**G.A. Cohen and the Limits of Analytical Marxism**

**Paul Blackledge**

In his book *If You’re an Egalitarian, How Come You’re So Rich?*, Jerry Cohen commented on his own intellectual trajectory that he had “moved from an economic point of view to a moral one, without ever occupying a political one”.[[1]](#footnote-1) This pithy epigraph illuminates not only the arc of his academic career but also a broader truth about analytical Marxism’s convergence with egalitarian liberalism.[[2]](#footnote-2) In this essay I’ll focus on the co-ordinates of this movement with a view to challenging the idea, widespread within the academy, that Cohen’s evolution specifically and analytical Marxism’s tendency towards egalitarian liberalism more generally, represent the most powerful, and most reasonable, Marxist response to the changed circumstances facing the left since the 1970s.

In part my argument is rooted in a simple exegetical difficulty with Cohen’s account of the changing focus of his work. His suggestion that he bypassed the political point of view is not simply an idiosyncratic position for a Marxist to take. Rather, it stands in sharp contradiction to the interpretation of Marxism implicit to Engels’s famous assertion that “Marx was above all else a revolutionist”. Engels’s claim is significant because it relates not merely to the personal idiosyncrasies of Marx’s biography, but more importantly to the profound contribution the two of them made in the 1840s towards transcending the antinomies of bourgeois thought.[[3]](#footnote-3) From the perspective of this revolution in philosophy, any attempt to unpick the economic and ethical points of view from the political point of view would do intense damage to, and mark a fundamental retreat from, the concept of “sensuous human activity, practice” as developed in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* of 1844, *The German Ideology* and the *Theses on Feuerbach*.

In what follows, I outline a critique of Cohen’s interpretation of Marxism with a view to suggesting a positive, ethico-political, alternative to it. I argue that Cohen did not correct but rather inverted the weaknesses with his theory of history when he moved to embrace the moral standpoint, and that this inversion repeated an earlier, similar, movement within the history of Marxism. In effect, he played both parts in a dramatic renewal of Bernstein’s Kantian critique of Kautsky’s materialism. And just as Lukács argued that Bernstein’s subjectivism and Kautsky’s fatalism represented two sides of the missing category of the totality, I argue that Cohen’s movement from the economic to the moral point of view represented not a shift from classical Marxism to morality but a movement between pre-Marxist categories. Indeed, whereas in Marx’s conception of human agency the ethical and the economic are best understood not as two distinct spheres but rather as moments alongside the political within a total conception of practice, the tendency to conflate Marx’s critique of the moral standpoint with nihilism is an unfortunate consequence of viewing this model of practice from a standpoint that Marx had decisively criticised.

**From the Economic to the Moral Point of View**

In the late 1960s and early 1970s an upturn in the class struggle underpinned a period of political and ideological creativity on the left. Unfortunately, this renaissance was relatively short-lived, and subsequent defeats suffered by the workers’ movement opened the door not only to neoliberalism but also to a corresponding retreat from Marxism amongst intellectuals.[[4]](#footnote-4) One manifestation of this retreat was what Alain Badiou refers to as the return from Marx (politics) to Kant (morality).[[5]](#footnote-5) It is hardly surprising that many on the left should have moved in the direction of increasingly abstract moral criticisms of capitalism – what Marx, borrowing from Fourier, called “impotence in action” - in a situation characterised by a growing sense of social injustice on the one hand alongside mounting pessimism about the prospects for a socialist transformation of society on the other.[[6]](#footnote-6) This process was given an added fillip by the failure of Althusser’s anti-humanist interpretation of Marxism to make adequate sense of the labour movement defeats that followed the upsurge of 1968.[[7]](#footnote-7) Althusser’s interpretation of Marx had gained a degree of hegemony on the left in the 1960s and 1970s, and its collapse helped frame the intellectual context in which the moral turn was justified by reference to the supposed failings of Marx’s claim that “[t]he history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles”.[[8]](#footnote-8) This model of agency was typically counterposed to, and found wanting by contrast with, moral theory’s focus on “the recognition of the subjective freedom of individuals”.[[9]](#footnote-9)

Analytical Marxism was in the van of this turn to ethics. Commenting on this tendency, Will Kymlicka argues that the widespread belief that Marxism died with the collapse of Soviet Communism is, at best, only partially true. For, alongside the demise of classical Marxism, the last two decades of the twentieth century saw something of a “rebirth of Marxist theorizing in the West” in the form of analytical Marxism. He follows Cohen’s suggestion that with the refutation of Marx’s claims about the inevitability of both the collapse of capitalism and the triumph of socialism through proletarian revolution, the classical Marxist attempt to provide a scientific account of the dynamic structure of capitalism was jettisoned in favour of a movement amongst a layer of socialist analytical philosophers to reshape Marxism as a normative political theory.[[10]](#footnote-10) There is a seemingly irreproachable logic to this trajectory: if Marx is understood through a positivist lens as perhaps the archetypical economic determinist and mechanical materialist whose scorn for moral theory’s engagement with the values that motivate individuals to action informed his embrace of a fatalistic conception of historical change, it makes sense for those socialists who came to reject his explanatory model as an inadequate account of human action would tend toward a reengagement with normative theory.

Nevertheless, it is more than a little ironic that analytical Marxism’s engagement with ethical theory was heralded by the publication of the most sophisticated argument for so-called “orthodox historical materialism”: Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History: A Defence* (1978). Cohen’s book was published at the moment when Althusser’s star had begun to wane on the academic left, and in many ways can be seen as playing a pivotal role in helping shift the centre of gravity of academic Marxism within the Anglophone world towards analytical Marxism.[[11]](#footnote-11) Indeed, Alan Carling points out that Cohen produced his sophisticated analytical interpretation of Marx’s theory of history just as Britain’s foremost Althusserians, Paul Hirst and Barry Hindess, announced their “utter despair at systematic social thought in general and Marxist theory in particular”.[[12]](#footnote-12) Consequently, as Althusser’s project appeared to run out of steam, an alternative conveniently emerged to challenge its hegemony on the academic left.[[13]](#footnote-13) Nevertheless the shift from a dominant Althusserian to analytical tone within Anglophone academic Marxism did not entail a simple intellectual break. For though analytical Marxists sought to reverse Althusser’s attempt to expunge ethical and moral concerns from Marxist theory, they accepted his “expulsion of Hegelian modes of thinking from Marxist theory”.[[14]](#footnote-14)

One important manifestation of this interpretation of Marx was registered only in passing in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*. Cohen suggested that it would be a mistake to conflate Marx’s method with one or other recent “anti-positivist” contribution to the philosophy of science because Marx “did not deviate” from “nineteenth century conceptions of science” and he was not wrong to do so.[[15]](#footnote-15) This is a very controversial claim that goes against the grain of most contemporary commentary on Marx’s method which locates him as a powerful precursor of the anti-positivist tradition that culminates in the work of modern critical realist philosophers of science such as Roy Bhaskar.[[16]](#footnote-16) As we shall see, critical realism points in the direction of a challenge to Cohen’s superficial positivist analysis of contemporary socio-historical trends. According to Bhaskar, reality should be understood as a stratified totality within which the laws governing higher strata emerge out of laws governing lower strata without being reducible to them. More importantly, because the empirical world is constituted through the interaction of a myriad of entities each with causal powers which may or may not be realised in specific circumstances, it cannot function as a transparent lens onto reality. This is because, though causal powers are immanent to things, they are realized within open systems. This means that they realise their potentials, contra Hume, not as constant conjunctures but as tendencies.[[17]](#footnote-17) Indeed, by contrast to positivism’s “shallow realism”, Bhaskar’s deep realism holds that social science should aim not to uncover constant conjunctures but should rather attempt to explain social processes through the retroductive inference of the explanatory powers of mechanisms within the world.[[18]](#footnote-18) This approach parallels Marx’s attempt to understand the world through a process of “rising from the abstract to the concrete”, and stands in sharp to contrast to Cohen’s positivist belief that, in the words of Jolyon Agar, “operating at the level of how things appear” is enough to understand the world.[[19]](#footnote-19) Indeed, Cohen explicitly reconstructed historical materialism as a positivist science in opposition to Marx’s claim that “all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence”.[[20]](#footnote-20)

To this end, in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History*, he famously sought to defend a version of historical materialism characterised by two key propositions. First, “the forces of production tend to develop throughout history (the development thesis),” and, second, “the nature of the production relations of a society is explained by the level of development of its productive forces (the primacy thesis)”.[[21]](#footnote-21) Cohen explained this relationship in a functionalist manner thus: “if it is the case that if an event of type E were to occur at t1, then it would bring about an event of type F at t2, then an event of type E occurs at t3”. This is a form of what he termed a “consequence law”, but one which, paralleling the situation of pre-Darwinian biology, is innocent of the mechanism through which the law might be explained.[[22]](#footnote-22)

Cohen did, though, point to an explanation for the salience of the development thesis: he assumed that in a situation of scarcity human agents find it rational to develop the forces of production over time. This is because “men are . . . somewhat rational”, they live in a “historical situation of ... scarcity”, and they “possess intelligence of a kind and degree which enables them to improve their situation”.[[23]](#footnote-23) Cohen’s interpretation of historical materialism thus involved an idiosyncratic defence of a type of political fatalism that was rooted in what Wright *et al.* call a “transhistorical” model of human rationality.[[24]](#footnote-24) Thus he claimed that “in so far as the course of history, and more particularly, the future socialist revolution are, for Marx, inevitable, they are inevitable not despite what men may do, but because of what men, being rational, as bound, predictably, to do”.[[25]](#footnote-25) Commenting on this argument, Alex Callinicos accurately observes that the inevitabilist structure of Cohen’s reinterpretation of historical materialism “is almost a *reductio*” of historical materialism.[[26]](#footnote-26)

In defence of his account of historical materialism, Cohen argued that he had been drawn to these conclusions through a desire to reconstruct Marx’s theory of history free from much of the “bullshit” characteristic of the kind of lazy Marxist theorising that hid beneath a veneer of (often Hegelian) impenetrability. This process was sparked sometime around 1966-7 when he delivered a paper to an academic audience including Isaac Levi. Levi first asked for clarification of a point made by Cohen, and then upon noticing Cohen’s discomfort ventured the following: “Look, I don’t mind a different way of doing things. I just want to know what the ground rules are.” Henceforth, Cohen claimed that, whenever he wrote, he tried to ask himself the laudable question “precisely what does *this* sentence contribute to the developing exposition or argument, and is it true”.[[27]](#footnote-27)

Somewhat later Cohen sought to differentiate his understanding of bullshit from Harry Frankfurt’s discussion of the same. Whereas Frankfurt focused on the “bullshit of ordinary life”, Cohen was more concerned with the “bullshit that appears in academic works”. The distinction between these two forms of bullshit is important and centres on the problem of intentionality: whereas Frankfurt’s bullshitter was actively bullshitting, the bullshit beliefs of Cohen’s academic bullshitter were usually sincerely held.[[28]](#footnote-28) This distinction is of profound consequence because the sincere bullshitter, unlike the insincere bullshitter, should normally be open to rational criticism and correction.

This conception of academia implied by this argument helps make sense of an aspect of Cohen’s work that might otherwise appear strange for a Marxist. Whereas Classical Marxist writers tended to address audiences of either or both workers or socialist activists,[[29]](#footnote-29) Cohen’s orientation was towards the academy. This is evident, for instance, in his comments on the structuralist and post-structuralist “bullshit” produced in France. He explained this phenomenon partly in terms of the difference between a unipolar Francophone culture centred on Paris, and a multipolar Anglophone culture based “in Oxford, in New York, in at least two Cambridges, in Los Angeles, in Berkely, in Sydney, and so on”.[[30]](#footnote-30)

Whatever else may be said about this orientation, it certainly served to cut Cohen adrift from Marxist theory as it evolved beyond these elite institutions (even as it was practiced elsewhere in the academy). Indeed, his dismissive approach was most apparent in his insistence that though there existed tendencies within Marxism that were neither analytical nor bullshit, “once such pre-analytical Marxism encounters analytical Marxism, then it must either become analytical or become bullshit”.[[31]](#footnote-31) More specifically, he claimed that because “there is no such thing as a dialectical form of reasoning that can challenge analytical reasoning” those Marxists who resisted “non-bullshit” analytical reasoning did so from a perspective that could best be described as a form of “irrational obscurantism”.[[32]](#footnote-32)

Callinicos rightly comments that Cohen’s “insufferably smug” use of the slogan “non-bullshit Marxism” to describe the analytical approach functions as a barrier to a creative dialogue between his work and non-analytical traditions within Marxism. Unfortunately, not only did Cohen rarely engage with non-analytical Marxist critics,[[33]](#footnote-33) but a similarly dismissive tendency underpins Kymlicka’s claim that the trajectory of especially Cohen’s analytical Marxism amounted to the most creative Marxist response to the (supposed) falsification of the precepts of classical Marxism. This interpretation simply ignores the power of, for instance, Michael Lebowitz’s argument that the “essential thrust” of analytical Marxism is not merely mistaken it is actually “anti-Marxist”.[[34]](#footnote-34)

Interestingly, far from exhibiting the kind of woolly thinking suggested by Cohen’s dismissive comments on “dialectical” and “holistic” thought, Lebowitz’s Hegelian Marxist critique of Cohen is actually commensurable with the latter’s preference for explanations of change in terms of “micro-constituents and micro-mechanisms”. Indeed, Lebowitz points out that Marx “never denied that real human beings are the only actors ... what he always stressed, however, is that they act within constraints”.[[35]](#footnote-35) Superficially at least this comment overlaps with the sentiments expressed in the crucial line from the poem with which Cohen opened his study of historical materialism: “it all depends on where you live and what you have to build with”. But, as Lebowitz suggests, the difference between dialectical and analytical approaches isn’t that one accepts whilst the other rejects individual agency. Rather it relates, in the first instance, to how profoundly they each register the historical constitution of these agents. Whereas the analytical approach tends to view change as issuing, in Cohen’s words, from pristine individuals with properties “possessed independently of the social form”, dialectical Marxists embrace a deeply historical conception of agency which recognises that a “private interest” is, as Marx insisted, “already a socially determined interest”.[[36]](#footnote-36) Thus it is that Marx’s theory of history is intended to relate to his broader theory of revolution through the light it shines on the concrete content and historicity of these socially determined interests.[[37]](#footnote-37)

That this is not how Cohen understood this relationship is apparent from an answer he gave in 1996 to a question about the trajectory of his research. When asked if the changing locus of his research reflected any doubts he might have about historical materialism, his answer was strangely equivocal. Rather than address the question directly, he merely suggested that a gulf separated his old and new research interests: “I just don’t think that [historical materialism] is terribly important, whereas I think that the normative questions are desperately important”.[[38]](#footnote-38) Clearly, the relationship between history and morality can only be understood in the terms implied in this sentence if we dismiss the socio-historical determination of human individuality. Marx thought otherwise, and in his more concrete musings on the subject Cohen showed that he was not unaware of the deeply historical constitution of individual rationality. Unfortunately, his theory didn’t rise to the level of these practical insights. So while he noted the relationship between his own upbringing and education and his deeply held beliefs, he no more than gestured to the “disturbing” consequences that this insight might have for his transhistorical conception of human rationality.[[39]](#footnote-39)

This unfortunate theoretical lacuna has problematic consequences beyond Cohen’s conception of individual rationality: because humans change themselves through changing the world, transhistorical models of human nature tend to reify the context in which agents act as well as agency itself. This is why Moishe Postone is right to argue that Cohen’s materialism resembles the kind of approach “Marx had already criticized in the *Theses on Feuerbach* for not being able to grasp the subjective dimension of life and understand practice as socially constituting”.[[40]](#footnote-40) This is evident, for instance, in what has often taken to be one of analytical Marxism’s crowning achievements: John Roemer’s work on exploitation.[[41]](#footnote-41) Roemer’s aim in this work was to unpick what was defensible in the Marxist tradition, particularly its claims that capitalists exploit workers and that capitalism is unsustainable, from what he believed was the discredited notion of the labour theory of value.[[42]](#footnote-42) Accordingly, he insisted that “the classical concept of exploitation should . . . be abandoned, and replaced by a definition of exploitation phrased directly in terms of an unjust distribution of property in the means of production”.[[43]](#footnote-43) For his part, Cohen agreed with Roemer that the labour theory of value had been decisively refuted such that a sound model of exploitation must be freed from it.[[44]](#footnote-44)

The claim that the labour theory of value has been refuted can be traced back to an argument, first systematically presented by Ladislaus Bortkiewicz, that Marx’s attempt to transform values into prices was internally inconsistent.[[45]](#footnote-45) Though Bortkiewicz tried to show that, once corrected, Marx’s schema could be reprieved; Ian Steedman articulated the most complete positive alternative through his argument that the concept of value was unnecessary to the calculation of prices.[[46]](#footnote-46) These seemingly arcane points are of profound theoretical and political importance. For, as Lebowitz points out, in Steedman’s model capitalism tends to vanish as a specific object of enquiry. Indeed, by shifting the locus of exploitation from the process of production to the arena of circulation, Steedman’s neo-Ricardianism offered little by way of a mechanism to distinguish the exploitation of modern proletarians from the exploitation of producers in pre-capitalist societies.[[47]](#footnote-47) Similarly, Roemer’s attempt to reconstruct an account of exploitation on the micro-foundations of individual agency drew him away from Marx’s analysis of the specific capitalist form of exploitation towards a model in which “there is no distinction between a capitalist and a pre-capitalist relation”.[[48]](#footnote-48) Likewise, Cohen’s rejection of value theory led him to embrace of an “ahistorical account of exploitation”[[49]](#footnote-49) and a similarly ahistorical account of the theft of labour as “the central justice objection to capitalism.”[[50]](#footnote-50)

Interestingly, of those economists who defended Marx, Cohen’s critique focuses on the work of Ronald Meek. This is significant because Meek was amongst the most prominent of twentieth-century academic Marxists to conflate Marx’s value theory with Ricardo’s.[[51]](#footnote-51) This conflation is important because the supposed flaws with Marx’s method located by Bortkiewicz and Steedman can be resolved once these two conceptions of value are unpicked. Marx’s concept of abstract labour is fundamentally important to this task. Whereas Ricardo failed to explain how distinct and varied types of labour could be compared, Marx was able to solve this problem through his suggestion that labour had a dual character: it was both “concrete labour”-the specific act of working to produce useful things-and “abstract labour”-the process of value creation through the equalisation of concrete acts of labour under the discipline of competition.[[52]](#footnote-52) Unfortunately, by skirting over the discussion of value in the first chapter of Capital, Meek and other twentieth century Marxists effectively reduced Marx’s concept of abstract labour to (an agglomeration of simplified acts of) concrete labour. Steedman’s critique of Marx depends on this conflation, and consequently obscures that which the concept of abstract labour illuminates so well: the historically specific form of capitalist production.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Of course, if Bortkiewicz was right and Marx’s attempt to convert values into prices was inconsistent then the latter’s attempt to delineate the historical specificity of capitalism would have to be dropped. We need not do this, however, because Bortkiewicz erred in supposing that Marx assumed that the values of commodities as they were inputted into a reproduction cycle were equal to their values at the end of the cycle. Andrew Kliman contrasts this assumption about “simultaneous valuation” of input and output values with the claim that values change “temporally” through the process of production. He argues that whereas Marx’s reproduction schema cannot be made consistent with the former, they can be made consistent with the latter.[[54]](#footnote-54)

Though Kliman doesn’t attempt to prove the truth of value theory, he does show, contra Bortkiewicz, that it isn’t inconsistent. This is important both because Cohen’s dismissal of value theory assumed the validity of this criticism of Marx, and because the power of Marx’s anti-positivist method is nowhere better illuminated than through his concept of value. Cohen’s analysis of exploitation at the level of distribution was not only ahistorical, it also informed his conception of classes as mere agglomerations of individuals similarly related to the means of production.[[55]](#footnote-55) It is easy to imagine how, from this perspective, increasing occupational diversification could be interpreted as entailing the death of class politics. Because value theory, by contrast, focuses on the process of production it is able to frame these differences against a backdrop of emerging internal relations in the production process through which the working class is constituted as more than the sum of its (changing) parts.[[56]](#footnote-56)

More importantly, value theory is intended to reveal the general dynamic contours of social life.[[57]](#footnote-57) Specifically, the concept of value functions for Marx much like the concept of gravity in Newton’s system: it is a non-observable entity at the heart of reality that accounts for its dynamism.[[58]](#footnote-58) So, contra Cohen’s attempt to reduce the labour theory of value to a (flawed) way of understanding exploitation, for Marx’s value theory “is not an aspect of the analysis of capitalism, but the theoretical core from which all other analysis unfolds.” It consequently acts as “the key to unlocking the inner nature of capitalism.” Indeed, value theory illuminates the class relations at the core of capitalism and thus capitalism’s essence as a system of class struggle.[[59]](#footnote-59) Without something like this conception of capitalism, the orthodox comments on class agency made by Cohen in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* are at best contingent: there is no good reason, as Debra Satz points out, why other non-class agents could not serve as the vehicles of social transformation.[[60]](#footnote-60)

The theory of value explains tendencies within capitalism – to the ageing of the system and to crisis and class struggle. It neither predicts constant conjectures nor does it imply the kind of “inevitabilitarian claims” about capitalism and its revolutionary overthrow that Cohen in his positivist misreading of Marx argued has been refuted by history.[[61]](#footnote-61) According to Cohen, Marxists used to believe, on the basis of claims about the rise of the organised working class and the development of the productive forces, that material equality was both “historically inevitable and morally right.” These predictions had, or so Cohen claimed, been “shredded” by history: the proletariat was “ultimately reduced and divided by the increasing technical sophistication of the capitalist production process” while “the development of the productive forces now runs up against a resource barrier”.[[62]](#footnote-62)

If Cohen’s suggestion that Marx was a promethean thinker cannot withstand critical scrutiny,[[63]](#footnote-63) his comments on class are equally problematic. He claimed that, for Marx, the proletariat “constituted the majority of society”, “produced the wealth of society”, “were the exploited people in society”, and “were the most needy people in society”. Consequently, they “could and would transform society” because they had nothing to lose in a revolution. Unfortunately, he suggested, though there are today groups of people who fit into one or other of other of these categories, because there is none that fits them all, there is none that can play the role previously ascribed by Marx to the proletariat. Socialists “must therefore settle for a less dramatic scenario” of social transformation than that envisaged by Marx, and “they must engage in more moral advocacy than used to be fashionable”.[[64]](#footnote-64)

As Callinicos points out, Cohen’s analysis of class “does not begin to rise to the level demanded by the subject matter”. And insofar as Cohen engaged with Marx’s account of social class he was simply wrong: Marx did not argue that the proletariat was the majority in society; neither did he believe it to be the only exploited wealth producer; and he did not believe that it was the neediest group in society.[[65]](#footnote-65) More generally, no serious Marxist has suggested that there have been no important changes to the class structure attendant to the rise of neoliberal capitalism.[[66]](#footnote-66) From a Marxist point of view, the most important question is not have there been changes, but rather have these changes transformed the essence of capitalist class relations such as to fatally undermine the Marxist wager on the proletariat. By denying the difference between appearance and essence, Cohen’s positivism informed his conflation of these two issues and thus his embrace, in the 1980s, of the “common sense” conclusion that class politics was in terminal decline.[[67]](#footnote-67) Indeed, his positivism not only informed a superficial and unduly pessimistic reading of contemporary socio-political trends, it also informed his dismissal of alternative attempts to come to terms with the defeats suffered by the workers” movement in the 1970s and 1980s. Thus it was that Cohen’s approach resonated with the zeitgeist because it spoke to the profound setbacks experienced by organised labour since the 1970s.

Indeed, Cohen largely ignored the rich and powerful Marxist literature critical of this general perspective when he claimed that classical Marxism’s political project had been undermined by technological changes that meant “the class base of that movement is gone”.[[68]](#footnote-68) Amongst those classical Marxists to challenge this interpretation, Bill Dunn notes, in a systematic survey of the literature on the situation of workers in a number of key sectors of the world economy since the 1970s —automobiles, construction, semiconductors, and finance, that though certain social processes have increased tendencies toward the fragmentation and sectionalism of the working class over the last two or three decades, other processes have tended in the opposite direction. More to the point, Dunn argues that political conclusions cannot be read mechanically from either the old or the new patterns of class structure, and points out, against the simplistic view that changes in the labour process weakened the power of workers, that in the car industry for example, “decisive defeats for labour preceded substantial restructuring and may have provided the basis for it, rather than simply being its consequence”.[[69]](#footnote-69) More recently he has generalized this point to argue that transformations in the situation of labour over the last few decades “do not require new conceptualisations nor do political strategies have to be re-imagined from scratch”.[[70]](#footnote-70)

Dunn may or may not be justified in making these claims, but his argument has substance. Similarly, Marxist critics of the pessimism that infected the British left under Thatcher cannot easily be dismissed as bullshitting optimists. Cohen’s discussion of class has much in common with Eric Hobsbawm’s analysis of the “forward march of labour halted”, and like Hobsbawm’s thesis it is susceptible to the criticism that it posits a mechanical account of the link between changing patterns of class structure and the demise of socialism. Bob Looker, for instance, criticised Hobsbawm for underestimating the ways in which politics mediates the relationship between economics and consciousness, and in particular for ignoring the way that the politics of Labourism helped undermine the labour movement. In fact, Looker argued that Thatcher’s victories over the working class had little to do with changing patterns of class structure but were only possible because the previous Labour government’s social contract “had sapped both shop floor organisation and economistic militancy”.[[71]](#footnote-71)

Like Hobsbawwm, Cohen’s inevitabilist interpretation of Marxism informed a tendency to bypass political accounts of the crisis of labour for a much more simplistic model of the economic roots of labour movement decline. This approach had important political implications. By ignoring the Labour Party’s role in his economistic interpretation of the defeats suffered by the working class, Cohen joined the chorus of “realistic” (Labourist) critics of Arthur Scargill’s “obsolescent” politics: indeed he claimed that in the modern world revolutionary politics would play into the hands of the capitalist class.[[72]](#footnote-72) It was against this background that he moved to embrace moral theory. This movement saw him criticise what he called Marx’s “*obstetric* conception of political practice” for reducing revolutionary politics to, as it were, an act of midwifery. He claimed that the corollary of Marx’s inevitabilism was a view of politics in which socialists failed to consider the “ideals” they aimed to realise because they conceived their role more prosaically as “deliver[ing] the form that develops *within* reality.” This approach, or so Cohen insisted, is fundamentally flawed because it takes no account of the fact that the inevitability of an outcome does not guarantee its desirability.[[73]](#footnote-73) It is not that Cohen believed Marx did not have moral beliefs, it is rather that he thought that Marx’s inevitabilist model of historical change helped ensure that these opinions were at best undeveloped: “Marx mistakenly thought that Marx did not believe that capitalism was unjust, because he was confused about justice”.[[74]](#footnote-74) It was to remedy this theoretical failing that Cohen moved to embrace normative theory.

**The Moral Point of View: Why Not Socialism?**

Commenting on Roemer’s attempt to unpick the concept of exploitation from Marx’s analysis of the labour process so as to explain it instead in terms of the “differential distribution of productive assets”, Lebowitz suggests that this movement opened the door to the claim that inequality is not unjust “if the original inequality in property endowment itself was not unjust”. The substantive point had been addressed by John Elster, who argued that exploitation has been typically judged unjust because historically it “has almost always had a thoroughly unclean causal origin, in violence, coercion, or unequal opportunities.” But, Lebowitz asks, “what if there was a “clean path” of original accumulation”?[[75]](#footnote-75) Prefiguring an answer to this question, Cohen argued that capitalism generates unjust inequalities even assuming an initially just distribution of resources. Against Robert Nozick’s argument that equality leads to the suppression of freedom, Cohen argued in *Self-Ownership, Freedom and Equality* that while it is conceivable that a conflict may exist between freedom and equality, “there is no conflict between equality and what the libertarian Right *calls* freedom,” and that in actual fact libertarian capitalism “erodes the liberty of a large class of people”.[[76]](#footnote-76)

This powerful engagement with normative theory couldn’t be further from the anti-moral sentiments Cohen grew up with as a youth within the international Stalinist movement. Cohen illuminated this attitude through a discussion of a conversation he had with his “uncle Norman” in 1964. He enquired of his uncle, who was then domiciled in Czechoslovakia as an editor of the Stalinist *World Marxist Review*, his opinion on the relationship of Marxism to morality, and was quite shocked by the response he elicited. Morality, Norman suggested, “is ideological eyewash; it has nothing to do with the struggle between capitalism and socialism”.[[77]](#footnote-77) Unfortunately, Cohen saw in this reply not the arid response of a Stalinist apparatchik, but a “faithful” rendering of the viewpoint of “classical Marxism”.[[78]](#footnote-78)

This dismissive attitude to morality is, of course, the flipside of the assumption that Marx and Engels were positivists. But Cohen’s claim that they criticised moral theory from the perspective of a “hard-headed historical and economic analysis” of a “stoutly factual character”[[79]](#footnote-79) flies in the face of their belief that the concept of practice illuminates the historical co-ordinates of the (capitalist) moment when facts and values were rent asunder while simultaneously transcending the opposition between the two. Thus it was, in the *Theses on Feuerbach*, Marx did not deny the ethical aspect of action but criticised modern moral theory for developing “the active side … abstractly”. This, he argued, was because modern moral theory (idealism) was articulated from the standpoint of civil society. Because this standpoint naturalises modern social relations and thus modern egoistic individualism it is unable to conceive modern humanity as a historical form. Consequently, it acts as a fundamental barrier to imagining life beyond this form of individualism except as an impotent and abstract imperative. So, like materialism, idealism is unable to grasp the full richness of “sensuous human activity, practice”. By contrast, Marx insists that the “new materialism” or “social humanity” he recognized from the perspective of the workers” movement was able to transcend the limits of these outlooks and provide a justifiable basis for the struggle for freedom against alienation.[[80]](#footnote-80)

Stalin’s bastardisation of Marxism into an incoherent combination of idealism (his own visionary leadership) and materialism (the automatic development of the forces of production) represented a fundamental retreat from this perspective back to the antinomies of bourgeois thought. Moreover, this movement reflected the way that his “Marxism”, which had become unhinged from the workers” movement by the early 1920s, had by the 1930s become simply a cynical justification for actions of the new ruling state-capitalist bureaucracy.[[81]](#footnote-81)

Cohen’s characterisation of his shift from defending Marx’s theory of history to articulating a socialist morality as a break with classical Marxism conflates this, Stalinist, social theory with Marxism.[[82]](#footnote-82) Indeed it was only through this conflation that he was able to present his (abstract) moral ideals not as an alternative to Marxism’s much more concrete ethical dimension but rather as a correction of its (failed) economic determinism. He suggested a political form to this abstract morality in “Back to socialist Basics” where he argued that though “socialist values” have lost what they once had – “mooring in capitalist social structures” - they should not be abandoned because the moral force of values such as community and equality “never depended on the social force supporting them that is now disappearing”.[[83]](#footnote-83)

Cohen’s most accessible outline of his moral case for socialism was presented in his posthumously published booklet *Why Not Socialism?.* In this essay, and through the medium of a discussion of what he took to be a reasonable account of a camping trip, Cohen argued for a socialist alternative to market capitalism that would appeal to “all people of good will”.[[84]](#footnote-84) At its core, this vision combined an egalitarian principle of justice with a principle of community.[[85]](#footnote-85) With regard to the former, Cohen differentiated his “socialist” egalitarian principle from both “bourgeois” and “left liberal” alternatives through his attempt to correct not only for status based and socially constructed restrictions to equality but also for inborn disadvantages.[[86]](#footnote-86) Clearly, although this approach is more radical than Rawls’s egalitarian liberalism, it can readily be described, as Cohen himself acknowledged, as a variant of left-Rawlsianism.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Despite these overlaps with Rawls, it is less clear that Cohen’s principle of community is as easily subsumed within the universe of egalitarian liberalism. For, by contrast with liberalism, his principle of community requires that “people care about and, where necessary and possible, care for, one another, and, too, care that they care about one another”.[[88]](#footnote-88) Elsewhere he describes this situation as being a “justificatory community” in which “there prevails a norm ... of comprehensive justification”.[[89]](#footnote-89) This argument functions as a corrective to weaknesses with Rawls’s “difference principle”, which, or so Cohen argued, undermines the radical egalitarian intentions of his work by justifying what are in effect acts of blackmail by the rich against the poor – “pay me more or I won’t work!”.

By focusing on the immoral consequences of market forces – “the motives of greed and fear are what the market brings to prominence” - Cohen intended his principles of equality and community to contribute towards a powerful leftist critique of Rawls’s egalitarianism.[[90]](#footnote-90) However, as he himself recognized, it is not self evident that these two principles actually cohere.[[91]](#footnote-91) Indeed, both Jeff Noonan and Norman Geras suggest, albeit from opposite perspectives, that they do not. Geras argues that socialism is best conceived through “just moral principles of equality of opportunity ... backed up by a suitable political framework of law and sanctions” rather than through “assumptions about wide-ranging fellow feeling or community” because the latter assumption is “not secure”.[[92]](#footnote-92) Elaborating on this point, he argues that though “generous propensities are indeed common and widespread ... they are also of restricted strength” because there are no good reasons for supposing that “communitarian-type sentiments of friendship ... could obtain across a very large society, much less the world”.[[93]](#footnote-93)

Alternatively, Noonan argues that Cohen’s principle of community is much more promising as a founding principle of socialism than is his principle of equality.[[94]](#footnote-94) This is because, as he argues, Cohen’s principle of equality focuses on what Marx rightly rejected as bourgeois “interpersonal comparisons relative to an abstract metric of equality”.[[95]](#footnote-95) The concept of community, by contrast, opens the door to a conception of humanity as an interconnected web of individuals who are able to flourish only “through cooperation and sharing of resources”.[[96]](#footnote-96) Insofar as it goes I think Noonan’s argument is more appealing than Geras’s. However, without something like what Geras calls a “communitarian-type sentiments of friendship” Noonan’s argument runs the risk of merely shifting the locus of the abstract moral criterion against which capitalism is to be found wanting. Unfortunately, the whole thrust of Cohen’s discussion of modern class relations leads him to deny the possibility that class struggle can underpin the emergence of such a community.[[97]](#footnote-97)

**Towards Revolutionary Ethics**

Similarly, because Noonan’s model of community doesn’t appear to be rooted in immanent tendencies within capitalism his argument reproduces what Raymond Geuss reminds us are the more general failings of the Kantian type approaches that dominate political philosophy. By starting from ideals about how people ought to act rather than the art or craft of how real historically and socially constructed individuals actually do act in the context of specific “social, economic, political etc., institutions” the moral approach operates as a retreat from an engagement with the power relations characteristic of real politics in a way that, in stark contrast to its averred intentions, is deeply ideological.[[98]](#footnote-98)

It was precisely against the “true socialist” variant on this model of politics that Marx and Engels first outlined their new worldview in the 1840s. Prefiguring Cohen’s socialism for “all people of good will”, the true socialists claimed their ideas were in the general human interest irrespective of class and other antagonisms. Max Stirner countered that, beneath the fine phrases, this socialism was but another form of repressive moralism. Marx and Engels replied to Stirner by distancing themselves from true socialism, claiming that neither the true socialists nor Stirner were able to grasp the richness of modern subjectivity. Solidarity wasn’t a transhistorical fact of human nature and nor was it an abstract ideal, but it was emerging as a need and desire amongst the “new fangled” working class.[[99]](#footnote-99) It was because of this link between ideals and desires, rather than some mythical nihilism, that Marx and Engels argued “communists do not preach morality” to workers.[[100]](#footnote-100) Marx was not confused about the place of moral ideals in his account of historical change; he simply assumed a distinction between abstract conceptions of morality which he rejected, and more concrete ethical claims which he, of course, made.[[101]](#footnote-101)

These ethical commitments were certainly not the incoherent flipside to an inevitabilist conception of social change. Rather, they were an essential ethical aspect of the rich model of subjectivity that was the corollary of the sublation of materialism and idealism that he and Engels had formulated in the 1840s. The fact that Marx didn’t make these arguments explicit does not mean that they aren’t implied in his work. Alasdair MacIntyre articulated one of the most powerful attempts to extend this approach in the context of New Left debates in the 1950s. He did this through his argument that the left should look for an ethical “theory which treats what emerges in history as providing us with a basis for our standards, without making the historical process morally sovereign or its progress automatic”.[[102]](#footnote-102) The possibility rather than inevitability of socialism, according to this model, is rooted in the specific capitalist form taken by the exploitation of what Marx calls the “collective labourer”.[[103]](#footnote-103) It is because solidarity in the struggle against capital is in the objective interests of these workers that community, of a very concrete sort, can be understood both as a need and potentially as a desire for proletarians.[[104]](#footnote-104)

This is not a mechanical claim, and it certainly doesn’t depend on the proletariat being an undivided whole. The working class is undoubtedly divided as Cohen points out. The problem with Cohen’s analysis is not that he is alive to divisions within the working class, but rather that he seems unaware that it has always been thus. There is nothing new about “increasing technical sophistication” and divisions within the working class are as old as the working class itself.[[105]](#footnote-105) The importance of value theory stems from its ability to express not only differences amongst the exploited but also the internal relations through which commonalities of interest exist across the collective labourer. The tension within working-class life between centrifugal and centripetal forces has always been mediated by activists against the background of the ebb and flow of the class struggle. In a context shaped by these struggles, revolutionary politics is best understood as a call to action based on an assessment of tendential potentialities. This open-ended political wager on the revolutionary potential of the proletariat[[106]](#footnote-106) is simultaneously historical and ethical character: because the possibility of socialism is historically grounded but not historically guaranteed it has to be fought for against organised forces fighting for other goals.[[107]](#footnote-107) More to the point, the ideal of freedom in this account is profoundly concrete – it is embedded in the collective struggles of the working class. This argument is an example of the anti-positivist way that Marx and “most of his insightful followers” have understood historical materialism.[[108]](#footnote-108)

Conceived thus, Marx’s critique of moralism is not the flipside of his supposed positivism, but rather emerges out of his recognition that abstract moral concepts cannot “substitute” for concrete political analyses of concrete situations.[[109]](#footnote-109) Similarly, Marx is best understood as an ethical thinker who is a stern critic of moralism, where ethical theory is understood to be socio-historical in character and concretely grounded while moral theory involves abstract imperatives to action. Marx’s criticisms of moralism, therefore, do not reflect a tendency in his work to dismiss purposeful human agency. On the contrary, they emerge out of his realisation that moral theory is unable to address people in their concrete particularity. In Marx’s view, the limitations of morality must be overcome alongside those of materialism in a concrete and complex sublation of these one-sided conceptions of agency.

Unfortunately, Second International Marxism retreated from this vision of agency towards a re-emergent mechanical materialism. For instance, Karl Kautsky, in a tone that prefigured Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* argued that “socialist production must, and will, come. Its victory will have become inevitable as soon as that of the proletariat has become inevitable”. It was against the palpable failings of arguments such as this that Eduard Bernstein similarly prefigured Cohen’s moral turn when he famously argued that socialists should re-engage with Kant.[[110]](#footnote-110)

This exchange set the backdrop against which Lenin and others powerfully renewed Marxism after 1914. The most philosophically sophisticated contribution to this debate was made by Georg Lukács who claimed that rather than overcoming Second International fatalism, Bernstein’s embrace of Kantianism was merely its flipside: it “is the subjective side of the missing category of totality”.[[111]](#footnote-111) Similarly, Lenin attempted to transcend Second International dualism by going back to Hegel. This process informed his renewal of the idea of real sensuous activity through his argument that “the activity of man, who has made an objective picture of the world for himself, changes external actuality, abolishes its determinates (= alters some sides or other, qualities of it), thus removes from it the features of semblance, externality and nullity, and makes it as being in and for itself (=objectively true)”.[[112]](#footnote-112) Commenting on Lenin’s notebooks on Hegel, Stathis Kouvelakis points out that it is “particularly significant that Lenin ended the section on ‘philosophical materialism’ with a reference to the notion of ‘revolutionary practical activity’”. For Lenin understood that subjective practical activity lay at the centre of the “objective” world. He consequently insisted that social scientific laws should not be “fetishised” as things distinct from conscious human activity but instead be recognised as necessarily “narrow, incomplete, [and] approximate” attempts to frame political intervention.[[113]](#footnote-113) So, whereas Second International theorists had interpreted Hegel’s claim that to act freely meant to act in accordance with necessity in a reductive manner, for Lenin, as Richard Day argues, “man’s consciousness not only reflects the objective world but creates it”.[[114]](#footnote-114) Similarly, Callinicos points out that it was because Lenin was unsure about the future that he acted with the intention of influencing the course of history: his activism was rooted in his belief that “the very unpredictability of history requires that we intervene to help shape it”.[[115]](#footnote-115) This form of practice assumed a guiding ideal, but not of the abstract kind imagined by Cohen. As Ernst Bloch argued, Marx’s claim that the working-class has no ideals to realise should not be understood mechanically as suggesting that Marxists have no vision of a better future, but that its ideals are “tendentially concrete goals” rather than “abstractly introduced goals”.[[116]](#footnote-116) So, whereas Kant’s categorical imperative “lacks all real practice”, Marx “cultivates not a general and abstract but an *addressed* humanity”.[[117]](#footnote-117) Specifically, Marx’s dialectical method points beyond Kant’s formalism by justifying his orientation towards the working class by reference to the socialist *potential* inherent in their revolt against even the most oppressive forms of capitalism.[[118]](#footnote-118) This is not a teleological view of history’s movement towards an inevitable conclusion. History doesn’t do anything. Rather it, in the words of Henri Lefebvre, “gives a direction to our view of the future, to our activities and our consciousness, it does not abolish them”.[[119]](#footnote-119)

**Conclusion**

The claim that Jerry Cohen’s work marked a rebirth of Marxism as a normative project in the context of its demise as a scientific project is fundamentally mistaken. Because Marx was not a positivist, to show that a positivist interpretation of his work has been refuted by history doesn’t prove anything very interesting. Cohen’s attempt in *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* to develop a positivist “reconstruction” of historical materialism as an inevitabilist model of progressive social evolution, though theoretically sophisticated, left him ill placed to understand the defeats suffered by the workers’ movement from the 1970s except superficially as a refutation of Marx’s model of social change. His subsequent pessimism was reinforced by his analysis of the changing working class: divorced from Marx’s labour theory of value, he interpreted this process simplistically as the reduction and division rather than recomposition of the working class.[[120]](#footnote-120) If he understood this as the falsification of classical Marxism, he responded to it by flipping from pre-Marxist materialism to pre-Marxist idealism: he reorientated his research from a focus on economics and history towards a commitment to normative theory.

Unfortunately, his contribution to normative theory merely inverted the limitations of his reconstruction of historical materialism. In both instances he deployed transhistorical categories - of human rationality on the one hand and of justice on the other - in ways that informed his reversion to pre-Marxist modes of thought – specifically to the crude materialism of his theory of history on the one side or to the abstract moralism of his later normative works on the other. Thus it was that he rehearsed variants of both Kautsky’s materialist and Bernstein’s idealist contributions to the famous revisionist debate. And like his famous precursors, in both Cohen’s economic and moral theories social processes were, as Sean Sayers points out, “lifeless, without any independent development or internal activity of their own”. Consequently, “[t]he dynamic of history comes from outside of history; and without external push, the social mechanism would grind to a halt”.[[121]](#footnote-121) So, just as his theory of history placed inevitabilist claims in the theoretical space where Marx had attempted to underpin a guide to action, his moral theory was equally abstract and empty. Indeed, this is the rational core of his claim to have “moved from an economic point of view to a moral one, without ever occupying a political one”.

Clearly Cohen contributed to strands of socialism associated with Kautsky on the one hand and Bernstein on the other. Equally clearly these were traditions that had been powerfully challenged by Lenin’s renewal of Marxism after 1914. Interestingly, Lenin famously wrote of Kautsky and his ilk that having not read Hegel, none of them had understood Marx.[[122]](#footnote-122) The same might be said of Cohen, whose unpolitical Marxism can be understood as the flipside of his rejection of Marx’s dialectical sublation of materialism and idealism.

This misunderstanding is perhaps best illustrated through Cohen’s critique of Marx’s obstetric metaphor. He framed this critique of this idea in terms of a crude opposition between materialism and idealism: Marx, or so he argued, rejected morality for a form of economic determinism and political fatalism. Cohen viewed his own trajectory towards moral theory as the most rational response to the failure of this project. This is certainly not how Marx perceived his standpoint. The obstetric metaphor was not meant to be understood literally – societies are not pregnant women, and social change is not like childbirth. However, Marx was right to point out that the only realistic alternatives to the status quo are those that grow within it. The obstetric metaphor is therefore best understood not as the medium through which Marx ditched moral theory for teleology but rather as his way of exploring the rich socio-historical content to the ethical form under capitalism. Marx’s theory of history was intended to explain the emergence of these novel forms of subjectivity with a view to illuminating the concrete content of freedom as it emerges as a historical possibility.[[123]](#footnote-123) Classical Marxism was thus simultaneously ethical, historical, economic, and political in character – it is much richer than Cohen’s positivist account suggests, and continues to be a dynamic and fertile theoretical and political project.[[124]](#footnote-124)

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1. Cohen 2000b, p.3 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Alongside Cohen himself, this tendency is associated most prominently with the works of John Elster, Andrew Levine, Philippe Van Parijs, Adam Przeworski, John Roemer, and Eric Olin Wright amongst others (Wright 1995, p.13; Bertram 2008, p.124; Cohen 2000a, pp.xviii-xix). For analytical Marxism’s convergence with egalitarian liberalism see Bertram 2008, p.137; Levine 2003, p.123; Roberts 1996, p.203. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Lukács 1971; Arthur 1985 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Harman 1988; Callinicos 1989b [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Badiou 2001, pp. 1-2; 4 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Lecourt 2001, p. 98; Bourg 2007 [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Callinicos 1982, Ch. 1; 1989b, p. 165; Eagleton 1996, p. 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Marx & Engels 1973, p. 67 [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Habermas 1987, p. 17; Wood 1995, pp. 30-35; Elliott 2006, p. xiii [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Kymlicka 2002, pp.167–8; Cohen 1995, p. 144; Mayer 1994, pp.20–22, 314–-316 [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Anderson 1983, p.24 [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Carling 1995, p.31 [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Levine 2003, pp.122–145 [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Callinicos 1989, p. 3; Wilde 1998, pp.4–5 [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Cohen 2000, p. 46 [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Sayer 1992; Collier 1994; Creaven 2000; Callinicos 2006 [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Collier 1994, pp.20-7; 61-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Bhaskar 1994, .30; Sayer 1992, p. 107; Collier 1994, p. 11 [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Marx 1973, p.101; Ager 2006, p.185 [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Marx 1981, p. 956; Cohen 2000, pp. 396; pp.411-414; Roberts 1996, p.68 [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Cohen 2000, p. 134 [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Cohen 2000a, pp. 260; 272; Roberts 1996, p. 73 [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Cohen 2000a, p.152 [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Wright et al. 1992, p.24 [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Cohen 2000a, p.147; 1988, p.55 [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Callinicos 2004, p.69. Terry Eagleton similarly comments on the thesis of Cohen’s *Karl Marx’s Theory of History* that “[r]arely has a wrongheaded idea been so magnificently championed” (Eagleton 2011, pp. 242-243). [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Cohen 2000a, p.xxii [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Cohen 2013, 96-8 [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Anderson 1976; Marcuse 1958 [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Cohen 2013, p.109 [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Cohen 2000a, p. xxvi [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Cohen 2000a, pp. xxiii-xxv [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Callinicos 2006, p.259. His angry response to Holstrum is the exception that proves the rule (Cohen 1983). [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Lebowitz 2009, pp.41; 61; cf Miller 1984, p. 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Cohen 2000a, pp.xvii; xxiii; Lebowitz 2009, p.252; cf Callinicos 2006, p.258 [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Cohen 2000a, pp. xxiv; 90; Lebowitz 2009, p.42 [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Blackledge 2006, Chapter 5 [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Cohen 1996, p.11 [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Cohen 2000b, p.18 [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Postone 1993, p. 320 [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Lebowitz 2009, p.49 [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Roberts 1996, p.157 [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Roemer 1986a, p. 6; 1986b, pp.262–263 [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Cohen 1988, pp.209-238 [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Kliman 2007, p.vix [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Steedman 1977 [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Rowthorn 1980, pp.14-47; Crompton & Gubbay 1977, p.31 [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Lebowitz 2009, p.56 [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Arthur 2002, p.49; Cohen 1988, p.209 [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Cohen 1995, p. 145 [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Banaji 1979, p.24; Weeks 1981, p.23 [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Saad-Filho, 2002, pp.26-29; Rubin, 1973, pp.131-158; Colletti, 1972, pp.82-92 [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Cohen 1988, p.225; 1983, p. 326 [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Kliman 2007, p. 34 [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. Cohen 2000a, p.76 [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. See, for instance, Doogan 2009 [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Sayer 1992, p. 131; Collier 1994, pp. 167; 172 [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Holmstrom, p. 300; Banaji 1979, p.19 [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Weeks 1981, pp.4; 6; 8; 191; cf Marx 1981, p.957; Lebowitz 2009, p.50 [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Satz 1989, p.409 [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Cohen 2000b, p.105; cf Miekle 1985 [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Cohen 2000b, pp.103-4; 114 [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Burkett 1999; Bellamy Foster 2000 [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Cohen 2000b, p. 107; Cohen 1995, pp.6; 9 [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Callinicos 2001, p. 175 [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Callinicos 2008, pp. 158ff [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Cohen 1995, p. 157 [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Cohen 2011, p.215 [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Dunn 2004, p.202 [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Dunn 2009, p.225 [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Hobsbawm 1981; Looker 1985, p. 245. For a survey of Marxist debates on Thatcherism see Blackledge 2002 [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Cohen 1995, p. 157. For a glimpse of Cohen’s fraught relationship with the Labour Party see Cohen 2000b, p.152. For a sense of how, despite repeatedly leaving the Labour Party, his politics remained resolutely, if critically, Labourist see Cohen 2011, Chapter 10. Contra Noonan, this did not mean that Cohen had abandoned his earlier revolutionary politics, for the Communist movement which had framed his youthful politics had been firmly reformist since the 1930s (Noonan 2012, p.124; cf Blackledge 2004, p.24). [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Cohen 2000b, pp.43; 50; 54; 75, 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Cohen 1983, p.444. Norman Geras famously expressed this contradiction thus: “Marx did think that capitalism was unjust but he did not think he thought so” (Geras 1989, p.245). [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Lebowitz 2009, pp.53; 59 [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. Cohen 1995, pp.36; 111 [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Cohen 2000b, p.101 [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. Cohen 2000b, p.102; 1995, p.133. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Cohen 2000b, pp.102 [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Mészáros 1986, p. 105 [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Though Cohen recognised that his reconstruction of historical materialism lent itself to Trotsky’s critique of the socialist pretentions of Stalinism (Cohen 2000a, p.394), he didn’t follow the logic of this argument to explore how the disjuncture between theory and reality profoundly distorted the Stalinist Marxism with which Cohen was raised. Indeed, because Cohen confused Marxism with Stalinism, his critique of Marx’s anti-moralism had him effectively tilting at windmills (On Stalin’s distortion of Marxism see Marcuse 1958, pp. 124; 121 and Harris 1968, p. 156). [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Cohen 2000b, p.103 [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Cohen 2011, p.215 [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Cohen 2009, pp.51; 10 [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Cohen 2009, p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Cohen 2009, p. 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Cohen 2008, p. 12 [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cohen 2009, pp. 34-5 [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. Cohen 2008, p. 43 [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. Cohen 2009, p. 40 [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. Cohen 2009, p. 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Geras 2013, p.234 [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. Geras 2013, pp. 237; 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. Noonan 2012, p. 132 [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Noonan 2012, p. 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Noonan 2012, p. 133 [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Cohen 2000b, p.43; 2011, p. 215 [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Geuss 2009, pp. 6-15; 90 [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. For an overview of Marx’s view see Blackledge 2012, pp. 78-82 [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. Marx and Engels 1976, p. 247 [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. Marx and Engels 1976, p. 468 [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. MacIntyre 2008, p.57. On MacIntyre’s relationship to Marxism see Blackledge 2012, pp.179-189 [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Marx 1976, Chapter 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. MacIntyre 2008, pp. 63-64 [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Samuel 1959, p. 44 [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Goldmann 1964, pp. 300-301 [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Barker 2001 [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. Miller 1984, pp. 7; 271ff [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Draper 1990, pp. 29; 31 [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Kautsky 1892; Bernstein 1996, pp. 91; 94-5; cf Blackledge 2012, pp. 107-114 [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Lukács 1971, p. 38 [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Lenin 1961b, pp. 217-218 [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Kouvelakis 2007, pp. 174; 186 [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Day quoted in Anderson 1995, p. 113 [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Callinicos 2007, p. 26 [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Bloch 1986, Vol. I, pp. 173; 199; cf Blackledge 2012, p.81 [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Bloch 1986, Vol II, p. 872; Vol III, p. 1357 [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. Bloch 1986, Vol II, p. 874; Vol III, p. 1357 [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Lefebvre 2009, p.152 [↑](#footnote-ref-119)
120. Terry Eagleton comments that “Class changes its composition all the time. But this does not mean that it vanishes without trace” (Eagleton 2011, p.162). [↑](#footnote-ref-120)
121. Sayers 1990, p.163 [↑](#footnote-ref-121)
122. Lenin 1961, p. 180 [↑](#footnote-ref-122)
123. MacIntyre 1967, p. 204 [↑](#footnote-ref-123)
124. See, for instance, the literature surveyed in Blackledge 2010 [↑](#footnote-ref-124)