

KEYNOTE III

John Carson (University of Michigan)

The Elusive Nature of the Normal Mind: Norms, Scales, and the Making of the Modern Citizen

/ Chair: Mitchell G. Ash (Vienna)

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In theory, citizenship denotes an absolute status: whether by blood or place of birth, one is born into citizenship or else acquires it through a process that the new United States called, tellingly, “naturalization.” In practice, however, citizenship is typically anything but absolute. Differences of various sorts—gender, race, religion, age, wealth, education, status, lineage—have often shaped the particular citizenship rights an individual is accorded and can invoke. What I will suggest in this talk is that the phantom of the “normal mind” came over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to haunt many of these adumbrations of citizenship, at least in the United States and Britain, and that technologies of difference—particularly norms and scales—constituted some of the ways in which practitioners of the human sciences provided, if at times inadvertently, ways of demarcating minds that could have significant legal and social ramifications.

John Carson is Associate Professor of History at the University of Michigan. He holds a Ph.D. from Princeton University in History (of Science) and a B.A. in Philosophy from Harvard University. He joined the History Department at Michigan in 1998 after postdoctoral fellowships at the Wellcome Institute for the History of Medicine in London and the Science and Technology Studies Department at Cornell University.

He works primarily in the fields of U.S. cultural/intellectual history and history of the human sciences from the mid eighteenth to the mid twentieth centuries. His book “The Measure of Merit: Talents, Intelligence, and Inequality in the French and American Republics, 1750–1940” (Princeton University Press 2007), tells the story of how two new democratic republics dedicated to some version of equality turned to understandings of human nature to reinstitute inequality on a new, seemingly more “rational” footing. He has had fellowships from, among other institutions, the Newhouse Center for the Humanities, the ACLS (Ryskamp), and the National Humanities Center. In 2013/2014 he contributed to the research group on the history of quantification at the Wissenschaftskolleg Berlin with a project on “Medical Jurisprudence and Unsoundness of Mind in Anglo-American Common Law.” His publications include: “Quantification – Affordances and Limits,” *Scholarly Assessment Reports*, 2 (2020); “‘Every Expression Is Watched’: Mind, Expertise, and Display in the Nineteenth-Century English Courtroom,” *Social Studies of Science* 48 (2018): 891-918; “Mental Testing in the Early Twentieth Century: Internationalizing the Mental Testing Story,” *History of Psychology* 17 (2014): 249-55; “Has Psychology ‘Found Its True Path’? Methods, Objectivity, and Cries of ‘Crisis’ in Early Twentieth-Century French Psychology,” in *Studies in the History and Philosophy of the Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 43 (2012), S. 445–454; and “Minding Matter/Mattering Mind: Knowledge and the Subject in Nineteenth-Century Psychology,” in *Studies in the History and Philosophy of the Biological and Biomedical Sciences* 30 (1999), S. 345–376.