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PARSING POSTWAR AMERICAN RATIONALITY

ANDREW JEWETT
History Department, Harvard University
E-mail: ajewett@fas.harvard.edu

George M. Marsden, *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment: The 1950s and the Crisis of Liberal Belief* (New York: Basic Books, 2014)

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

Paul Erickson, Judy L. Klein, Lorraine Daston, Rebecca Lemov, Thomas Sturm, and Michael D. Gordin, *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind: The Strange Career of Cold War Rationality* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2013)

The "long 1950s," once written off as a conservative era, now figure in many histories as the height of American "high modernity," the apogee of a scientific outlook rooted in instrumental reason. This portrait suggests that the "Enlightenment project" took firm hold of American thought and culture in the early Cold War years, having finally defeated those who sought to yoke scientific rationality to one or another system of moral restraints. Despite nascent movements of opposition, the story goes, a rationalistic, technocratic form of liberalism dominated national life until the left and right mobilized against it in the 1960s.

Each of the books under review here offers a sophisticated new take on the cultural and political career of rationality in the postwar United States. In *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, George M. Marsden criticizes the era's public intellectuals—secular and religious thinkers alike—for failing to grasp the ideological slant of modern science and expecting Americans, and perhaps all of humanity, to converge on science as a neutral framework of reasoning. Meanwhile, Jamie Cohen-Cole in *The Open Mind* joins the authors of *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind* in dissecting cutting-edge academic theories of human reasoning in a gentler, more detached tone of bemusement and irony. Taken together, these studies reveal that postwar American renderings of rationality differed significantly from earlier models, bearing the distinctive markings not

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only of the broad Enlightenment tradition but also of their specific historical contexts. By exploring the assumptions that underpinned influential conceptions of human reasoning, the three books, when read in conjunction with one another, offer a nuanced portrait of much postwar American thinking about knowledge and society. They also demonstrate that the cultural mainstream's internal critics embraced many of the assumptions about rationality that guided its more orthodox defenders.

Beyond that general approach, however, the authors diverge markedly. Marsden is a consummate lumper. He views Enlightenment rationality as a monolithic cultural bloc extending across huge swaths of space and time. Marsden yokes this approach to an equally homogenizing normative critique: that all Enlightenment-inspired thought is vitiated by its failure to recognize the primacy of faith commitments over cognitive beliefs. By contrast, Cohen-Cole and Erickson *et al.* are splitters at heart. They fasten on local variations, controversies, and conceptual tensions in the multiple, overlapping Western discourses of rationality—discourses about what rationality is, how it can be attained, and where it ought to be applied. Although Cohen-Cole and Erickson *et al.* reject the leading postwar constructions of rationality, they seek primarily to unpack how such constructions were assembled and to explore their concrete effects, at least in intellectual circles.

Unfortunately, Marsden's blunderbuss approach has become all too common among American intellectual historians. Marsden is a leading member of a group of evangelical and Catholic scholars who have redirected the scholarly conversation on the American universities and disciplines by crafting powerful jeremiads that blame moral decline in the wider society on the secularization of academic life. These accounts offer many keen insights. Yet they prevent full understanding of the past by obliterating the very real and consequential differences between the vast array of historical actors standing to the theological left of, say, the conservative Presbyterians Charles Hodge and J. Gresham Machen.

In the face of Marsden's lumping tendency, the splitting approach characteristic of scholars in the history of science and science and technology studies—the fields tilled by Cohen-Cole and Erickson and his colleagues—offers a much-needed corrective. The jeremiad form and massive generalizations are not unknown in those disciplines. Yet when their practitioners challenge the epistemological ambitions of the modern sciences, they generally do so by attending to the historicity and complexity of science's myriad articulations and uses, not by running all of these together under a homogenizing label that replicates the rhetorical excesses of science's most callow boosters. Intellectual historians should continue to cultivate the same precision and restraint in their discussions of science and rationality.

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PROVINCIALIZING RATIONALITY

I will examine Marsden's book at some length, to show how his lumping approach works—and what it obscures. Conveniently, *The Twilight of American Enlightenment* pulls together the main themes of Marsden's illustrious corpus in a compact and highly readable form. The book also emblematizes tendencies commonly found in a wider body of historical scholarship on religion's role in American thought and culture, to which Marsden has contributed so powerfully through his indefatigable writing, graduate mentoring, and organizational work.

Today, much of this literature builds on a sharp epistemological critique, with Augustinian and Calvinist roots, of mainstream religious and secular thought. In the tradition of Edward A. Purcell Jr's 1973 classic *The Crisis of Democratic Theory*, Marsden gives epistemological frameworks a constitutive role in American history. According to Marsden, an incoherent but durable intellectual formation that he calls—idiosyncratically using the lower case—the "American enlightenment" dominated American public life until the 1960s and still informs both sides in today's culture wars. Marsden's restriction of the term "religion" to pre- or anti-Enlightenment forms of faith, coupled with his claim that the religious right endorses secular rationalism, allows him to conclude that genuine religion has played virtually no role in American culture. All of American history has flowed from the influence of secular ideas, Marsden's account suggests, and thus all of that history's myriad ills stem from the Enlightenment's assault on genuine faith.

What is this "American enlightenment" that haunts American history, taking guises as diverse as atheism, liberal Protestantism, fundamentalism, and cultural anthropology? This framework, according to Marsden, combines "a broadly theistic Protestant heritage" (127) with the rationalist view of science as a universal mode of reasoning upon which all open-minded individuals will converge and to which all religious frameworks must accommodate themselves to remain viable. Marsden holds that a normative scientism has sharply constrained American public discourse since the early twentieth century. Traditional faiths, he asserts, hold a wide and growing appeal to what he portrays as a socially conservative populace. But the "American enlightenment," with its quixotic dream of finding a self-evident framework of universal reason—whether secular or nominally theistic—has blinkered cultural elites. Indeed, these elites have violated the democratic tenets of equality and inclusivity by barring traditional faiths from the public square and welcoming only those watered-down religious perspectives that grovel before modern science.

According to Marsden, genuine religious pluralism awaits the spread of an alternative epistemological framework that he finds in Augustine, recent Catholic theorists such as Alasdair MacIntyre and Richard John Neuhaus, and especially

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the nineteenth-century Dutch Calvinist Abraham Kuyper. "I believe in order to understand," declared Augustine. Kuyper, Marsden writes, grasped the crux of Augustine's insight: that faith preceded cognition, and thus that "reason, natural science, and methodological naturalism were not ideologically neutral. Even the most technical of natural sciences ... operated within the framework of the faith, or higher commitments, of the practitioner" (165). Kuyper held that the divergent first principles of Christians and non-Christians produced competing systems of knowledge, including competing views of science.

Marsden, like many theistic communitarians today, broadens Kuyper's analysis to include a whole host of "underlying faiths and commitments" (167). These "fundamental loves and first principles," he writes, furnish individuals with the "lenses through which they see everything else" (xxviii). Modern societies feature many incommensurable communities of interpretation, each with its "underlying set of assumptions, including beliefs about the ultimate nature of reality and values" (xxviii) and especially conceptions of "self-fulfillment" and "human flourishing" (42). According to Marsden, then, achieving genuine pluralism would require reorganizing American public culture, through a kind of affirmative action, to guarantee all such interpretive communities, whether religious or secular, an equal voice. In this view, it is competing theologies, not race, class, gender, or other axes of difference, that ultimately define and divide us. Yet in a truly pluralistic culture, Marsden suggests, the irreconcilable conflicts of identity politics would dissolve. The interpretive communities would discover an overlapping consensus: a shared framework of civic morality that the state, freed from the need to enforce a secular, amoral worldview, could promote for the good of all.

Surely the American public and academic conversations about religious differences ought to be more robust. And Marsden's account of the American past has much to teach readers who hold other views of faith and reason. Many such readers, however, will question his account of historical causation and important features of the resulting narrative. Marsden pins a host of maladies on Americans' failure to adopt Kuyper's approach to religion's role in public life. Underneath that failure, he sees a deeper, philosophical (Marsden would say theological) source: a flaw in the core assumption of the "American enlightenment" that mentally liberated individuals will converge on a universally valid, scientific perspective. According to Marsden, the corrosive effects of that naturalistic, consensus-oriented framework were largely checked for over a century by two cultural tendencies: first, the thoroughly science-obsessed and increasingly vestigial Protestant establishment; second, a firm belief, central to eighteenth- and nineteenth-century formulations of the "American enlightenment," in the existence of a sturdy framework of moral laws, as universal and binding as those of physics. Yet when twentieth-century elites concluded that modern science ruled out the possibility of absolute moral laws, the

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stripped-down tenets of the "American enlightenment" came decisively, and disastrously, to the fore. Marsden labels "pragmatism" this fateful modulation from moral universalism to moral relativism within the "American enlightenment" and sees this pragmatic framework in postwar movements as disparate as analytic philosophy, existentialism, and theological neoorthodoxy.

In *The Twilight of the American Enlightenment*, Marsden tours the landscape of mainstream thought and criticism in the 1950s and finds the pragmatic, anti-foundational version of the "American enlightenment" everywhere he looks. He uses a range of mostly well-known figures and texts to illuminate what he sees as a universal failure to grasp the proper relationships between faith, knowledge, and collective life. Dwight Macdonald and Hannah Arendt exemplify the postwar mass-culture critique, while Erich Fromm, David Riesman, William Whyte, Vance Packard, and Betty Friedan embody the proposed antidote to conformity, namely individual autonomy. Marsden uses the responses to Walter Lippmann's *The Public Philosophy* (1955) and the "end of ideology" perspectives of Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr and Daniel Bell to highlight the anti-foundational tenor of postwar cultural criticism. William Barrett, Carl Rogers, B. F. Skinner, and Benjamin Spock illustrate the era's various combinations of scientific authority and individual autonomy. And Henry Luce emblematizes the dominant religious perspective—Protestant modernism—while Reinhold Niebuhr stands for the shallowness of modernism's leading critics. Throughout, Marsden discerns an essential unity amid the apparent diversity of his characters. These figures all speak—if in slightly different accents—for a single "cultural mainstream" wedded to the core hope of rational agreement and the secular, antitraditional, and morally relativistic sensibility characteristic of the modernized "American enlightenment."

Marsden credits postwar cultural critics with recognizing the looming threat: the postwar onset of modernity, wherein the fruits of science and technology, increasingly unchecked by moral restraints, subverted individual autonomy in the process of massification that had earlier led to totalitarianism and the Holocaust abroad. But the solutions proposed by mainstream thinkers merely accelerated the massification process, Marsden contends, because these solutions embodied the underlying cause of the problem: the secular framework of the "American enlightenment." Despite the practical tensions between that framework's two pillars, individual autonomy and scientific authority, Marsden presents both pillars as expressions of the same naturalistic faith, namely "optimism about the ability of human beings to control their own destinies" (113). The "American enlightenment," according to Marsden, enforced a kind of naturalistic religion that badly misread the human condition. Denying the existence of the divine, postwar thinkers continued to view humanity as benevolent and self-sufficient. So long as critics embraced this secular optimism, they could only plough deeper in the same cultural furrow that had produced the crisis.

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Thus mainstream American thinkers continued to prescribe science and individual autonomy, in various combinations, as sources of ultimate authority after World War II. As a result, despite the superficial prestige of religion, the 1950s actually witnessed what Marsden, citing the late historian Alan Petigny, calls a new "permissiveness" (88): the complete liberation of Americans from all moral constraints.[1] By denying the very existence of authoritative moral norms, postwar critics undercut their own fulminations against consumerism and conformity. Ironically, Marsden contends—following Christopher Lasch—postwar critics pushed Americans further down the path to narcissistic self-worship, which in practice meant the decisive transfer of authority from communities to therapeutic experts and managerial bureaucrats.

The result of this philosophical error, says Marsden, was the cultural revolution of the 1960s, in which the increasingly brittle postwar consensus collapsed into a welter of competing interests and claims. In chapter 6 Marsden seeks to further discredit the "American enlightenment" by identifying "white male ... cultural leadership" (127) as one of its constitutive features, as if theistic communitarians such as Kuyper had always carried the torch for post-1960s modes of social inclusion. Marsden implies that genuine tolerance flows inevitably and uniquely from his epistemological tenets, such that one can truly embrace all forms of difference only within the terms of his own framework. He also argues that the philosophical core of the "American enlightenment" survived the 1960s conflagration and generated multiculturalism, which, Marsden charges, ignores the crucial dimension of faith commitments. Indeed, Marsden contends that an increasingly militant secularism has inspired American leaders to throw the baby of publicly engaged religion out with the bathwater of monopolistic cultural control by finally choosing the naturalistic principles of the "American enlightenment" over the incongruously lingering Protestant establishment. Although mainstream cultural leaders since the 1960s have celebrated racial, class, and gender diversity, says Marsden, they have thoroughly privatized religion, deeming it divisive and authoritarian. The antics of the religious right have strongly reinforced this perception. In fact, Marsden argues, the religious right is simply another expression of the rationalistic "American enlightenment," which always authorizes implicitly totalitarian forms of cultural monism at odds with the pluralistic sensibility of those committed to traditional faiths.

Marsden's narrative offers several compelling insights. Clearly the intense universalism of the postwar American intelligentsia—its expectation of finding truths that would apply to all situations and compel all individuals—figured prominently in twentieth-century history. Clearly, too, that sensibility reflected

[1] Alan Petigny, *The Permissive Society: America, 1941–1965* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

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key elements of the Enlightenment heritage. Marsden also captures other important features of 1950s social thought and the subsequent reactions against it, as when he notes that the fuzzy, vaguely Deweyan humanism of the psychologist Carl Rogers illustrated the postwar climate better than the manipulative, technocratic orientation of Rogers's nemesis B. F. Skinner. Above all, Marsden's book shows that historical episodes that are usually interpreted primarily in political terms also have deep philosophical dimensions, although readers may quarrel with Marsden's portraits of those dimensions and their import.

Yet Marsden's relentless identification of epistemological error as a causal factor often leads to questionable historical claims. So, too, does his belief that a single philosophical assumption decisively shapes the sensibilities of its holders and operates across not only the culture-wars divide but also virtually all of American history. It is revealing that Marsden typically offers neat summaries of his figures' main arguments and then levies his critiques in entirely separate sections, often at the end of chapters. These analytical, critical sections rarely refer to specific thinkers and texts. Instead, they challenge broad philosophical presuppositions that Marsden ascribes en masse to the previously mentioned sets of theorists. On the few occasions where Marsden criticizes particular figures directly, he does so to disabuse readers of the notion that these allegedly oppositional thinkers—William Whyte, with his anti-bureaucratic critique of scientism; William Barrett, with his existentialist disdain for the Enlightenment; and Reinhold Niebuhr, with his neoorthodox attack on liberal Protestantism—transcended the presuppositions of the "American enlightenment." In these cases, Marsden echoes his overarching refrain: the diagnosis of the cultural malady was sound, but the prescription—more of the same cultural tendencies that had created the problem—proved counterproductive. Thus "Whyte offered little by way of solution" to the problem of scientism because he fell back on "an affirmation of the heroic individual who was willing to be true to himself" (35). Barrett, according to Marsden, did not actually reject the "American enlightenment"; he simply stressed its nonscientific pole, which asserted "the primacy of the self" (72). And Niebuhr's "generalized Christianity offered little to challenge most of the secularizing trends that he himself identified" (xxvi), Marsden contends, because it "grant[ed] scientific outlooks sovereignty in their own territories" and consigned religion to the realm of pure subjectivity, where it was "wholly optional and dispensable" (119).

Many readers will also reject Marsden's assertion that a secular public culture thoroughly privatizes religion, officially establishes naturalism, and privileges a deracinated theological liberalism that speaks in the borrowed voice of science rather than reflecting a genuine relation to God. In Marsden's view, political secularity means the adoption of modern science as an official national creed, and modern science offers no more, and no less, than an alternative religion.

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Thus political secularity cannot, by definition, advance the interests of anyone except committed naturalists or adherents to a liberal faith that amounts to little more than warmed-over naturalism. Secularity, according to Marsden, represents a thinly veiled assault by naturalists and theological liberals on other faith communities, cloaked in the seductive but philosophically incoherent rhetoric of scientific neutrality.

Those who eschew the classic conception of the scientific "view from nowhere" need not embrace Marsden's contention that secularity forces "religious people" to "assimilate into a melting pot defined by naturalistic intellectual and cultural norms" (172). Nor must they agree that American secularity emerged because a single, secularist "mainstream culture" imposed its views on a largely unwilling populace via "culture-forming institutions such as education, the media, and government" (130). Skepticism about the absolute and self-sufficient character of scientific truths does not require us to accept any particular account of the configurations of power or the contours of historical change in the modern world. It can be detached from the increasingly common claim that the twentieth-century West witnessed the rise of a hegemonic secular culture that de facto established philosophical naturalism, violating the rights of religious believers twice over by attacking their core beliefs under the guise of neutrality and preventing them from defending those beliefs by banning religious arguments from the public square.

The phrase "religious people" signals another problematic feature of Marsden's account: his silent expulsion of theologically liberal perspectives from the linguistic umbrella of "religion" on the grounds that they adopt a "progressive and cumulative model of truth" patterned after science and thus wrap secular rationalism in sheep's clothing (153). This usage would be merely irritating, except that it plays an important causal role in Marsden's account. In his book, theological liberals have not been "seriously religious." They have not reasoned from what are properly the first principles of their inherited traditions. Nor have they taken their faith commitments into the public square as inspirations and reasons for their actions (158). In a telling example, Marsden not only sets Martin Luther King Jr apart from secular and religious liberals—a questionable claim in itself—but also argues that the mainstream figures could not effectively fight segregation because they denied the existence of an absolute moral law and were congenitally optimistic about the innate benevolence of human beings. To suggest that antifoundationalists cannot challenge the status quo, or that they find human beings utterly faultless, because their moral tenets are not absolute and unconditional, is simply false, as a point of historical fact if nothing else. Nor can we conflate theological liberalism with moral antifoundationalism, as the case of King makes abundantly clear.

Marsden's narrow use of "religion" connects to an interpretive approach that shapes the entire book: his tendency to sort all Americans into two

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massive blocs with incommensurable views of knowledge. Despite his stated emphasis on diversity, Marsden sorts his actors into two categories, with "starting points" of two competing kinds (167). On one side are the members of the cultural mainstream, who reason from the postulate of "nontheistic naturalism" (167), and on the other are the beleaguered cultural minorities that adopt "various forms of theism and openness to the supernatural" (167) and vest ultimate authority in their own collective forms—in "subcommunities or their traditions"—rather than modern science (152). Marsden occasionally refers to ethnic communities, but he usually means the "myriad of traditionally religious communities—Catholic, fundamentalist, Pentecostal, holiness, Jewish, Eastern Orthodox, African American, Midwest Lutheran, Southern Baptist, and many more" (152). Elsewhere, he lists "Mormons, Orthodox Jews, conservative Catholics, Muslims, Hindus, and many others who did not fit the mainline religious profile" (159). Marsden lumps together these heterogeneous groups under the header of "traditional religion," assuming that all of them—when true to themselves—endorse theological communitarianism, not a secular public sphere and Enlightenment conceptions of knowledge and authority. Indeed, Marsden's analysis suggests that these non-mainstream groups have stood together against the technical rationality that, in his view, dominates most spheres of modern life and represents the translation of the Enlightenment's naturalistic pseudo-religion into social practice. Again, Marsden's normative prescription falls short as a description of the behavior of past actors.

Beyond these questionable assumptions about secularity and religion, Marsden's account of how ideas work in history demands adherence to his own epistemological framework as a precondition for democratic commitment. He contends that all religious and secular thinkers can and should move beyond their competing universalisms to converge on the neo-Augustinian claim that all reasoning reflects prior, pluralistic structures of faith. Does this view truly represent common ground? Must we adopt this epistemology in order to be good democrats and avoid oppressing others? As a claim about human thought, Marsden's view privileges a rather narrow group of philosophical commitments—"foundational" anthropological assumptions about human nature and epistemological claims about the nature of truth and the locus of authority—and downplays the impact of beliefs and values of all other kinds, not to mention more material forces. It conflates philosophical justifications of a particularly rationalistic, deductive kind with psychological motives and cultural identities. In this manner, Marsden's approach converts his form of communitarianism from a normative prescription into a description of human psychology and an ontology of social groups.

Strict neutrality may be impossible in human thought, but Marsden's rationalistic multi-foundationalism is not the only alternative. Another view of reasoning that could also appeal across many communities of interpretation

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would posit that human thought is rarely as deductive or neatly defined, and human action rarely as ideational in its inspiration, as Marsden's version of philosophical determinism suggests. For the most part, our belief systems are patchwork affairs and relate only loosely, if consequentially, to our actions. Even when we reason in philosophical or theological modes, we partake of multiple, heterogeneous discourses, cobbling together our thoughts and practices from a wide range of available resources that may bear little formal relation to one another. Those who insist that individuals can and should operate in accordance with fixed, mutually exclusive first principles can still admit the implausibility of that normative model as a description of ordinary, everyday thought, even among highly intelligent and self-conscious scholars. In the end, anthropologies of the person and theories of knowledge and authority have exerted considerably less influence in history than Marsden assumes.

PARTICULARIZING RATIONALITY

What, then, can we say about the admittedly consequential roles played by the ideal of rationality in twentieth-century American history? Marsden's book, despite its flaws, offers some significant leads. But to answer the question more fully, it is crucial to get a sense of what rationality has meant to various actors at various times rather than indiscriminately projecting onto their actions our own view of rationality's meaning. Here, historians of science and practitioners of science and technology studies have provided important resources.

Cohen-Cole and Erickson *et al.* do not take it upon themselves to theorize overtly about how historical actors formed their beliefs and commitments. Instead, they simply outline the contours of these intellectual constructions, restricting themselves primarily to academic renderings of human thought. Each book identifies a leading conception of human reasoning as a contingent aggregation of formerly disconnected elements that temporarily cohered in the minds of leading scholars due to postwar intellectual, cultural, and political imperatives. These accounts imply that historical actors responded relatively freely to historical developments within common patterns of academic and popular discourse that allowed individual variation and innovation—often, but not always, based on empirical findings and interdisciplinary borrowing.

Cohen-Cole's quarry is a model of the "open mind" that reverberated through the postwar human sciences and curricular discussions. According to that model, a cluster of mental traits or virtues—openness, flexibility, breadth, creativity, autonomy, and rationality—cohered as a mutually reinforcing whole and constituted a peculiarly valuable character type. Most of Cohen-Cole's book tracks the three postwar roles of this typological construct: as a normative prescription for democratic citizens (in chapters on the general education

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movement and the social ideals associated with the open mind after World War II); as a normative prescription for researchers (in chapters detailing how postwar thinkers framed, justified, and instantiated a new impulse toward interdisciplinarity); and as a postulated description of actual, normal human nature (in chapters on the cognitive revolution and the resulting research and curriculum initiatives). The final chapter and conclusion explore how the New Left turned liberals' conceptual tools against them, portraying liberals as closed-minded and authoritarian, and how conservatives exposed the ideological ties between the open-mind discourse and postwar liberalism.

The cognitive revolution in psychology, inaugurating the takeoff of the interdisciplinary field of cognitive science, lies at the heart of Cohen-Cole's book. Although he does not frame his narrative in a strongly chronological or causal fashion, his chapters show that cognitive scientists took a character type—the open mind—that had been posited as a norm for citizens and researchers and embedded it in the world by equating it with human nature itself. In a nice turn of phrase, Cohen-Cole writes that the cognitive revolution "substituted normalizing for normative terminology" (163) as the 1950s gave way to the 1960s.

Much of *The Open Mind* is marked by such perceptive insights. Cohen-Cole has a keen eye for the telling incident or phrase. His deeply contextualized case studies of important institutions, figures, and episodes are studded with astute observations on the cultural work performed by key texts. Most importantly, to my eye, his excavation of a bitter postwar struggle over the legitimacy of behaviorism as a scientific model cuts against many interpreters' assertion that positivist epistemologies dominated the postwar scientific landscape. Cohen-Cole shows that the behaviorists' narrow-gauged empiricism lost appeal as a self-description and ideological resource for many human scientists after World War II. This does not mean that postwar scholars eschewed the temptation to declare themselves politically disinterested, but Cohen-Cole complicates the portrait of 1950s American academia as a methodologically naive wasteland of empiricism and scientism.

Cohen-Cole's concern with the methodological and political dimensions of the cognitive revolution may explain why he downplays the theological resonances of a portrait of human thinking that clearly owed much to centuries-old caricatures of Catholicism. Still, I would like to have seen more attention to this religious dimension of the story. It seems unnecessarily limiting to suggest that postwar theorists of the open mind targeted only communism, McCarthyism, and the hierarchical mindset of the military. Catholics certainly felt the sting of such language as well, as the historian John McGreevy and others have shown. More generally, the model of the open, creative mind had roots in a wide range of earlier intellectual discourses, American and otherwise. For example, that model strongly echoed the American "discussion movement" of the 1930s, as

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well as many of that decade's prescriptions for teaching the "scientific attitude" in primary and secondary schools. What matters to Cohen-Cole, however, is the later process wherein psychologists and their academic allies took up this widely circulating view of human reasoning and cast it as a coherent, self-reinforcing whole during the brewing revolt against behaviorism.

How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind posits a similar dynamic of intellectual "condensation under extreme pressure" in the postwar years (183). The book is presented as a collaborative effort, although one can readily discern which author bore primary responsibility for each of the main chapters. Whereas Cohen-Cole explores the more humanistic, deliberative side of scientific thought in the long 1950s, Erickson *et al.* trace the harder, technocratic edges of postwar discourses of rationality and thus focus on a different cast of characters, many of them associated with the RAND Corporation.

The volume's introduction and first chapter argue that this influential network of scholars—drawn to the interdisciplinary study of cognition from fields such as psychology (Robert Freed Bales, Charles E. Osgood), political science (Herbert A. Simon), economics (Oskar Morgenstern, Thomas C. Schelling), mathematics (George B. Dantzig, John Nash, John von Neumann, Anatol Rapoport), and physics (Herman Kahn)—crafted a distinctive "Cold War rationality" that diverged from all previous versions of Enlightenment thought. They did so by eliminating trained human judgment from the picture and equating good reasoning with the mindless rule-following of the perfect technician—or the electronic computer, whose imminent arrival loomed over postwar "thinking about thinking." Elements of Cold War rationality had appeared in earlier contexts, contend Erickson *et al.*, but these elements only fused under the intense pressures of the late 1940s. The result was a freewheeling but loosely coherent argument among some of the nation's leading researchers over how to construct a fully depersonalized, instrumental form of reasoning that could produce better decisions than either the will of the majority or the practical wisdom of bureaucrats and politicians. At a time when the fate of humanity seemed to rest in the hands of an American elite, postwar theorists of rationality hoped to make that elite's decisions maximally effective.

The case studies in the remaining chapters explore the birth of mathematical programming and management science in the Berlin Airlift, the psychologist Charles E. Osgood's critique of the rationalistic axioms of nuclear strategy, the emergence of the "situation" as a privileged methodological space in the postwar human sciences, the spread of game theory in various military contexts, and American psychology's eventual turn away from Cold War rationality toward a presumption of human irrationality. These fascinating and illuminating discussions are somewhat unevenly connected to the book's central theme. Each episode featured powerful impulses toward predictability and social engineering.

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However, the model of reason as algorithmic rule-following, announced as the book's central thread in its opening sections, weaves in and out of more general models of rationality that stood closer to their interwar predecessors and post-1960s successors than the overarching interpretive frame would suggest.

It is difficult to write accessibly about such dense, technical material, yet several of the chapters succeed admirably in this regard. Still, the authors sometimes take disciplinary knowledge for granted, especially in the more internalist chapters. For example, the "prisoner's dilemma" game—which targets the gap between actual human decisions and the path of rational self-interest—receives detailed explication in chapter 5, but readers lacking that knowledge will struggle to comprehend two earlier invocations of that classic game. Or take this sentence from chapter 2: "For several years to come, [the air force] had to rely on nonoptimizing models that were essentially small rectangular sets of a few equations arranged in such a way that their coefficient matrices formed a sequentially descending diagonal that bisected the matrix into triangles" (68).

Still, the relatively uninformed reader can muddle through these passages well enough, picking up most of the needed knowledge along the way. And the book generously repays such a reading. In addition to offering keen insights about tectonic shifts in the meanings of rationality over the centuries, *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind* also reconstructs several of the leading sites and episodes in which postwar American thinkers gave the Enlightenment tradition its most inhuman constructions—ironically, in the name of human dignity and humanity's very survival. Like Cohen-Cole, Erickson *et al.* carefully examine how a variety of Enlightenment-inspired perspectives and their constituent concepts changed over time, while situating these in their institutional as well as political and cultural settings.

In contrast to Marsden's lumping approach, then, *The Open Mind* and *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind* offer detailed, deeply contextualized case studies that track the rise and fall of many different Enlightenment-inspired views of the nature and purposes of human cognition. As Cohen-Cole and Erickson *et al.* show, the advocates of these models of reasoning expected them to prevail not only in the human sciences but also in the wider culture, especially the political domain. The discourses of the open mind and Cold War rationality implored laypeople to follow the lead of professional scientists. They took much of their energy from a deep frustration with the apparently irrational nature of postwar politics, coupled with a belief that researchers had finally, after millennia, discovered the outlines of a correct account of truly productive thinking.

The two books occasionally ascribe more power to these intellectual formations, even within the domain of the human sciences, than seems warranted. Cohen-Cole, as his introduction acknowledges, leans rather heavily on Cambridge-based examples, although much of the infrastructure of postwar

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thinking about thinking certainly emanated from that frenetic center of scholarly activity. Erickson *et al.* note that their characters occupied only one intellectual network among many, but elsewhere imply that their models of human reasoning reigned uncontested in the early Cold War years. Still, the discourses addressed in these books clearly structured much postwar thought, within the universities and beyond. Giving the Cold War its due, yet never overstating its influence, *The Open Mind* and *How Reason Almost Lost Its Mind* open up important avenues of exploration for other historians engaged in "thinking about thinking about thinking."

FRAGMENTING RATIONALITY

Whence the ideal of rationality since the "long 1950s"? All three of these books provide evidence of significant intellectual continuities linking the mid-twentieth century to the present, but they tend to highlight instead the particularities of the postwar context. Marsden, who covers recent developments most extensively, employs a narrative of fragmentation holding that the 1960s brought the dissolution of a relatively homogeneous thoughtworld—indeed, in his view, the end of the Enlightenment's long, uncontested reign over American intellectual life. In this narrative, the second half of the 1960s inagaurated a complex splintering process that continues today.

This fragmentation narrative overstates the coherence of postwar thought and emphasizes the discontinuities between the two historical periods at the expense of equally important continuities. Influential clusters of mid-twentieth-century meanings—especially a set of deeply rooted understandings of fundamental categories such as religion, science, the Enlightenment, the West, and modernity—have survived détente and social upheaval in the 1960s, the global economic crisis of the 1970s, the conservative triumph of the 1980s, and the dissolution of Communism. In this regard, postwar America is neither dead nor gone, despite the widespread desire of scholars and cultural commentators to distance themselves from that troubling era. To understand the many lines of intellectual connection across the apparent chasm of the 1960s, historians will need to steer clear of Marsden's philosophical determinism and employ a more complex understanding of how ideas are implicated in the affairs of the world. They should also contextualize more fully the rationalistic versions of liberalism that characterized the postwar United States. Technocratic modes of postwar thought not only clashed with one another but also faced potent challenges from without, long before today's left and right critiques took their familiar shapes in the crucible of the 1960s.

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