

SOCIAL PHILOSOPHY

READING GUIDE #8

OWNERSHIP & EQUALITY

WHEN doing the reading for this class, there are the two basic kinds of information you need to understand:

1. What are the main points or conclusions that an author accepts with respect to a particular issue?
2. What are the reasons, important considerations, and evidence that lead the author to accept that conclusion?

For our purposes, *it is information of the second sort that will be our primary concern* since our most basic task is to *evaluate the reasons and evidence* that are offered to support accepting one possible position on an issue, rather than another.

READING

Cohen, G. A. (1995). Self-ownership, world-ownership, and equality. In *Self-ownership, freedom, and equality* (pp. 67–91). Cambridge University Press.

QUESTIONS

As you read, keep these questions in mind:

1. According to G. A. Cohen in section 1, what is self-ownership, why does it have a central role in Robert Nozick's theory,

and how does it shape the scope and nature of Nozick's conception of freedom?

2. At the end of chapter 1, what claim about self-ownership does Cohen want to justify in this chapter? After reading the entire chapter, what is Cohen's general strategy for doing this?
3. At the beginning of section 2, how does Cohen justify his claim that an account of "what constitutes a rightful original acquisition" (p. 72) is crucial to Nozick's defense of the legitimate transfer of private property on the market?
4. What role does a "proviso" play in the just or rightful acquisition of private property from the Lockean commons? How does Cohen characterize the different provisos from Nozick and Locke? (You will need to read the whole chapter to get the full scope of Cohen's interpretation.)
5. In section 3, Cohen presents his main arguments against Nozick's proviso. What are these arguments?
6. Section 4 contains a brief criticism of one of Nozick's crucial assumptions. What is this criticism, and how may it be understood as yet another argument against Nozick's proviso?
7. Having cast doubt on Nozick's proviso, Cohen then shows, in section 5, how this same doubt will now also apply to Nozick's defense of capitalism.

According to Cohen, how does Nozick justify our current capitalist system of private property and an open market? Why does this defense of capitalism seem to depend on something like Nozick's proviso? How does this defense then seem to have the exact same problems as Nozick's proviso?

8. Immediately after this critique of Nozick's defense of capitalism, Cohen make a much bolder claim that "it almost certainly follows that not only capitalism but every economic system will fail to satisfy a defensibly strong Lockean proviso" (p. 87).

What is Cohen's justification for this rather startling claim?

9. Finally, in section 6, Cohen claims "that private property and freedom are conceptually connected is an ideological illusion" (p. 89).

How is that justified?

To answer these questions you will have to reflect critically on what you have read and possibly re-read important passages.

Although I strongly suggest that you write out brief answers to these questions, you do not have to turn in written responses. You do, however, need to be prepared to speak intelligently about these issues at our next class meeting.