The rhetoric of equality played an important part in motivating both the American and French Revolutions. Revolutionaries sought to tear down the existing social and political hierarchies, to replace them with ... what? This was a problem that political theorists grappled with at the end of the eighteenth century. Their solution is the subject of John Carson’s new book, *The Measure of Merit*. In it, Carson unpacks the idea of a meritocracy as it emerged in the eighteenth century and explores how the deceptively simple idea of merit was influenced by philosophical and scientific debates about mind, brain, talent, and intelligence.

The first part of Carson’s work recounts the struggles of post-revolutionary political philosophers as they tried to imagine how their newly democratic governments could effectively control a society that seemed to them to be overtly marked by physical, mental, and moral differences between individuals. Nature, as Carson shows, became an important concept, both for explaining and legitimating “the persistence of difference despite the equality of rights” (39). For example, Thomas Jefferson criticized the old political structure for making distinctions based on wealth, rank, and heredity, because these were “artificial” distinctions. Nature, he believed, provided its own kind of aristocracy, one based on talents and virtue. Jefferson’s thoughts on this matter were not entirely unique. In fact, Carson’s first chapter demonstrates how extensively he and his contemporaries drew on the lengthy debates about the constitution of the mind by English associationists, French sensationalists, and Scottish Common Sense philosophers. What was unique about the discussions of the nineteenth century was this attempt to link republican governance with the sciences of the mind. By grounding his “aristocracy of talent” in nature, Jefferson tied the human sciences and the republican venture to one another in such a way that bolstered both their claims to legitimacy. Republicanism became a positive improvement over the aristocracies of old for its ability to more closely approximate the hierarchies of nature, rather than the artificial hierarchies of man. And for the human sciences, the centuries-long debates over the nature of man were no longer merely pedantic. Now they carried with them the fates of nations.

Carson illustrates his argument by describing two of the most prominent lines of research stemming from this increased attention to the
human sciences: craniometry and intelligence testing. Craniometry, Carson argues, was important despite having largely failed by the end of the nineteenth century for having established two key principles: (1) all facets of human intellect could be accurately described by a single category of intelligence, and (2) this kind of intelligence might be measured and studied statistically. French psychologist Alfred Binet’s intelligence test, as well as the subsequent tests developed by American psychologists in the early twentieth century, relied heavily on both these assumptions.

In the last section of Carson’s book, he focuses almost exclusively on the United States, where intelligence testing found the most success. Carson argues that French psychologists proved much more resistant to the idea of a single category of intelligence than did American psychologists. Content with their system of concours (general examinations) and generally confident in the belief that intelligence was multifaceted, the French did not have an immediate need for intelligence testing. The sudden sharp increase in military recruitment in the United States during World War I, however, proved a fertile ground for psychologists like Robert Yerkes to coordinate intelligence testing on a large scale. Although intelligence testing in the military was never ubiquitous or uncontested, Carson’s monograph ends by foreshadowing the lasting cultural legacy left by intelligence testing, despite its only limited success.

One minor issue I had with this book was that the last section seems relatively weaker than the rest of the book. Carson spends a great deal of time focusing on Yerkes and his involvement in intelligence testing in the American military. While this story is clearly important to Carson’s overall narrative, it nevertheless comes off as a bit myopic in the context of his professed interest in broad trends, discourses, and the intersection of political and social languages (xiii). This flaw, minor in itself, becomes more noticeable in comparison to the rushed feel of the last chapter. Carson admirably tries to cover a wide variety of social and political reactions to intelligence testing in the postwar years. In contrast to the narrowly focused chapter before it, Carson cuts perhaps too broad of a swath here. Another way to read this criticism, however, is to simply say that Carson leaves his readers hungry for more.

Overall, Carson’s study does an excellent job of bringing the tension between equality and difference to the forefront in both French and American contexts. Throughout the book, Carson shows how intelligence became an almost monolithic category for describing mental ability, and that this monolithic conception gained considerable influence in both scientific and popular arenas throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Moreover, he demonstrates how the seed of this view of intelligence grew out of the nineteenth-century quest to identify
and quantify a hierarchy of natural distinctions, leaving the politics of merit and the sciences of human behavior firmly entwined.

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Timothy Hickman has written a welcome addition to the growing body of scholarship that examines the history of addiction as a social and cultural phenomenon. Hickman’s work pushes the study of addiction in an important new direction: he suggests that widely held ideas about habitual narcotic use, which he calls “the addiction concept” (4), simultaneously grew out of, and helped create, a “cultural crisis of modernity” (4) in the United States during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Ideas about addiction, he demonstrates, were deeply embedded in both popular ideas about gender, class, and race, as well as in debates about what it meant to be modern, including “the struggle to redefine the terms of human agency in the face of rapid technological, economic, and political change” (4–5) that lay at the heart of the cultural crisis he describes. At the same time, Hickman argues that the concept of addiction contained within it, from the beginning, the implication that habitual drug use could be either voluntary or compelled. This “double meaning of addiction” (7) helped fuel the sense of cultural crisis Hickman describes, and it was eventually codified into law by the passage of the 1914 Harrison Act. The consequence, he suggests, “was to divide the drug-using population into groups of criminals and patients while also helping to expand the roles of professional medicine and federal police authority” (151).

This is an interesting and novel argument, and it raises fundamental questions about the relationship between habit, drug use, and the experience of modernity. Yet Hickman’s methodological approach also means that his insights are surprisingly limited in scope. The book is based primarily on a series of close readings of what he calls “canonical” (13) texts. This approach has the strength of allowing the author to pursue in-depth and at times fascinating interpretations of key works, drawing out insights that otherwise might go unexplored. Yet by relying on a single document