight against anti-semitism, we can do better by studying our resources and taking thought as to how best we can be prepared to do our share as Jews in the fight for humanity. To do this we must join the liberal forces everywhere, help them in the crucial battles ahead on behalf of all oppressed minorities, and prepare ourselves to bear the inevitable wounds and hardships. In olden days the strength to do this came from religious conviction. Today we Jews are no longer united as a religious brotherhood. But we can and we must do all in our power to strengthen our resources by a campaign of educating or enlightening our fellow Jews as to where we stand and what we may reasonably expect. [137]

Not only Jews, "but all good Americans and indeed all who value humane civilization must devote themselves [to] the maintenance of the fundamental rights of human beings irrespective of their race or creed." [138]

Cohen's general philosophy can be said to rest on three principles -- "Rationality," "Invariance" and "Polarity."

Rationality

In Reason and Nature Cohen, as a "logical realist," begins with a presentation of four "arguments actually advanced against the indispensable role of rational thought in the attainment of truth. These may be grouped under four main heads: (1) the psychological; (2) the historical; (3) the empirical; and (4) the Kinetic."[1]

The "psychological"[2] argument as Cohen framed it was advanced by those who were either "idealists" or "positivists." The "anti-rationalism common to positivism and to certain forms of idealism shows itself in the effort to deny the significance of logic by reducing it to psychology."[3] Cohen did not deny validity to the discipline of psychology itself, but he did see it as "only one among a number of sciences" and that it needed to conform to the "results of logic."[4] To those who said that a psychological account of the way we think can replace logic, Cohen wrote that, "A psychological description of what goes on in my mind as I deal with an ethical or practical problem will not determine the correctness of the solution arrived at; and psychology can no more include the whole of logic and ethics than it can the whole of technology."[5]

The "historical" argument, Cohen says, seeks "to dispense with reason by reducing everything to the facts of history,"[6] and Cohen recalls that many nineteenth century "historical studies" were attacks on "rationalism."[7]

Historians bent on showing that history, being concrete and irrational, is "nearer to reality"[8] than "physics," an abstract set of laws, should recognize that "despite differences in subject matter, the same type of reason underlies scientific history whether human or natural. Hence any successful attack on the truth-value of reason in physics would be fatal to the claims of history."[9]

In presenting the argument of "empiricism," Cohen points out that "the growth of natural science, with its extensive use of mechanical instruments for observation and experiment, has brought about an impression that science distrusts reason and relies rather on observation and experiment."[10] In refuting this Cohen simply states that reason is required for observation and experimentation. About the "argument of empiricism" Cohen notes that "without a well-reasoned anticipation or hypothesis of what we expect to find there is no definite object to look for, and no test as to what is relevant to our search."[11] Not only is reason necessary for the "undertaking of scientific observation and experiments," it is also essential for the "proper interpretation of the results of such experiment and observation."[12]

The fourth argument against reason, that of "Kineticism," is that of Cohen's teacher, William James. This argument is described by Cohen in this way:

> [The] kinetic theory of matter, the gradual elimination of the inert atom, and the consequent abandonment of [James Clerk] Maxwell's view that each individual molecule has remained unaltered since the day of creation, have fortified the impression of universal change . . . The sight

> of so much change where formerly we saw only constancy has produced the dizzy romantic generalization that only change is real and that nature contains no constant elements. 13

Cohen's refutation is:

> How could this universal judgment itself ever be proved by changing empirical facts? . . . The truth is simply that there is no change except in reference to something constant . . . logically, the fact of change or motion is nothing more than the correlation between different moments of time (as determined by some clock) and the different spatial positions of an object . . . There is, therefore, nothing paradoxical in saying that the meaning of any motion does not itself move, but is rather a timeless fact or phase of nature . . . To argue, as James and others have, that the constant rules of logic cannot be true of a world in flux is a confusion as gross as to argue that motion cannot have a constant velocity or a fixed direction, or that one standing still cannot catch a flying ball. Indeed, are not flux, change and motion themselves concepts[eternal and independent of "spatial location"]? 14

Cohen's own position, then, as regards "reason" is that "the rational order" of logic "is independent of human or superhuman mind."[15] As he himself put it:

> Reflection . . . shows that it is possible to view a priori principles as both expressive of the fundamental nature of things and as enabling us to organize them according to certain orders or patterns suggested by these principles. From this point of view the rules of logic and pure mathematics may be viewed not only as principles of reference applicable to all systems but also as descriptive of certain abstract invariant relations which constitute an objective order characteristic of any subject matter. 16

In chapter four of Reason and Nature, titled "The Metaphysics of Reason and the Scientific Method," Cohen isolates three ways that have been utilized to base philosophy on science. He says those who have tried to build a "world-view" in this fashion base it "(a) on the results, (b) on the

presuppositions, or (c) on the method of science."[17] It is here that Cohen spells out what he means by "scientific method" in philosophy.

Basing philosophy on the results of science means making a philosophy which is a synthesis of the "generally accepted results of the various sciences and to weave them together into a picture of reality."[18] However, there are two flaws in basing a philosophy on a synthesis of results, says Cohen. The first Cohen identifies is that it is "difficult for any one but a specialist to know what <u>are</u> the results of any one special science."[19] It is not enough to have a simplified understanding of scientific results because "detailed qualifications [are] essential to their truth."[20] The second difficulty is "the fact that a synthesis of the results of science is not necessarily scientific" since such synthesis is often "dominated more by practical, dramatic and aesthetic" motives, not scientific ones.[21]

Basing philosophy on the presuppositions, or as a critique of those suppositions, is "the road made classic by Kant, who called it the transcendental method," Cohen says.[22] Cohen says that Kant assumed that "science results in synthetic propositions a priori, and asks what must be the nature of mind (and ultimately of the world) to render such knowledge possible."[23] Cohen's first objection to this way of basing a philosophy on science rests on the fact that it is not possible to accept Kant's assumption that we have a priori knowledge of nature "in light of modern mathematics

and physics."[24] Cohen's second objection to this is that "to argue that any theory (like the Kantian one) that explains how knowledge is possible . . . is thereby demonstrated to be true" is simply a logical fallacy of "affirming the consequence."[25]

The third manner in which philosophy can be based on science is to base it on the method of science (hence, the "scientific method"). According to this view, Cohen says,

> philosophy can be scientific only by applying scientific methods to its own subject matter which is distinct from the subject matter of the other sciences. This subject matter may be <u>being</u> as such, <u>reality</u> as distinguished from appearance, the nature of the <u>mind</u>, or the nature of knowledge."26

However, Cohen notes that "a philosophy that excludes the subject matter of the special sciences, natural and social, can not satisfy that interest in the cosmos which has at all times been the heart of philosophic endeavour."[27]

Cohen proposes that:

> philosophy, seeking the most comprehensive vision, cannot ignore the insight gained by the sciences, but must go forward to envisage their possible synthesis. Though such synthesis is necessarily speculative it may be well to note: (1) that a certain speculative element is necessary for the substantial growth of science, and that the various sciences have in fact thus been nurtured by philosophy, and (2) that a scientific philosophy corrects the dangers of speculation by rigorously logical analysis of fundamental concepts and assumptions, so that it should be aware of how much certainty can be attached to its wider speculative reaches. 28

For Cohen the "scientific method"

> depends on the principle of causality. This . . . is only a special instance or application to temporal events of the wider principle of suffi-

> cient reason. The latter, as applied in mathematics, as well as in natural science, may be formulated as follows: Everything is connected in definite ways with definite other things, so that its full nature is not revealed except by its position and relations within a system. 29

Contingency, Cohen points out, is ordinarily viewed in philosophy as being incompatible with the principle of sufficient reason and the scientific method. This, in Cohen's view, is not the case. Cohen writes that

> the principle of sufficient reason as actually relied on in scientific procedure is not only compatible with the domain of chance, contingency, or indetermination, but positively demands it as the correlative of the universality of law. We may see this in the application of any law of mechanics or physics. For the most thoroughgoing mechanism necessarily involves: (1) contingent data, e.g. the actual position of the elements, (2) abstraction from other aspects or elements which are thus regarded as irrelevant and independent, and (3) rules of connection which themselves have a contingent aspect. 30

Besides its implications for contingency, the principle of sufficient reason, for Cohen, has other implications. Among these implications is that the principle of sufficient reason "is incompatible with the view that regards the total universe as the cause of any of its constituent facts"[31]; that classification of things is meaningful ("If there were no real likeness, no examples of identity in different instances, the formulation of scientific laws would be without any possible application.")[32]; and at the same time as there exist "constant class properties it is well to note that in order that these classes be recognizable there must be discontinuities in nature."[33] On the question of probability Cohen writes that "the recognition that the

material truths of physical science are more or less probable both corrects and enriches our conception of a metaphysic based on the requirements of rational or scientific method."[34]

Thus on the nature of things Cohen says:

> If we thus take the principle of sufficient reason seriously we are justified in examining the nature of things without worrying about the ego-centric predicament of how we know that such knowledge is possible. The assumption of the critical philosophy that we can know only our own ideas is itself a dogmatism which involves infinite regress. If the fact that I know a given entity does not determine any of its specific characteristics -- and it is hard to see how it can determine any one known trait more than any other -- then the fact of knowledge can be eliminated from the most general formula for the nature of things, though the existence of knowledge is itself a most important fact in our universe . . . The fundamental metaphysical issue between rationalism and the various forms of anti-rationalism may be stated thus: Is the nature of things revealed most fully in developed rational science, or is it so well known in non-rational ways that we are justified in saying that science is a falsification or a merely practical device for dealing with dead tihngs? Actually the various forms of anti-rationalism dogmatically assert the nature of things to be "really" individuality or continuous experience, spontaneity or practical experience, etc. But an attempt to justify any one of these formulae by evidence commits the anti-rationalist to the canons of scientific method. 35

Invariance

Contingency is contrasted with "invariance," the universal, invariant relations of particular events.

> The main metaphysical contention of anti-rationalism . . . is that things have no constant nature, that everything is pure change and nothing else . . . In daily life we find no difficulty in asserting that an individual or object maintains its character in the stream of change. Scientifically this constancy is expressed in the accurate language of mathematics by the concept of the invariant,

> not the isolated constant but that which remains identical amidst variation. We may say then that the nature of anything is the group of invariant characters. 36

Polarity

The principle of "Polarity," reducing apparent contradictions to balancing contrasts, was the chief feature of Cohen's philosophy. While recognizing that the idea of polarity was hardly new to philosophy, Cohen made it central. By polarity Cohen meant: "opposites such as immediacy and mediation, unity and plurality, the fixed and the flux, substance and function, ideal and real, actual and possible, etc., like the north (positive) and south (negative) poles of a magnet, all involve each other when applied to any significant entity . . . The idea is as old as philosophy."[37]

"This principle of polarity," he wrote,

> seems to me to represent what is sound in the Hegelian dialectic without the indecent confusion at which we arrive if we violate the principle of contradiction and try to wipe out the distinctions of understanding. The being and non-being of anything are always opposed and never identical, though all determination involves both affirmation and negation. Far from overriding the distinctions of the understanding, the principle of polarity shows their necessity and proper use. 38

If you employ this principle, Cohen says you can "guard against two opposite evil intellectual habits: on the one hand to regard real difficulties as absolute impossibilities, and on the other to belittle such difficulties by calling them false alternatives."[39]

Cohen took this principle and employed it in every area of thought where he sought to make any analysis, including ethics, law, "life," and Jewish affairs.

Ethics

In the area of ethics, Cohen took a position which rejected both "the illusions of absolutism" and the "illusions of antinomianism" and which advanced the idea that it is possible to have an ethical system which would be both "logical" and "empirical."

As far as moral absolutist stands are concerned, Cohen held that "it does not occur to most people that there can be any genuine doubt about them. Men generally are surprised and painfully shocked at the suggestion that we need to search for new moral truth or to revise the old."[40]

Cohen says that absolute moralist positions are usually supported by "some authority regarded as beyond question, e.g. by some priest, sacred book or prevailing respectability" which seldom have any justification outside of tradition or subjective taboo.[41] In Reason and Nature, Cohen shows the relative morality attached to "killing" under different circumstances and moral systems.[42] Cohen says that a "great and noteworthy effort" was made by Kant "to prove all moral rules absolutely obligatory" and derivable from one principle, "the categoric imperative."[43] Yet though great and noteworthy, Cohen had reservations about its validity.

> To one who asks, "Why should I accept this categorical imperative as the rule of my conduct?" Kant offers no reason except to offer this principle as a formula for the unconditionally obligatory character of all moral rules, such as the absolute prohibition against lying. But why should I regard the latter as absolute? . . . There is no logical force at all in the claim that there is some absolute contradiction or inconsistency in telling a lie and wishing to be believed . . . Empirically, of course, it is true that lying is subversive of that mutual confidence that is necessary to all social co-operation. And this justifies a general condemnation of lying -- but not an absolute prohibition. 44

On the other hand, Cohen identifies and refutes three brands of moral relativism: "moral anarchism, dogmatic immoralism, and anti-rational empiricism."[45] Moral anarchism meant the simple denial of any support for moral rules because they are "mere opinions."

Dogmatic immoralism is roughly equivalent to non-conformity to some moral system, and in turn replaces it with but another subjective system of morals. Anti-rationalist empiricism

> in ethics generally sets up the claims of what is called "the concrete facts of the situation" against all abstract rules . . . No two physical situations are ever absolutely identical. Yet this does not preclude the possibility of abstract physical laws that give us control over nature undreamed of by other means. 46

In light of the principle of polarity, Cohen then says that his analysis of the issues between absolutistic ethics and empiricist-relativistic ethics presents a point from which to view the truth at the basis of both contentions.

> Concretely every issue of life involves a choice. The absolutist is right in insisting that every such choice logically involves a principle of decision, and the empiricist is right in insisting on the primacy of the feeling or perception of the demands in the actual case before us . . . We must . . . accept empiricism as to the content of moral rules without abandoning logical absolutism in our scientific procedure. 47

Law

The ramifications of this view of morality "in light of the principle of polarity" were perhaps most far-reaching in the field of law. Nathan Margold, writing about "Morris R. Cohen as a Teacher of Lawyers and Jurists" in Freedom and Reason (the memorial volume of philosophical and Jewish cultural studies published in 1951 by people influenced by Cohen) points out that Cohen's greatest characteristic as a teacher was that he refused to impose his personal philosophy on any student. Margold says that

> to trace the influence of Morris R. Cohen's philosophy upon the practice of law one must first know what that philosophy is. But try as I may, I can recall no "Cohen philosophy" whose postulates I learned as a student. Indeed, the recollection that stands out the clearest is that no teacher of mine was ever so careful not to impose his viewpoint upon his students . . .

It may have been true that the students of varied backgrounds who came under Cohen's influence and ended up in law found no "Cohen philosophy" to

> use to solve the problems that faced us in professional life. We were of all parties of politics, of all schools in economics, of all faiths in religion. But his teachings impressed one recognizable pattern on us and on our contribution to the life of the law. He trained us to

> be alert to the superstitions, the prejudices, the frailties in the law and to be steadfast in championing their elimination or correction. 48

Margold, who called Cohen "America's first legal philosopher," said that

> in days that men of my generation can remember, it was popular for lawyers to assert that judges do not make the law; they merely find it as it already exists in law books and other source material of recognized authority. This notion went unchallenged and exercised a dominant influence over the practical life of the law. Morris R. Cohen was one of the first publicly to challenge it as a myth which, when put to proof, could find no credible witness to veracity. That it is a myth is now generally recognized. 49

Margold also said of Cohen's impact on American law that

> It was back in 1913 that Morris R. Cohen shocked the lawyers and law teachers of America with his epoch-making paper on "the process of Judicial Legislation." What he said then supplied the text to which the most valuable work of progressive jurists since that time has been commentary. No excerpt can do justice to the productive insights of that essay, but a paragraph points to the intimate dependence of law upon the social sciences, a dependence which was once surreptitious and is now open, public, and on the way to becoming as scientific as human affiars ever can become: "Law deals with human affairs and it is impossible to legislate or make any judgment with regard to law without involving all sorts of assumptions or theories. The issue, therefore, is not between a fixed law on the one hand and social theories on the other, but between social theories unconsciously assumed and social theories carefully examined and scientifically studied." 50

"Morris R. Cohen made the phonograph theory of justice" which said that "disc jockeys" on the judicial bench merely played the right record of a given verdict at the right time "intellectually untenable."[51]

Life

Given what the principle of polarity meant when applied by Cohen to ethics and law, it should not be surprising that when Cohen talked about "life" and human "progress," he could take neither the traditional western notion that mankind "regenerates" over time because it is further from some initial point of purity or a time when all knowledge was known to man, on the one hand, nor could he fully accept the optimistic position of Dewey that progress consists in the certain evolution of man. Cohen believed that human progress was cyclical.

Dewey wrote that "positive attainment, actual enrichment of meaning and powers opens new vistas and sets new tasks, creates new aims and stimulates new efforts," as part of the evolutionary process. And though failure is natural and "inevitable," progress is the "consequence of expansion, not of the failures of power, and when grasped and admitted it is a challenge to intelligence."[52]

Hollinger writes that

> by the early 1920's, when Dewey was still defending the "infinite perfectibility of man," Cohen had identified himself with the contrasting emphasis on the permanent limitations and iniquity of humankind: "Neither in love nor in work, neither in society nor in solitude, neither in the arts nor in the sciences will the world of actuality permit us to attain perfection," for we are powerless against the "ineradicable evil" that haunts our efforts. 53

Yet the position of these two naturalists, Dewey and Cohen, seems to be less different than Cohen thought. Hook wrote:

> Although in educational matters and psychological insights Cohen lagged far behind John Dewey, he would admit that Dewey's faith in the use of intelligence, and its imaginative projection to widen the circles of shared human experience, was the true faith of the liberal. But since he was loath to agree completely with anyone, he would declare that Dewey seemed to underplay, if not ignore, the darker sides of human nature. 54

If Dewey's philosophy can be called "optimistic," then perhaps Cohen's could be called "pessimistic." The title of the epilogue to Reason and Nature is titled "In Dispraise of Life, Experience and Reality." In it he begins by saying that

> In speaking of the new philosophic movement which began with the present century, William James remarked: "It lacks logical rigour, but it has the tang of life." It is strikingly significant . . . that this was intended and has generally been taken as praise of the new philosophy . . . Why . . . should the word life itself be a term of praise except to those who prefer the primitive and dislike intellectual effort? 55

The same difficulty Cohen had with an undefined term like "life" he experienced with the terms "experience" and "reality." For Cohen the aim of philosophy was not to capture life, but to lead to the "good life," a concept he also felt needed strict definition in order to have any meaning.

Cohen said:

> The use of the word experience without any ascertainable meaning is perhaps the outstanding scandal of recent philosophy . . . experience in [the] personal and ordinary sense is but an infinitesimal portion of what is going on in the world of time and space, and even a small part of what is going on in the world of ordinary human affiars . . . The absurdity of identifying the whole realm of nature with our little human

> experience of it is obscured in two ways -- to wit, (1) by confusing the nature of possible experience, and (2) by stretching the word experience until it excludes nothing and therefore includes no definite meaning. 56

As far as "reality" goes, Cohen said, "if terms that have no genuine negatives are to be condemned as devoid of significance, the word reality should head the list." Cohen continued by saying that the "honourific use of a non-discriminating term like reality undoubtedly tends to justify the introduction of the inept and the ugly, which certainly cannot be denied to have real existence."[57]

Cohen concludes by saying

> we cannot praise life without including in our praise moral and physical evil, corruption and death. As experience certainly includes error and illusion, we cannot praise it indiscriminately as a support of truth. Finally, as reality undoubtedly includes the useless and the ugly, its praise cannot but confuse the arts.
>
> Instead of life we want the good life. Instead of accepting experience science discriminates between the experience of truth and the experience of illusion. Not all reality, but only a reality free from ugliness and confusing incoherence is the aim of art. Conduct, science and art thus depend on rational discrimination. 58

that is, the scientific method used by Morris Cohen.

As a philosopher and as a Jew Cohen defended the idea that evil was really evil, not just a disguised species of good. Hollinger points out that

> the idealists had no monopoly on anti-Semitism, but they had several traits that undoubtedly prevented Cohen from fashioning a more complete solidarity with them. While officially cosmopolitan, American idealism was materially parochial: it was well understood by both its proponents and its critics to be a means of affirming the

> goodness and wholeness, not only of being in general, but of American society and the Christian religion in particular. Logically, it has always been possible for an atheist or revolutionary to accept [George] Berkeley's analysis of knowledge or Kant's transcendental method, but in social fact the American idealists were religionists and patriots. Santayana's now-cliched description of them as the embodiment, in philosophy, of the "genteel tradition" was largely sound as cultural analysis, however limited it may have been as a philosophical critique. Among their greatest achievements was the proof that evil did not exist; even Royce was not free from the felt need to prove that what appeared as evil was, in the final analysis, a species of good . . . The "job" done on evil . . . by the idealists had an absoluteness, a final completeness, that both attracted and repelled Cohen. Eager as he was to replace precariousness and sin with something good, safe, and permanent, he retained a sense that life's treachery was too endemic to be so fully eradicated. 59

For Cohen human history -- life -- "will continue to be full of tragic failures."[60] Paying "tribute" to his teacher Felix Adler, Cohen felt he had taken Adler's "assumptions as to history and evolution" and had expanded them to reach the conclusion that mankind can, but does not necessarily, learn from its "failures." The development of human history has been neither a line of progress nor a line of regress. It is a cycle of learning from, and forgetting, failures. Cohen wrote:

> History shows many cases of the defeat of good causes by brute power, [but] it also shows that good causes are more often defeated by negligence in the pursuit of the right than by the positive forces of evil; and while it is true that brute power can for a limited time crush the human spirit, history also shows that the spirit of truth has a superior vitality and thus truth, even though for a time crushed to earth, rises again. The Hellenic spirit has outlived the Roman conquest, and Napoleon could not permanently wipe out the ideal of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity. 61

Cohen's

> tragic view of history widens our sympathies and prevents us from becoming dull to the finer possibilities which wiser conduct or a different turn of events might have realized. Above all, it enables us to do our best in an actually imperfect world, and it warns us that in the language of Kant man is a crooked stick and that we cannot build a perfect kingdom of heaven on our own limited earth, it also provides us with the vision of an ideal which, even though not attainable at any one time, illumines the direction in which our efforts should be exerted if the history of the future is to be brighter than the history of the past. 62

Jews and Judaism

Cohen did not have a systematic definition of Judaism, but it is possible to piece together a picture of his view of Jews and Judaism just the same. Considering that Cohen was a "pluralist" in philosophy and in every other area of his interest, it is only natural that he would be a pluralist in his view of Jews and Judaism. In this context, being a pluralist meant that Cohen saw Jews as individuals, not as a homogeneous ethnic group. An example of this view is his correction of the "chivalric" assertion that "love of knowledge for its own sake is a characteristic of the Jews." To this Cohen simply points to contemporary and historical Jews and Jewish communities which were narrow and parochial. "It is important to remember," wrote Cohen, the pluralist, "that the Jews are a widely scattered people and that we should not create them all in our own image." 63

In writing an inaugural article for Jewish Social Studies in 1939, Cohen presented six interpretative modes of Jewish historiography. Cohen first describes an a-histor-

ical tendency within Jewish thought which does not recognize history, a tendency represented by the timeless philosophies held by Philo and others which he calls "Unhistorical Philosophies of LIfe." Then his Philosophies of Jewish History analyzes: the Orthodox Religion Interpretation; the Philosophy of History in Modern Judaism; the Political Interpretation; the Geographic Interpretation; the Economic Interpretation and the Cultural Interpretation.

In presenting the first interpretation Cohen is careful to point out that "there is a wide variation of beliefs even among those who call themselves Orthodox Jews,"[64] but for the purpose of discussion he identified a "main stream of tradition." He represents Orthodoxy as having an historical sense though he recognizes that it can also be viewed as "unhistorical." He separates three historical periods found in the Bible, the first being the "epic" of the Israelites as "chosen people" from creation until a unified monarchy, and the second period being one of prophetic literature. Yahweh is viewed differently in these two periods. The third period is concerned primarily with the "history of the cultus, especially the temple ritual."[65] This last "legal-religious phase of Biblical history dominated the thought of Pharisaism, from which the Orthodox Judaism of today directly stems."[66] "Talmudic Judaism," he wrote, "is centered around the Law, which existed even before creation and was given to Abraham [sic.] personally and to all the Jews through Moses on

Mt. Sinai."[67] The destruction of the commonwealth and other historical events are all less crucial than the "suspension of the temple service."[68] Subsequent history becomes a "long martyrology" of Jews who weren't permitted to observe their religion. "Rabbinic Judaism did produce some important historical documents such as Sherira's account of the schools in which the oral law was developed. Its main energy, however, has been devoted to legal and homiletic considerations, and the course of temporal events has been regarded as of little significance," Cohen writes.[69]

Cohen recognizes the problem inherent in "any religious philosophy of history" namely "the suffering of the faithful."[70] According to this view Yahweh punished people based on their sinning and behavior generally. In each generation it was necessary to explain why Yahweh was angry with His people. "The view that the misfortunes of the Jews are attributable to" sin on their part, says Cohen, "is still very much alive today. Not long ago I received a letter from a rabbi in which he pointed to the suffering of the German Jews since the advent of Hitler as God's punishment for the Reform movement and for the general 'assimilationist' tendencies of the German Jews." To this Cohen responds that "the view which regards all suffering as directly due to sin . . . involves too many difficulties to be universally accepted."[71]

Another position to explain the problem of God and the suffering of the righteous is the "view of vicarious

suffering, which," he wrote, "plays such an important role in Christianity and which forms an integral part of Reform Judaism's conception of the world-mission of Israel, [and] is a view which cannot be universally accepted so long as our ordinary disinclination to suffer for others or cherish those who wrong us asserts itself."[72] A third view of theodicy, "among Orthodox Jews, as among other religious people [is their] great reliance upon a different theory" -- in opposition to the idea of suffering being a trial of faith -- which says that "Human intelligence is too limited to grasp God's entire plan. Who are we to pass judgment on the whole cosmic drama? We must accept our fate and trust God. Logically the latter view would give us no interpretation of any specific event in history."[73] Cohen recognized that other explanations have been offered within Orthodoxy, but all rested on "the authority of revelation and tradition."[74]

Though the Orthodox conception according to Cohen provides hope to those who await "divine restoration" and "pride in being the favorite of God -- the only people to serve the one true God while all other peoples are sunk in the mud of ignorance and idolatry," it has certain drawbacks.

> Few of the Orthodox consider whether this pride is not a source of resentment on the part of other peoples, and whether it is justified in the forum of historical truth. Was the Greek and Roman worship of idols really so different from the respect of the Jews for the sacra of their own religion? The absence of statuary or graven

> images is an artistic loss. It reduces the number of religious symbols. But does it of itself prove a superior conception of God's righteousness in human history? 75

"Modern Judaism" Cohen defines as "the general movement to modify the old customs, ritual law, and the beliefs or dogmas on which they are based, to the end that they may be better adapted to the mental and material conditions of modern or western civilization."[76] Modern Judaism includes "Reform Judaism in Germany and the United States, the liberal Judaism of men like Israel Abrahams and Claude Montefiore in England, as well as the Haskalah."[77] Cohen prefers to view modern Judaism as "the consequence of the . . . industrial revolution" and not so much the outcome of the Haskalah or emancipation.[78] Reform and Liberal Judaism went beyond the Enlightenment by "accepting the modern idea of progress and evolutionary history" thereby breaking "with the dogma of the immutability of the Jewish Law -- or, at any rate, the ritual part of it."[79] Still, it is a "religious interpretation of history, maintaining that there is a divine direction for human affairs in which a special role or mission is assigned to the Jewish people."[80]

In his analysis of the modern religious view of history, Cohen presents a description of La Loi de Moise written in 1822 by the French Jew, Joseph Salvador. This essay is the first, Cohen says, which examines Jewish history "from the point of view of the French Revolution."[81] Cohen says that the significance of this essay was that it

traced a development of the ideas of "liberty, equality and fraternity" from the starting point of "mosaic legal institution." Salvador minimized the role of priests in Israel's history, so that instead of a theocracy, the commonwealth of the Israelites was described "as a government by law (nomocracy), which is the essence of what Spinoza called democracy, and Kant, a republic." "The history of Jewish persecution was thus attributed to the efforts of Christian clergy who fanned the flames of bigoted hatred because the Jews, in denying the dogmas of Christianity, were thus dangerous in arousing free thought."[82] After his analysis, Cohen adds that from the standpoint of history, essays like that of Salvador can "not be taken seriously." However, they did "raise ideas" which "stirred men's minds" and created an opening for breaking down "hostility of the liberal philosophies of the eighteenth century" to Judaism. These liberal philosophies were opposed to ritual and the immutability of the law in Judaism and religion generally. The essays mentioned above emphasized "that element in Judaism which nineteenth century Biblical scholarship served only to re-enforce, namely the role of the prophets . . . Reform Judaism adopted this interpretation of the role of the prophets in the history of Judaism."[83]

"When the theological elements in the Hebrew prophets and their references to miracles are interpreted as merely poetic discourse," Cohen wrote, " . . . the spirit of God . . . becomes simply the spirit present whenever men are moved

to heroic and philanthropic deeds. But Reform Judaism as a whole is much more theological. Indeed its most outstanding recent figures, Hermann Cohen and Claude Montefiore, have a much more intense conviction of a personal deity than many of those who put Orthodox ritual observances above theological doctrine."[84]

Cohen then traces an historiographical line of development from Nachman Krochmal (whom, despite his piety, Cohen calls a pioneer in modern Jewish history) to Leopold Zunz, and to Hermann Cohen, whom Morris Cohen shows to be a "universalist."[85] Cohen thinks that the claim of some liberals that all religions express the same truth, defeats the purpose of their religion because this universality obviates the Jews' world mission of spreading ethical monotheism. Though the universal truth in all religions is a noble idea, Cohen says that "in the court of critical history, little evidence has been presented as to whether the Jews, by clinging to their separateness, have actually been teaching mankind. If ethical monotheism were the gospel, has not Islam insisted on it for over thirteen centuries?"[86]

Against the accusation that Reform has taken too much of its conception from Protestant theologians, Cohen asserts that throughout history the Jews have been influenced in their thought by non-Jewish thinkers. But he criticizes Modern Judaism because it is "supposed to have revolted against Talmudic law" and yet claims continuity with Talmud and Bible. It relies too heavily on history, Cohen says. Cohen asks,

> How can we justify progressive departures from traditional faiths or practice and philosophy which has no support for Judaism but its history, on the assumption that a knowledge of the past will breed loyalty to it? With all their interest in ethical monotheism, men like Montefiore and Cohen have, in fact failed to develop any new support for the Jewish religion or for the claim that the Jews are in the possession of some supreme moral or religious wisdom to teach the world. Nor has progressive Judaism developed any rational criterion by which to judge which parts of the Torah may be disregarded as obsolete and for which parts we must be ready to suffer martyrdom. If the significance of the Sabbath is merely that of a day of rest and peace, why Saturday, rather than Sunday, and why not every fifth, rather than every seventh day? Thus Reform Judaism presents the spectacle of a progressively retreating army that has no natural fortification behind which it can take a definite stand. 87

The "Political Interpretation" turns out to be primarily a Zionist version of Jewish history. Political Zionists, Cohen believes, acting under the influence of western nationalism, see all of Jewish history revolving around Palestine (or the lack of a homeland). The "Geographic Interpretation" corresponds to a Religious Zionist version of Jewish history. Several different types of economic theory are included in what Cohen calls the "Economic Interpretation," the primary one being Marxist. For Cohen, an economic view of history is too limited, ignoring pertinent considerations which influence events.

Cohen's choice is the "Cultural Interpretation," in which the word "culture" is used in the sense used by Franz Boas as applied to the field of anthropology. Cohen rejected the "extreme" views he outlined in favor of this last version. He said that "nothing is really explained

if we rely on any one principle . . . certainly in dealing with human affairs, a pluralistic point of view must be adopted"[88] -- hence his acceptance of a position which would take into account all aspects of culture when looking at history, including psychological factors, religion, economics and political conditions.

Cohen's cultural-anthropological interpretation of Jewish history reflects Cohen's personal attitudes toward the Jewish people. Cohen's first principle is that though there is no agreement among Jews as to what is a Jew, "no one of us denies that there are Jews, that they are human beings, and that they therefore have rights and duties."[89] Cohen says that

> while the future is always uncertain, it seems highly improbable that the Jews will completely disappear in the near or even distant future. They will never be completely destroyed by any tyrant nor will they all be assimilated by instantaneous universal intermarriage with non-Jews and complete abandonment of all the customs, traditions, manners, feelings and attitudes which have characterized them for so long. 90

Assuming that the Jews will continue to exist, Jewish education, in Cohen's opinion, should be required to supplement secular American education in order to provide Jews, as a minority group, with self respect.[91] Traditional religious elements of Jewish education while "no longer so adequate for the regulation of our life,"[92] need to be retained because many Jews desire this, if not for themselves, "at least for their children"[93] -- but these must be framed in modern terms. New problems may not have any solutions in traditional religious terms so that

> we cannot ignore the fact that the Jews of today hold divided opinions on all aspects of religious experience. There is an enormously large variation in the respect people pay to the dietary laws and Sabbath observances. There are many Jews who have never entered a synagogus in their lives, and do not want their children to do so; and it will not do to protest against this indifference -- their attitude is conscious and deliberate. It would be futile as well as illiberal if we denied anyone the right to follow his convictions. 94

If that was not a clear enough statement of the right of the individual to his religious freedom, Cohen writes that

> if any effort is ever made to restrict the liberty of those who do not believe in conforming to traditional Jewish laws in regard to diet, the Sabbath or other respects, my sympathies as a liberal will naturally go to those whose rights to think freely and to act accordingly are thus attacked. I naturally respect those who honestly share the faith of my saintly parents and my Talmudic teachers. But though I have little missionary zeal to make others change their views I must follow and respect my own faith. Hence, when anyone says that those who have departed from orthodoxy are ignorant, fools, or immoral, my indignation is naturally aroused by the falsity and arrogance of it. It is fortunate indeed that such utterances are today [1936] relatively rare. But if liberalism declines we shall have to fight the battle for tolerance all over again.
>
> It is, therefore, not untimely to insist today that the fact that one is born a Jew involves no duty to believe in the mosaic cosmology, in the wisdom of the Jewish dietary laws, or even that the Hebrew prophets have solved, or said the last word concerning, our present social problems. 95

The cause for which Cohen did feel some "missionary zeal" was that of challenging supernaturalism. In an exchange of letters with a Christian minister reprinted

in Portrait of a Philosopher Cohen says unabashedly that supernaturalism in religion must be fought. Cohen said that

> the notion that belief in the supernatural is necessary in order to promote humane conditions seems to me entirely unwarranted . . . For people who do not believe in the supernatural . . . to pussyfoot the distinction between naturalism and its denial seems to me to be as morally corrupting as it is intellectually confusing. 96

As a pluralist Cohen did not want or expect unity among Jews on matters of religion. "Every once in a while," wrote Cohen, "someone discovers that Judaism is identical with some other moral or spiritual ism." "Unity," he said, "on matters of religious opinions is futile as a means and undesirable as well as unattainable as an end."[97]

Zionists who recognize that the Jews are not one religious "ism" try to unify the Jews around Palestine. They are right, in Cohen's view, that the Jews are a people, not a religion, but their nationalism is not the appropriate point for agreement for American Jews. Their advocacy of separating Jews from non-Jews is based on an "apologetic defense" of the Jews' right to exist as a distinct group in the face of hostility from non-Jews. But Cohen felt Jews did not

> need any justification for our existence, any more than we have a right to ask anyone to justify himself for not being born a Jew. . . While the Jewish, like any other, historic group, has a certain amount of social inheritance or continuity of tradition which it is foolish to ignore, that does not justify a policy of separating ourselves from our fellow citizens and building up a voluntary cultural ghetto. 98

Cohen did not fear assimilation. "Assimilation was not the cause of the tragedy of the German or the Polish Jews" caught in the Holocaust, he wrote. "Assimilation is the fruit of that liberalism which opened the gates of the Ghetto and enabled the Jews to enjoy their days of prosperity and to make their great contributions to the world's art, science and literature."[99] What happened in the Holocaust was a "frantic reaction against liberalism" and Cohen felt it was "cruel and insane to blame the German Jews for a general relapse of civilization."[100] Cohen asks if any modern Jews can seriously believe that assimilation can be avoided, noting that "the Jews have been an assimilated people throughout their history,"[101] borrowing languages and all other aspects of culture from other peoples.

> If we are really opposed to assimilation, we ought to talk Hebrew, dress the way our ancestors did, follow the old Palestinian occupations . . . I have no quarrel with anyone who wishes to do that. But if you do not believe that this is a practical road for the Jews of this country, then you cannot in candor and sanity speak with horror of assimilation. 102

At the same time, however, while assimilation "contains nothing to horrify a reasonable being, it is not a complete or immediate solution to our difficulties . . . In the end, of course, assimilation or destruction is inevitable. For no one can reasonably suppose that the present divisions of mankind will last forever."[103]

Jews, Cohen felt, should "participate fully in all America's cultural activities . . . We can make the most

effective contribution to civilization by being ourselves and not mere slavish copies" of other groups.[104] Cohen believed in Jewish education because "no human being can really lead a self-respecting life who is afraid to look at and understand himself."[105]

Though Cohen was convinced that only through common cause with liberals could the Jews or any group in American society safeguard freedom, he was "not at all certain that the liberalism of America will see us through."[106]

> We have been told that the tradition of America is liberalism, fair play, equality of opportunity for everybody. This is true in a limited sense. It is true that this is the philosophy which we have professed since the eighteenth century. It is not, however, true that all Americans are liberals. If you study history, you know that the eighteenth century philosophy is super-imposed upon an older philosophy, which isnot liberal at all. The native American, just like the native European, is rooted in his traditions and distrustful of cosmopolitan differences. He may have been brought up on the liberal ideology and he may repeat its phrases, but they may not have the meaning to him that they have to us. When the signers of the Declaration of Independence asserted that all men are equal and that government can rightly rest only on the consent of the governed, they did not mean to include Negro slaves. And so, many of our universities which claim to be liberal and non-denominational often mean that they are open to all kinds of Protestants. If we wish to understand the phrases that people use, we must study the deeper roots of their traditions. 107

Cohen had a love of America, despite the fact that he had been its "acidulous critic from the very first day he arrived," Hook says. Familiar with all kinds of discrimination, poverty and violence, "in a world made dark by the threat of totalitarian power,

he was impressed by the achievements, the progress, and above all, the promise of the American experience. He saw the future of liberal civilization bound up with America's survival and its ability to make use of the heritage of human rights formulated by Jefferson and Lincoln," Hook wrote.[108] In describing the obligation Cohen felt to America, Hook said:

> Without abating any of his criticisms of existing American shortcomings and evils, he saw them in proper proportion. America had given him and countless others a chance to make good that would have been denied them anywhere else. This was no invitation to complacency. The moral task was to give others a chance to make good too . . . Cohen was no nationalist; he knew that no one chooses the country in which he is born . . . yet . . . without the slightest tincture of chauvinism, he was an American patriot . . . Those who went beyond rational criticism and reform and denounced America, either from the standpoint of an impossibly perfectionist ideal or, more often, as defenders of the foreign policy of the Soviet Union, appeared to him to be violating the adage "not to spit from the waters from which one has drunk." Although he rarely made this explicit, he felt that those among his students, and in Jewish circles generally, who lapsed into this hostility . . . were morally insensitive in disregarding the special obligation that they, like himself, were under with respect to America. 109

Cohen was convinced that the only friend Jews "have in America today are the liberals, and if we should do anything to antagonize them by adopting an anti-liberal philosophy, we should certainly cut ourselves off from any possibility of having the cooperation of any part of the American public when we are in trouble. . . That is a real danger because our Jewish nationalists <u>are</u> adopting an anti-liberal philosophy."[110]

For Cohen, synagogues and philanthropy had their place in his vision of the proper "road for American Jewry," but sociologists, not religionists or philanthropists, were the people Cohen hoped Jews would call upon to help solve contemporary Jewish problems.[111]

Maimonides and Spinoza

Two figures were significant subjects for analysis by Cohen. Both could be viewed by him as precursors for his own position within the Jewish world.

Maimonides was more a hellenized scientist than a Jew, as far as Cohen was concerned. "We think of Maimonides as a Jew," Cohen wrote in his "Maimonides," found in Reflections of a Wondering Jew, "Undoubtedly he was, and very intensely so. Let us, however remember that he wrote his philosophic masterpiece [the Guide to the Perplexed] in Arabic. Not for Arabs, to be sure, for he used Hebrew letters, but for Jews who in thinking about philosophic problems would naturally think in the language of the learned, which in those days was Arabic."[112] Cohen mentions this as a sign of the historical reality of assimilation by Jews of language and ideas of other groups and also to show that beyond a simple defense of Judaism, a work like the Guide represented a noble attempt to rationalize the religion. Christian, Moslem and Jewish philosophers like Aquinas and certain Mutakalimun and Maimonides "were trying to eliminate irrationalities, superstition and other features repugnant to a scientific mind,"[113] he

wrote. Cohen admired the effort of Maimonides and others "to harmonize religion with philosophy . . . to make religious beliefs more rational, and therefore the religious system more humane."[114] But at the same time he felt that the cosmology of Maimonides limited the applicability of his medieval, a-historical philosophy to a particular phase of intellectual history. One lesson Cohen thought the work of Maimonides taught which had contemporary ramifications was that Maimonides made less distinction between enlightened Jews and enlightened non-Jews than between enlightened Jews and the Jewish masses.[115]

Cohen was careful to make no claims of being a particularly adroit Maimonidean scholar, but he felt much more comfortable in dealing with Spinoza. His interest was greater in Spinoza, whom he called the "philosopher-prophet of liberalism;" Spinoza is the first paradigmatic liberal figure presented in Cohen's Faith of a Liberal.

Cohen identified with no other historical figure to the same degree he did with Spinoza -- for Cohen Spinoza exemplified "the faith that the way to human salvation is through reason and enlightenment."[116] Here it is not the Ethics of Spinoza as much as the Theological-Political Treatise which appealed to Cohen, with its defense of the "doctrine of toleration" which Cohen said is the "touchstone" of liberalism.[117]

Still, Spinoza's philosophy did attract Cohen. Cohen wrote:

> It is true that Spinoza rejects the idea of an anthropomorphic God, who will respond to our flattering prayers, reward us for our unsuccessful efforts, and in general compensate us for the harshness of the natural order and the weaknesses of our reason. But such a conception of the deity is too much a product of human weakness to find support in any philosophy that has a vigorous sense of evidence. If, however, religion consists in humility (as a sense of infinite powers beyond our scope), charity or love (as a sense of mystic potency in our fellow human beings), and spirituality (as a sense of the limitations of all that is merely material, actual or even attainable), then no one was more deeply religious than Spinoza. 118

With this definition of religion, Cohen, who felt atheism was an extreme form of arrogance considering the extent of man's knowledge, can also be called a religionist.

Cohen also notes that

> it is true that Spinoza does not believe in the freedom of the will, in the sense of arbitrary or causeless volition. Such freedom would rob life of order and significant certainty. But Spinoza does believe in the possibility of attaining freedom from irrational passion, and in the conquest of our weaknesses by the very act of understanding them. 119

Needless to say, such an outlook, framed as Cohen has it, was close to Cohen's own position about the capacity of the human mind and reason.

In his article in the Menorah Journal on Spinoza called "The Intellectual Love of God," printed in 1925, as in book reviews and other articles, Cohen defended Spinoza from theistic absolutists, naturalists -- anyone who was willing to challenge the motives or judgment of the Dutch philosopher.[120]

It is likely that Cohen identified so strongly with Spinoza because, though accepted by the Jewish community,

Cohen proposed so many ideas which would put him outside what he considered to be normative Jewish life. An agnostic and vocal critic of theism and all forms of supernaturalism, an opponent of nationalism in its Jewish and general forms, an advocate of sociology as the method for dealing with Jewish problems traditionally left to religious institutions and philanthropy, a pluralist who did not fear assimilation, Cohen correctly identified many problems which still plague both Jewish and secular America. Perhaps it is true that in the realm of general philosophy his successors have surpassed him, which has been suggested, and that his work in that area has largely been forgotten.[121] If this is the case, it is a pity, for in Cohen's work there lies a justification of liberalism sorely needed today. In Jewish life, as in other areas of his concern, Cohen was a critic. At least in the area of Jewish affairs, many of Cohen's methods of dealing with, and attitudes toward, Jewish problems remain viable and worthy of consideration.

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64. Thomas Davidson, A History of Education, (Scribners, New York, 1900) p. v.

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66. Cohen, Dreamer's Journey, p. 103.

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77. Cohen, Dreamer's Journey, p. 121.

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90. Sidney Hook, "Morris Cohen--Fifty Years Later" (hereafter: "Fifty Years"), American Scholar, 45 (1976), pp. 426, 429.

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103. Originally appeared in Modern Monthly, April, 1934 and reprinted in Morris R. Cohen, The Faith of a Liberal, (Holt, New York, 1946).

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