THE LEGACIES OF RICHARD POPKIN

Edited by

JEREMY D. POPKIN
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CONTRIBUTORS

**Brian Copenhaver**, the Udvar-Hazy Professor of Philosophy and History at UCLA, first met Richard Popkin in Avranches in 1981, where he studied French cuisine and scepticism with Popkin. Copenhaver is now working on Lorenzo Valla, Giovanni Pico della Mirandola, Cabala in the Renaissance and post-Kantian philosophy in Italy.

**Allison P. Coudert** holds the Paul and Marie Castelfranco Chair in Religious Studies at the University of California at Davis. Her publications include *The Impact of the Kabbalah in the Seventeenth Century: The Life and Thought of Francis Mercury van Helmont* (Leiden & New York: E.J. Brill, 1999) and *Leibniz and the Kabbalah* (Dordrecht & Boston, MA: Kluwer, 1995). She first met Popkin around 1981 or 1982 when she was an independent scholar at the Clark Library and had the temerity to slip him two articles about Francis Mercury van Helmont.

**James E. Force**, professor of philosophy at the University of Kentucky, is the author of *William Whiston, Honest Newtonian* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 2002) and of numerous publications on David Hume, Isaac Newton, and the intersection of science and religion in the early modern period. Force first met Popkin in the office of the *Journal of the History of Philosophy* in the Humanities Library at the University of California, San Diego, in the late summer of 1972. Force had just returned from the Gulf of Tonkin and was in his first week as an Editorial Assistant for the JHP. Popkin had just returned from New York. Popkin burst into the JHP office in a rumpled suit, wearing a huge McGovern button, looking for the Oreo cookies that were hidden in one of the office’s file cabinets.

**Matt Goldish** is Samuel M. and Esther Melton Professor of Jewish History and Director of the Melton Center for Jewish Studies at The Ohio State University. His publications include *Judaism in the Theology of Sir Isaac Newton* (1998); *The Sabbatean Prophets* (2003); and *Jewish Questions: Responsa on Sephardic Life in the Early Modern Period* (2008). He first met Dick Popkin in a UCLA seminar on Spinoza around 1985.
Sarah Hutton holds a Chair at Aberystwyth University and is director of the International Archives of the History of Ideas. Her publications include *Anne Conway. A Woman Philosopher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), *Platonism at the Origins of Modernity*, co-edited with Douglas Hedley (Springer, 2008) and *Women, Science and Medicine 1550–1700*, co-edited with Lynette Hunter (Sutton 1997). She has also edited Ralph Cudworth’s *Treatise Concerning Eternal and Immutable Morality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). She first saw Popkin when she was a student at the Warburg Institute which he visited, from time to time, at the invitation of his friend, Charles Schmitt. They first really became acquainted at a conference on Spinoza held in Amsterdam, where they discovered that, Spinoza apart, they shared an interest in the kind of historical characters that other people found strange and deemed irrelevant.


David S. Katz is Director of the Fred W. Lessing Institute for European History and Civilization at Tel Aviv University, Israel. He co-edited two of Popkin’s Festschrift volumes, and with Richard Popkin, he co-authored *Messianic Revolution: Radical Religious Politics to the End of the Second Millennium* (New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1999). His first sight of Richard Popkin was in the law school cafeteria at Tel Aviv University in early 1980, when he saw a large man with a beard drop a tray full of food in front of a crowd of students. Israel being Israel, no one paid the slightest bit of attention. Later on in the day, a proper introduction took place at the History Department. In order to spare his blushes, he never mentioned the story about the tray to Popkin.

José R. Maia Neto is Associate Professor at the Universidade Federal de Minas Gerais, Belo Horizonte, Brazil. He is the author of Machado de Assis, the Brazilian Pyrrhonian (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 1994), The Christianization of Pyrrhonism (Dordrecht: Kluwer, 1995) and co-editor with Richard H. Popkin of Skepticism: An Anthology (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2007). He first met Richard Popkin in 1988 in Saint Louis, Missouri, when he arrived to begin his graduate study at Washington University. He was impressed that Popkin and his wife Julie invited him for a dinner in a very nice restaurant to discuss his thesis project and other issues.


Gianni Paganini is Professor of the History of Philosophy at University of Piedmont (Italy). His most recent books are Les philosophies clandestines à l’âge classique (Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, 2005); The Return of Scepticism (Boston, MA, London & Dordrecht: Kluwer, 2003); Skepsis. Le débat des modernes sur le scepticisme (Paris, Vrin, forthcoming); Thomas Hobbes, De motu, loco et tempore (Turin, UTET, forthcoming). He corresponded with Dick starting in 1984, when Popkin reviewed his edition of Theophrastus redivivus, but first met him in 1989 at University of Milan, where he gave a lecture.

Peter K. J. Park is Assistant Professor of Historical Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas. He teaches early modern European history and the comparative history of philosophy. He met Richard and Juliet Popkin in 1999, while he was a graduate student at UCLA.

Knox Peden is a doctoral candidate in the Department of History at UC Berkeley, where he is preparing a dissertation on the conflict between Spinozism and phenomenology in twentieth-century French thought. He met Popkin in the spring of 2005 when he responded to Popkin’s advertisement for a research assistant. Thus began a lively conversation that would last for several short, but intense months, covering subjects ranging from Isaac Troki to Spinoza to Knox’s audition for “Jeopardy!” Popkin was ultimately delighted that Knox’s audition was unsuccessful because in his view fame and riches have a tendency to spoil academics.

Jeremy D. Popkin is T. Marshall Hahn, Jr., professor of history at the University of Kentucky. He has published a number of books on the history of the French and Haitian Revolutions and on autobiographical writing.
He first met Richard Popkin in the newborn ward of the University of Iowa hospital on 19 December 1948.

David B. Ruderman is the Joseph Meyerhoff Professor of Modern Jewish History and Ella Darivoff Director of the Center for Advanced Judaic Studies University of Pennsylvania. His most recent book is Connecting the Covenants: Judaism and the Search for Christian Identity in Eighteenth-Century England (Philadelphia, University of Penn, 2007). He first met Richard Popkin in about 1975 when he was visiting his friend, Leonora Cohen Rosenfeld, at the University of Maryland, and Popkin called to set up a meeting.

Avrum Stroll is Research Professor of Philosophy at the University of California, San Diego, and the author of numerous books, including Surfaces (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988). He met Richard Popkin at a West Coast American Philosophical Association meeting in 1952.
INTRODUCTION

By the time of his death on 14 April 2005, my father, Richard H. Popkin, had already received many tributes for his contributions to the history of philosophy, Jewish studies, and other fields. He had been honored with two volumes of essays and several academic conferences had been held about his work. The memorial conference held at the William Andrews Clark Memorial Library in Los Angeles on 10–12 June 2006, sponsored by the UCLA Center for Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Studies and its director, Peter Reill, showed that there was still something new to be said about the new directions in research he had continued to inspire until the very last days of his life. As his son and, later, as a fellow scholar, I had grown up listening to my father develop his ideas, and I thought I knew his areas of interest well, but the papers presented at the conference taught me many new things about his own research and the work it has inspired other scholars to undertake. As the program unfolded, all the contributors gained a new appreciation of the breadth of Richard Popkin’s interests, the number of fields he reshaped by his lifelong refusal to accept conventional scholarly wisdom, and his never-ending capacity to detect unsuspected connections between seemingly unrelated phenomena. Although each of the participants at the UCLA conference spoke about some particular aspect of my father and his intellectual legacy, the papers fit together into a larger whole: the portrait of a man whose scholarly curiosity never flagged, and who took as much interest in what others were discovering as in his own research.

Richard Popkin sketched out the main stages of his career in several autobiographical essays, and the many letters that he left to the Clark Library, as part of his donation of his scholarly papers, make it possible to follow the details of his intellectual development, as I have attempted to do in the essay, “In His Own Words: Richard H. Popkin’s Career in Philosophy,” which concludes this volume. His first great interest was in the role of the skeptical tradition (why he insisted on the spelling “scepticism” throughout his career remains a mystery). This was the subject of his first scholarly book, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes, originally published in 1960 and still in print, in a revised and expanded edition titled The History of
Scepticism from Savonarola to Bayle (2003) as I write this in 2008. He was proud of having shown the central role of the skeptical challenge in shaping the main lines of modern philosophy, but he never claimed to have written the definitive account of the subject. The contributions to this collection by Brian Copenhaver, Alison Coudert, Jose Maia Neto, and Gianni Paganini look at aspects of this subject that Popkin did not explore, and add to the picture he laid out; all of them show the continuing fruitfulness of the questions he raised. Sarah Hutton analyzes Popkin’s view of Spinoza, a figure who fascinated him although he was certainly not in the skeptical camp, and John Christian Laursen raises the question of why he paid so little attention to another classical philosophical tradition revived in the Renaissance, the school of cynicism.

The earliest versions of Popkin’s thesis about skepticism said little about the connections between religion and philosophy in the early modern era. It was a turning point in my father’s thinking, as he himself recognized, when he came to see the debates about religious certainty provoked by the Reformation as crucial to the development of philosophical thinking, a thesis laid out in the initial chapters of the History of Scepticism. In all his later work, Popkin paid great attention to the interplay between religious and philosophical issues. James E. Force’s paper on Newton and Martin Mulsow’s discussion of the thinkers who Popkin labelled “the third force” in seventeenth-century philosophy – writers who found in millenarian conviction a position between philosophical scepticism and dogmatism – explore some of the new directions that Popkin’s work in this area suggested.

As he was finishing the writing of The History of Scepticism in the late 1950s, my father began to develop a passion for a new subject: friends who had been in the habit of calling him Popkin Scepticus began to refer also to Popkin Judaicus. Never willing to invest the effort to learn Hebrew, he devoted himself instead to tracing the interactions between Jewish and Christian thinkers in the early modern period, and especially to exploring the impact of members of the Sephardic diaspora as they and their descendants dispersed throughout the European world. In their contributions to this volume, David Ruderman, Yosef Kaplan, David S. Katz and Matt Goldish look at the reasons for Popkin’s interest in this subject and the new perspectives he brought, both to the history of philosophy and to the field of Judaic studies.

Always open to new ideas, Popkin was nevertheless essentially a scholar of western European thought in the early modern period. Nevertheless, as the two papers by the young scholars who worked with him in the last years of his life, Peter Park and Knox Peden, show, he took an interest in issues going well beyond his own field of expertise, including Asian philosophy and twentieth-century intellectual developments. An often unrecognized aspect of his
influence was his co-authorship of several introductory books about philosophy, intended for general audiences and students. Avrum Stroll, his longtime collaborator on these projects, has added to the papers delivered at the 2006 conference a short account of this aspect of Popkin’s work, together with an appreciation of Popkin’s work as seen by a friend who was also a practitioner of the analytic approach to the subject that my father often criticized.

This volume is not meant to be the last word on my father’s work: with the donation of his scholarly papers to the Clark Library, it will be possible for others to study the development of his own ideas and to find hints that will allow them to go beyond what he accomplished in his own studies. We hope, however, that The Legacies of Richard Popkin will provide a permanent record of his many intellectual contributions. Some contributors to this volume have insisted on referring to my father as “Dick” because they also want their words to convey the personality of a warm and witty man who was never happier than when he was discussing scholarship with his friends. Like the other participants in this volume, I learned a great deal from discussions with my father, who introduced me to the world of the mind and the passion of history. To me, of course, Richard Popkin was not “Dick” but “Dad.”

Putting together this volume for publication in the International Archive of the History of Ideas, the monograph series he co-founded with Paul Dibon in the early 1960s, has been one small way of honoring his memory.

Jeremy D. Popkin