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Martin S. Staum, *Nature and Nurture in the French Social Sciences, 1859-1914 and Beyond*. Montreal and Kingston: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2011. xvi + 266 pp. Illustrations, bibliography, and index. \$95.00 U.S. (cl). ISBN 979-0-77-353892-4.

Review by Allyson J. Delnore, University of Pittsburgh.

It will surprise no one that the debate over the relative importance of heredity or environmental influence was not resolved in the period under consideration in Martin S. Staum's most recent work, *Nature and Nurture in the French Social Sciences, 1859-1914 and Beyond*. As Staum himself alludes in his title, it remains unresolved today, particularly with the emergence of "epigenetics." But the value of Staum's intricate and layered work lies not in its revelations (indeed there is little in the book that seems particularly surprising or unexpected). Rather, it is in the sophistication of the genealogy (pun not intended) Staum constructs of this perennial debate.

Social scientists in France during the Third Republic were not immune to the influence of popular fears of depopulation, degeneration, and crime that have been well documented by other historians.<sup>[1]</sup> Moreover, with the expansion of the French overseas empire and increased demands for greater civil and political rights for women, ethnographers, anthropologists, psychologists, and sociologists felt called upon to provide scientific justifications for ideas about race and gender. In the half-century before World War I, Staum identifies a trend away from the physical anthropological perspective that stressed the importance of measurements and heredity and toward a new cultural anthropology in which the cultural and social aspects of an individual's milieu were given greater weight by social scientists. Nevertheless, there was no wholesale abandonment of physical anthropology or racial hierarchy in any of the social sciences during the period.

Moreover, as Staum's work makes clear, leaning to one side of the heredity-milieu debate in the period between 1859 and 1914 did not automatically dictate where one stood on the issue of imperialism. As he puts it, "[T]he most hereditarian did not always advocate the most uncompromising imperial expansion, while partisans of the milieu could be apostles for empire. Yet the latter group did not necessarily embrace an egalitarian framework on questions of race" (p. 16). Similarly, gender equality did not necessarily follow from a belief in the educability of European women. Staum emphasizes throughout the work that advocacy of racial equality did not necessarily follow from advocacy of gender equality, arguing that "race and gender issues did not always elicit consistently conservative or progressive viewpoints" (p. 16). Finally, in his chapter on Vichy France that wraps up the book, Staum highlights the development in the 1930s of more subtle concepts of race and culture that provided extremists with "scientific window dressing" (p. 210) for racial ideologies and state policies encouraging traditional gender roles.

Staum's approach relies on an exhaustive reading of a number of periodicals to reveal changes and continuities among the adherents of both innate and environmental explanations of difference. Staum is able to illustrate the often subtle shifts in thought that developed in response to significant thinkers, larger societal debates, and a handful of historical events. These published sources were supplemented by professional papers, letters, and the archives of the Musée de l'Homme and Collège de France.

Following an initial introductory chapter in which he sets up the major outlines of the nature/nurture debate in the nineteenth century and today, chapter two introduces readers to the ethnographers of the Second Empire, who were organized into two rival societies: the Société d'ethnographie américaine et orientale and the Société d'anthropologie de Paris, under the intellectual leadership of Paul Broca. This chapter is largely background information, synthesizing previous work on the differences between the two societies. The ethnographers, as opposed to the anthropologists, emphasized nature over nurture. Even while condemning racial hierarchies, however, most ethnographers enthusiastically endorsed empire--as long as it was humanely administered--as a way to guide backwards peoples toward civilization. Chapter three then shifts the reader's focus toward the other side of the debate and the anthropologists.

Though Staum acknowledges that the Société d'anthropologie has received more scholarly attention than the Société d'ethnographie, he argues that anthropologists' "complicated relationship to heredity" deserves closer examination, for it reveals much about racist, sexist, and imperialist attitudes at the time (p. 46). *The Bulletins de la Société d'anthropologie de Paris*, which began in 1859, provided both a basic record of the society, but also the chronological starting point for this work. Grounding the anthropologists' debate within a Lamarckian paradigm, Staum then structures the rest of the chapter around particular individuals and their followers: Paul Broca and his disciple, Paul Topinard, as well as Ernest-Théodore Hamy, Emile Cartailhac, and professors at the Ecole d'anthropologie. If anthropological Lamarckianism was a sort of happy middle in the debate between environmental influence and innate tendencies, then the various schools of anthropologists could be measured by how far away from the fulcrum they rested. Tipping the scales on the side of heredity were Gustave Le Bon and Georges Vacher de Lapouge, with Broca and Topinard moving closer to the center. For the most part, though, the second generation of anthropologists within this time frame tended, in Staum's analysis, toward Lamarckianism, with some variation for what he terms "differential" Lamarckianism, which credited Europeans over other races with a greater adaptability in response to changes in their environment.

Moreover, the anthropologists, though struggling through a crisis over how to quantify variation within humanity (as anthropometric evidence was shown to be inconsistent), still maintained a certain scientific prestige which gave weight, Staum posits, to cultural assumptions about European superiority. Examples of anthropologists who opposed French imperial projects are few. The majority supported French colonial rule on one of two grounds. First, that Europeans needed to help non-Europeans advance--the view held by most monogenists who viewed humanity as one species with variation within the species the result only of milieu. Second, on the grounds of an absolute right to rule of Europeans--a view often expounded by polygenists who separated humanity into different, and unequal, species (pp. 82-83). In this analysis, then, the differential Lamarckianism that came to dominate anthropological scientific discourse allowed individuals on both sides of the political spectrum to marshal arguments in support of the French colonial project at the turn of the century.

The fact that social scientists who championed a more Lamarckian understanding of race and the educability of non-European peoples still defended the imperial project is not wholly unexpected for anyone with a familiarity with the period, but it does provide a more nuanced view of imperial justifications and ambitions in the Third Republic. Staum reveals yet another layer in the pro-imperial rhetoric of the early twentieth century. While Alice Conklin has shown that French colonial officials in western Africa invoked universalist arguments in support of the *mission civilisatrice*, Staum effectively shows that republican social scientists did not (pp. 158, 166, 167). Moreover, while Joan Scott and Uday Mehta, among others, have argued that an exclusionary impulse exists within French republicanism (one that informed republican imperial projects[2]), Staum finds "no predetermined association between republican universalism or individualism and the exclusion of 'difference.' Not only were opponents of

the republic inclined to be exclusionary but also republicans themselves had many degrees of reception of the ‘other’” (p. 205).

Psychology presents yet another example of this. Chapters four and six show changes over time in the ideas of a single individual: Ribot and Alfred Binet, respectively. In chapter four, Staum sets out an analysis of the philosophy teacher and theorizer of psychology Théodule Ribot’s intellectual trajectory that also highlights the larger discipline’s turn away from physical anthropology and towards a more sociological viewpoint, even if Ribot’s concessions to the social were, in Staum’s view, largely half-hearted (p. 106). If Alfred Binet stands as the principal advocate for the value of physical anthropology in understanding the psychology of individuals, Ribot was influenced by Hippolyte Taine and Herbert Spencer and was therefore more apt to consider milieu in his understanding of collective psychology. But he nevertheless never abandoned his Lamarckian belief in the tendency of individuals to inherit acquired characteristics, a belief that was buttressed by his reading of Prosper Lucas and others on hereditary diseases and Francis Galton’s work on dynasties of talent and genius.

Ribot’s psychological heredity influenced what articles appeared in the *Revue philosophique*, the periodical which he established in 1876. In chapter five, Staum sifts through some 180 articles and reviews that touch on heredity and milieu and exposes a shift from an anthropological to a sociological perspective that privileged milieu over heredity. The shift went beyond Ribot’s own personal and gradual move from a more physical to a more cultural anthropology. But beyond psychological heredity, social scientists working in other fields were moving more definitely toward sociological perspectives without, however, abandoning racial and gender hierarchies.

This chapter is, in many respects, the heart of Staum’s argument. As he explains in the introduction, “[T]hrough the medium of periodicals and learned societies, I investigate the turf wars and shifting boundaries among these emerging disciplines” (p. 9). This is the chapter in which those disciplines most interact and in which the hereditary-milieu debate is most at play in the dynamic of boundary-shifting among those disciplines and the *Revue philosophique* is indeed pivotal, as Laurent Mucchielli has shown, for providing a forum for evolutionists, empiricists, and naturalists to break with spiritualists and stake new claims as scientists.<sup>[3]</sup> The chapter is peppered with familiar (and less familiar) names such as August Weismann, Léonce Manouvrier, Alfred Fouillée, René Worms, and Émile Durkheim and Staum charts the progression of thought once more from anthropometric to sociological with due diligence paid to the nuanced differences in their positions on gender issues, racial hierarchy, and the imperial project.

But again, in discussions of race and gender, Staum remarks with seeming surprise that attitudes toward gender and women’s rights do not necessarily correspond to assumptions about privileging the influence of the environment or a presumption of natural roles and limitations. In passing, Staum recognizes that “[n]o doubt the ferment over the ‘new woman’ and the movement for Civil Code reform and political equality for women led to reconsideration of the principle of an essential nature of woman,” but does not give much more consideration to the role of historical events in forming social scientists’ positions on the issue of gender rights (p. 125). As he explains, “...even if authors did not believe in an essential nature of women, they wished for a social order that envisaged women as tending the household and caring for children” (p. 122). As he concludes in chapter seven on non-Durkheimian sociology, despite the evident trend among most social scientists to privilege social and cultural (environmental) explanations of human behavior over innate ones, many of the most ingrained cultural and social issues—gender and racial inequality and elite acceptance of the imperial mission—remained unquestioned in the interwar years. Staum nevertheless shows some greater flexibility on race than on gender issues, with widespread agreement in the value of the goals of French imperialism (p. 141). Yet this continued insistence that attitudes toward gender equality did not necessarily follow attitudes toward racial equality seems to put too much weight on contemporary political discourses that lump all non-white non-males together into some category of “marginal other” and expects liberalism to

champion their equality. I suppose it is worth the reminder that this was not a nineteenth or even early-twentieth century assumption, but it still strikes me as hardly surprising.

Furthermore, in Staum's analysis of the role of racial theories among social scientists during the period, he recognizes only briefly one or two events that shaped individuals' opinions. As Staum concedes in the conclusion to the chapter, the Dreyfus affair was clearly a critical moment for consolidating the identity of the Durkheimians, and he also recognizes the importance of the upheaval caused by World War II and the era of decolonization, but beyond these obvious concessions, historical events seem like epiphenomena that, like epigenetic markers, can be read in the intellectual pedigrees of certain periodicals, but without any identifiable, significant long-term effects on ideas. As Alice Bullard's work on criminological and anthropological understandings of both the Communards and the Kanak of New Caledonia suggests, there are other moments that deserve attention in Staum's analysis.<sup>[4]</sup> But the Commune and even the Great War are all but ignored. This seems to me to pay too little attention to events, a trait of the first eight chapters of the book that makes the final chapter on the Vichy Era seem oddly unmoored from the historical moments before World War II.

The chapter on Binet goes some way to addressing some of the limitations of his approach in earlier chapters, as it explicitly deals with the social implications of Binet's move away from anthropometry and towards the recognition of the influence of the environment on both physical development and intelligence. Staum also highlights the limitations of the intellectual milieu in which he operated: Binet's understanding of the effects of poverty did not lead him to conclude that intelligence testing was culturally and socially biased. "The anthropological shadow" under which so many of the social scientists labored, Staum insists, "illustrates the deeply embedded cultural commonplaces about race and evolution (for Ribot) and physical-mental correlations (for Binet) among significant leaders of the French intellectual elite" (p. 141).

This persistence of belief in innate differences within humanity and its social implications is most clearly expressed in Staum's penultimate chapter on the Vichy Era. René Martial and George Montandon find the political climate ideal for a resurgence of the earlier anthropometric approaches and essentialist assumptions. That Staum's chapter on Vichy then transitions quickly to his final chapter bringing the debate to the present period highlights his final theme that claiming something is "scientific" does not make it true, something that this thoughtful analysis of earnest, seemingly scientific-minded, yet ultimately flawed individuals cannot fail to impress upon the reader.

An excellent complement to this study would be Janet Horne's *A Social Laboratory for Modern France. The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State*.<sup>[5]</sup> In that work, Horne collects detailed mini-biographies of the founder, leaders, and administrators of one influential extra-parliamentary organization of middle class industrialists, politicians, and academics that was instrumental in shaping a discursive transformation that led liberals of the Third Republic to an implicit critique of traditional nineteenth-century liberalism and paved the way for the founding of the welfare state of the twentieth century. Staum's chapters on Ribot, Binet, and on the *Revue philosophique* come close to this approach, attempting to enmesh the various authors within the broader historical context to provide insight not only into why their views were shifting, but also the larger consequences of the shift. But this is not a book aimed at the casual reader. As dense as it is, it will likely appeal primarily to specialists and graduate students. For those who do take it up, however, Staum's work is a fascinating biography of an ongoing intellectual debate.

## NOTES

[1] See for example Robert A. Nye, *Crime, Madness, and Politics in Modern France: The Medical Concept of National Decline* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1984); Dominique Kalifa, *Crime et culture au*

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*XIXe siècle* (Paris: Perrin, 2005); Benjamin Martin, *Crime and Criminal Justice under the Third Republic: the Shame of Marianne* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991); and Daniel Pick, *Faces of Degeneration: A European Disorder, c. 1848-1918* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).

[2] Uday S. Mehta, "Liberal Strategies of Exclusion" in *Politics & Society* 18/4(1990): 427-454; Joan B. Landes, *Women and the Public Sphere in the Age of the French Revolution* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1998). See also Jennifer Pitts, *A Turn to Empire: the Rise of Imperial Liberalism in Britain and France* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2005); Miranda Spieler, *Empire and Underworld Captivity in French Guiana* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2012); and Ann Stoler, "Sexual Affronts and Racial Frontiers: European Identities and the Cultural Politics of Exclusion in Southeast Asia," in Frederick Cooper and Stoler, eds, *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 198-237.

[3] Laurent Muccielli, "Aux Origines de la psychologie universitaire en France 1870-1900: enjeux intellectuels, contexte politique, réseaux et stratégies d'alliance autour de la 'Revue Philosophique' de Théodule Ribot," in *Annals of Science* 55(1998): 263-89, esp. 271, 275-282.

[4] Alice Bullard, *Exile to Paradise: Savagery and Civilization in Paris and the South Pacific, 1790-1900* (Palo Alto, Cal.: Stanford University Press, 2000).

[5] Janet R. Horne, *A Social Laboratory for Modern France: The Musée Social and the Rise of the Welfare State* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001).

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