

BOOK REVIEW

Jamie Cohen-Cole. *The Open Mind: Cold War Politics and the Sciences of Human Nature.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014. ISBN: 9780226092164.

Jamie Cohen-Cole's *The Open Mind* offers a fresh, stimulating, and significant contribution to the history of the social and behavioral sciences, as well as to American intellectual history more broadly. His work leaves no doubt: the accounts of human nature developed by mid-century social scientists played a central role in the creation and maintenance of American political and intellectual culture in the early Cold War. At the center of these accounts of human nature was a concept Cohen-Cole terms the open mind, "a kind of mind characterized by autonomy, creativity, and the use of reason," as well as tolerance, acceptance of ambiguity, and the intellectual ability to discriminate among conflicting values and navigate across increasingly specialized expertises (1). The constellation of characteristics associated with the open mind emerged beginning in the 1940s, and until at least the mid-1960s, they powerfully shaped scholars' ideas of the self on three distinct registers. The open mind described the era's idealized scientific self and its idealized democratic citizen; it also became naturalized as a "universal model of human nature" (4) in the emerging field of cognitive science. An open mind was a healthy, rational, scientific, and democratic mind; the closed mind was an aberration.

Indeed, the ideas associated with the open mind grew in large part out of concern with its opposite. In the wake of World War II, intellectuals (and Americans more generally) worried about conformity, mass society, authoritarianism, and ethnocentrism. Psychologists developed personality scales to diagnose selves suffering from these qualities, which by the 1950s were equated with cognitive defects and irrationality. While the social psychologists, cognitive scientists, and allied intellectuals who generated accounts of the open mind packaged their ideas as descriptive and objective, not surprisingly, the characteristics associated with the open mind became "nearly invisible norms of American culture" (2). Cohen-Cole's account goes far beyond the obvious cases like *The Authoritarian Personality* to locate the articulation and embrace of the open mind in a surprising variety of venues. In Chapter 1, he examines how pedagogical experts led by Harvard's James Bryant Conant championed educational reforms that would train students to become virtuous, democratic citizens by imbuing them with the habits of the open mind. In Chapter 2, he sheds new light on the history of the study of creativity. The creative personality was the authoritarian personality's opposite, and Cohen-Cole's examination of studies of creativity demonstrates compellingly how ostensibly descriptive studies of mental qualities such as intellectual flexibility, autonomy, and rational productivity validated the liberal centrist political commitments that defined 1950s American politics.

Subsequent chapters explore the discourse of open-mindedness as it related to academic culture. As Cohen-Cole shows in the book's middle chapters, the values of the open mind lent themselves effortlessly to the embrace of interdisciplinary research as an unquestioned virtue. Being too steeped in one's own discipline was an indication of intellectual conformity; the ability to think across disciplines, however, was an indication of one's cognitive acuity and creativity. The interdisciplinary mind was an open mind—and therefore, by definition, politically and intellectually virtuous. In this context, it is no surprise that social scientists understood

themselves as model democratic citizens and envisioned their universities as microcosms of American society.

If midcentury pedagogical reform and social psychology masked normative traits as the subjects of descriptive social science, cognitive science went even further. In chapters on Harvard's Center for Cognitive Studies and the 1960s educational reform project "Man: A Course of Study" (MACOS), Cohen-Cole shows how social scientists packaged the virtues of the open mind as natural and universal traits. The narrative of the open mind thus returns to where it began: in educational reform designed to create rational, democratic citizens guided by the insights of the human sciences.

Cohen-Cole's account is rich and compelling. It is also shot through with irony: the advocates of the open mind judged harshly those who did not possess its myriad virtuous qualities. At times, it is clearly a dogma itself. Cohen-Cole closes his account with the growing attacks on the open mind and its brainchild, MACOS, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Americans on the right attacked the open mind as a specimen leftist rigidity; at the same time, the embrace of the open mind by a younger generation of New Leftists and feminists led some of the open mind's architects to flee liberalism for neoconservatism.

While Cohen-Cole's account ends with the "divided mind" of the late 1960s and early 1970s, his description of the liberal consensus that was both shaped and captured by the open mind resonates with a number of policy debates today. The virtues of the open mind are still being defended in contemporary statements about the necessity of liberal education for training reasonable, tolerant, and democratic citizens. And they are still enshrined in major foundations' calls for interdisciplinary research proposals and in the advertising literature sent by myriad educational institutions to countless aspiring undergraduates and potential donors. *The Open Mind* tells us much about midcentury intellectual life and political culture, and it offers clues to our current circumstances. It should be required reading for historians of American social science, for American intellectual historians, and for historians of midcentury American politics.

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