

***Cognitive Capitalism: Human Capital and the Wellbeing of Nations.* Heiner Rindermann.
Cambridge University Press. 2018. 576pp.**

The central aim of Heiner Rindermann's *Cognitive Capitalism* is to bring to together and explore all of the arguments regarding why some nations and groups of people end up being wealthier and more powerful than others. Fundamental to this, the professor of psychology at Germany's Technical University of Chemnitz argues, is general intelligence: in particular the way that the average of IQ of individuals interacts with that of their elite and the way in which the IQ of the elite interacts with that of the people whom they lead.

For example, Rindermann looks at the situation in South Africa, observing the presence of superstitious beliefs about AIDS even among that country's political elite. South Africans, he suggests, are, in part, more likely to believe these things because the cognitive ability of their political elite is nowhere near as high as in the Western world. But, at the same time, when members of the political elite start to adhere to such superstition, they will not find many people in the general population who are prepared to challenge it, meaning they're more likely to believe it (p.236). Rindermann also demonstrates that the poorer a country is the more its wealth level positively affects its cognitive ability, seemingly by raising intelligence to its genotypic limit via a functioning educational system and access to proper nutrition. However, the richer a country is, the more likely this is to have been reached, so the more its cognitive ability positively impacts wealth level. The smarter it is, the smarter will be its cognitive elite. And the smarter they are, the better the nation will be organized, the more inventive it will tend to be and the wealthier it will become (p.232). These are two of many of intriguing insights in this book.

Cognitive Capitalism is the ideal go-to reference book for anyone who wants to understand the correlates of intelligence and how these and intelligence itself interact with life outcomes, especially at the national level. No psychological stone is left unturned in presenting and carefully critiquing the enormous body of evidence on this which has been amassed. Rindermann explores, for example, the impact that the nature of different religious belief systems is likely to have on a country's educational values and, by extension, its average level of cognitive power. He has problem with looking at the politically challenging area of immigration from developing countries into Western countries. He demonstrates how it has reduced not just the average intelligence of receiver countries but also, by complicating and putting pressure on the education system, the average IQ of *natives within* those countries. Rindermann's deep mining of every cognitive national cause and effect also throws up some delightful little diamonds of information; data proving the veracity of something that one might have assumed to be so but didn't realise had been tested. For example, Rindermann shows that war tends to select for the less intelligent. High IQ people – with their community-oriented, altruistic values – really were more likely to have got killed in World War II, and presumably World War I (p.243). More likely to become officers, they would be at the vanguard of any attack, but even the most intelligent among the troops would have been more prone to gallant, self-sacrificing behaviour. Wars, Rindermann demonstrates, do indeed take the best of the 'breed,' just as was suggested using indirect evidence over a century ago (Starr Jordan, 1915), with all the consequences that has for the nation's competitive advantage and future trajectory.

But perhaps what is most refreshing about a lengthy psychology book which spends much of its time testing stereotypes as they pertain to intelligence research, is that it manages to confound so many stereotypes about lengthy psychology books. Such books are notorious for

suppressing the whole issue of intelligence or unreasonably treating the issue of group differences in intelligence (Warne et al., 2018). But this is not an issue that worries Rindermann. He waxes lyrical, for example, on the way in which the substantial average IQ differences within Italy contribute to the different socioeconomic profiles when comparing north and south and how the low IQ south is able, to some extent, to drag the north down (p.250). Quite how he got this refreshingly honest approach past a certain kind of peer reviewer, who one may well find oneself confronted with when submitting to a prestigious publisher such as Cambridge University Press, is unclear. But perhaps the lesson for researchers who want to take the evidence wherever it leads them is that the most thought-provoking findings must be buried deep in the tome, rather than constitute the tome's central insight.

Rindermann's style also confounds various stereotypes, be it about dry, academic books or humourless Teutonic professors. His tone – in exploring these complex issues – is light-hearted; playful even. This ensures that his argument is much easier to follow, his lengthy book far more engrossing, and the ride, generally, far more enjoyable. Where ever he can, Rindermann takes the opportunity to illustrate his data-based insights with personal anecdotes, further helping to ensure that his book is not merely a mine of information but a genuinely fun experience. In one chapter, he makes a point of playing amateur social anthropologist, giving his anecdotal impressions of intelligence levels in various countries he's visited (p.145). In addition, Rindermann's slightly unusual vocabulary and sentence construction – reflecting the fact that his native language is German – could have been edited out by the publisher. Fortunately, it wasn't. It makes the text seem more honest and open.

As with any substantial book, there are, of course, minor issues with which any individual reviewer could take issue. The first chapter could have done with being rather more dramatic. It perhaps could have been centred around one of the lively everyday personal experiences which Rindermann uses in other parts of the book. Also, in looking at national education levels, Rindermann observes that the better a country's education system is the better remunerated its teachers tend to be, however: 'there is one 'famous' exception: Finland's teachers have only a comparatively small salary but their school systems can attract the most able school graduates to become teachers' (p.268). As a resident of Finland I'd highlight two issues here. Firstly, though the cognitive abilities of Finnish teachers are likely higher than in many other countries, the 'most able' graduates still go into the same kinds of areas they do in all Western countries, so this should have nuanced. Secondly, British teachers, who are indeed paid more than Finnish ones, do a full day of teaching and are then expected to do marking and admin as unpaid overtime. Indeed, when they strike British teachers simply 'work to rule.' Finnish teachers spend about half their day teaching before sending the children home or to 'after school club.' The teachers spend the rest of the day doing marking and admin, not needing to take any work home. So, by British standards, Finnish teachers are paid slightly less than full time British teachers are paid but for doing a part time job! But these are minor gripes. *Cognitive Capitalism* is well-written, absorbing, daring and jammed with fascinating insights. This reviewer highly recommends it to academics and students alike.

Reference

Starr Jordon, D. (1915). *War and the Breed: The Relation of War to the Downfall of Nations*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Warne, R.T., Astle, M.C. & Hill, J.C. (2018). What do undergraduates learn about human intelligence? An analysis of introductory psychology textbooks. *Archives of Scientific Psychology*, 6: 32-50.