

John McCumber. *The Philosophy Scare: The Politics of Reason in the Early Cold War.* University of Chicago Press 2016. 224 pp. \$45.00 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780226396385).

Divided into three parts ('The Cudgels of Freedom', 'The Carrots of Reason', and 'Purifying the Academy'), McCumber's *Philosophy Scare* discusses a part of the history of philosophy in the USA. The book focuses almost exclusively on UCLA's philosophy department. McCumber starts with the story of a nomination of philosopher Max Otto (1947) to a 'one-semester appointment' (xi) that never materialized. The case marked the outcome of a bitter media campaign orchestrated by the '*Los Angeles Examiner*, the city's Hearst newspaper' (xi). The power of such media is immortalized in Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941)—often voted the best movie ever made. The campaign conjured up religious fanatics set against the teaching of atheism. But this story only sets the scene of what was to come. What came was the rise of what McCumber calls Cold War philosophy, which used the 'mathematical veneer of scientific objectivity and practices of market freedom [largely engineered by] forces outside the university' (1) to remove what today is known as continental philosophy. All this occurred as US philosophy entered 'the dark realm of socio-political pressure' (2).

McCumber's key text to explain the philosophical side of this is Reichenbach's *The Rise of Scientific Philosophy* (9), as well as his impressive research using primary sources (university documents, catalogues, letters, memorandums, directives, policies, etc.) gained through substantial archival work as well as secondary sources (newspaper articles, etc.). The rise of Cold War philosophy occurred at a time 'deeply haunted by fear of atheism' (11) and 'the battle against communism [for which] rational choice theory (RCT) provided the favoured model. With the support of governmental and academic elites, RCT quickly took over the discipline of economics and made strong inroads into political science' (12). It also affected philosophy.

Following McCarthy's HUAC (House Un-American Committee), California introduced its own version (CUAC). Its task was to hunt communists, thereby supporting McCarthyism's anti-communist hysteria. Strikingly, McCumber notes CUAC's goal was 'to clean up the campus. Their ultimate discovery was that communist infiltration at UCLA was basically mythical: the only communist faculty member CUAC would ever find on the UCLA faculty was a woman who played the piano for exercises in the women's gym' (15). Like any witch hunt, anti-communism was never deterred by facts such as these, as its real goal was somewhere else and McCumber shows this eloquently. He writes: 'while rhetorically couched in terms of anti-communism, in fact [it] had other targets. These included Jews, homosexuals, African-Americans, and feminists' (19), to which almost any form of critical philosophy could be added. 'Marx's communism would not have been, in 1947, a major problem ... atheism, however was' (34).

The fight against non-existent communism (except for the piano-player) continued relentlessly when management forced academics to swear a rather silly 'oath' (37) not to be a communist. But 'very few volunteered to take the oath. It was rammed down their throats' (38). This was made worse through the 'California Plan' (117) that prevented communists from being hired and the 'Allen Formula' (135) that extended the witch-hunt to virtually everyone, as orchestrated by 'Raymond B. Allen, America's leading academic Red hunter' (136). All this also included spies called the 'contact men' (123). At the administrative level, they spied while reporting people to the authorities. The Nazis called them 'Blockwart' outside and 'Kapos' inside concentration camps while the Stasi in East Germany called them 'IM' (Informal Members). Totalitarianism seems to create similar structures of surveillance, control, and intimidation. In any

case, all of this was designed to pave the way so that Cold War philosophy could flourish while continental philosophy was being liquidated.

McCumber's key argument is that all these political (CUAC, etc.) and administrative instruments (California Plan, Allen formula, contact men, etc.) were not so much designed to fight non-existent communism but rather idealism and continental philosophy. Eliminating these opened the space for analytical philosophy to become the dominant force in America. Materialist philosophy was also removed even though 'materialism was not the kind of force on the American philosophical scene that idealism was' (53). This may also explain why 'Hegel, who was already unpopular, not only because of the painful difficulty of his texts but also because of his association with Marx' (57), was almost completely removed.

Meanwhile, at the philosophical level, idealism, Hegel, Kant, Nietzsche, existentialism, etc. were fought through 'the politics of rational choice' (71) as engineered through 'the Rand Corporation' (72). It was sold through the hallucination that RCT was 'a compelling philosophical alternative to Marxism' (73). Unlike in Marxism, 'preferences in RCT are given' (80) so that the tidily controlled individual can select their pre-given preference. This is cast as follows: 'in RCT, each individual is solely responsible for his or her preferences' (81). People are told that consumer choices are actually free choices, even when they are being exposed to a multi-billion dollar global advertising behemoth supported by rafts of psychologists that design TV-ads for maximum impact, as Lindstrom has shown in his book *Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy* (Doubleday, 2008). Crucially, RCT not only fits to Cold War philosophy; it also supports capitalism and its ideological bedfellow of neoliberalism.

One of the most disturbing ideas of RCT comes in 'RCT ethics' (85). McCumber notes that one of RCT's core ideas is that 'preferences... are not susceptible to moral evaluation' (87). Any theory that claims to exist outside of moral philosophy should be considered extremely dangerous. But despite its supposed objectivism and rationality, 'RCT was not up to the ideological job' (91) of replacing idealist philosophy, and perhaps not even 'Wittgenstein's economic cousin Friedrich von Hayek' (95) with his ideology of neoliberalism was able to do that, despite their best efforts. Perhaps because there simply is no 'rational choice ethics' (108) as RCT 'does not present an ethical theory but instead argues that one is impossible' (109). This is strengthened through the idea that 'everyone is entitled to set up his own moral imperative and to demand that everyone else follow these imperatives' (110).

One of the key messages of McCumber's book is that a 'network of friends and supporters [and] a loud backlash ... can seriously impede ... CUAC's crusade against subversion [and its] exercise in political repression' (124). Some of America's finest philosophers may be forced to rely on exactly that as 'the dark realm of socio-political pressure' (2) may rise again with the newly elected US president. What those dark forces rely on is 'the removal [of philosophers and others] without fanfare and publicity' (125), and again, such removals aren't based on factual evidence. Hysterias are not determined by facts: 'as late as 1959, when after nineteen years of work, CUAC has still not uncovered a single subversive professor at UCLA or elsewhere in California's higher education' (128). Perhaps many of the removed academics and artists may well have wondered 'why me?—I have done nothing wrong'. Under authoritarian regimes—whether Nazis, Stalin, Pinochet, McCarthyism, etc.—this has never been necessary, as these regimes determine who is picked up and who is let go.

Of course, university 'internal surveillance' (135) can be used to select people and as justification of any university's action. UCLA's boss and prime Red-hunter Raymond B. Allen invented such justification when arguing on communists that 'their allegiance to Moscow had led them to abandon the scientific method' (136), even though there were hardly any communists at

UCLA (except the piano-player). Beyond that, allegiance to capitalism was never seen as doing the same. Meanwhile, the supposed ‘abandonment of science’ (!) led Moscow to Sputnik (4th Oct. 1957). Never mind the pretended objectivity of the Red hunters; these considerations never entered the minds of ideological demagogues engaged in riding the wave of anti-communist hysteria. Yet the goal wasn’t ‘reds under the beds’, but the ideological cleansing of philosophy departments. As a consequence, ‘social philosophy was taken off the list [of teaching subjects] entirely’ (155). Simultaneously, ‘idealism ... is hardly to be found on American campuses today’ (155), while ‘continental philosophy [continues to suffer] with some notable exceptions, such as Binghamton, Emory, Northwestern, Penn State, Stony Brook, California/Riverside and Vanderbilt’ (156).

Overall, however, Cold War philosophy’s march to glory was never a total victory. Not long after McCarthyism, ‘the rejection of Cold War philosophy in the university at large [occurred already] in the sixties’ (167). But the damage was done. Today, McCumber concludes on a rather pessimistic note: there has been ‘an enormous proliferation of programmes, their names often ending in “studies” (as in African American, Asian, Hispanic, Islamic, Jewish, and Women’s Studies) [but there still is] the personal hostility of some professors to certain groups or methods’ (170). In short, there is an ‘ongoing influence in American intellectual life of the Cold War, and of Cold War Philosophy’ (170). One thing one might learn from McCumber’s exquisite book is that as soon as the freedom to write philosophy is restricted, philosophy is damaged. If anything, McCumber’s book is a timely reminder that true philosophy can only exist in absolute freedom.

Thomas Klikauer, Sydney Graduate School of Management, Western Sydney University