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Philosophy Out in the Cold

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John McCumber's book, *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War*, exists on four levels at the least. First: on the literal level, the book is about the special case of the UCLA philosophy department. How the philosophers, university administrators, and the State of California, hide away from and at the best, avoid, the McCarthy witch-hunt for communists. Also, on the literal level, the book is about how subliminally, the philosophy department unconsciously absorbs and thereby becomes subject to the ideology of the Red Scare.

(In place of the generic term, "ideology", McCumber prefers the term *paradigm* borrowed from T.S. Kuhn, a term that is well known, widely used or misused term of choice when talking about internal pressures on general viewpoints. Also, in place of "ideology", McCumber prefers the term *dispositive*, borrowed from Michel Foucault, a term lesser known that includes political-social external intellectual shapers).

Second: on the broader and extended literal level, the UCLA philosophy department case during the 50s and into the 60s is manifested by many if not all philosophy departments in the USA. Third: on a deeper level, just below the surface text of the book, there is an insinuation that Philosophy in America has barely moved away from the ideological iceberg of Cold War American anti-communism.

Fourth: on the deepest level, not at all articulated in the text, but presumed in the book is a commonly held axiom of intellectual life in and out of Academia. The axiom is that America hegemonically or mono-manically wields an ideology that molds all thought. The American ideology is enforced by the *power* conditions of the *American Hegemony* or *American Empire*. Moreover, we won't fully realize the American ideology until the Empire tumbles—perhaps if the War against the *Evil Empire* (whichever one it happens to be at the moment) is lost.

(Though the *End of X* theme is not played in this book, the reality presumed in the book is that America is going strong continually recovering from fumbles, but still scoring touch-down after touch-down in spite of whatever fool happens to be the quarterback.)

### **An Argument of Classical Rational Choice**

The core thesis of the text is concisely stated about mid-way through a very deliberately planned and structured book with three parts, two chapters to each part, balanced by an Introduction and an Epilogue. Not counting the customary Prologue, the book has 8 chapters. This is no accident—the text has the shape of a sine curve. The peak of the sine curve delineates the Rules and Premises of the American Intellect. The curve downward points to an alternative Philosophy existing always on the fringes of American Philosophy (and American Philosophy Departments) imported from Europe, *Post-Modernism* (often disguised in the updated version of old-fashioned *American Pragmatism*—found in the intellectually trend-setting works of Rorty. According to McCumber:

When Cold War philosophy became the operating philosophy of the United States, this [operating philosophy] was elevated into a new social gospel. Institutions that help individuals become powerful and wealthy (law schools, business schools) or stay that way (medical schools, hospitals) flourished; other public infra-structure, along with the environment was left to rot. Many of the problems faced by the United States in the early twenty-first century are testimony to the power of Cold War philosophy's theory of mind. (p.112).

The theory of mind that McCumber refers to is in the philosophical extrapolations that McCumber develops (in the two chapters of Part 2, pp. 71 ff.) largely from the dilemmas of rational choice (*in democratic-capitalist society*). McCumber's text concentrates on Kenneth Arrow's dilemmas of rational choice that micro-economics or welfare economics employs to resolve the problems of *wealth* redistribution (*in democratic-capitalist society*).

However, McCumber's text also fingers the von Neumann/Morgenstern mathematical game-theoretic approach to the dilemmas of rational choice (*in democratic-capitalist society*). The contextual qualifier of the phrase “in democratic-capitalist society” carries in it the unstated presumption that rational choice theory (RCT for short in the text)—explicitly extrapolated from Arrow's micro-economics and mathematical game-theory—is the only and best intellectual weapon of defense against the intellectual fifth-column of anti-American communism. The best intellectual weapon is the ideology of a great and free American money-making machine composed of individuals buying (especially on credit) and consuming great quantities of goods—at the cheapest cost and produced at the cheapest cost with the cheapest resources by the cheapest and most efficient means of production.

All this making, selling-buying, consuming ever spinning of the economic-technological-industrial-military wheel turns regardless of down-stream costs to future generations, not only economically with the increasing American debt at all levels, but also environmentally with the increasing down-stream damage to all life and the planet—not merely unintended, but with imposed and willful disregard.

Into this pot of rational choice theory, was blended the philosophy found in Philosophy at UCLA, in specific in the work of the German-Jewish Berlin expat, Hans Reichenbach, especially in Reichenbach's introductory philosophy textbook, *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy*, 1951. According to McCumber: “In the United States it [Reichenbach's book] played an enormous role in establishing the various permutations of what would later be called analytical philosophy as the dominant dispositive in most American philosophy departments.” (pp. 56-7)

But what is its—the meld of analytic/scientific philosophy and rational choice theory-- “cash-value” (a popular phrase in American vernacular, including the sophisticated academic jargon of both the pragmatist and analytic schools of philosophy)? What is the ultimate content of this meld of “scientific philosophy” or later known as “analytic philosophy” and rational choice theory? How does the meld function as an intellectual weapon of defense against communist ideology (and even today, against all anti-Americanism)? How does the

meld act to discretely (or, in the punchy phrasing of McCumber, “stealthily”, form formal/academic philosophy and keep alternative philosophical schools, such as traditional pragmatism, continental philosophy, academic Marxism—as opposed to “vulgar” Marxism—and though not-mentioned in this text, Adorno/Marcuse critical philosophy at the fringes)?

### **Stealth Influence**

Most importantly, in terms of what is taught and published—in the main—how does the meld (of scientific/analytic philosophy and rational choice theory) become adopted by the power structures of academia and even those power-structures in the world outside (as an intellectual superstructure or rationalization) that govern and inhabit politico-economic activity? The content of the meld that has become America's intellectual defense weapon of choice is concisely articulated again at the very peak of the book's textual sine curve in the concluding section of Chapter four, in terms of six premises (cited indirectly as under “some famous attacks” by philosophers at the edge of the cold war or post-cold war.)(cf. p. 112).

Summarizing the summary of the 6 premises in terms of 6 phrases, the six dogmas of analytic philosophy are as follows: 1. Unified Reason. 2. Knowledge=Prediction. 3. Prediction=Justified Knowledge vs Discovery/Intuition/Guessing. 4. Reason=Analytic Truth=Formal?Mathematical Logic. 5. Externalities are irrelevant (i.e. History, Culture). 6. Emotion (in argument or intellectual passion) is an Externality.

All the above 6 *propositions/dogmas* are part of the “stealthiness” of modern American Analytic Philosophy (not just the UCLA of the Cold War) but even today, even though those “dogmas” or in more discrete terminology, “axioms”, of American Cold War Philosophy are under attack by the intellectual descendants of the founders of American Cold War Philosophy (not just at UCLA, but almost everywhere—even outside America). Though today, the intellectual descendants of cold warrior philosophers hack away at the intellectual dogmas of their teachers (or their teachers's teachers), the practices of stealthiness unconsciously remain in the new analytically dominated platforms for the production and distribution of the intellectual goods of philosophy.

We find out how, in the Epilogue (in the download flow of the sine curve of the text):

With the main enemies [who were the prejudiced and brainwashed general public, and the McCarthyite anti-Red vigilantes in high places] now internal to academia, the elaborate tactics of stealth directed against outsiders . . . hiring one's own graduate students, publishing in obscure places if at all, and pretending to make hires while actually delaying them—were no longer necessary. Simply ignoring professors outside one's own field and being ignored by them in return provided sufficient cover. (p.159)

I think it would be only fair at this point of the text, before going onto McCumber's own intellectual weapon of defense against the now ancient dogmas of analytic philosophy, enunciated in the Epilogue, to allow Reichenbachians a chance to reply (after a few remarks

about the context of the reply and a few other replies). In general, to be intellectually fair and honest, the wide condemnation of Philosophy in the America of the 50s also should have its day in the court of Reason *in all its varieties*. Because there are so many varieties of Reason, it would only be fair to pick up on four courts of hearing—I am not merely referring to the Reason of the pluralism in intellectual life today, but of the overlooked pluralism of intellectual life of the 50s in America.

### **Undercurrents Against Positivism**

I am actually going to pick up on the four schools of anti-logical positivism (or at least those who were friendly and unfriendly critics, and those who just went their own way not bothering to criticize logical positivism but to pursue their own lights regardless of the criticisms of logical positivists.) Furthermore, I will only mention people who were mentioned in this book as part of the mainstream intellectual adherents of the “operating philosophy” of America.

First, let's give Wittgenstein a hearing, not the “Whereof you cannot speak, be silent” Wittgenstein, but the so-called later Wittgenstein of his posthumously published works (in the 50s and until very recently). I pick Wittgenstein first because his later philosophy of the 50s is antithetical to the mainstream philosophy of the 50s that became the “operating philosophy” of America. Wittgenstein (and various philosophers who influenced American philosophy but practiced ordinary language philosophy mainly in England, not mentioned in this book) clearly recognized and brought to the light of day the importance of how culture influences thought via language games. The Wittgensteinian dictum of “no private language” and the Wittgensteinian thought experiment of not understanding a lion that could speak, is intended to contextualize the intellectual role of the individual and the thought and language of the individual by focusing on the public nature of language and mind.

McCumber could reply, Wittgensteinians except for Rorty, largely mumbled among themselves, and wrote obscure short articles and books (that were really long articles) and so were stealthily pursuing their own little puzzles hardly known outside their own specializations within philosophy let alone outside philosophy. This goes to prove McCumber's point: the public quiescence of philosophy allowed the Cold War Ideology to go unchallenged, and Cold War practices of self-censoring what is said in public and who are hired in academia, to go on behind doors closed to outside scrutiny—not only to the scrutiny of the Red Scare mongers, but as well to the scrutiny of independent thinkers wherever they happened to land a job whether in or out of academia.

Second, now let's give Reichenbach, as a representative and founder of America's “operating philosophy” in the Cold War, a chance to reply: Naturalism applied to philosophy is no mere extension of science but an answer to the traditional big questions of philosophy—an answer that historically stems from the Pre-Socratics—that were the progenitors of modern rational thought including the sciences of today: cosmology, physics, mathematics, evolutionary biology, psychology, sociology, and economics. Moreover, , though there may be no “logic of discovery”, there is still a social aspect for science—and in the social aspect,

there are conventions that evolve with science—and similarly all intellectual disciplines. In other words, there is a social aspect to the methodology of science, in particular to the methodologies for the use of experiment and verification/refutation in science. Whether or not there are higher-level social conventions that govern all intellectual disciplines is open to discussion.

McCumber can reply that he critically discussed Reichenbach's theory of the social aspect of sciences in the book:

But Reichenbach has a limited view of what this kind of scientific cooperation [society/Republic] amounts to...Scientific collaboration is thus a sort of quantitative amplification, in which many different individuals can pool their intellectual strength because they are all, in principle, doing exactly the same thing. . . . The scientific community, applying reason to observations, is thus not a set of clashing perspectives . . . but a sort of “superperson.” (p.100)

Society reduces to the sum of abstract logical individuals. The product of social interaction in a community of intellectuals equals the thought of the logically constructed idealized individual. Everyone, according to Reichenbach, in an intellectual community, must come up with the same answers as long as the algorithms, of reason are applied to the same data, correctly or uniformly.

Third, though not attacked in the book, Bertrand Russell, deserves a voice. Russell is mentioned in the book as an early pre-Cold War victim of anti-atheist religious fundamentalist pressure groups who lobbied for the firing of Russell from UCLA and from his next stop, CCNY. Russell's case is a proto-version of the later American public witch-hunting of leftist intellectuals. How Russell could speak up goes as follows: Russell's pioneering efforts provided the foundations in logico-mathematical reasoning for the development of analytic philosophy.

He was much admired by the logical positivists for starting an intellectual revolution in philosophy that turned philosophy from woolly thinking enmeshed in religion, mysticism, idealism, and a discipline without discipline, into a critical enquiry using the latest intellectual techniques available to scientists and mathematicians. Moreover, Russell used these tools of critical enquiry not only to tackle the fundamental philosophical problems where he also constantly revised his theories, but also to tackle the social, political, and ethical issues of the day for a wide audience. Hence, for Russell (unlike most of his followers including Wittgenstein, A.J. Ayer, and Quine) analytic philosophy was used to blast the idols of the day—especially the increasing production, testing, development and storing of nuclear weapons as a “deterrent”.

McCumber's reply is easy: the exception proves the rule. In most cases, analytic philosophy turned its critical enquiry upon itself and even a-historically treated classical philosophers as either proto-analytic philosophers (when those older views or arguments were endorsed by the analytic school of philosophy) or as muddled, without looking at historical context. The

inward approach of most analytic philosophers reveals that their use of analytic philosophy as a “stealth” weapon—to keep undetected from the outside world in the Cold War—is highlighted by contrast with how Russell was brave enough to expose all his intellectual armoury to attack from the outer world. It is not that analytic philosophy is inherently an insider-game, it is that as an insider-game, analytic philosophy, on the one side, avoided trouble from Cold War evangelists; and analytic philosophy as an insider-game, on the other side, played into the hands of the Red Scare avant-garde by not avoiding confrontation with those keen to find a “commie in every corner.”

Fourth, Hayek and Popper are treated as Cold Warriors as if it were both common knowledge and unquestionable truth—and so deserve a chance to set the record straight according to their own lights. Friedrich Hayek and Karl Popper, though mentioned in the book as anti-communist, which they were, are not mentioned as anti-scientism or anti-unified science.

Both were against the doctrine of applying a singular, supposed universal scientific method to all disciplines including history and economics. Both thought that history had no laws: not material, not natural, not economic, not social. Historical events are contingent and unique; therefore, historical events are not repeatable and so have no “laws” or even “regularities” unlike the natural sciences. Economics assumes a social level not reducible to psychology, hence, the only law of economics is the hypothetical zero-law of rational behaviour in idealized situations, that is used to expose what is unexpected, and therefore treat the unexpected as a problem to be explained, though never completely.

McCumber's reply is apparently an easy one too: Hayek and Popper adopted “methodological individualism” as an explanation of the social. Hence, the social becomes the abstract individual with identical goals and beliefs. Moreover, Hayek and Popper, though against scientism and the unity of scientific method—across disciplines—were avowed followers of the Enlightenment. Popper advocated “critical rationalism”, a fringe school of philosophy that aims to apply rationality universally in all disciplines. Moreover, Popper, especially does not admit that rationality is culturally, temporally, and disciplinarily relative.

(Popper argues against what he calls the “myth of the framework”, contrary to the cultural relativism held by Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Foucault, Post-Modernism, and apparently McCumber as well: culture permeates but does not totalize all thought, perception, and action; otherwise, liminal, transitional, and fringe thinkers could not occur, and their thoughts and activities would be inconceivable. However, this aside about Popper, it is important to note, does not undercut McCumber's point that intellectual deviance does actually occur. Moreover, according to McCarthy, intellectual deviance is and was insufficient to disturb other than as a nuisance effect, the hegemony of America's “operating philosophy”—analytic philosophy and its subservience to the McCarthy Effect.)

## Conclusion

How then, might the reader of this review ask, does the text under review, answer the question: how can we thoroughly expose and thoroughly debunk whatever elements remain in philosophy from the era of the Cold War? The part of the intellectual iceberg of the American ideology (paradigm/dispositive) of the Cold War that remains is the part out of view--the most hazardous part to enquirers at sail in the ocean of thought (in every field of enquiry, and even in our everyday thinking about everyday matters).

John McCumber outlines in a subsection of the Epilogue, “Reason Beyond Rational Choice”, (pp. 164 ff.) a 5 step program, for overcoming the meld of scientific philosophy and Rational Choice Theory that evolved into modern analytic philosophy. Here is a concise version of a manifesto for a program that appears to comprise both a revision and fusion of good old-fashioned American pragmatism (in the footsteps of Rorty) and Americanized post-modernism.

First, engage in dialectics—people passionately arguing together from different cultural/intellectual outlooks. Second, the aim is not to win, but to gain mutual understanding, and even help each other better articulate their own viewpoints. Third, recognize the historical background for each other's different outlooks—contextualize outlooks rather than universalize outlooks. Fourth, use no rules or for whatever minimal rules are used, treat them as guidelines to be modified and replaced as the situation demands, and as the dialectics evolve. Fifth, attempt to let a harmonization of outlooks develop without overwhelming or drowning out the different voices.

There are three questions a reader of the book might pose to the author—that are called forth by the very text of the book and inherent in the deepest level of the book. I will state the three questions below that arise from the deep level tacit premise of the book. This tacit premise goes roughly in this way: The individuals in a professional field of an academic institution where independent thinkers are protected by the professional ethics of academic freedom as well as the laws of most democratic countries that guarantee freedom of speech and thought, can be “subjectivized” (in the terminology of McCumber adapted from post-modernist thinkers). “Subjectivization” is the unconscious domination of academic thought that creates a subliminal conformism to a mainstream of one voice in philosophy and becomes absorbed into a monolithic American ideology.

I conclude with the three questions that pop-out of the logic of a situation where an academic mainstream arises and catches those in it unawares; and, where in practice, regardless of theory and regardless of the advocacy of pluralism, members of the non-analytic schools of thought until today are either unemployed, underemployed or marginalized both in academia and in business.

1) How has the God of the Cold War and the iceberg of the American Cold War ideology though exposed, survived the voluminous talks and texts about pluralism, multiculturalism, multi-genderism, diversity...? 2) Or, if the Cold War God is dead, what is the subliminal

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ideology/paradigm/dispositive that has replaced the Cold War ideology and has in turn captured American life where an evolved analytic, but still analytic roaring mainstream drowns out alternative voices? 3) Is the whole neo-Kuhnian and neo-Foucaultian trend-setting and widely used but vague and metaphorical terminology of paradigm/dispositive, misleading; and so, are there other externalities at work, perhaps those in front of our noses—such as the current economic-techno-social structures that provide a niche for the professionalization of elites that allows those elites to separate themselves from the everyday world; and, create new places of power and control for themselves?

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### **References**

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