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BOOK REVIEW

Cohen-Cole: The Open Mind

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Cohen-Cole, Jamie (2014) *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature*. Chicago, London: The University of Chicago Press.
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A recurrent narrative in scientific studies of the social and human sciences in the United States during the Cold War relies on the motif of an intellectual narrowing. The impending danger of nuclear war, it is argued, added further fuel to the attempts to move these branches into a sphere of scientific rigor comparable to those of the natural sciences. Thereby, a broad range of forms of knowledge production was deemed non-scientific and virtually excluded from the first lines of the research front. In some instances, this motif is even over-stretched to fit into a regression narrative that accuses the coeval scholars of being too preoccupied with following the bandwagon to realize the stupidity, flaws, and pitfalls of their own research. "Issues that could not be measured [by the Cold War behavioral scientist] were either ignored or trivialized in order to fit the paradigm," claims historian Ron Robin (2001: 7). His colleague Bruce Kuklick (2006: 14) diagnoses a "lack of complication in the imagination of [Cold War defense intellectuals]" with regard to theorizing Soviet behavior. Finally, Hamilton Cravens' claim that "social scientists [in this period] largely embraced a powerful nationalism along with an equally virile belief in scientific truth—in positivism, in other words" (Cravens 2012: 132), aims into the same direction.

While adding to the currently blossoming literature on Cold War social science, the book under review takes a different perspective than the one sketched above. It traces the history of open-mindedness, a notion central to Cold War political, scientific, and socio-cultural discourses. As a catchword, the open mind served as a crystallization point for the hopes of American liberals. Personality traits related to an open mind were autonomous thinking, creativity, and the use of reason in deciding.

In the context of the emerging bilateral opposition between the Soviet Union and the US, this notion clearly had a political dimension. The message was that societies, depending on the degree of freedom they offered their members, either damped or fostered the development of an open mind; that the Soviet Union were too illiberal to allow for open minds; and that the US should take measures to foster the development of open minds in order to prevail in the struggle of systems. By fostering the open-mindedness of the American people, liberal elites in the US hoped to achieve a society that was at once more liberal, more rational, and more prosperous.

The book follows the idea of the open mind through three inter-related discourses and explores these in consecutive parts. The first part (chapters 1 and 2) analyzes the concerns of educators seeking for means to increase the open-mindedness of students of various ages. This concern received support from a specific form of social scientific studies en vogue at that time: studies of national characters that used psychological (or psychoanalytical) techniques to explain cultural semantics. As an influential instance of this form of study, Cohen-Cole discusses *The Authoritarian Personality* (Adorno et al. 1950) and shows how the fears permeating this 1000-pages study match the liberal hopes attached to the open mind (pp. 40-54).

The book's second part turns to the "role" of the open mind in academic discourses. Chapter 3 convincingly argues that the coeval rise of interdisciplinarity as a "valued mode of research" (p. 8) or even a virtue (p. 68) can be explained by reference to the ideal of the open mind: it is a mind that is not restricted by seemingly artificial boundaries and is able to transcend them in search for truth. Based on virtues like interdisciplinarity, members of the academia were certain that they could come up with remedies against social fragmentation and disintegration. They were also convinced that their community itself, the organized communication it engendered, could function as a model for society at large. "Properly conducted and nurtured," Cohen-Cole concludes, "the community of leading intellectuals would heal rifts in the academy and would also provide the model for how modern society could be healed as well. They themselves and their community were what America needed" (p. 137).

The third part (chapters 5, 6, and 7) turns to the then-nascent field of cognitive science and investigates how this field propagated the virtues, both epistemic and social, of the open mind. After reconstructing the theoretical debates that led, according to Cohen-Cole, to an adoption of the virtues upheld by academic elite circles as basic human characteristics, the book describes the installation and early years of Harvard University's Center for Cognitive Studies (CCS). Founded in 1960 by Jerome Bruner and George Miller, the Center was a very important institutional home for this young branch of psychological research. Initially designed as a place for interdisciplinarity, around 1965 the center turned into a place where multidisciplinarity—various lines of disciplinary research on the same topic that run in parallel and are mutually informing—dominated. The driver of this transformation was specialization. While in the beginning, interdisciplinarity had allowed for trying various concepts and techniques available across the scientific fields, once the adequate tools had been selected, the need for interdisciplinary openness vanished. The decline of interest in the weekly seminar of the Center, once a highly appreciated element of the Center's culture and a place to discuss books from a wide spectrum of scholarly activity—among them Ernst Gombrich's *Art and Illusion*— indicates this. As evinced by personal reminiscences, the Center's younger members "now found the weekly seminars a time sink and superfluous to their own research activities" (p. 181). Yet, uninfluenced by this change of culture at the Center, Bruner had developed an elementary studies curriculum that embodied the virtues of the open mind. This curriculum, called "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), and its history are described in chapter 7.

In concluding, Cohen-Cole points out how the open mind later went on to become an important point of reference for social movements, among them the feminist movement. He argues that "what held together the political, the academic, and the scientific visions of open-mindedness was that these aspects were not defined through a set of abstract or logical descriptions but by reference to real people whose psychological profiles served as exemplars for the category". In striking contrast to those processes of rationalization that so heavily shaped other branches of Cold War culture (cf. Erickson et al. 2013), the discourses on the open mind upheld the humanistic intellectual and

scholar as a model for a good life. It is this balancing effect of Cohen-Coles book that has left a long-lasting impression on me and that makes it an important contribution to the history of the social sciences during the Cold War.

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