

## BOOK REVIEWS

Jamie Cohen-Cole, *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2014), pp. viii, 397, \$45 (hardcover). ISBN 978-0-226-09216-4.

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Readers of this journal will not be surprised that a book on open-mindedness in Cold War America has little to say about economics. In recent years, the profession has often been decried for its lack of openness towards the social world to the point that economists' postwar reticence to place their subject within the social sciences, which has long served as a sign of distinction, is now occasionally taken as one of the reasons for its isolation. In a sense, this book reflects the frequent uneasiness of historians of science with economics when it comes to writing about the post-Second World War era. Yet, the place of economics in *The Open Mind* also results from Jamie Cohen-Cole's own inclinations. In addition to his focus on cross-disciplinary research and teaching ventures in the postwar era—an orientation that is not necessarily conducive to considering economics—Cohen-Cole has a weakness for psychology, a discipline that has alternatively been associated with the natural and social sciences, but, unlike economics, demonstrated more tolerance towards methods, tools, and theories from other fields. There is nothing wrong with this weakness: though the significance of psychology in the postwar era is widely recognized among historians of psychology, some effort may be needed to convince historians of other social sciences of the centrality of that discipline in the American academy, and of its influence over the political, cultural, and social life of Cold War America. Cohen-Cole's effort is a success.

To the author, the concept of the open mind played an important role among Cold War intellectuals and policymakers, as illustrated by their belief that it helped social cohesion. It declined itself in three different modes: first, through its flexibility, tolerance, and broadness, the open-minded self offered an exemplary model of citizenship, upon which America could build a free and democratic society; second, as it endorsed the difference of viewpoints and encouraged boundary crossing in the sciences, the open-minded self provided the academy with a model for conducting research and more generally for entertaining a rich and productive intellectual life centered on conversation. Finally, the open mind was a model of human nature: it described those characteristics that one found in America and could hope to see elsewhere once the merits and benefits of human autonomy and creativity would have gained wider recognition.

The book is divided into four sections: “The American Mind,” “The Academic Mind,” “The Human Mind,” and “The Divided Mind.” The first two decades after the Second World War represent by far its most substantial part, but the decade of the war in Vietnam, covered mainly in Chapter Eight, is shown to be equally important, as its treatment offers another perspective on the ideational fragmentation affecting

American intellectual life, which Daniel Rodgers has nicely described in *Age of Fracture* (2011). The eight chapters are presented briefly at the end of the Introduction so that readers get a glimpse of the main contributions of the book. Yet, a number of lessons about the history of postwar social sciences can be distilled from a close reading of these chapters. Of special interest, first, are the considerations on the general education movement. As it concerns leading universities, researchers, and administrators, and took an important part in the training of students, it deserves special attention. Following the Second World War, there was a widespread concern over the nation's coherence as a political entity and a risk of fragmentation was thought to threaten social cohesion. Reflecting on education and amending curricula could offset some of these unfortunate developments. *General Education in a Free Society* (1945), produced at Harvard by a committee chaired by historian Paul H. Buck, served as convenient reference for debates over general education and propagated a vision of society in which citizens equipped to judge one another's expertise would not see their participation in political life impeded by the increasing specialization of knowledge. Chapter One will interest readers who feel that pedagogy is often neglected in comparison with research when it comes to writing the history of postwar social sciences.

The power of open-mindedness to shape Cold War political and social thought is discussed in Chapter Two, where creativity, as opposed to conformity, is described as the characteristic of the personality type that could enable American society to escape the risks of disunity. Striking the right balance between the maintenance of social and cultural unity and the promotion of autonomous selfhood was not an easy task even if the strategy of consigning the traits opposed to creativity to those who endorsed McCarthyism and racism proved politically successful. In showing how psychology—through its characterization of closed-mindedness—served as a means of pursuing centrist politics, this chapter offers another illustration of the way social scientists attempted to weigh in on politics in the postwar era. Just as economists who, in constructing an image of economics as a rigorous and apolitical discipline, made their views more acceptable among policymakers, psychologists framed authoritarianism so that it applied to the Right and the Left—an apolitical characterization that consolidated the scientific character of their analyses and made them especially helpful in marginalizing non-centrist political ideas.

The second section of the book, "The Academic Mind," deals with open-mindedness in the academy. It starts with a lively and instructive analysis of interdisciplinary ventures in postwar social sciences. Cohen-Cole points out that interdisciplinarity should be taken as an expression of specific values, which has the advantage of justifying its overwhelming presence by the permanence of these values in the two decades after the Second World War, whereas it is often accounted for in relation to the shortcomings of disciplinary specialization. Because leading social scientists valued their capacity to cross disciplinary boundaries, interdisciplinary work acquired a prestige and appeal that even increasing specialization could hardly weaken. The conviction that the best way to approach problems and obtain practical results was through a cross-disciplinary perspective was widespread among social scientists, administrators, and policymakers to the point that it significantly influenced institution building. Yet, it also served as a character trait: it helped make differences between types of person, with the interdisciplinary person regarded as more permeable than other types to different disciplinary traditions and more than willing to make his or her views understandable by people from other disciplines.

The ability of that type of person to learn from others and communicate effectively with them supported the belief that what was good for the academy was good for society. It may seem odd that social theorists who saw themselves as open-minded conflated the needs of their community with those of American society. One would have expected open-minded intellectuals to make a special effort not to inject their analysis of the social world in general into their view of the academy and to show more circumspection in proposing creativity as a solution to the problems of society as a whole. As Chapter Four shows, however, academic culture did not encourage such restraint; to the contrary. The link between increased disciplinary specialization and mounting social fragmentation may seem far-fetched at first, but the strong connections among academics, administrators, foundation officials, and policymakers, which were supported by continuing conversation, fostered the perception that fragmentation of knowledge created rather than solved the problems associated with the growing complexity of society and that creative interdisciplinary interactions could serve as a model for a cohesive society. Pondering Chapter Four, historians of economics will realize that most postwar economists were at odds with elite intellectuals: they endorsed disciplinary specialization and the belief in the invisible hand of the market dissuaded them from connecting social divisiveness to fragmentation of knowledge.

The book's third section (chapters Five through Seven) focuses on the way cognitive science participated in the propagation of the values attached to the open mind. Chapter Five ("Scientists as the Model of Human Nature") should interest historians of economics. It describes forms of reflexivity that those who are sensitized to the marked separation between expert and lay knowledge in economics may find puzzling. The kind of reflexivity, linking the scientist's self to the agents studied, is not something economists appreciated. It was more to their tastes to assume that the agents studied had the features of *homo economicus*—a rather idealized depiction of real agents, it should be said, but one that carries much weight in the models of economists and allows them—unlike psychologists—to clearly stand apart from their object of knowledge. Against the background of the debates between behaviorists and cognitive psychologists, Cohen-Cole offers a lively analysis of the way whereby the latter made the virtues encountered in salons and other venues for conversation—open-mindedness, flexibility, realisticness, interdisciplinarity, and creativity—the characteristics of normal human nature.

The following chapter describes in some detail the destiny of the Harvard's Center for Cognitive Studies (CCS), founded by Jerome Bruner and George Miller in 1960. Including people from a variety of disciplinary fields, CCS stands as a remarkable illustration of the way social scientists, their patrons, and university administrators thought of the conditions under which a satisfactory solution to problems of American society could be expected. In addition, CCS evidences one possible development of social and intellectual interactions within cross-disciplinary research groups: from an interdisciplinary culture in which researchers know about one another's work and exchange concepts, tools, and ideas to a multidisciplinary culture with researchers working in parallel but with little attention to one another's work. Not all cross-disciplinary institutions in the postwar era experienced such a development, but the example of CCS is interesting precisely because it denotes an approach to cross-disciplinary ventures that explores their varied historical forms rather than presupposes a model of cross-disciplinary exchange.

Chapter Seven details how "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), an elementary social studies curriculum organized by Bruner and based on cognitive scientific knowledge,

strove to make Americans more “human.” One of the chapter’s main merits is to shed light on a pedagogical enterprise when so little has been written on teaching in the history of cross-disciplinary ventures in postwar social sciences. The idea of MACOS was to make its students more human by promoting a scientific attitude among them with a view to transforming them into little social scientists. Students would be encouraged to think like interdisciplinary social scientists; that is, to accept the multiple disciplinary angles through which a subject could be approached and the variety of interpretations to which it was susceptible. In teaching students a form of “mental self-reliance” rather than truths derived from authority, MACOS encouraged a liberal sensibility that could provoke the ire of those who believe progressive education undermined American values.

The fourth section of the book, “The Divided Mind,” is composed of Chapter Eight and a brief concluding chapter. This time MACOS is considered through its conservative critics, who saw its most original features as a threat against the nation. The development of thinking skills and cognitive abilities, which many had held as necessary for the construction of a more liberal society, was now seen as undermining American values through brainwashing. The reaction of conservatives to MACOS and its cognitive-based approach to learning testifies that by the mid-1960s open-mindedness had become an element of divisiveness within American society. Those same virtues that were attached to the culture of open-mindedness and that conservatives connected with a liberal and secular, political project to destabilize American society were lauded by feminists and members of the Left as facilitating the critique of a society that often falls short of remedying sexual and racial inequalities. Though left-wing intellectuals valued open-mindedness, they failed to see it among advocates of the status quo and more specifically centrist policymakers and intellectuals who may have hoped for more gradual and rational social transformations. By the mid-1970s, the interchangeability of academics, citizens, and humans became untenable, as had the connections between political centrism and the social sciences.

To the extent that in the postwar era economists were more interested in building an image of independence and autonomy for the discipline than in cultivating the characteristics Cohen-Cole’s account attaches to the open mind, it may be wondered whether *The Open Mind* will not leave historians of economics with the feeling of having undertaken a journey through unfamiliar lands. Historians of economics may therefore ask themselves whether economics fit in the story at all. The fact is that Cohen-Cole ends his essay with a reference to behavioral economics, its inroads into the center of government, and its alignment with centrist politics. Economics may have followed a route different from that taken by other social sciences since the Second World War, but these different paths have crossed, providing good reason to try to connect the history of economics with the broader developments in American society discussed in this book.

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