

BASIC INCOME STUDIES
An International Journal of Basic Income Research

Vol. 2, Issue 2

BOOK REVIEW

December 2007

Tony Fitzpatrick, *New Theories of Welfare* (Basingstoke: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), pp. 239, £21.99 (paperback), ISBN: 1-4039-0152-X.

Gerard Cotterell
University of Auckland

Fitzpatrick's latest book complements his earlier work *Welfare Theory: An Introduction* (2001), in which Fitzpatrick focused on what he called "classic" theories of welfare, while his latest book provides an overview of contemporary approaches to welfare theory – theoretical developments post-1990. Fitzpatrick notes that these two books overlap only in covering reciprocity, altruism and class. This speaks to the ongoing centrality of these issues in the welfare policy arena.

The nine chapters cover a wide range of topics not necessarily easily associated with the typical interests of welfare theory. They include chapters on insecurities, information and society, genes and environments, social psychologies, emotions and bodies, governance, crime and surveillance, and culture and media.

In chapter one Fitzpatrick sets the book's context by contrasting modern conservatism and social democracy. Fitzpatrick notes that while there has been little in the way of new developments in conservative thinking in recent years, social democratic thinkers have been reconstructing social democratic thinking in light of the neoliberal project's impact. While encouraging these reconstruction attempts, Fitzpatrick does note that the neglect of the importance of class in these accounts leads to underestimating "the continuing role that structural inequalities play in determining our life chances" (p. 23).

The second chapter examines the "new radicalisms" that Fitzpatrick suggests have replaced socialism. After reviewing egalitarian, governmentality, post-Marxist and feminist contributions, Fitzpatrick suggests that Nancy Fraser's analysis of redistribution and recognition offers the best prospects for

underpinning a strategy for dealing with inequality. Her work brings together the material and the cultural – the primary battle sites between the left and the postmodernists – through an analysis that attempts “to conjoin redistribution (social justice and class) with recognition (status and culture)” (p. 48). Fitzpatrick singles out for censure the governmentality approach due to its focus on the micro level effects of capitalism, which he argues renders it unable to critique the role of power at higher levels and therefore inadequate for any emancipatory strategy.

In chapter three, having devoted the early chapters to reviewing the primary political approaches that underpin contemporary welfare theory, Fitzpatrick outlines recent debates about agency, community and class. He discusses the recent increased use of the term “community” as a policy focus and its failure as a central organizing concept; instead, he claims, the concept of “class,” much maligned in recent years, still plays an important role in that respect. The concepts of agency, community and class, Fitzpatrick argues, can only be fully understood in relation to how they interact with each other and not as distinct categories.

Chapters four to nine cover a range of topics such as insecurities, genes and the environment, information and society, governance, crime and surveillance, and culture and the media. This diversity of topics means that a review of this length cannot deal satisfactorily with their contents. While this diversity may at first seem distant to welfare theory in general and social policy in particular, Fitzpatrick successfully links them using the political frameworks outlined in the early chapters – modern conservatism, social democracy and the new radicalisms – to illustrate their connection and relevance to issues associated with welfare. For example, in chapter four’s discussion of insecurity, Fitzpatrick examines how recent theoretical developments interpret the primary contemporary sources of insecurity such as the impacts of globalization. In chapter six, which examines recent biotechnology developments, he outlines how this technology will impact the provision of health care and the contrasting theoretical views these different theoretical approaches hold of such developments.

Overall the book is a welcome addition to contemporary debates about welfare. First, the book stimulates the reader to ask further questions, a most admirable quality for a book. Second, it provides a refreshingly wide view of the field of social policy – an approach that should stimulate students’ interest in the subject. In turn, this may broaden the discipline’s appeal beyond those who normally choose to study social policy. Third, extensive references provide a more than adequate starting point for those wishing to go deeper.

Readers of *Basic Income Studies* might reasonably expect to find mention, especially in the chapter examining the rethinking of social democratic thought, of the role that some form of basic income (BI) could play in this renewal of the centre-left tradition. However, Fitzpatrick does not include any such discussion, which is especially disappointing given that he had earlier published a book on this subject, *Freedom and Security: An Introduction to the Basic Income Debate* (1999). In this earlier work Fitzpatrick was favourably disposed towards the BI approach and even notes in the last chapter that “it might be those political and social policy commentators that refuse to make connections with BI who will be called upon to justify themselves” (Fitzpatrick, 1999: 205), advice that he seems to have forgotten in this latest book.

In addition, Fitzpatrick, in covering such a wide range of topics, while laudable, attempts to do too much in too small a space. Who might be this book’s audience – undergraduate students, who may not appreciate the breadth of thought, or postgraduate students and academics for whom the content may be too light? His early promise to link contemporary welfare thinking to the three political ideologies outlined in chapters two and three is carried out in a less than comprehensive manner, making the book disjointed in places. The book’s merits and faults make this an illuminating, if sometimes frustrating, read.

References

- Fitzpatrick, T. (1999) *Freedom and Security: An Introduction to the Basic Income Debate*. Basingstoke: Macmillan Press.
- Fitzpatrick, T. (2001) *Welfare Theory: An Introduction*. New York: Palgrave.

Gerard Cotterell
Department of Sociology
University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019, Auckland Mail Centre
Auckland 1142
New Zealand
Email: g.cotterell@auckland.ac.nz