
In an extensively researched book encompassing wide domains of American and French intellectual history, Carson discusses the reconciliation of democratic ideology with the existence of unequal talent and intelligence. Both the French and the Americans developed measures of merit to justify unequal outcomes. In France, state-sponsored competitive examinations and expert judgment selected successful leaders. There was minimal interest in quantifying intelligence. In the United States, however, belief in a single, measurable, unilinear variable of “intelligence” triumphed among psychologists. Part of the explanation relates to the increased sensitivity in American culture to alleged group or “racial” differences.

In the late Enlightenment and early nineteenth century, many authors postulated “virtues and talents,” whether derived from heredity or education, as the only justification for social distinctions. “Talents” were ambiguous enough a designation to allow conservatives to use them as vehicles for exclusion, while progressive thinkers heralded a counterweight to privilege.

A particularly effective chapter on anthropology outlines how brain size or a similar physical index became a significant variable for assumed differences in “intelligence” among racial groups. Yet in the end, all such correlations failed. The relative homogeneity of the French nation decreased the cultural resonance of anthropologists’ arguments about racial hierarchy inside France. While acknowledging the importance of the colonial project, the author, however, does not highlight the importance of French colonial ambitions paralleling the emergence of polygenist racial theory. Nor does he allow for the differential application of neo-Lamarckian anthropology that allowed the French to judge Europeans as perfectible while non-Europeans were often doomed to a slow climb up the evolutionary ladder.

Carson deftly illustrates the physiological imperative and pathological studies that dominated the new French “scientific” psychology. He also shows that Alfred Binet, developer of the metric scale of intelligence, at first imitated an anthropological approach including correlations between head volume and intelligence. Binet’s eventual revision of the metric scale apparently shifted intelligence from a multivalent complex of traits to a single numerical entity representing mental level.

Paradoxically, in France the Binet scale languished. School physicians were unwilling to cede power to psychologists in diagnosing abnormality. In the United States, Lewis Terman, among others, revised the Binet scale to promote the IQ test as an assessment of intelligence. While critics of the IQ test never disappeared, its cultural impact was far greater in the United States than in France.

During the First World War, American psychologists tested 1.75 million soldiers. French psychologists felt no such need for mechanical methods to replace expert judgment. For them, clinical psychological studies and a more complex view of intelligence prevented undue enthusiasm for the IQ results. Some American psy-
chologists later used the army tests to question the viability of democracy or to make invidious ethnic distinctions for the benefit of northern Europeans. By the 1930s and 1940s, more environmentalist explanations of IQ predominated.

The author concludes that the measure of merit is always ambiguous and will differ by culture and time period. Despite the admitted abuses of the IQ scale for racial exclusion, he somewhat surprisingly asserts that debates on hereditary versus environmental origins of intelligence will never be resolved either in popular or scientific discourse. Measures of merit are just too convenient a tool for a democracy that always needs to justify inequality. The entire debate shows “how scientific knowledge and social order not only interact and continually reconstitute each other, but also shape the lives of the individuals living in their midst” (p. 280).

This richly rewarding study should especially appeal to historians of anthropology and psychology. The publishers, however, have not served readers well by omitting a bibliography.

Martin S. Staum
University of Calgary


This is a germinal book. It is not only the first scholarly biography of the founder of the watercure in Germany, Vincenz Priessnitz (1799–1851), but also a history of the reception of his ideas till the end of World War I. While Uwe Heyll’s recent monograph on the history of naturopathy in Germany hardly pays attention to Priessnitz and his tremendous influence on the watercure movement in Germany, Helfricht proves that Priessnitz was pivotal not only for the early stage of hydropathy but also for later pioneers in this field, for example, Dr. Heinrich Lahmann in Dresden.

What makes this book so outstanding is its use of newly discovered archive material in Jesenik, the former Freienwalde. Helfricht came across a mine of information on the everyday life of the world-famous spa of Gräfenberg: family documents, reports by his assistants, more than three thousand letters by patients, the complete list of patients who stayed in the Priessnitz sanatorium in the years 1829–38, as well as about four hundred rare booklets on hydropathy, mostly from the nineteenth century.

Helfricht starts with Priessnitz’s vita, which is well known; yet he adds a few new details, such as the spelling of Priessnitz’s Christian name; the exact date of his birth (5 October); and the Preissnitz family, including Priessnitz’s children (who turned out to be less successful in life). We also learn new facts about the