



# **On Open and Closed Minds: a talk in the honour of Victoria Chick**

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# **On heterodoxy and education (Interview with Phil Armstrong, 2020)**

- PA: Did you teach undergraduates and postgraduates in the past, in different universities where it was different?
- VC: Well, I think the important thing is not place but time. When I came into economics, there were many approaches and they were tolerated. I mean, people would make fun at the LSE of Arnold Plant who was very right-wing, and so on, but they listened respectfully when he gave a lecture because he knew the economic data like the back of his hand - he was absolutely fantastic. Richard Sayers was mocked for studying money (it wasn't a fashionable thing to do - imagine that - really quite extraordinary!) But I studied with Richard and he was tremendous. He's been a very formative influence in my thinking and my life, because Richard (unlike most economists) went to banks and asked them what they did! Remarkable man. I'm speaking of the 1960s at the LSE, where, in effect, Samuelsonian-type Keynesianism, was the orthodoxy. Orthodox economics was not what it is now - it was Keynesianism.

# **On heterodoxy and education: Interview with Phil Armstrong, 2020**

- So, two things. One, that I always emphasise when talking to Rethinking Economics people, is, “Don’t despair, the orthodoxy wasn’t always like this and doesn’t have to stay like this.” The other came out in something I said up in Leicester, which you might have heard - someone asked, “If we took over the orthodoxy, would we be as nasty to those who don’t agree with us [as the mainstream is to us]?” I said that I didn’t think so - because there is a personality difference, a character difference, which has to do with dualism. On the one hand, if you have a dualistic outlook on life and you think differently from me, you’re right and I am, by definition, wrong. If you don’t think dualistically, you might ask, “Why do you think that?” The reaction is different. It’s the difference between a closed and open mind in the sense of [Milton] Rokeach, and it’s a very important psychological difference between most of the heterodox and the mainstream...But I genuinely believed what I said in Leicester, I think the attitude is different.

# **The Open and Closed Mind, Milton Rokeach, 1960**

- “This book is addressed to all those who, for one reason or another, have had occasions to reflect on the nature of their own belief systems and that of others”. (p. Vii)
- “Our research into the nature of belief systems began with the analysis of ideological dogmatism; over the years, we have had occasions to observe a number of persons, mostly intellectual, who in real life appeared to be dogmatic or closed in their modes of thought and belief; what they were dogmatic about varied from one person to another “.
- “long before we were able to define the phenomenon of ideological dogmatism explicitly, it seemed clear that it referred to a number of things: a closed way of thinking which could be associated with any ideology, regardless of content (p.4), an authoritarian view of life, an intolerance towards those with opposing beliefs, and a suffering of those with similar beliefs

# **The Open and Closed Mind, Rokeach, 1960**

- In both the practical and academic world there is conflict among men about who is right and who is wrong, who is rational and who is rationalising and conflict over whose convictions are domatic and whose are intellectual.
- The author defines ideology as an organization of beliefs and expectancies, man's cognitive activities (thinking, remembering, perceiving) as processes and changes that take place within a person who has already formed a system of beliefs, which we can describe and measure;
- There are 3 types of acceptances and rejections: of ideas, of people, of authority.

# **The Open and closed mind**

## **Rokeach, 1960**

- Every system is asymmetrical rather than symmetrical, it includes on one hand a system of beliefs that one accepts, and on the other, a series of systems that one rejects (pg. 32);
- “the belief system is concerned to represent all the beliefs, sets, expectancies or hypotheses, conscious or unconscious that a person at a given time accepts as true of the world he lives in” (p.33)
- “the disbelief system is composed of a series of subsystems rather than merely a single one, and contains all the disbeliefs, sets, expectancies, conscious and unconscious, that to one degree or another, a person at a given time rejects as false” (p.33)

# The Open and Closed Mind, Rokeach 1960

- The defining characteristics of open-closed systems:
- **1. Open**
- A. the magnitude of rejection of disbelief subsystems is relatively low at each point along the continuum;
- B. there is communication of parts within and between belief and disbelief systems;
- C. there is relatively little discrepancy in the degree of differentiation between belief and disbelief systems;
- D. there is relatively high differentiation within the disbelief systems.

# The Open and Closed Mind, Rokeach 1960

- **2. Closed**
- A. the magnitude of rejection of disbelief subsystems is relatively high at each point along the disbelief continuum;
- B. there is isolation of parts within and between belief and disbelief systems;
- C. there is relatively great discrepancy in the degree of differentiation between belief and disbelief systems
- D. there is relatively little differentiation within the disbelief system.



# **The Open and closed Mind, Rokeach, 1960**

- The author proposes to frame the open-closed systems concepts with the help of various threats rather than a certain definition and finally he proposes two opposing sets of motives, the need to know and the need to defend against threat, which are conceived to jointly determine the extent to which a belief system is open or closed.
- In a similar fashion, Victoria Chick frames the open and closed systems concepts with the help of various characteristics or traits (see 2023, on Open and Closed systems).

# **Chick 2023, Open and closed systems/Routledge Handbook of macroeconomic methodology**

- What is a system: Oxford English Dictionary, an organised or connected group of objects ( a set or assemblage of things connected, associated or interdependent); a whole composed of parts; a set of principles, scheme, method; the set of correlated principles, ideas or statements, belonging to some department of knowledge or belief.
- Open system: a material system in which the total mass or energy fluctuates; an incomplete or alterable system of ideas, doctrine ,things.
- Closed system: a system , a complete or essentially unalterable system (of ideas, doctrines, things, etc.); a material system in which the total mass or energy remains constant , a self-contained realm, unaffected by external forces.

# Chick 2023, ibid.

- Conditions for Open systems:
- 1. real-world systems: the system is not atomistic; at least one of the following holds:
  - A. outcomes of actions cannot be inferred from individual actions (because of interactions );
  - B. agents and their interactions might change;
- 2. structure and agency are interdependent;
- 3. boundaries around and within the social or economic system are mutable for various reasons;
- 4. identifiable social structures are embedded in larger structures.

# Chick 2023, ibid.

- Implications for theoretical systems: (conditions for open systems)
- 5. there might be important omitted variables or relations and /or their effects on the system might be uncertain;
- 6. the classification into exogenous and endogenous variables may be neither fixed nor exhaustive;
- 7. connections and/or boundaries between structures may be imperfectly known and/or may change;
- 8. there is imperfect knowledge of the relations between variables.

# Chick 2023, ibid.

- Conditions for closed theoretical systems:
  - 1. all relevant variables can be defined;
  - 2. the boundaries of the system are definite and immutable;
  - 3. only the specified exogenous variables affect the system and they do it in a known way;
  - 4. relations between included variables are either knowable or random;
  - 5. economic agents (whether individuals or aggregate) are treated atomistically

# Chick 2023, ibid.

- 6. the nature of economic agents is treated as if constant;
- 7. The structure of the relationship between the components is treated as if it is either knowable or random;
- 8. the structural framework within which agents act is taken as given.
- “The words ‘open system’ have two meanings in heterodox economics, one referring to the structure of reality, models and theories and another to the conjunction of events generated in reality, theories and models... Closed and open systems both have their uses, but creating a closure as an abstraction from reality is to be done with care...” (p.152)