

Book Reviews

Post-1800

STEFFAN BLAYNEY. *Health and Efficiency: Fatigue, the Science of Work, and the Making of the Working-Class Body*. Activist Studies of Science & Technology. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2022. Pp. 248. \$90.00 (cloth).
doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.185

Wellness industries have become a familiar dimension of many corporate workplaces in recent years: management spruik lunchtime yoga and mindfulness apps to their employees as an antidote to all manner of work- (and non-work) related stresses. In *Health and Efficiency: Fatigue, the Science of Work, and the Making of the Working-Class Body*, Steffan Blayney makes explicit the historical roots of capital's investment in, and construction of, healthy workers. He argues convincingly that the development of what he terms “a science of work” in Britain in the period 1870–1939 was intended to produce apparently healthy working-class bodies who would serve the needs of capitalism. More ambitiously, though tentatively, he contemplates what health might mean outside a capitalist system, by destabilizing both scientific and commercial models of worker well-being.

Blayney begins by tracing the evolution of notions of human fatigue during the second half of the nineteenth century. He explains how the concept of fatigue took shape in relation to the new theory of thermodynamics, and in the broader context of anxieties about modernity. In chapter 1 he also introduces the metaphor of the “human motor” (13) and follows its application both within Britain and across Europe and the United States. The emphasis on fatigue and specifically industrial fatigue is contrasted with a later, post–World War Two, obsession with stress, which, according to Blayney, has dominated the historical scholarship until now. In this opening chapter, he helpfully sets the sociocultural and intellectual context for the twentieth-century approaches to fatigue examined in the remainder of the book.

In chapters 2 and 3, Blayney details individual and increasingly institutional responses to fatigue in the specific interests of capitalist production. In chapter 2, he emphasizes how early attempts to scientifically measure muscular fatigue in the body of the worker were always focused on the body's productive capacity; feelings of tiredness were discounted unless productivity was affected. Such attempts were given new national urgency with the

onset of World War One, leading to the formation of the Health of Munitions Workers Committee. In chapter 3, Blayney focuses on the interwar development of industrial psychology, exploring the history of the state-run Industrial Fatigue Research Board (which became the Industrial Health Research Board in 1928) and the private National Institute of Industrial Psychology. For Blayney, psychology as a creditable academic discipline was essentially forged on the factory shopfloor.

Across these two key chapters, Blayney outlines an important distinction between the emerging science of work represented by industrial physiology and psychology, and Taylorist scientific management (coming out of the United States), which tended to focus on the tasks rather than on the worker. Blayney argues convincingly that of the two approaches, it was in fact the science of work that had the more long-lasting impact. He highlights how British interwar institutions made significant, hitherto neglected, contributions to the science of the working body.

In chapter 4, Blayney moves out of the factory and into the arena of consumption. Labor historians have argued for some time of the need to recognize the ways in which workers are themselves consumers, and the book certainly provides interesting evidence of this. Blayney examines how the battle against fatigue was commodified by the food and drink industries: for example, in products such as Bovril and Rowntree's Cocoa. Along with considering a range of advertising, Blayney studies the physical culture movement, the popular psychology texts of the day, and the eccentric figure of Herbert Casson, with his Efficiency Exchange (132) and correspondence courses for workers.

In the final chapter, Blayney prioritizes worker and union responses to the interventions of industrial physiologists and psychologists. He emphasizes how the application of a model of health to the factory floor did not go uncontested. Acknowledging the challenges of finding worker voices in the extant historical record, especially of those who engaged in an explicit way with the science of work, Blayney makes no claims to being representative in his analysis. Nevertheless, he has brought to light a range of worker testimonies from published and unpublished autobiographies, as well as from reading between the lines of official reports.

Health and Efficiency is a highly engaging approach to what could have been a dry institutional history of organizations such as the Industrial Health Welfare Board. Blayney incorporates a wide range of perspectives, including those of employers, industrial physiologists and psychologists, and workers and consumers. The book is fluently written and highly readable. Blayney positions his work as making a key contribution to histories of medicine and health. As a labor historian, however, I found *Health and Efficiency* fascinating for its insights into British working life in this period and would recommend it to scholars of labor and business. Perhaps surprisingly given his topic, Blayney is ultimately optimistic in tone. He argues that studying health as “fundamentally historical” makes it possible to see that there is always potential for human action. In his final sentence, Blayney encourages the reader to imagine “new kinds of political consciousness, new solidarities and better futures” (186).

Emma Robertson

La Trobe University

emma.robertson@latrobe.edu.au

PETER CLARKE. *Keynes in Action: Truth and Expediency in Public Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 274. \$39.99 (cloth).

doi: 10.1017/jbr.2023.170

Peter Clarke is probably best known to readers of this journal for *Hope and Glory: Britain 1900–2000* (2004) and *The Last Thousand Days of the British Empire: The Demise of a*