

argument that national survival also involves a struggle. Until such time as war and nations can be eliminated from our vocabulary, reasonable discussion of citizenship and war must take account of the apparent need for national self-defense—even if the author might ultimately conclude that the many calls for self-defense are jingoistic or overblown.

Ben-Porath treats the concept of patriotism seriously, recognizing that it is a phenomenon that cannot be lightly dismissed. She follows Amy Gutman in describing patriotism: “[P]atriotism is a sentiment, not a moral perspective” (p. 45). But this does not acknowledge the Aristotelian counterargument that patriotism is something weightier. According to Aristotle, patriotism is a passion, as is honor, ambition, love, and fear. Passions, according to Aristotle, are necessary to fuel virtue, and to bring this logic full circle, tough virtues are indispensable in times of war. At this point in her argument, the author might have enriched her discussion if she had compared and contrasted her ideas with those of Walter Berns (*Making Patriots*, 2001), whose view of patriotism draws upon the American Founding generation, or even with Martha Nussbaum in *For Love of Country?* (2002), whose cosmopolitanism might be supportive of Ben-Porath’s thesis.

In conclusion, some will find this a meaningful contribution to civic education literature; others, though, may judge it an opportunity missed given that Ben-Porath’s endeavor avoids several of the difficult issues at the heart of civic education in time of war. Yet, regardless of one’s ultimate evaluation of the book’s arguments, the author clearly addresses important issues in a distinctive and engaging way.

**The Myth of the Rational Voter: Why Democracies Choose Bad Policies.** By Bryan Caplan. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007. 280p. \$29.95.

DOI: 10.1017/S1537592708080158

— Jeffrey Friedman, *University of Texas at Austin*

Bryan Caplan’s book could only have been written by an economist. This has a good side and a bad side. On the good side, Caplan makes an important contribution to the public-opinion literature by analyzing the American people’s *economic* views—an area overlooked by most previous researchers. And he asks a crucial question: Are the public’s economic views *wrong*?

The heart of the book is Chapter 3, where Caplan organizes 1996 survey data on economic attitudes into four “biases”: antiforeign bias (opposition to free trade); anti-market bias (suspicion of the profit motive); make-work bias (favoring public-works programs); and pessimistic bias (underestimating how well the economy is doing). By “biased,” Caplan means that the public’s views are *systematically erroneous*. His data do show systematic—nonrandom—opinions. But when he tries to prove that

these opinions are erroneous, his economism works against him.

Caplan’s astonishing metric for *the truth* about free trade, and so on, is the consensus view on these matters held by people with economics PhDs. By showing that they disagree with the public, Caplan claims to have established that the public is wrong. This is an argument from authority, logically invalid on its face: It runs into the obvious rejoinder that even economists can be biased.

The author easily dispatches weak versions of this rejoinder: that economists are biased because they are rich, or because they are conservatives. But he does not mention a long line of critics who hold that economists are biased by a methodological dogma: rational choice theory (RCT).

Still, bracketing the question of whether economic “experts” are right, one should certainly stipulate that the public could be systematically wrong—about economics or anything else. The question to which Caplan then turns is: What might cause systematically erroneous opinions? He thinks that his biggest contribution is his answer to that question: his theory of “rational irrationality” (Chapter 5). Caplan wants to make room within RCT for *the rational choice of* “irrationality”—a choice that he views as responsible for voters’ economic errors.

The usual RCT explanation for voter error is “rational ignorance” (Chapter 4). The average voter supposedly knows that a lone vote probably will not determine an electoral outcome; so the voter chooses not to invest resources in becoming politically well informed. A rational-ignorance theorist would similarly attribute voters’ economic errors to their low incentive to become economically well informed. *Total* ignorance of economics, however, would produce a random scattering of economic views, not systematic patterns such as those displayed in Chapter 3. To explain these nonrandom “errors,” Caplan contends, we need another independent variable: not ignorance but irrationality. Thus, according to the author, the public’s economic opinions are not merely uninformed; they are the product of “emotions or ideology” (p. 14 and *passim*). Indeed, they are like religious dogmas, held so “fervently, dogmatic[ally], and fanatical[ly]” (p. 15) that attempts to dispute them provoke anger.

But Caplan provides no evidence that the public is fanatical, or even stubborn, about its economic opinions, nor that the opinions held by the public “feel” better (p. 2) than the opinions economists hold. Nor does he show that voters know the high odds against individual votes mattering (nor does he explain why, if they knew that, they would vote anyway), nor does he show that they therefore (rationally choose to) “turn off” their “rational faculties,” and indulge their “emotions or ideologies,” because they “don’t care about the truth” (p. 2).

Instead of proving that (unspecified) emotions or ideologies explain the public’s economic views, Caplan sim-

ply assumes it. Why else would the public be so “crazy” (p. 69) as to disagree with economics “experts”? His only actual *argument* for mass economic irrationality, however, is that it can provide an RCT explanation of nonrandom mass opinion. He gives no reason to believe that rational irrationality “exists”—except as a solution to a problem in the theory of rational choice.

However, the fact that Caplan fails to prove that rational irrationality exists in the real world does not mean that there is nothing in the real world to be explained. Emotion and ideology, not to mention error, are plentiful in politics, amply deserving the attention he pays them. But to explain them as rational choices, he has to assign them to the mass level, where they can be seen as corollaries of the average voter’s insignificance.

Caplan references, but does not seem to have understood, Philip Converse’s “The Nature of Belief Systems in Mass Publics” (David E. Apter, ed., *Ideology and Discontent*, 1964), which showed that ideology tends to be the province of the well-informed few, not the ignorant masses. More recent political-psychology literature on “motivated reasoning” suggests that people cling dogmatically to their beliefs—by using their *knowledge* to fend off discrepant information. Thus, “ideological constraint” would be likelier among relatively knowledgeable elites than relatively ignorant masses—as Converse found.

Elite dogmatism, however, fits uncomfortably with RCT. The politically knowledgeable few would tend to have greater incentives than typical voters to *avoid* stubbornly clinging to what might be mistaken ideas, because all things being equal, the politically knowledgeable would likelier be politicians, bureaucrats, political activists, terrorists—even economists or political scientists—who influence politics much more than average voters do. Caplan would predict that influential elites are less ideological than average voters, yet at least with *knowledgeable* elites, the opposite holds. They seem inclined toward dogmatism *regardless* of the incentive to keep an open mind (cf. Tetlock, *Expert Political Judgment*, 2006).

But then, the world they are trying to understand is complicated. In confronting complexity, people err inadvertently (and nonrandomly, for cognitive and cultural reasons): not by choice, but *by accident*. And the more misleading information people inadvertently accumulate, the easier it is to fend off discrepant information. Here, dogmatism is unintentional. In RCT, though, everything—even “irrationality”—is intentional. Extracting from this hyper-rationalism a plausible theory of *mistake* may simply be impossible.

These days, understanding political error and dogma is especially crucial. But judging from *The Myth of the Rational Voter*, that objective might best be advanced by leaving RCT behind—no matter how dogmatically economists cling to this particular error.

**Cooperation Without Trust?** By Karen S. Cook, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2005. 256p. \$32.50.

**Rationality and the Ideology of Disconnection.**

By Michael Taylor. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 238p. \$75.00 cloth, \$26.99 paper.

DOI: 10.1017/S153759270808016X

— David M. Woodruff, *London School of Economics and Political Science*

The two books under review differ sharply on the fruitfulness of rational choice theory. Karen Cook, Russell Hardin, and Margaret Levi posit that even trust is best understood as a product of rational, materialist calculations. On their “encapsulated interest” view, trust “exists when one party to [a] relation believes the other party has incentive to act in his or her interest or to take his or her interests to heart” (p. 2). But can incentives truly whisper to the heart? Michael Taylor decries the baleful consequences, both intellectual and practical, that stem from assimilating all reasoned decision making to the numerical weighing of material incentives and ignoring the role of heartfelt personal and moral commitments.

Cook, Hardin, and Levi find it most useful to define trust as resting not only on incentives but specifically on those incentives arising from the desire for repeated personal interactions. The major contention of their book is that trust in this sense can play only a limited role in sustaining cooperation in contemporary mass societies. Even allowing for some transitivity of trust across social networks, the individual in a contemporary society must cooperate with multitudes of people for whom a future of prospective dealings with the individual or that person’s trusted associates casts no shadow. Various substitutes for trust are thus required if cooperation is to proceed. The authors consider many examples, among them fictive kinship relations employed by Kenyan pastoralists, associations that license professionals such as doctors or lawyers, and state organs of coercion and regulation.

The sheer variety of these topics is a problem. The terrain of alternatives to trust is vast. Even a selective survey of this terrain yields conclusions of such extreme generality as to be almost devoid of content. Doubtless the authors are on safe ground in stating that “distrust and lack of trust are more likely than trust . . . to motivate us to create the institutions that allow us to cooperate with each other and treat each other as trustworthy” (p. 186). However, this verity offers little guidance into launching an investigation of concrete empirical situations.

As a result, reading the book’s many short treatments of the dilemmas of cooperation in various realms is a frustrating experience: They fail to cumulate and are generally too abbreviated to be satisfactory on their own terms. For instance, in illustrating how large-scale social transitions destabilize established structures of cooperation, the authors