

6-1-2015

Remembering the Philosopher Ted Cohen (1939-2014)

Curtis L. Carter

Marquette University, curtis.carter@marquette.edu

Remembering The Philosopher Ted Cohen 1939-2014

My first, and on-going acquaintance with the American philosopher Ted Cohen has been thru the annual meetings of the American Society for Aesthetics. As far back as I can recall, Ted was a visible, active presence in the Annual Meetings of the ASA. At the ASA sessions where he presented his papers, attendees could count on there being no empty seats. His thoughts, fresh and original, were presented with great clarity and passion. His presidency of the ASA during 1997-1998 took place concurrent with the beginning of my tenure as Secretary-Treasurer of this Society. He also served as President of the American Philosophical Association 2006-2008.

I became curious when colleagues in ASA advised that Ted might be a difficult person to work with in his role as president. Nothing could have been further from the truth. He was in fact a thoughtful and very supportive president offering wise counsel. My experience, during Ted's presidency of the ASA was the beginning of our near twenty-year friendship. The pleasure of stimulating conversations on a variety of topics over leisurely dinners with Ted and his wife Andy Austin Cohen at the Annual Meetings of the Society: (Montreal, Reno, Washington...and for the last time San Diego in November 2113) always offered more than sufficient reason to attend these meetings.

Ted's scholarly contributions to the profession consisted of six books (as author, editor, and contributor), some 60 scholarly articles and book chapters on a wide variety of subjects in aesthetics and philosophy of language, visiting lecturer at multiple universities, and his role as professor of philosophy at the University of Chicago.

His books include *Metaphor: Thinking of Others: On the Talent for Metaphor* published by Princeton University Press, 2008 (author); *The Great Latke-Hammantash Debate*, (Contributor), University of Chicago Press, 2006; *Jokes: Philosophical Thought on Joking Matters* (author), University of Chicago Press, 1999; *Pursuit of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, (editor and contributor)}, Texas Tech University Press, 1992. And, *Essays on Kant* (Contributor, Edited with Paul Guyer} University of Chicago Press, 1982.

Ted is best known for his expertise especially on the Aesthetics of Jokes, Metaphor, and the philosophies of J. L. Austin and David Hume. A perusal of the list of his journal articles and guest lectures (See Cohen's CV University of Chicago Philosophy Department) will reveal a rich mine of additional topics approached from the perspective of analytic philosophy. Among these are: Hume's aesthetics, aesthetic judgment, the concept of taste, humor, stories, narrative, literature and morality, high and low art and audiences, art and sports, photography, film, television, and a host of other topics in aesthetics. Additionally, the list includes topics in philosophy of language such as speech acts.

In recognition of his talent as a writer of extraordinary clarity and force, Ted received the Pushcart XVI prize in 1991 for his essay, "There are No Ties at First Base." Ted's academic publications appeared in leading publications

in aesthetics and philosophy such as *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, *The Journal of Philosophy*, *Philosophical Review*, *Critical Inquiry*, *Philosophy and Literature*, *the Oxford Handbook of Aesthetics* among others. His approach to aesthetics acknowledged both the tradition of the fine arts and as well popular culture, which many aestheticians have neglected.

His lectures included Phi Beta Kappa Visiting Scholar 2000-2001 and multiple lectures at many universities and colleges throughout his career. Among these were invited lectures at Harvard, Stanford, Cornell, Northwestern, Oxford and a list extending well beyond.

For Ted, teaching was at the heart of his professional commitments at the University of Chicago where he served from 1967 to the time of his death March 14, 2014. Known as charismatic, passionate about his interests, and caring toward his students, Ted received the Quantreel Award for Excellence in Teaching in 1983. Throughout his teaching career, he offered an unusually rich variety of courses in aesthetics as well as in philosophy of language. The list of courses in aesthetics corresponds to the breadth of his intellectual curiosity and interests. Among the courses he offered were these: Aesthetics, History of Aesthetics, Contemporary Aesthetics, The Concept of Taste, Philosophy of Literature, Aesthetics and the Theory of Criticism, Stories, and Introduction to Music.

Ted received the B.A. degree from the University of Chicago in 1967 and the Ph. D. in philosophy at Harvard University in 1972. At Harvard he studied with prominent analytic philosophers including Willard Van Orman Quine and Stanley Cavell.

Beyond his interests as a philosopher and a writer, Ted's life embraced a wide variety of enrichments. His mastery in recounting jokes was seldom challenged. Ted was married to courtroom artist for television Andy Austin Cohen for the past 20 years. He enjoyed serving as the long time popular moderator of the annual Latke (potato pancake)-Hamantash (triangular poppy seed or fruit filled cakes) debates. The debates concerned the relative merits of these Jewish holiday delicacies. He was also at home performing as a drummer or an actor in annual satirical reviews. An avid White Sox baseball fan, he also found enjoyment in "cowboy pool" games at the Quadrangle Club on the University of Chicago campus.

Ted's grandfather emigrated from Russia as a young man. The family settled in in the heart of the Midwest in the small town of Hume, Illinois where he lived as a youth. His burial remains were returned to this site, which he often reflected on with appreciation.

Curtis L. Carter

Past President International Association for Aesthetics

Professor of Aesthetics Marquette University