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Book Review

Francis, G. Castles, *The Future of the Welfare State: Crisis Myths and Crisis Realities*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2004, 197 pp., £50 hbk.
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Since the verdict of the end of the 'golden age', the literature on welfare states has been abundant with accounts of crisis posed by globalisation and demographic transformation. This book is a major endeavour to distinguish *crisis myths* from *crisis realities* through a systematic assessment of empirical data on 21 advanced OECD welfare states, for nearly two decades between 1980 and 1998.

Castles, one of the leading social policy researchers of our time, examines the various arguments of the current crisis accounts throughout seven chapters, and, on the basis of this evaluation, traces the possible trajectories of Western welfare states in the coming years. Through a robust empirical measurement based on OECD data, and comparative hypothesis testing, he shows that most of the crisis arguments are endowed with 'mythic' elements, due to (1) their denial of the 'complexity of the policy context of advanced, democratic, capitalist societies'; (2) their assertion that 'the coming crisis is supposed to affect all countries, irrespective of their economic, social and political circumstances and irrespective of their prior social policy developments'; and (3) 'the mismatch between their supposedly universal applicability and the extreme narrowness of the empirical evidence on which they rely' (6–7).

Hence, there has been no '*race to the bottom*' caused by globalization according to any spending measures, and, while there are real signs of a slowdown in expenditure growth, there are likewise no signs of a general and consistent trend of welfare retrenchment or deteriorating welfare standards, with the diversity of 'families of nations' facing considerably different prospects: the 'race to the bottom' is thus a crisis myth rather than a crisis reality. Similarly, in the period under consideration, there has been no significant change in the '*structure of social provision*', as would be implied by a significant downsizing of existing programmes, or alteration of spending priorities towards 'poverty alleviation' or 'social security'; the only exception being a slight convergence towards 'state services' provision.

Moreover, of specific significance for those interested in a '*European Welfare State Convergence*', the book argues that there is equally no distinct pattern leading towards a 'European social model'. Starting from the 'downward harmonisation' hypothesis, which is a derivative of the 'race to the bottom' argument relating specifically to the economic processes in the European Union, Castles demonstrates that, what can be observed is rather a consolidation of the 'family of nations' patterns.

With a view to '*explaining expenditure outcomes*' in later chapters, and in order to locate the factors likely to shape the future of the Western welfare states, Castles furthermore establishes that expenditure change in recent decades is not directly related to changes in the international economy, but rather to the developments in the domestic sphere. Within this framework, the 'new politics of the welfare state' arguments cannot be sustained either, as the countries with a strong Leftist legacy 'not only exhibit higher levels of aggregate spending, but are also those in which the boundaries of welfare provision have been most rapidly transformed to

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respond to new needs associated with population ageing and a changing family structure' (110).

Moving from the threats posed by the international economy to demographic threats to the financial viability of the welfare state, in the last two chapters Castles considers '*population ageing*' and '*birth-rate blues*'. The former bears no crucial significance on the cross-national expenditure variation, which rather depends on the differential generosity of programmes for the elderly in different welfare structures. What this implies is that 'the so-called 'old-age crisis' is not one of general application, but limited to particular countries' (18), in line with most other crisis myths. The rapidly declining fertility, however, is the only instance of the book that is not a crisis myth, but a real threat. Nevertheless, it is strongly determined by family-friendly social policies, as well as measures which enhance women's access to education and to employment, which can, in fact, be the best solution for this problem, as implicated by the recent significant reversal of the trend in Scandinavia.

An important thread of the book is the affirmation of 'families of nations', rooted in commonalities arising from history, geography, language and culture, affected by, and responding to, the crisis threats in a variety of ways. The four families are 'English-speaking', 'Scandinavian', 'continental Western European', and 'Southern European' countries, which reflect, with the exception of the Southern European grouping, Esping-Andersen's now classical three-fold distinction (1990). These families remain, indeed, extremely diverse, confront different problems and, hence, face distinctive challenges in the coming years, the only identifiable tendency being a convergence towards a '*steady-state*' *welfare state*. In this regard, this is doubtlessly a prominent book, with significant policy implications stemming from the key factors and challenges it identifies, which are likely to shape advanced welfare states in different 'families of nations'.

Reference

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Tony Fitzpatrick, *New Theories of Welfare*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, Basingstoke, 2005, 239 pp., £19.99 pbk.
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The medley of chapters in this book contains the headings: 'Modern Conservatism versus Social Democracy'; 'The New Radicalisms'; 'Agency, Community and Class'; 'Insecurities'; 'Information and Society'; 'Genes and Environments'; 'Social Psychologies, Emotions, Bodies'; 'Governance, Crime and Surveillance' and 'Culture and Media'. An account of key political perspectives in the first two chapters is followed by an exploration of a number of somewhat randomly selected ideas and themes that may illuminate the welfare domain. Many do but are presented here in such an abridged, hectic and eclectic manner that this reader was left disappointed.

Chapters 1 and 2 illustrate the problem. The first chapter gallops through a range of recent books and articles on conservatism, free market liberalism, libertarianism, neo-conservatism, neo-republicanism, pluralism, community, meritocracy, reciprocity, inclusion, pragmatism and the new productionism. Everything potentially relevant is present but without judgement as to

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why it should be included. Thus, as examples, a description of Kekes version of conservatism goes nowhere and a detailed account of Narveson's opaque critique of Nozick's rectification principle is included only to be rejected. Moreover, the chapter fails to explain why – given New Labour's revision of social democracy – 'modern conservatism *versus* social democracy' is the mainstream political choice or to reach an overall verdict on the respective merits of the two perspectives. Chapter 2 contains a brusque narrative on the variety of egalitarian thinking broken down into class, markets, resources, respect and sufficiency, freedom, desert, and priority, plus summaries of governmentality, post-marxism and feminism. Yet no links between the 'radicalisms' are made and there is no reflection on the capacity of this assortment of social movements to challenge mainstream welfare theory – 'radicalisms' is not a fruitful *political* category.

In the author's words, 'Having spent the opening chapters reviewing three of the key political perspectives at work in contemporary welfare the rest of the book is spent discussing some of the main debates of recent years into which they may be said to intervene.' Unfortunately most of the subsequent chapters do not make the necessary systematic links between the political perspectives set out in the first two chapters and the main welfare debates. Rather the reader is offered self-contained examinations of various topics in social policy. The absence of an historical perspective restricts each account – many of the debates are old controversies revisited – and some of the chapters suffer from the same problems as the first two chapters. Chapter 8, for example, on 'Governance, Crime and Surveillance' does not make robust connections between 'governance' and 'crime and surveillance' and hence the treatment of each theme is cursory. Nonetheless, when the author focuses on a manageable theme and resists the temptation to try to include all the potentially relevant ideas, some promising chapters emerge that connect apparently diverse areas. 'Agency, Community and Class' is a sound, nuanced overview of the structure/agency debate and 'Insecurities' is a succinct yet coherent exploration of 'risk' and the impact of globalisation. They provide useful maps for students through these specific debates.

The conclusion demonstrates the overall limitations of the book. A summary of each chapter is given followed by some insipid comments such as, 'If the theoretical agenda for social policy therefore consist of debates over how best to balance the material and cultural (born of the unshakable, if not always fair, sense that past debates have been inadequate in this respect) then we have decisions to make. What kind of balance is appropriate, both ontologically and politically, and what kind of policy reforms would it inspire?' No answers to these questions are attempted because the book lacks an overall political philosophy within which such answers may emerge.

In his introduction the author states 'Some will also complain, as some complained of *Welfare Theory*, that the following pages attempt to do too much, that the agenda is too crowded.' Indeed, the agenda is overcrowded both in the specific chapters and in the overall content. Whereas the juxtaposition of ideas can, at times, be illuminating, compressed thinking can also be bland. As Woody Allen once said, 'I've speed read *War and Peace*: it's about Russia.'

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Nanna Kildal and Stein Kuhnle (eds), *Normative Foundations of the Welfare State: The Nordic Experience*, Routledge, Abingdon, 262 pp., £65.00 hbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406239771

Mr Christian Noyer, the governor of the Bank of France, in an interview in the *Financial Times* (11 July 2005) stated that the Scandinavian economic model, combining market flexibility with a high degree of social protection, 'is full of lessons for countries such as France, Germany and Italy'. This book, a result of a workshop on 'The normative foundation of the Scandinavian welfare state' held in Bergen in May 2002, could not have come at a more opportune time, as the Nordic/Scandinavian model is in vogue in European policy debates.

The Nordic welfare model is often used as a general term for the way in which Denmark, Sweden, Finland and Norway organise and finance their social security systems, health services and education. It supports open markets and job flexibility. It is the pact between the state, employers and workforce that forms the central ingredient of the Nordic model.

While there is a trend in some European countries to look for solutions to their welfare crises, in the Nordic welfare model one should point out that there are those who claim, that as a uniquely Scandinavian construction, the Nordic welfare model is not easily exportable. This is because countries differ in their normative foundations, strategy and programming procedures, decision-making and administrative culture.

In this book Kildal and Kuhnle bring to us a set of essays that systematically presents the basis of the Nordic welfare state. After introducing the historical foundations of the Nordic welfare model, they present the normative tensions and possible conflict of values and social goals in the current welfare policies. The book then concludes with a section on the possible changes in the normative foundations of the Nordic welfare states. The general theme of the book is that, while there still is an agreed normative foundation regarding welfare policy in the Nordic countries, individual countries will differ on the implementation of programmes on specific issues.

The opening section provides an historical perspective of the development of the Nordic experience. Kildal and Kuhnle in the opening chapter tell us that the basic principle of the Nordic welfare model is 'universalism'. Universal welfare, the keystone to the Nordic welfare model, developed earlier and stronger in the Nordic countries for both idealistic and pragmatic reasons. But, conditions in the Nordic countries have changed as a result of the economic crises in the 1990s.

Part II of the book demonstrates that within the context of today's social and economic reality it is evident that the Scandinavian model is a normative model with variations of a theme. It has become clear that in the Nordic countries welfare issues are not necessarily solved by the so-called 'universal' model when micro issues are debated. The different Nordic countries apply specific solutions to their social problems. Siim and Borchorst (Chapter 6) point out that the Nordic welfare states represent five different gender profiles, though they are all considered women-friendly. Similarly, Andersson and Kangas (Chapter 7) state that: 'although the main features of the welfare systems have been kept intact, a shift towards workfare in Sweden and Finland has taken place' (p. 113). Kaukonen and Stenius found that, as a result of the economic crises, in the treatment of alcohol and drug misusers, the value based discussion has been replaced by economic and scientific-professional rationality (p. 145).

Part III 'Towards a paradigm shift' may be the most important section of the book as it demonstrates that the Nordic welfare state is undergoing change not only regarding solving specific issues but also in the conceptual approach regarding these issues, a paradigm shift. This is relevant for those who see the Nordic welfare state as a solution to current welfare state problems. Thus, Carson's contribution 'Paradigm drift in the Swedish welfare state' (Chapter 11)

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becomes a key chapter in the book as it provides us with a framework by which to analyse change in the Nordic welfare states. It also provides the basis by which any country aspiring to take on the Nordic welfare system can analyse their policy paradigm, institutions and structure.

The paradigm shift in the Nordic countries is found on a number of levels. In two Swedish case studies on housing and health, Carson demonstrates that equality as a core principle/goal has lost significant ground to efficiency and competition over cooperation. Ervik (Chapter 10) points out that the Nordic countries have or are changing the normative base of their pension schemes by deviating from the principle of universiality to the conception of distributive justice and fairness. Loftager in the concluding chapter of the book claims that there is a gradual shift to the new Third Way in the Scandinavian countries, based on activation and the community of work moving away from the principles of a liberal socio-political community of citizens with equal rights and duties, the 'Scandinavian' way.

These studies have implications regarding the adaptation of the Nordic model by other European countries. At the same time, it is here that we find a drawback in the book. There is no summarising chapter with an analysis of the contributions. The editors do not advance our knowledge regarding the ramifications of the change in the Nordic welfare states. What appears to be missing is a policy analysis of the current Nordic experience. It is up to the reader to work out what the implications of the Nordic experience are for the European welfare experience.

This is an important book as a valuable resource for policy makers who want to study and maybe appropriate the Nordic welfare model. Its in-depth material transmits the message that such a transformation is not straightforward. But it does provide the information to assess such a process.

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Peter Abrahamson, Thomas P. Boje and Bent Greve, *Welfare and Families in Europe*, Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2005, 244 pp., £50.00 hbk.
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This book is the product of a research project conducted between 1997 and 1999 into the relationship between families, the welfare state and the labour market in five European countries – Denmark, Sweden, Germany, France and the United Kingdom.

The authors situate their study within three contexts. The first relates to the changing economic, political and social realities of the late twentieth century, and the challenges that these pose for post-war welfare states: namely, the configuration of social citizenship; the relationship between the state, the market and civil society in the provision of social welfare; and the financing of state welfare. The second is the intellectual context of the welfare-state typology approach to comparative research, and 'feminist' criticisms of its tendency to focus only on the (labour) market/(welfare) state interface, to the exclusion of the family, and relationships and activities (particularly, care) within it. The third and final is a methodological context, in which national-level policies tend to form the focus of cross-national social policy research, to the neglect of how these policies are experienced by the citizenry.

It is the attempt to address the methodological schism between analysis of social policy at the national level on the one hand, and analysis of social policy as it is experienced in the everyday lives and practices of families on the other, which I found to be the most interesting aspect of this book. So, there is coverage of socio-demographic trends – especially relating to women's employment patterns – and welfare systems – especially family policy and measures related to the reconciliation of work and family life – in the five countries. This is combined,

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however, with material derived from in-depth qualitative interviews with 20 'middle-income' and 20 'low-income' families (both couple and lone-mother) living in a 'medium' sized town (for example, York is the UK fieldwork site) in each of the five countries.

The qualitative interviews cover three main topics: patterns of paid work, including the impact of childrearing on parents' relationship to the labour market, childcare arrangements and economic well-being. Running through these topics is a concern to establish how families 'package' support (both childcare and economic) in the context of an emerging mixed-economy of welfare.

The qualitative interviews offer-up some interesting findings. They reveal for example, that, while the precise way in which families adapt their labour market behaviour when children arrive on the scene varies across the countries, adaptation in all the countries remains overwhelmingly the task of mothers. Where there is evidence that fathers would like to take on more childcare responsibilities, financial constraints, and in particular the lack of well-paying part-time jobs, are seen to be the main obstacles. Unfortunately, however, we rarely hear from the fathers themselves, since in all but a couple of cases (in Sweden!) only the mothers were interviewed. From a UK perspective, where there is increasing interest in fathers, especially in the context of the enhancement of their rights around care-leaves, it was disappointing not to hear more from UK fathers and their European counter-parts about precisely what their expectations and experiences of paid work and care are.

The interviews also reveal the importance of extended familial support (mainly grand-parents) with childcare. This is the case even in Denmark and Sweden, where the provision of public care services and measures to enable the reconciliation of work and family life are more developed. As might be expected, familial support was more important to dual-working, and employed lone-mother households. Even where such support might be considered marginal if measured only in terms of the hours or frequency of care, when examined for the impact it had on parents' ability to manage what were frequently very tight and complex work–care timetables, as well as crises, such as child illness, the support was always significant. In giving parents some opportunity for 'time-out', grandparents were also revealed to be an important resource for parents' sense of well-being more broadly defined, and the authors highlight the difficulties experienced by those parents who do not have access to this resource. They also warn of the implications for this type of support of changing expectations around retirement age.

While the qualitative study interviewed both low- and middle-income families, I felt that the authors could have done more in their analysis of the interview material to reflect on the importance of class in shaping families' opportunities for reconciling work and family life. It is not that there is no disaggregation by class; it is just that there is not enough of it. Moreover, the need for it is on occasions dismissed without any evidence being presented that it does not matter (Chapter 5). The result is that any conclusions drawn as to the relative importance of welfare regime and class (p. 221) lack a substance which could have easily been there.

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Linda McKie, *Families, Violence and Social Change*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2005, 178 pp., £18.99 pbk.
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Families, Violence and Social Change is a wide-ranging exploration of issues of violence covering domestic violence, elder abuse, violence in wider societies and exploring some of the links between public violences and violences which take place 'behind closed doors' (p. 1). It gives

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coverage of cross-national policy comparisons, exploration of families as sites of violence and gendering and embodiment in policy on the issues.

Indeed this reliance on the concept of 'public' and 'private' is one of the problems for the text as it fails to acknowledge that 'domestic' violence is not confined to being 'behind closed doors'. This is particularly true for those violences taking place between separated or divorced partners or those involving non-physical tactics such as humiliation, psychological abuse or refusal of resource to clothe and feed.

Indeed this wide remit seems to be the texts key problem; coverage of most sections is, at best, brief. The central thesis of the text is unclear and wavers between linking 'private' violences to public ones, comparing cross-national comparisons of domestic violence policy (but not in the context of welfare state typologies such as Esping-Andersen, see Borchorst, 1994 or Daly, 1994) and examining the family as a site of violence. Whilst all of these are worthy topics for closer examination, one cannot help but feel the attempt to do all this, and more, in one book is too ambitious.

In addition to this, McKie repeats marginalisations and omissions familiar within traditional social policy. There is little or no coverage of race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability (even in the context of elders) or, most surprisingly, child abuse. Lesbian women facing domestic violence do get some mention, but interestingly no index mention, but there is a repeated sense, which is never resolved, that the ideas of 'family' and homosexual relationships are in tension. McKie does (albeit briefly) discuss heterosexism in policy, commenting that 'lone parent or same-sex families can be considered to be inferior forms of family life by some commentators' (p. 20), but the experiences of same-sex families are, without comment, simply missing from discussions of prevalence and policy. Issues around racism within policy and intervention for domestic violence and elder abuse are also not critically explored, despite stereotypes about the family and cultural difference for ethnic minority women often playing a role in the lack of service they receive. As has been noted elsewhere this does mean that 'already marginalised groups of women have to work harder to include their voices and resist exclusion' (Dominelli, 2002: 73). Indeed, even in discussions of 'public' violence, the racial nature of some of the acts discussed is never brought to the fore and yet by their very definition the acts of rape carried out on Bosnian and Kosovan women (discussed on p. 152) were episodes of ethnic cleansing (the same could be pointed out about the rape of Hutu and Tutsi women in Rwanda). To avoid discussion of race and ethnicity even in these contexts implies another ambivalence within the text.

The omission of child abuse within a survey of 'family violence' is also surprising and this is abetted by very little coverage of the material on children witnessing domestic violence (for example, Hester and Radford, 1997, or Morley and Mullender, 1994). It seems odd that McKie recognises the impact of witnessing violence outside and inside the home (p. 51), but fails to follow up with a discussion of the impact on families of witnessing violence against other family members.

This is not to say that the text, as a whole, lacks merit, the chapter on elder abuse is an interesting overview of the area and, whilst it lacks discussion about embodiment and elder abuse, it does raise some of the ambiguities in policy over treatment of elders. However, given McKie's own acknowledgement that the majority of elder abuse is carried out by paid workers rather than family members, its inclusion seems rather anomalous. Similarly, the comparative coverage of domestic violence policy in Scotland, Finland and Sweden provides a good introduction to cross-national responses and the ideologies underpinning them. As such, it suggests itself as an introductory book to issues of violence which has potential, particularly in aiding students to consider critical aspects of omission in social policy. But it is frustratingly lacking a central thesis and repeats too many omissions to serve as more in-depth coverage of the issues.

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Simon Prideaux, *Not So New Labour: A Sociological Critique of New Labour's Policy and Practice*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2005, 170 pp., £24.99 pbk.
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Arguably it is quite rare for sociological ideas and ways of thinking to enter wider political and public discourses, but with New Labour one does not have to look far to find evidence for the deployment of concepts and notions that have a sociological pedigree of some kind or another. Ideas of social inclusion/exclusion, social cohesion, community, social capital and social disorganisation among others, figure prominently in New Labour policy-making documents and frequently figure in the rhetoric of leading New Labour politicians. And then there is the direct influence of prominent sociologists today such as Giddens and Etzioni, to name but two. This has been well documented, notably by Ruth Levitas (Levitas, 2005). She has been to the fore in exploring the influence of Dukheimian inspired ideas of social inclusion on New Labour policy making.

In his book, then, Prideaux is treading a path that is already well travelled. However, he avoids simply repeating what has been said previously through his central contention 'that New Labour, when dealing with welfare, utilise the age-old sociological diagnoses and remedies of structural functionalism to help counter and rectify the perceived ills of contemporary British society' (p. 1). In making such a claim Prideaux draws a distinction between the structural functionalism of Parsons, Merton and Davis and Moore, and the 'socio-functionalists' represented in his book by Durkheim himself and also the Chicago School of Sociology. The former, he claims, are characterised by a shared celebration and promotion of the virtues of free market capitalism.

Prideaux seeks to argue that North American sociological theorising has both direct and indirect influences on New Labour thinking and policy making today. There are a number of different dimensions to this, but it is most evident, he argues, in workfare programmes and through the communitarian ideas of Etzioni and Philip Selznick. It is claimed that the functionalist influence on Etzioni has not been fully appreciated as yet and Prideaux carefully unpicks some of the ways through which Etzioni's ideas have been shaped by structural functionalist ideas. Here notions of family, community, individual responsibility and social morality come to the fore. Etzioni is not the only contemporary American social commentator to have been influenced by functionalism. Prideaux also draws out the links between the 'underclass' approaches of Charles Murray and Lawrence Mead, in particular, and communitarian and functionalist thinking. This is most evident in their use of notions of functionality and dysfunctionality when talking about the threat posed by the underclass to social order and stability.

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This is a wide-ranging discussion and it is successful to a considerable degree in uncovering what can often appear as a complex tangle of links between the various theorists and schools of thought considered here. This is a very readable book, clearly structured and one I would have thought would readily find a place on undergraduate sociology and social policy course reading lists. One of the strengths of Prideaux's book is that it is accessible and it brings together in one volume a diverse assortment of influences on New Labour. In addition to those already highlighted above, there is also a chapter devoted to the Third Way arguments of Giddens and also a discussion of the nineteenth-century Scottish Christian Socialist, John Macmurray, often flagged as a key influence on his thinking by Blair himself.

However, while Prideaux does devote part of his conclusion to the contradictions and tensions in the New Labour project, which to some degree the often competing influences of these different theorists give rise, I feel that this part of his discussion could have been taken much further. How do these 'American' ideas sit alongside other influences? There is an underplaying here of the continuing legacies of social democracy, albeit ones that New Labour has sought to marginalise, and of European influenced ideas of social exclusion/inclusion, where again perhaps Durkheim's influence is more evident. Following Levitas, for example, the different discourses of social inclusion, the moral underclass, social integrationist and redistributionist discourses reflect a wider range of influences than is evident here. However, there is another dimension to the 'Not So *New* Labour' claims of Prideaux, that revolves around the continuing tensions between 'Old' and 'New' Labour. Functionalist notions of social disorganisation, dysfunctionality and concerns with 'family' and 'community' certainly pre-date New Labour, and, while Old Labour's view of the world did revolve around a much more explicit concern with material inequalities, Old Labour was not slow to deploy some of the sociological categories that feature in this discussion, even if their pedigree was largely unspoken. What this possibly shows more than anything is that many of these notions are somewhat 'fuzzy' to put it mildly, their enduring appeal testimony to their flexibility.

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Brian Fanning, Patricia Kennedy, Gabriel Kennedy and Suzanne Quin (eds), *Theorising Irish Social Policy*, University College Dublin Press, 2004, 226 pp., £16.95 pbk.
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This is the fourth volume of collected articles edited by groups of staff in the Department of Social Policy and Social Work at University College Dublin and published by the UCD Press. On the whole these volumes provide excellent up-to-date reviews of a wide variety of topics relating to social policy, broadly defined, in Ireland. They are particularly useful in teaching, but they also provide valuable introductions to Irish social policy under many headings. The first two were presented simply as textbooks and basic reference books. This latest volume in its very title seems to promise something more.

'Theorising Irish social policy' could mean developing theories to elucidate or explain *Irish* social policy as distinct from social policy in other countries. But Irish social policy does not

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require a theorising that would be different from the theorising of social policy elsewhere. The more realistic expectation is that 'theorising Irish social policy' means applying general theories in social policy studies to Irish historical and contemporary realities, or elucidating or explaining Irish social policy developments by reference to general theories. The editors acknowledge that 'writing about Irish social policy could be located within identifiable "indigenous" and international ideological and theoretical accounts of society and social problems' and that the volume under review is 'an attempt to locate a number of Irish social policy debates within such theoretical contexts' (pp. 1,2).

There are ten chapters in the book. The first chapter by Bryan Fanning, the lead editor, proposes to set the scene by reviewing ideological influences on Irish social policy and locating 'understandings of Irish social policy within international debates'. The last chapter, by Gerry White, a leading academic constitutional lawyer, is a detailed treatise on 'Rights and judicial activism'. This deals with recent developments, and the possibility of further developments, in social policy in Ireland by the adoption or recognition of specific justiciable social rights within the specific Irish constitutional context, where there is a written constitution and the higher courts can choose to be more or less active. This thorough-going discussion of a specifically Irish topic is quite detachable from the rest of the volume. It will be a novelty to most non-Irish readers, but has an increasing relevance for readers generally in the context of trans-national charters of social rights.

The eight chapters in between can be divided into two groups. Four take as their focuses specific objects or target groups of Irish social policy, namely women (Chapter 5), fathers (Chapter 6), the poor (Chapter 7), and Travellers, the indigenous Irish nomadic people (Chapter 9). The other four deal with factors or big ideas that can be seen to influence social policy developments in Ireland or the Irish social policy discourse: globalisation (Chapter 2), communitarianism and social capital (Chapter 3), individualisation (Chapter 4) and equity and efficiency, in this last case as they relate to health care (Chapter 8). However in most chapters there are cross-cutting references.

To my mind the chapters that work best are those with a sharp focus, a clear story-line and a well-defined theoretical under-pinning. Gabriel Kiely on 'Individualisation' (Chapter 3) gives a thought-provoking account of debates and developments in Ireland in the past decade against the background of the wider discussion of the term in relation to social policy. Anne Coakley on 'Poverty and insecurity' (Chapter 7) provides an overview of government responses to poverty in recent decades from a sociological perspective. Alaister Christie's focus is on the concept of 'Difference' (the title of Chapter 9) and its implications for social policy. He deals specifically with the Irish minority Travellers, who have been labeled in different terms and differentiated for policy purposes in different ways over the past 50 years, but within a wider discussion of 'difference' and social policy.

In most of the other chapters, the challenge suggested by the title of this fourth welcome UCD volume is less successfully met. In some cases, there are just too many perspectives and too many passing references to too many concepts. What is lacking is theoretical coherence. The difficulties are understandable. Writers and prospective writers on contemporary Ireland are burdened in two ways, by the present and by the past. First, the present is almost incomprehensible given the impact of the wide-ranging and totally unpredicted developments of the past ten or 15 years that are simplistically summarised in the term 'the Celtic Tiger'. GDP per head has doubled between 1997 and 2004. Over the past ten years, the total population has increased by 15 per cent, over half-a-million people, including net immigration of 277,000. Ireland had one of the highest levels of unemployment in Europe in the 1980s and now has the lowest. The knock-on changes in all aspects of social life in such a short space of time, and their implications for social policy, are hard to handle cogently. Secondly, in Ireland the past

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casts a long shadow, and fosters an introspective pre-occupation with the consequences, real or imagined, of colonialism, the dominant peasant culture and the Catholic religion.

These burdens vitiate the clarity of the analysis of would-be Irish theorists generally and this is also evident in the volume under review. The intention was 'to locate a number of Irish social policy debates within [international] theoretical contexts'. What is needed, then, for Irish readers as well as outsiders, is a departure from specific Irish pre-occupations and a greater engagement with the major themes of social policy theorists generally, themes such as globalisation and Europeanisation, path dependency and regime theory, commodification and privatisation. If we in Ireland are to understand what is happening around us – as I have said a major challenge – our best vantage point is from outside. If we can locate Irish developments within a wider analytical context, we will also be doing a service to all comparative social policy analysts, and will have less reason to object, as we often do, to their misconceptions of Ireland.

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John F. Ermisch and Robert E. Wright (eds), *Changing Scotland: Evidence from the British Household Panel Survey*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2005, 310 pp., £65.00 hbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406289773

Questions of Scottish identity and distinctiveness have fuelled an (occasionally rancorous) cottage industry of scholarship for decades. The advent of devolution in 1999, and the opportunity it affords for experiments and possible divergence in policy, means that social policy analysis has an increasing interest in and potential contribution to make to such debates. Judgements of how different public and welfare services in Scotland have become from the rest of the UK since devolution are influenced as much by perspective as by the facts. However, undoubtedly a significant obstacle to progress in such debates has been the paucity of reliable and representative evidence regarding basic features about Scottish society. In particular, understanding has been hampered by a lack of longitudinal survey data, and samples of sufficient size and geographic scope (e.g. north of the Caledonian Canal) to draw meaningful conclusions. Since 1999 the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) has included boosted Scottish and Welsh sub-samples (totalling in Scotland to about 3,500 cases annually), allowing valid national analysis for the first time. *Changing Scotland* illustrates the potential of this additional data by analysing a range of issues drawing mainly upon evidence from the first two waves of the Scottish BHPS 'boost'.

The book includes 19 attractively brief (although not simplistic) chapters organised into four main sections covering, respectively, families and households; inequalities; labour markets; and social and political behaviour, each of which is prefaced by an editorial summary. The 17 substantive chapters are preceded by the editors' discussion of the devolution settlement and the resulting institutional and policy context, and concluded by a brief summary of the main policy and analysis issues raised by the substantive chapters. The picture of Scotland which emerges is of a country which is essentially similar to the rest of the UK, albeit with interesting differences in details. So, for example, Scotland's distinctive demography of a shrinking and ageing population, lower life expectancy, higher mortality, and lower fertility, could lead to distinctive family structures, but has not done so yet. Similarly, Jamieson and McKendrick conclude from their chapter on 'Teenagers' Relationships with Peers and Parents' that 'Differences between the three national regions are often modest but the overall pattern is suggestive of some difference in the tenor of families and relationships' (p. 27). Each chapter includes sufficient detail and novelty to interest specialists, but overall the data hold few surprises for anyone familiar with

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the evidence and analyses generated by the growing number of other surveys which devolution has prompted, such as the 'Scottish Social Household Survey', 'Scottish Social Attitudes Survey', or the other Scottish longitudinal surveys, e.g. the 'Growing Up in Scotland Survey', 'Scottish School Leavers Survey' and the 'Scottish Longitudinal Study'. Indeed, although the book is intended primarily as a 'show case' for the expanded BHPS, and does not pretend to be an exhaustive account of either Scottish social processes nor survey data, it would have been interesting to see more references to findings from these other sources. Also, although it is inevitable that the book focuses on households rather than institutions, it must be recognised that some of the most significant policies 'changing Scotland' since devolution have taken place in the processes of government and the institutional landscape rather than in peoples' lives and values.

Whether a recognisably different 'Scottish welfare state' is emerging as a result of devolution remains an open question. There was already considerable autonomy and distinctiveness in several areas of Scottish social policy and administration before devolution; e.g. law, education, local government. However, *Changing Scotland* usefully highlights two further considerations in this debate. Firstly, Scotland does not face significantly different circumstances and needs from the rest of the UK, which in themselves justify radically distinctive social policies. Such differences as there are between Scotland and the rest of the UK in relation to demography, health, etc. are at the margins and have therefore resulted in marginal policy divergence. Secondly, Scottish public opinion and preferences in relation to social policy are not significantly different from those in the rest of Britain. As Curtice's chapter 'What Makes Scotland Want Something Different?' demonstrates, the Scottish Parliament is more of an expression of 'Scottishness' *per se* than a demand for drastically distinctive policies. The Scots might be eager to assert their (our) differences from England in particular, but otherwise do not do very much about it; as the joke goes: 'How do you tell the difference between a Scot and someone from England . . .? You don't, the Scot tells *you*'.

Changing Scotland will not itself resolve arguments of Scottish identity and distinctiveness; no single book will. However, it is a further welcome contribution to the growing body of systematic evidence which is replacing supposition, assertion and polemic in this debate.

STEPHEN SINCLAIR
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Jurgen Friedrichs, George Galster and Sako Musterd (eds), *Life in Poverty Neighbourhoods*, Routledge, London, 2005, 145 pp., £65.00 hbk.
doi:10.1017/S004727940629977X

This hardback book is a collection of papers from a special issue of the journal *Housing Studies* and explores European and North American perspectives on life in poor neighbourhoods (one of the stated goals of the book is to bridge the gap between the different national debates on neighbourhoods).

There has been a recent resurgence of interest in neighbourhoods – and the effects that living in specific types of communities has on life chances – both in the UK and elsewhere. 'Neighbourhood renewal' is a key New Labour policy though, as the editors point out, the way that neighbourhoods shape residents' opportunities has been a focus of North American scholarly attention for more than 50 years.

There are seven chapters in the book, including the editorial and an index. In the editorial, the authors describe the different theories of neighbourhood effects and the policy context behind the interest in neighbourhoods. The other six chapters examine neighbourhood social

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norms, the effects of urban restructuring and social mobility in poor neighbourhoods, with authors reporting the findings of analyses of German, US, Dutch and English data. The final chapter is a theoretical piece, with some summing up of the earlier chapters, and where Xavier De Souza Briggs (of Harvard University) calls for a 're-shaping of the geography of opportunity'.

The English findings (Chapter 3) are interesting. Kearns and Parkes' analysis of longitudinal data show that dissatisfaction with neighbourhood conditions is higher among residents of poorer communities. This is not surprising perhaps, but what is noteworthy is the authors' assertion that: 'no evidence was found to support the notion of a distinctive housing culture in deprived areas' (p. 53). In other words, people in poor areas react to their environment in the same way as anybody else in the population. These findings undermine notions of 'an underclass' or the 'culture of poverty,' conclude the authors.

The book is clearly written and laid out, and is suitable primarily for those readers who are familiar with the concept of neighbourhood effects and have some understanding of the main issues and debates in this area. It is probably not for novices. Neighbourhood effects is not an easy idea to understand, though a good paper to read which might elucidate the concept is one by Atkinson and Kintrea (2001).

All the chapters report the findings of analyses of statistical data; no qualitative data are presented. Considering the title of the book (which has a qualitative 'ring' to it), this is an unfortunate omission. Furstenberg *et al.*'s (1999) book on life in poor American neighbourhoods reported the findings of analyses of qualitative data alongside statistical results. Respondents' perceptions about their communities greatly added to the wholeness of the book.

Overall, this book is clearly focused primarily on neighbourhood effects on social and economic opportunities. This is evident from the first paragraph. For those with a keen interest in neighbourhood effects, it is certainly worth reading, though not all the figures are easily understandable even for the advanced reader. It is also a little surprising that theories about the 'underclass' are not discussed in any detail by the various authors. Kearns and Parkes mention it briefly, but it does not appear at all in the index, and there are only three brief references to the 'culture of poverty' theory.

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LISA ARAI
City University

Peter Ratcliffe, *'Race', Ethnicity and Difference: Imagining the Inclusive Society*, Open University Press, Maidenhead, 2004, 190 pp., £17.99 pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406309774

Those of us working in this area, struggle with various long-standing dilemmas, whose familiarity often breeds contempt. Such contempt, however, disguises genuine concerns, which mean minority ethnic populations continue to experience disadvantage and struggle to gain access to appropriate support. Flawed understandings, inappropriate explanations and wasted opportunities remain common place. How can we avoid descriptive and essentialised accounts

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of difference, which perpetuate rather than challenge disadvantage? Is it possible to make sense of ethnic differences without recourse to stereotypes and myths, which reduce the experience of minority ethnic populations to that of 'the other'? There is then the practical problem of ensuring our accumulated evidence actually has an impact on improving outcomes for minority ethnic populations. Finally – and perhaps of particular relevance to readers of this journal – is the ongoing difficulty of convincing mainstream social policy to incorporate diversity and difference as part of its everyday concerns.

This excellent book engages with these debates and provides an extremely readable account which deserves to be widely read by a more general audience. In short, the author, in making sense of current imaginings, presents a mix of theoretical and empirical debates, as he challenges exclusionary forces. The book's principal aim is to take a critical look at the nature and sources of inequalities in contemporary societies and examine the prospects for an 'inclusive society'. This aim captures an important strength of the text, as the analysis attempts to move beyond simple description and provide explanations and possible solutions to enable policy and practice to tackle disadvantage and discrimination.

Part I offers a broad ground clearing and evaluates the current and historical meanings ascribed to ideas such as social exclusion, ethnicity, 'race', diversity and difference. In doing so, the author reminds us that, although such debates are socially constructed, the consequences of exclusion and disadvantage are very real for UK minority ethnic populations. In part II, the book explores sites of exclusion, through the use of particular case studies. These include the treatment of refugees and asylum seekers; housing and spatial inequalities; education; labour market; and policing and the criminal Justice system. Each chapter provides an excellent overview of its respective area, providing a useful introduction to the non-specialist reader. Part III provides an extremely good summary of strategies aimed at combating exclusion. In doing so, the author specifically reflects on the different approaches of North America and the UK, as he explores the role of community activism and empowerment, before evaluating the effectiveness of anti-discriminatory law and affirmative action. The final part of the book, reflects on the prospects of progress towards greater inclusivity, by discussing the ongoing significance of 'difference' and its relevance to making sense of modern day societies.

The importance given to conceptualising ethnic difference within the broader context of gender, age and social class ensures the author avoids the trap of offering simplistic essentialised descriptions. Consequently, his situational interpretation is able to capture the complex and multi-dimensional aspects of ethno-cultural identities. In taking a lead from Giddens' structuration theory, the author also offers an account of the two-way introduction between actors and the wider social structure. This enables him to emphasise the role of social agency, on the part of minorities, in confronting social exclusion, while acknowledging that the shifting nature of structures presents social actors with an ever-changing series of enablements and constraints. Whether or not one agrees with such an interpretation is a different matter. Nonetheless, the author should be congratulated on confronting a fundamental tension in writing about ethnicity and difference. His account is stronger because of it.

On the down side, the lack of a chapter exploring health is disappointing and there are other instances where a little more detailed discussion would have helped the coherence of the text. In the concluding chapter, for example, the author raises the interesting and important point about the potential role of the sociologist in promoting a more inclusive society, before curtailing the discussion by saying, 'there is no space here to devote to a full discussion of these issues'. Indeed similar problems undermine much of the final chapter. This is unfortunate because the chapter shows considerable potential. This is made all the more frustrating, as there are occasions elsewhere in the book where the text is reparative, covering ground previously discussed in other chapters.

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Nonetheless, these are minor criticisms and should not distract from an otherwise excellent introductory account. The book is engaging and accessible to a general reader with little understanding of current debates. It would, for example, provide an ideal text for inclusion in introductory courses to social policy. More importantly, however, is the books potential contribution to ensuring debates about diversity and difference become mainstream concerns, rather than seen as of specialist interest.

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Neil Chakraborti and Jon Garland (eds), *Rural Racism*, Willan Publishing, Cullompton, 2004, 210 pp., £30.00 hbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406319770

Rural Racism covers a difficult and often invisible topic – the impact of racism on ethnic minorities living in rural areas. The book is an edited collection of nine chapters divided into three parts: contextualising rural racism, assessing the problem and tackling the problem.

The first part has two chapters that contextualise rural racism, show that it exists and argue that it be taken seriously. The equating of Englishness with whiteness is held responsible for the lack of interest in rural racism. The four chapters in part II highlight how rurality is constituted as a homogeneous entity despite the existence of diversity and difference, to render invisible the minorities that exist in its midst. The association of rural England with white people is an issue of both space and place, but, in being configured as white, those excluded from this category are construed as outsiders rather than integral parts of the rural whole. That they are few in number compared with their prevalence in urban areas adds to this perception. Racist acts pervade everyday life and make it difficult for those of non-white ethnicities to feel that they belong in rural communities. This section also indicates how cultures of hate perpetrated by white extremist organisations have taken hold in rural areas and unhelpfully politicised ethnicity.

The third part considers how racism might be addressed. The suggestions cover: provisions that deal with racist violence directly, as in a race harassment project, a racially aware educational experience that promotes understanding and inclusivity through the National Curriculum and social services that respond to the needs of ethnic minorities. This provides a partial rather than comprehensive range of matters to be addressed in eradicating rural racism and leaves many questions unanswered, including some raised earlier in the book. How are issues of scarcity, economic insecurity, housing shortages and inequalities that permeate British society to be tackled when these contribute to the spread of racism, not least when targeted by racist extremists peddling messages of hatred?

The contributing authors are knowledgeable and committed to bringing rural racism into the open. Thus, each contribution: reiterates the common theme that little is known about rural racism because most research focuses on urban racism, shows how idealised images of the countryside as a place of tranquillity and harmony contribute to this neglect and argues that these rural images are intricately linked to a notion of Englishness that resides in the rural landscape and is white. Thus, ethnic minority peoples (termed minority ethnic peoples) and their experiences and needs are invisible. There is considerable repetition of this message, but it reinforces the importance of remembering it.

While highlighting a gap in the literature, this book constructs a new dualism, rural racism versus urban racism and creates a new totalising discourse. The complex reality of racism suggests that both rural and urban racism are part of a larger whole, a racist construction of

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the nation-state in which diversity and difference are subsumed in the interests of presenting a homogeneous national identity. It also masks counter discourses, including the resistance to totalising discourses offered by minority ethnic peoples.

The book covers a lot of ground and makes suggestions that should be taken seriously by policy makers, practitioners and lay people, regardless of whether they live in rural or urban areas. However, I feel that this is not the definitive book on this subject. It sets up a dichotomy between urban racism and rural racism which is somewhat false. The dynamics of racism – particularly the construction of minority ethnic peoples as 'others' or outsiders who do not belong on a particular piece of turf, who are humiliated and have their traits devalued – are the same whether racist acts occur in the city or countryside. My experience of living in rural Britain suggests that rural dwellers are as aware of fine gradations in skin colour as their urban counterparts. Thus, it is not that minority ethnic groups are invisible, but that they are not counted as relevant to the social interactions that reproduce dominant discourses about everyday life in these communities.

Diversity features amongst minority ethnic communities but not amongst 'white' ones. But 'whiteness' is no more homogeneous a phenomenon than 'blackness' and so should be deconstructed to find out how it is constructed and who benefits from it. This would expose a differentiated privileging rather than a uniform one. There are hierarchies of belonging and privileging amongst white people living in rural and urban areas. Unpacking these becomes crucial to identifying allies in the struggle against racism. Holding this complexity in mind alongside the recognition that people construct mythical unities helps achieve particular purposes, including creating a nation-state and its reproduction over time. For those trying to establish egalitarian social relations and promote social justice amongst and between people of diverse origins and ethnicities living in any given locality, uncovering what is shared and what is different between and amongst them is a starting point for working together to end racism. And, these have to take into account both the personal and structural dimensions of racism.

LENA DOMINELLI
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Phillip Bean, *Drugs and Crime*, 2nd edition, Willan Publishing, Cullumpton, 2004, 269 pp., £17.99 pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406329777

By chance, I started to read the up-dated version of Phillip Bean's book during the on-going saga of Kate Moss, Pete Doherty and their consumption of Class A drugs. As always, I was struck by the complex and varied manner in which the media dealt with the two protagonists. In many ways, the 'poor Kate', 'bad Pete' dichotomy encapsulates the British attitude to illicit drug use and, from my perspective, this dual approach is at the root of our current, somewhat confused, approach to illicit drugs and their attendant problems. Phillip Bean would have us believe that he has the solution – the introduction of the drug court, so beloved in the USA, into the English and Welsh criminal justice system and it is the justification of this stance which is at the heart of the work.

As one would expect from an author of Phillip Bean's standing and experience of researching and writing around the topic of illicit drug use, the book is informative and informed and is constructed in a style that is straightforward and easily read. The opening two chapters offer some familiar overviews on the nature and extent of the problem as well as a review of the key theoretical assumptions. I particularly enjoyed the concluding comments in

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Chapter 2 but felt the dismissive comment regarding normalisation theory was unnecessary and somewhat confusing: Bean follows it by saying that statistically drug taking seems to be normalised, yet at the same time we should avoid telling this to young people. It seems to me that he is shooting the messenger for conveying the message. Surely we need to recognise the reality of the situation and offer the appropriate advice linked to the lived reality of many young people? Experience tells us that the impact of any prevention message is devalued if the recipient feels they are being patronised or the message skews their experiences.

Personally, and after all that is all a review can ever be, I felt that Chapters 3, 4 and 5 are the core of the book in terms of Bean's thesis as they address what Bean sees as the central problem in British drug policy – what to do with the drug-using offender. Chapter 3 sets the scene by looking at sentencing drug offenders; Chapter 4 provides an examination of coercive treatment and mandatory testing; and in Chapter 5 he provides an informed critique of the Drug Treatment and Testing Order as well as making the case for the introduction of an adapted version of the US drug court into the English and Welsh criminal justice system. This is clearly an issue which the author has thought long and hard about and has some strongly held views. As such, these chapters offer a thought-provoking alternative to our present approach and would be key reading for anyone with an interest in policy and policy developments.

Chapters 6, 7 and 8 repeat the format of the opening two chapters by providing well-crafted and informative but familiar overviews of trafficking and laundering, policing drug markets and informers and corruption respectively. Chapter 9, which deals with women drug users, remains much the same as in the first edition of the work. Chapter 10 returns to the core of the book by suggesting the way forward for British drug policy and again offers some thought-provoking suggestions and insights.

A book review is not the vehicle to challenge some of the assumptions and arguments which are debated within the work. However, as fascinating as I found the argument and evidence offered by Phillip Bean, I am not convinced by the book as it stands, that even an adapted drug court based on the US model would fit into the British system. I was equally frustrated that Bean did not fully explain why he did not look to Europe, or how a US style drug court would fit into an increasingly European-wide approach. Moreover, at times his solutions to some of the organisational and structural problems in adapting such a model are simplistic, being based on little more than organisations and individuals 'accepting change in status and influence' (p. 230).

Herein lies my problem with the book. At times I felt as if I were reading a book within a book. By that I mean that the issues that are dealt with in Chapters 3, 4, 5 and 10 probably warrant a volume on their own, devoid of the lengthy and familiar overview of the current situation. That said, this book will be a key text in the field and should be in the collection of anyone with an interest in British drug policy.

ADRIAN BARTON
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David Taylor and Susan Balloch (eds), *The Politics of Evaluation: Participation and Policy Implementation*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2005, 261 pp., pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406339773

Taylor and Balloch make a bold opening claim in this stimulating book, to go beyond the notion of evaluation as a political activity set out by either scientific realists like Pawson and Tilley or by constructivists like Guba and Lincoln and develop a conception of evaluation as 'an inherently and inescapably political project imbued with issues of power at every level' (p. 3). This of

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course whets our appetite for their analysis of power and how it shapes this political project, for without a systematic and perhaps novel analysis we would be left to conclude that this is yet another case of power being used in rather portentous terms with little analytical substance materialising. Does the book deliver on this promise? In parts and to some extent. Although the concluding chapter is too brief to be especially valuable and misses the opportunity to draw together the preceding strands, the first section of the introductory chapter provides a good summary of key debates on the conceptualisation of policy evaluation as a political activity. The concluding chapter does, however, offer some proposals around which critical debate can be profitably organised: involve central actors so that the views of the recipients or intended beneficiaries of an intervention take precedence over others; challenge prescribed indicators and do not accept the limitations and boundaries imposed by the funders of evaluations; take a positive approach and do not get drawn into a cynical analysis of what does not work very well; and share any learning that comes out of an evaluation. These are of course admirable suggestions but there is a hint of the evaluator as heroic supporter of the oppressed, able not only to speak truth to the powerful but also to get the powerful to listen.

But what of the 15 chapters in between? These emerged from a conference on the politics of evaluation hosted by the Health and Social Policy Research Centre at the University of Brighton in 2002 and deal mainly with evaluations carried out in a variety of different UK policy settings. They vary, of course, in the extent to which they are able to extract and present more general findings and conclusions from tales of specific evaluations, but each makes a useful contribution. Three chapters stood out for me. Beresford's contribution on the involvement of service-users in evaluation and research is especially valuable, because, as a high profile advocate of greater involvement, he calls for a more critical engagement with the simple if not simplistic moral imperative to develop more involvement. Squires and Measor's critical reflection on evaluating youth justice policy and practice is also insightful, not least in their call for academic evaluators to maintain a critical association with the field of policy evaluation, rather than abandoning it and retreating to ivory tower to moan about the evils of neo-liberalism. Parry-Crooke and Sullivan offer a fascinating discussion of the ways in which a political dimension can be introduced and managed in courses that set out to teach people how to do evaluation in theory and in practice.

The book and many of its chapters highlights the importance of articulating, as clearly as possible, a model or theory of how policy is made, the extent to which policy actually changes the material circumstances of people and the role of evaluation and other forms of research in the continuous development of policy. Although it is increasingly derided as one of the mantras of Blairite neo-liberalism, evidence-based policy making at least forces us to think about the role of knowledge and ideas in driving social change. Understanding our own circumstances and analysing the forces that shape and change our social worlds is surely critical to any political project. Any evaluative effort has the potential to contribute to this understanding, but the way in which it is framed, executed and utilised determines this contribution. In this sense evaluation is and must be political. Some of the contributions fall back rather too easily on clichés of evaluation theory: objectivity implies a denial of politics, process is more important that outcome, qualitative approaches are inherently more progressive than quantitative and so on. But overall this collection provides a wide range of interesting cases of evaluations and evaluators trying to deal with the complexities of practice in a very turbulent policy environment.

This book does not provide all the answers to these perennial problems in evaluation, but it succeeds in provoking further reflection and that is surely a good thing.

PAUL BURTON
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David Clapham, *The Meaning of Housing: A Pathways Approach*, The Policy Press, Bristol, 2005, 286 pp., £25.00 pbk.
doi:10.1017/S004727940634977X

David Clapham's *The Meaning of Housing: A Pathways Approach* is an interesting attempt to develop a new 'framework of analysis' (p. 27) in housing research by applying notions of discourse theory, which many readers will find conceptually interesting but problematic in practice.

Clapham critiques mainstream approaches to housing research, which treat housing as a set of static facts – primarily legislative measures and financial regimes – and argues that a new approach is needed which illuminates and explores the manifold and subjective ways in which the meaning of housing is constructed and contested. Housing is a shifting field that has different meanings and interpretations and requires not a single theory but a flexible 'pathways approach'. In this spirit, the author posits the perspectives of households at the centre of the pathways approach. Households are made up of individuals whose choices and experiences are shaped by the ways in which the meaning of housing is constructed for and by them.

The perspective of households is increasingly important, as housing, in the developed world at least, becomes more of a status symbol and an expression of lifestyle choice in our consumerist and individualist society. Households are not just buyers, sellers and renters but active agents who use housing to shape their identity or, in the case of homeless young people and tenants with little mobility choice, are shaped by their housing situations. Much housing research has 'stopped at the front door' (p. 37), treating the dynamics and interactions within households as an analytical black box. It is refreshing to read a study of housing that is prepared to cross the threshold and open up questions about the form and power balance of modern households that other studies pass over or treat in purely functional ways.

The premise of the pathways approach is therefore theoretically appealing, even though observations like that on ' "sub-universes of meaning" that define taken-for-granted reality and include institutionalised codes of conduct that define and construct appropriate behaviour' (p. 20) will leave some readers scratching their heads or scrambling for their copy of *Post-structuralism for Beginners*. There are further instances in which the exploration of the social constructionist and discourse theory notions underpinning Clapham's approach can become quite detached from the field of housing.

After forcefully setting out the rationale for the pathways approach, its value as a corrective to these failings is only partially demonstrated and the following chapters do not make a very convincing case to the reader that the pathways approach is one worth following. In trying to apply the pathways approach to a very broad range of topics, it is necessary to cover a lot of ground, which often leads to over-simplification or over-elucidation. The opening sections of each chapter recount basic facts that can be found in the mainstream housing studies which Clapham has critiqued. Given that the book is aimed primarily at housing researchers, this level of introduction is superfluous and slows down the flow of the argument.

The level of background information also leaves little space for Clapham to really work through a pathways approach to a particular issue. For example, a pathways approach grounded in households' perspectives problematises the notion of housing decency, because the definition and expectation of a decent home is highly subjective. Yet Clapham does not further explore what this means for the government's Decent Homes Target or how a more flexible notion can be constructed. Other key housing issues, such as the impact of different local authority allocations and lettings policies, are dealt with even more briefly. A more selective application of the pathways approach might allow for more time and space to work through such issues in detail.

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In chapters such as that on 'Households, jobs and housing', the level of analysis is at a high level of generality and supposition. It is not clear, for example, why a pathways approach is necessary to point out that 'the main earner in the household may wish to take advantage of employment opportunities in another location' (p. 82). Clapham calls for the construction of analytical typologies to dig deeper into the ways in which jobs and housing issues are surfaced in different households, but does not explain what these might look like, what questions they might provide and, more importantly, why a pathways approach would be particularly beneficial.

The *Meaning of Housing* is an innovative contribution to what can be described as a broader attempt to diversify and re-theorise the study of housing. Hopefully it will trigger further research and encourage others to fill the knowledge gaps that Clapham has usefully highlighted and make the case for a pathways approach more persuasively.

JOHN HOUGHTON

Roger Clough, Mary Leamy, Vince Miller and Les Bright, *Housing Decisions in Later Life*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, Basingstoke, 2004, 255 pp., £50.00 hbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406359776

With an increasingly ageing population, an implosion of pension provision and appropriate housing becoming a scarce and unattainable resource for many, this is a timely and provocative book. It draws on the qualitative data gathered for a three-year study, 'Housing decisions in old age', which ended in 2003, and includes material from 189 in-depth interviews, 125 'housing stories' submitted in response to an advertisement, together with data from older people's panels.

A key feature of the project was the choice of older people who were trained as interviewers, some of whom subsequently became practising and paid researchers. There is fascinating detail on the complexity and nature of doing research in this way, although the interviewers themselves remain shadowy figures: we know nothing of their backgrounds or housing histories, not even their ages, save that they are 'older'. This is in contrast to their subjects who are duly laid bare in these respects. Maybe this is the stuff of another book, but the authors' anxiety at being so distant from the data collection process (a position with which other researchers can readily identify) is both palpable and, occasionally, explicit:

> One of the aspects of our research project that has most interested others has been the style of involvement of older people. At times this has been frustrating as we have wanted some attention paid to the findings about housing decisions. (p. 201)

Although interviewers were encouraged to elicit biographical narrative by way of housing, or even life, history, the authors do not appear to have drawn on the increasing body of biographical research literature, relying instead on thematic analysis:

> to analyse systematically the meanings people were communicating, looking at both the manifest content and also the latent content to discover what was implied . . . we have also tried to stay with people's storylines as a whole. (pp. 43–44)

This is the key to how the book is actually written, and, while I had some anxiety around the risk of being seduced by the apparently undiluted authenticity of narrative accounts where

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'the actors speak for themselves', this was offset, to some extent, by the moderating process of feeding back findings and interpretations to the panels of older people.

The lengthy interview extracts are always fascinating, and sometimes poignant, as we hear accounts of moves which have been successful, or regretted, of rational and structured planning, and of the understandable, but ultimately risky, determination to stay put whatever happens. The sheer range and variety of responses, demonstrating that 'the emotional context of housing decisions has emerged as a key overarching theme to our findings' (page 44), are both compelling and bewildering. Reading the book from beginning to end (which is the best way, since it is beautifully written with an accessible and engaging style), you wonder how they are going to pull all this together.

The book largely succeeds because it acknowledges complexity – indeed rejoicing in it as evidence of the vitality and wisdom of the older people interviewed – and looks at ways of engaging with it. We learn through the interviews of the myriad factors that are at work in home creation and sustainment – the importance of control rather than just choice – with theories of attachment and identity being drawn in. Ontological security would have been a useful overarching concept here, as, for example, in the work of Winstanley *et al.* (2002), with its notion of continuity. This would embed and develop the theoretical basis more, and complement the authors' view of ageing as part of life's journey, so that home in later life is somewhere to live and not merely a container in which to await ultimate dispatch. In this context – an important message from the research – we hear the concerted criticisms of the limited choice in sheltered or 'retirement' housing, with their underlying assumption that older people will necessarily need less space. Essentially, however, this book is about making decisions and, in working with the complexity of housing choice, the authors see an urgent need for dispassionate advice, perhaps from a peer who knows the options and recognises the personal, emotional, and intensely individual factors at play.

This book will clearly be important to housing providers and policy makers, as well as those interested in the intricacies of participatory research. There is a wider audience too as most of us will be facing these stark choices ourselves sooner or later, so we might want to exert a bit of influence now!

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Rob Baggott, Judith Allsop and Kathryn Jones, *Speaking for Patients and Carers*, Palgrave Macmillan Publishing, Basingstoke, 2005, 349 pp., £18.99 pbk.
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Analysis of recent changes in government health policy in the UK have tended to highlight the emergence of the consumer health movement and emphasise its influence. Yet, only limited evidence has tended to be presented about the size, organisation and nature of consumer health groups in the UK and there are doubts about whether it could or should be characterised as a social movement and whether health consumerism was and is a reality. This book goes some way towards filling this gap by presenting detailed empirical evidence from an ESRC funding study (the De Montfort Study) about the characteristics of health consumer groups

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and their internal and external relationships. The external relationships which were particularly examined were those between the health groups and the government and other interests in the health arena, such as with the pharmaceutical industry, health professionals and the media. In the De Montfort Study health consumer groups were defined as a 'voluntary sector organisation that works to promote and/or represent the interests of users and/or carers in the health arena at national level' (p. 4).

This empirical research was informed by a 'multi-lens' theoretical perspective which drew on a range of different theoretical perspectives to explore a range of research questions. No attempt was made to construct a new, coherent or integrated theoretical perspective and the concluding chapter assessed the explanatory power of the theoretical perspectives separately for different aspects of the policy process. Does Alfords structural framework still adequately explain the balance of power relationships between the corporate rationalisers, the medical profession and the so-called 'repressed' community? Is the concept of 'a new social movement' relevant to explaining the formation and internal dynamics of health consumer groups? The study addressed other key questions which included how consumer groups actually behave within the policy process and their strengths and weaknesses as policy actors and the contribution of health consumer groups to a more responsive and inclusive form of policy making. This latter question was placed within the context of debate about the participative and representative democracy and the 'problem' of the democratic deficit on the NHS.

To explore these important and fundamental questions, the study relied on a mixed methods approach (details of which are presented in an appendix) beginning with a postal survey of condition-based groups, population-based groups and informal alliance groups. This was followed up with face-to-face interviews with key informants from health consumer groups, key policy actors and culminating in a final round of interviews with former ministers and other key participants and observers which were used by the investigators to 'test' initial interpretations. The limitations of this methodology for exploring such key questions were recognised by the authors and questions for further research were in evidence throughout the text.

This empirical evidence was used to inform a series of chapters beginning with an understanding of the changing role of health consumer groups in the policy process; a comparison of the similarities and differences between the types of health consumer group and their impact on the policy process, the characteristics of the groups and their formation; the groups social and political resources and the networks and informal and formal alliances.

This was followed by a series of chapters about the nature of the relationships between health groups and health professionals, the drug industry, the government, parliament and the media. The concluding chapter attempts to reassess the theoretical questions identified earlier in the light of the evidence. For example, this evidence suggested that Alford's model, where the community is presented as passive, is outmoded in that health consumer groups were actively involved in policy and in some contexts were influential and were incorporated within policy-making institutions. In addition there was also evidence of close partnerships between professional and some consumer groups. However, this is not to say that medical interests are not powerfully represented in government.

This book, in addition to its theoretical insights, provides a 'mine' of information and there are 'nuggets' to be found throughout: for example, the ambivalence about developing a close relationship with the drug industry; the fear of being dominated by a 'profit' driven multinational industry counteracted by the need for funding and information about new treatments. A different example involves the organisation of condition-specific groups. The low political profile of conditions such as arthritis has limited its influence on the policy agenda, yet the common problems experienced by the groups facilitated co-operation. This is in contrast to the

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high profile cancer groups, which, at least until recently, have been limited by fragmentation and competition.

There are other numerous examples which show fascinating insights into the world and influence of consumer groups. An important book, written in a clear and accessible way by academics who have been working in this area for some time, it should be of interest to policy makers and academic health policy analysts as it provides the first detailed picture of the working of health groups in the UK and their influence on health policy.

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John Swain, Sally French, Colin Barnes and Carol Thomas (eds), *Disabling Barriers: Enabling Environments*, 2nd edition, Sage, London, 2004, £19.99 307 pp., pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406379779

Nearly ten years after its first edition, *Disabling Barriers: Enabling Environments* is updated and, once again, aims to challenge the reader to develop a broad understanding of the experiences of disabled people, largely from their own perspective. There are 45 short contributions contained within five themed sections, most of which are written by disabled activists and academics. The book aims to be a 'short, pithy, challenging analysis of disability issues', marketed at students of disability studies and related subjects.

The introduction and first section certainly make for challenging reading. They chart some of the recent and on-going debates about the social model of disability – the idea that crucially underpins the struggle of disabled people to achieve full civil and political participation in a society which excludes and disempowers them. Mike Oliver and Vic Finklestein open the book with a robust, sometimes angry defence of their understanding of the social model. They lament the fact that there has perhaps been too much debate and dissecting of the social model and not enough emphasis on implementing it and bringing about significant improvements to the lives of disabled people. They are clearly right about the poor progress which has been made in many areas of social policy in relation to disabled people. The Prime Minister's Strategy Unit document, 'Improving the life chances of disabled people' (PMSU, 2005) clearly sets out the scale of disadvantage:

> Disabled people are doing less well than non-disabled people across a wide range of indicators and opportunities. Disabled people are more likely to achieve lower outcomes in terms of employment, income and education. They are more likely to face discrimination and negative attitudes, and often experience problems with housing and transport.

Oliver and Finklestein are critical of attempts by other people to incorporate experiences of impairment into the social model – a challenge which goes to the heart of a lot of debate about the social model. Much of this challenge comes from prominent disabled women writers, who think that the model can, and should, be able to accommodate the personal experience of impairment. Carol Tomas writes cogently about the possibilities of moving the debate on in a way which includes personal accounts of impairment, whilst still supporting collective social action. French and Swain contribute by suggesting that it is possible to reflect on the identity associated with impairment, whilst avoiding the dangerous terrain of the 'tragically disabled' stereotype. Sally French goes on to do this very successfully I think in a very personal

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account of all the pressure on her to deny her impairment and the huge cost to her sense of self.

All of this is in Section 1, which I found to be the most challenging but perhaps engaging part of the book. Subsequent contributions cover most aspects of life that one could think of – arts, housing, leisure, technology, work, ageing and so on. These are arranged around the other four main themes: image, controlling lifestyles, in charge of support and help and creating a society fit for all. These sections are good as introductions to specific topic areas, but the danger is that they will date quite quickly, given the fast-changing context of policy relating to disability and adult social care.

This is an important and valuable book, which undoubtedly derives much of its credibility from having so many contributors who are actively part of the disability movement. I thought there were some very minor weaknesses, including too many different font sizes and styles in a book which perhaps ought to know better about accessibility issues. Only one section talked in any depth about issues for people with learning difficulties, which seems a pity given that struggles for autonomy, control and independent living are also at the heart of the self-advocacy movement. Overall, the book will certainly achieve what it sets out to do and be a valuable starting point for students and practitioners who want a grounding in the central issues in disability studies.

Reference

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Vicky White and John Harris (eds), *Developing Good Practice in Children's Services*, Jessica Kingsley, London, 2004, 208 pp., £16.95 pbk.
doi:10.1017/S0047279406389775

It would be easy to view the most far-reaching changes to children's services in England and Wales since those instigated by the Seebohm report of 1968 as a threat, and consequently to be defensive. This book is a breath of fresh air then, because it emphasises how such flux presents opportunities to enhance the quality of service provision and so achieve better outcomes for children and families. Notwithstanding the value of thoughtful critiques of new policy directions, too often such accounts fail to offer constructive solutions. In the light of recent evidence showing that aspects of child well-being are deteriorating (e.g. Bradshaw and Mayhew, 2005), this could appear to be at best unhelpful and at worst indulgent.

This book picks up the challenge by reporting on initiatives in one local authority: all contributors write about their experiences of working in children's services in the county of Warwickshire in central England, whether as researchers based at the University or as policy makers and practitioners working predominantly in social care. Surprisingly, the editors appear somewhat coy about this innovative approach: similar such ventures, albeit perhaps designed and presented as a more coherent package (even some kind of research experiment), would be extremely instructive for those engaged in the aforementioned reforms.

Even so, the breadth of this book, the well-presented case studies and the succinct overview of changes in the opening chapter ensure that this will prove a useful resource for students undertaking qualifying programmes in different areas of children's services and help more

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experienced practitioners to reflect on their own practice. It also holds up a mirror to children's services, deliberately (and occasionally, I would venture, inadvertently) exposing some of the key areas for development. A handful of these will now be highlighted.

First is the perennial task of assessing need and risk for individual children (addressed in chapters by Tuck and Quiggin). Contributors rightly stress the importance of practitioners developing analytic skills and the value of practice tools in helping to structure their thinking (pp. 60–61), not to mention the danger of focusing on assessment to the detriment of interventions aimed at addressing the identified problems (p. 80). They also seek to evaluate alternative approaches to assessment, both through practitioner feedback (pp. 58ff) and also a case study of how using the government's *Framework for the Assessment of Children in Need and their Families* made a practitioner think and act differently in relation to one family (pp. 68ff). Further evaluative work in this area might strive to be more ambitious, for example by using techniques applied to the measurement of social work learning (Carpenter, 2004).

Second is the assessment of need at an aggregate level (especially the chapter by Johnson and Sawbridge). Here, a critical message is the importance of need audits of a cross-section of children served in order to inform the development of a spectrum of services (pp. 149–150). Indeed, realising that it was not helpful to plan placement services in isolation, those involved in the audit of a sample of children becoming looked after ended up designing a range of services – some for looked-after children and some for those supported at home. Extending this further, there is a strong case for agencies adapting population survey methods to chart the pattern of need among *all* children in their catchment areas, since some children will not receive services despite having identical needs to those of service recipients. One might add a call for greater investment in acting on the findings of need audits. The exercise in Warwickshire fed directly into strategic decision making, but such initiatives often fizzle out and there are alternative approaches to service development that bear further testing.

Third is the concept of children's rights. As is often the case on this subject, the analysis does not extend much beyond noting principles that, supposedly, increasingly provide an underpinning for service provision and describing ways of integrating children's opinions into aspects of service provision (pp. 10–12, 112). Yet a rights perspective is about much more than soliciting and acting on children's views, and, in my view, its influence on policy and practice calls for more agnostic and rigorous assessments of its benefits and drawbacks for service quality and child well-being.

The book also touches on at least two other issues that deserve further scrutiny. One is the view in government that delivering improved outcomes necessitates changes to organisational structure and culture. New research might usefully test this assumption: the evidence to date for such a link is distinctly ambivalent (Morpeth, 2004). The other issue concerns the potential for learning from 'what works' in other countries and replicating proven interventions. Seal's chapter on a preventive service aimed at keeping children safe, for instance, describes the difficulties encountered in adopting the 'Protective Behaviours' programme from the US. There is much scope for similar work in the future so that lessons can be learnt about maximising programme fidelity. Indeed, these and other topics discussed here might lend themselves to exploration in a new book edited by the same team aimed at drawing out the links between this volume and its companion on community care services for adults (see White and Harris, 2001).

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