

aspects covered in family policy. Correspondingly the interest in green ideas in social policy, a development that is entirely certain to be of increasing importance as time goes on, is hardly included in discussion. Similarly issues of race and ethnicity, bound up with ideas about what constitutes nation in the nation state and underlying the politics of immigration, are not considered.

Despite these points, the framework provides a serviceable approach to enable the authors of the descriptive chapters to present the main developments in each country.

The overview chapter on the EU setting out how economic considerations have always trumped social concerns, if anything more powerfully as time goes on, presents a clear and compelling account. It is doubly striking that the economics should always win out, as closer economic integration among a range of increasingly unequal countries in itself strengthens the case for corresponding social integration. That case is reinforced by the impact of the recession and of austerity programmes (and one might add, now by the Covid-19 recession).

A chapter on social spending demonstrates that there is no indication of retrenchment or convergence across the EU as a whole, when spending per 100,000 inhabitants is the measure. It is not clear whether an analysis that took into account changes in the level of need – perhaps in terms of population ageing or even degree of inequality within countries, or one which examined trends within different groups of countries (for example, western, eastern and southern Europe; established versus accession members; larger versus smaller countries and so on) – would arrive at the same conclusion.

The final chapter concludes that there is much action across the policy landscape, but that what is happening is best understood as piecemeal adaptive change, conditioned by the circumstances of each country. There is no indication of general directions in policy. This is striking in view of the theory-driven literature that points to the rise of neo-liberalism and the shift towards more market-driven economic systems across the world and the strong suggestion that collective challenges – most importantly, climate change – are certain to pose to government and certain to have strong implications for the welfare of citizens. Nonetheless it is an achievement to provide an up to date overview of developments in welfare across 28 rather different countries in the space of a book which can be lifted from the table in one hand and doing so is a service to the discipline.

PETER TAYLOR-GOOPY
University of Kent
P.F.Taylor-Gooby@kent.ac.uk

Helmut Gaisbauer, Gottfried Schweiger and Clemens Sedmak (eds) (2020), *Absolute Poverty in Europe: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on a Hidden Phenomenon*, Bristol: Policy Press, £29.99, pp. 440, pbk.
doi:[10.1017/S0047279420000598](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279420000598)

In a region that boasts some of the world's wealthiest countries, does absolute poverty exist? The editors' introductory comment that their students have doubted the existence of 'real' poverty in Europe, only in insert-stereotypical-poor-country-here, is one to which I can relate. While perhaps only part of the impetus for such a book, it nonetheless highlights that the definition of 'poverty' continues to be highly debated and personally defined, a perspective that plays out in these pages.

The introduction argues for a shift in conceptual language and a revitalisation of discussion that debates ‘absolute’ rather than ‘relative’ poverty. Relative poverty concepts and measurements have dominated the poverty discussion for the past few decades, in Europe certainly but also globally. Redefining ‘absolute poverty’ is a somewhat ambitious goal, and one that is not quite met throughout the book, something the editors acknowledge. Many of the chapters still cover topics that one could argue would broadly fall under the umbrella of ‘relative poverty’, and indeed do draw on many of the concepts and measures that have followed on from the seminal work of Peter Townsend (1979). Nonetheless, the book draws out and highlights important debates – and people – that are often forgotten when discussing poverty in more wealthy countries. In particular, it highlights that there are some groups of people – such as those experiencing homelessness, asylum seekers forbidden to work, undocumented migrants, marginalised unemployed workers – who are so far below the relative poverty line that it is rendered irrelevant for them.

So then, in what ways can we conceptualise poverty, beyond the absolute-relative binary? Lena Dominelli proposes a participatory relational space encompassing individual agency while recognising structural constraints (p. 27). Robert Walker’s strong – if, at times, flippant – argument for shame as the central consideration for conceptualising and measuring poverty aligns with Christian Neuhäuser’s argument that poverty is linked to dignity. Gottfried Schweiger applies the concept of justice, positing that poverty violates the justice-based entitlements of Europe’s citizens, an argument supported through Elena’s Pribytkova’s discussion of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) and Guillem Fernández Evangelista’s arguments about the penalisation of homelessness. Taking a different approach, Jonathan Bradshaw and Oleksandr Movshuk propose five measures of extreme poverty based on analysis of the European Union Statistics on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) survey data, while Ides Nicaise, Ingrid Schockaert and Tuba Bircan argue that some of the most vulnerable groups, including those experiencing homelessness and undocumented immigrants, remain underrepresented or are excluded in SILC data. Similarly, Patricia Kennedy and Nessa Winston recognise the limits of household surveys to capture information for groups living in extreme poverty.

While it includes a very diverse range of perspectives and approaches, the book largely focuses on the visibility of or responses to poverty, rather than addressing root causes. This is not necessarily a downfall; rather, it brings to light the realities of the diversity of individuals who experience poverty, something desperately needed in poverty studies (Simpson Reeves *et al.*, 2020). The experiences of migrants, both from outside and from within Europe, form the basis of several chapters of the book. Ursula Trummer discusses health care entitlements for Europe’s undocumented or irregular migrants. Clemens Sedmak describes ‘accompaniment needs’ for migrants, recognising many may have left relative poverty in their home countries for absolute poverty in Europe. Migrants play a major role in Rebecca O’Connell and Julia Brannen’s chapter on food poverty in the UK, as well as in Ruth McAreavey’s descriptions of migrant workers’ experiences in Northern Ireland. In a departure from the other chapters, Carlos Pitillas argues that trauma and the intergenerational transmission of violence is a major barrier to overcoming poverty, with a powerful narrative about the patterns repeated with a young child and his mother. However, while it makes an important and poignant case for recognising the prevalence of violence in the context of poverty, the focus of this chapter nonetheless feels a little out of place compared to the other chapters.

The question of who carries the burden of responsibility for these groups is also debated here. Dominelli makes the point that the “[r]esponsibility for addressing societal levels of poverty rests with the nation state” (p. 17), with nation states meeting this responsibility by encouraging paid employment for nationals while restricting or removing the rights of

non-nationals. This viewpoint reinforces the elimination of absolute poverty as the responsibility of each individual nation state, rather than global endeavour, and this is also an argument implicit in Stefanos Papanastasiou in his comparison of EU social protection policies and extreme deprivation outcomes. Broadening beyond the nation state, Gaisbauer traces the history of poverty in EU social policy discourse, recognising combating poverty and social exclusion as “one of the cornerstones” of EU social policy realm (pp. 306-207). Anna Sofia Salonen and Tiina Silvasti, on the other hand, discuss the role of faith-based organisations in providing food relief to the extreme poor, although this is argued to be an expression of a shift from the welfare state eradicating poverty to governing the consequences (p. 275).

The book is truly interdisciplinary in scope, with work drawn from sociology, philosophy, ethics, law, economics and social policy – a little something for everyone. Some of the debates here are well-trodden ground but recognising the diversity of those experiencing poverty in its many forms and providing suggestions for how to alleviate harm – of material deprivation, income and social inequality, and social exclusion for some of Europe’s most vulnerable peoples – is a strong step in the right direction.

References

- Simpson Reeves, L., Parsell, C. and Liu, S. (2020), ‘Towards a phenomenology of poverty: defining poverty through the lived experiences of the ‘poor’’, *Journal of Sociology*, 56(3): 439-454.
- Townsend, P. (1979), *Poverty in the United Kingdom: a survey of household resources and standards of living*, Middlesex: Penguin.

LAURA SIMPSON REEVES

University of Queensland

laura.simpsonreeves@uq.edu.au

Alvin Finkel (2018), *Compassion: A Global History of Social Policy*, London: Red Globe Press, £25.99, pp. 317, pbk.

doi:[10.1017/S0047279420000604](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0047279420000604)

Alvin Finkel aims to explore two competing notions of those who deserve empathy, and the history of welfare from 200,000 BCE to the present day. His scope is global, tackling the question of why countries and regions have diverged in ways of dealing with inequality, and the associated role of gender, class and race in the development of social policy. Why study social policy as a global phenomenon? The Introduction illustrates this through the case of West Bengal in 1967, juxtaposing the Left Front’s focus on social structures against Mother Teresa’s emphasis on aiding the victims. Finkel argues the history of compassion is also the history of competition within elites about the distribution of wealth, and the right to provide social aid. The book is organised in three parts – social policy from early humanity to Bismarck; social policy from the First World War to the Cold War; and social policy under neoliberalism.

Chapter 2 takes us from 200,000 BCE to the Middle Ages. Claiming that indigenous peoples and pre-state societies were egalitarian, Finkel gives examples of caring and sharing in early agricultural societies, slave societies, monotheism, charity and the major religions. Chapter 3 moves on to 1000-1850, and to charity and the Poor Law versus ideas of moral economy. Finkel argues the Poor Law was a means to both pacify the people and impose social controls on behaviour. During the key shift from feudalism to agrarian capitalism, ideas of the