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Jérôme Martin, *La naissance de l'orientation professionnelle en France (1900-1940): Aux origines de la profession du conseiller d'orientation*. Paris: L'Harmattan, 2020. 301 pp. Tables, figures, notes, bibliography, and index. €32.00 (pb). ISBN 9782343196701.

Review by Aro Velvet, University of Southern California.

Career guidance occupies a strange place in contemporary society. Part psychological evaluation, part educational advice, part scientific management of a potential labor force, it sits uncomfortably on the border of each discipline. Pared down to its basics, it is simply a method for matching a worker to a job. At its most elaborate, it is “une forme de technique sociale dont le champ d'application est très étendu, de l'école à l'usine, en passant par la justice et les services sociaux, dans le but d'une insertion fonctionnelle de l'individu” (p. 8). It is this more complex elaboration that is at the heart of the debates and conflicts analysed in Jérôme Martin's well-researched and nuanced book, *La naissance de l'orientation professionnelle en France (1900-1940)*.

As the title suggests, the book centers on the first half of the twentieth century, and, really, on the interwar years, charting the emergence of career guidance primarily through non-state and voluntary organizations towards first attempts at state institutionalization in the late 1930s, cut short by the start of World War II. The dramatic changes in the French economy and society, notably the expansion of educational opportunities and the rise of white-collar work, that took place after World War II are therefore left unexamined. In the US, this later period saw the rise of, for example, personality typing (the infamous Myers-Briggs test) in career guidance and employment decisions—a taxonomy fit best for intellectual, rather than manual labor.[1] In France, the late 1940s and 1950s were the years when institutions envisaged before the war actually came into being, guidance counselors became state employees, and career guidance was integrated into the school system. It is a shame that this period of maturation and expansion is not examined in this otherwise excellent study.

Martin's book does provide an excellent analysis of the various factors that contributed to the emergence of career guidance in the early twentieth century, as well as the many points of conflict that made the field so rife with controversy and difficult to institutionalize in the interwar years.

The more familiar story relates the emergence of career guidance to the transformation of the industrial economy. This story is retold in part one of the book. In the late nineteenth century, both entering the labor market and job training became complicated affairs. The number of professions—and the number of potential employers—increased. Families no longer provided adequate networks for finding gainful employment. Apprenticeships, the traditional form of job

training, effectively disappeared, partly because of legislation regulating the employment of minors, partly because of the demands of primary education, and partly because taylorized industrial work rarely required the kind of deep immersion gained through apprenticeships. The state responded to this with a number of initiatives, including the establishment of new kinds of educational institutions geared towards technical and professional education (Écoles Primaires Supérieures, Écoles Primaires de Commerce et d'Industrie, etc). Nevertheless, in 1914, only 8 percent of 13- to 18-year-olds in the labor force received additional training.

In short, there were pressing practical reasons for developing something like career guidance in French society. How the resulting discipline took the form of a mixture of psychological and education expertise, aspiring not just to match applicants to jobs, but to achieve broader (one might say Foucauldian) goals of individual and social reform--this is where the really interesting story lies. On the one hand, the charge was led by teachers concerned by the career outcomes of their students, on the other, the novel discipline was legitimated by psychologists such as Alfred Binet who sought to give their studies more practical applications, and develop a science that would ensure "l'adaptation de l'individu à son milieu" (Binet, cited on p. 47).

In contrast to the United States, where wartime measures accelerated the use of practical psychology, the French army rarely used psychological profiling in military recruitment, the sole exception being the recruitment of aviators. The war, however, accelerated the rise of career guidance in a different way: by completely reorganizing the labor market. 25 percent of workers had to quit their jobs because they were drafted to the army; another 40 percent of those not drafted had to change jobs, because their workplaces shut their doors. Unemployment rose drastically. The crisis in employment further reinforced the need for new initiatives.

Part two of Martin's book considers the formation of career guidance into a distinct field with its own expertise and its own institutions. One driving factor, Martin argues, was the marginality of psychology within the academy, which led several researchers to look for practical applications that would help legitimize their research. Researchers such as Henry Wallon and Jean-Maurice Lahy established career counseling services in their laboratories, and began offering courses in what they called pedagogical psychology and practical psychology.

Psychology also contributed the ideological justification for career guidance that expanded its scope to encompass broader social reform. Scientists such as Édouard Toulouse saw their work as the basis for a "biocracy," a eugenicist social order, where the life sciences were given the task of reorganizing society on both more just and more efficient grounds. These ideas found traction among radical and radical-socialist politicians concerned with unemployment and the fraying of social order after World War I. Toulouse and Lahy consciously forged these links in masonic lodges, where they both were members.

By the 1930s, career guidance had become a theory which saw work not simply as an economic activity, but as a source of social harmony and cohesion. In the words of Édmond Labbé: "Travaillez, jeunes gens. Le travail n'a pas seulement transformé la terre. On peut dire qu'il a créé l'homme. Le travail professionnel, le dévouement à la tâche, l'amour du métier, c'est la clef de l'avenir, comme c'est la leçon du passé" (cited by Martin, p. 110). It had also become a professionalized field, with its own associations, professional conferences and an esprit de corps. What it lacked was state recognition.

In part three, Martin tackles the question of institutionalization, as well as the variety of intellectual and political conflicts that emerged around career counseling in the 1930s. The psychologization of childhood education impinged on the authority of the family—a potent source of conflict. To what degree did career counseling limit the “liberty of the family”? For some, the purpose of such a project of social reform was to “*étatiser les enfants et les arracher à l’influence de leurs parents*” (Mauvezin, cited on p. 149). Proponents of career counseling argued that their expertise actually reinstated the responsibility and liberty of the family—which would be but a mere illusion if the social conditions for their actualization had not been created by the state.

Other problems were equally thorny. What was the relationship between professional guidance and technical education? What role would doctors play in career counseling? Could aptitude tests be used to classify and sort students into professions, or would a more impressionistic method, based on the expertise of individual practitioners, be required? Even a comprehensive taxonomy of the professions proved elusive, let alone a proper statistical overview of the labor market. In theory, career guidance promised a rationalization of the eclectic and aleatory measures through which individuals navigated their professional lives. In practice, it remained mired in debates over how exactly this was to be achieved.

Over the course of the 1920s and 1930s, career counselors allied themselves with a variety of new services made for the modern age. These ranged from the *Service social de l’enfance en danger moral* to the *Société de prophylaxie criminelle*. The problem of delinquent youth was exacerbated by rising unemployment during the Great Depression—although the ability of career guidance institutions to meet rising demand for their services was hampered by their own financial difficulties. The book concludes with the transformative reforms of Jean Zay, Minister of Education in the Popular Front government. Zay’s reforms, which restructured professional education more broadly, also included a structure for the institutionalization of career guidance. It imagined counseling centers in each department, tasked with helping with the orientation of 13- to 18-year-old students. The orientation sessions remained voluntary, thus retaining the liberty of the family, which had proved such an intractable point of contention. At the same time, Martin argues, the reforms calcified career guidance as a field apart from both retraining and scholarly orientation, contrary to its proponents unitarist visions.

Martin’s book is a solid contribution to the literature on early twentieth century social reform, the history of expert knowledge, and to the history of the life sciences. Many histories of social reform focus on scientific disciplines that have, for one reason or another, become politically and intellectually dominant—criminology, public health, eugenics. Yet it is equally important to understand why other fields failed to achieve such popularity. Career guidance was one such field. On its face, it bore all the signs of imminent success. It answered pressing social demands (the transformation of education and the industrial labor market); it had ambitions to remake social life writ large; and it drew on and built upon expertise from multiple different disciplines, from psychology to pedagogy. Yet it remained an auxiliary science, despite its world-historic ambitions. Martin’s focus on the disciplinary squabbles within and between fields, the failed attempts of career counselors to intrude on the territory of already established institutions—from schools to labor unions—and the inability of career counselors to ally themselves with political ideologies, helps illustrate why some programs of social reform fail, while others succeed. It is impressive in breadth as well as depth, and equally adept in analyzing the history of labor, as well as sketching out intellectual differences between competing disciplines. It deserves to be widely read.

NOTES

[1] Merve Emre, *The Personality Brokers: The Strange History of Myers-Briggs and the Birth of Personality Testing* (New York: Doubleday, 2018).

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