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Richard Steckel, Roderick Floud. *Health and Welfare during Industrialization: National Bureau of Economic Research Policy Report.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997. ix + 465 S. $72.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-226-77156-4.



Reviewed by Lee A. Craig

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One of the oldest and most persistent debates in economic history concerns the "standard of living" during the "Industrial Revolution". Indeed, it is one of the few debates that both ante-date the Cliometric Revolution and has survived it more or less in tact; furthermore, the meaning of the terms themselves is not immune from controversy. In the past two decades a growing body of research focusing on biological indicators of Homo sapiens' well being- a biological standard of living, if you will - since the eighteenth century has emerged. Two pioneers of that research, Richard Steckel and Roderick Floud, have put together a collection of essays entitled 'Health and Welfare during Industrialization', and as these things go in academic publishing it is probably as close as one can get to one-stop shopping on the subject.

The volume begins with an editors' introduction to the various biological measures employed in the essays, and for the uninitiated this is a good place to start. That piece is followed by an excellent essay by Stan Engerman, who reviews the conceptual and practical issues involved in defining and measuring the "standard of living". Depending on one's pain threshold, one might recommend the essay to colleagues who uncritically employ components of the national income and product accounts in time series analysis.

The body of the volume contains nine essays covering various indicators, biological and otherwise, of well-being among eight countries: The United States (Dora Costa and Steckel), Britain (Floud and Bernard Harris) and the United Kingdom (Paul Johnson and Stephen Nicholas), Sweden (Lars G. Sandberg and Steckel), France (David Weir), Japan (Gail Honda), Germany (Sophia Twarog), the Netherlands (J.W. Drukker and Vincent Tassenaar), and Australia (Greg Whitwell, Christine de Souza, and Nicholas). The biological indicators, which are calculated for one or more countries, include mortality rates, life expectancy, and the body mass index (BMI), but perhaps the most useful measure, because of the information it conveys and because of its considerable availability over time and space, is human stature.

As the first industrial country, Great Britain is a particularly interesting case. While the British were tall by European standards in 1800, from the

late eighteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century the trend in average height was downward, suggesting a biological counterpart to the Kuznets' curve. At least some groups in the United States, Australia, and Germany also experienced declines in mean stature. Although the timing and explanations vary dramatically across countries, they each correspond roughly with a period that might arguably be labeled as one of "industrialization". Interestingly, Human Development Indices (HDI) series for Britain, the United States, and Germany do not show the same pronounced downturns as the heights. Since HDI generally includes some combination of literacy, per capita output, and life expectancy, this finding suggests some divergence between these measures and stature.

The other countries studied do not reveal the same trend in heights however, the way in which they avoided the externalities associated with industrialization varies from country to country. In France, for example, Weir argues that the relatively slow pace of urbanization and an increase in parents' investment in their children's health contributed to the steady rise in stature. In the Netherlands, Sweden, and Japan a combination of slow urbanization, high literacy, and late industrialization- that is after the germ theory of disease had motivated improvements in public health- ameliorated the externalities experienced by the early industrializers.

The volume concludes with a very useful summary by the editors. Specifically, Steckel and Floud compare levels and trends of five "socioeconomic indicators" (per capita GNP, stature, life expectancy, literacy, urbanization) between c. 1800 and c. 1950 for the eight countries analyzed in the other essays. Although some of the figures are, to put it generously, the product of creative calculations, the authors are careful to qualify their conclusions accordingly.

When offering an overall review of the essays in this volume it is difficult to separate them from the broader research agenda from which they were generated. I would say the essays (and the agenda) offer at least two major contributions and raise a set of related questions. The first contribution is simply that they offer more data. The second is that they offer a different approach to the standard of living question. While the former may not be controversial, the latter surely is, and there are those who might not welcome a new approach, or at least not this particular approach. Since Marshall, the principles of economics have rested on the foundation of individual optimization based on relative prices and subject to an income constraint. In these essay one must ask, What is being optimized? What are the relative prices? What is the income constraint? Of course the anthropometricians only need to address these questions if they see their research as a product of those principles. A sense of that need will no doubt vary from researcher to researcher, and to be sure, neo-classical control of the field is not carved in stone. One might argue that the anthropometricians have stated their case, and the intellectual marketplace will decide if that case is to become part of the canon. It is worth noting that in the introduction Steckel and Floud address these issues indirectly by referring to related neoclassical research in the health and development fields.

Whatever one's views on the relative weights of the contributions versus the questions, it is safe to say that henceforth no one will be able to claim cliometric literacy or write knowingly on the "standard of living debate" without reference to the issues addressed in and raised by this volume. In that sense we are all anthropometricians now.

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coming in 'Studies on the Biological Standard of Living in Comparative Perspective', J. Komlos and J. Baten, editors, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag.

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