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The social changes associated with the transition to a post-industrial ‘service economy’ give rise to a new pattern of social risks in advanced welfare democracies throughout Europe. On the one hand, the increasing participation of women in paid work generates the need for a ‘defamiliarization’ [sic p. 32] of private (i.e. female) care responsibilities. On the other hand, in the context of increasingly flexible labour markets a growing number of market participants, the young and low skilled in particular, face severe risks of job insecurity and in-work poverty. In addition to this, the growing reliance on private forms of welfare provision brought about by the political creation of ‘welfare markets’ implies new forms of social inequality and social exclusion.

It comes as no surprise that the idea for a book dealing with the policy responses to these new social risks in a comparative (European) perspective has originated in the UK. The shift away from industrial employment having started earlier and having been more radical in Britain than in most other European countries, ‘new social risk’ reforms ranked high on the policy agenda with which New Labour took power in 1997. Since then, the Blairist program of ‘using market means to achieve welfare ends’ has been highly influential on post-industrial social policy making all over the Continent, and the UK has become (as Peter Taylor-Gooby and Trine P. Larsen put it in their chapter on the British case) the training ground for the European – or ‘Lisbon’ – approach to a ‘dynamic flexible knowledge-based economy’.

*New Risks, New Welfare* is thus, its comparative thrust notwithstanding, a book with a British flavour. Co-authored by (most of) the participants in a major EU Framework Five research project (‘Welfare Reform and the Management of Social Change’ – WRAMSOC), the tone, character, and message of the volume is unequivocally set by its editor. Its major findings concerning the policies and politics of new social risks in Europe, i.e. at the EU level and in seven European countries (the UK plus Germany, France, Switzerland, Spain, Sweden, and Finland – the latter two cases unfortunately and incomprehensibly being reviewed in one single contribution), may be summarised as follows: (1) The successful adaptation of welfare states to new social risks is a politically difficult – and disputed – process everywhere. (2) In all of the cases considered, the existing welfare state institutions influence both the emergence of and the response to new social risks: ‘old social risk regimes’ condition – but do not determine – ‘new social risk regimes’. (3) In this sense, new social risks do not blur the well-known pattern of (Nordic, Corporatist, Liberal, and Mediterranean) regime differences, but the policy responses to them unquestionably involve new directions in welfare (‘path-dependency with departures’, in Taylor-Gooby’s words, the recent development of the French welfare state as discussed by Bruno Palier and Christelle Mandin being a case in point). (4) While the relative long-standing experience of the Nordic countries (reviewed by Virpi Timonen) in addressing social needs
perceived elsewhere in Europe as ‘new risks’ puts these welfare states in a relatively comfortable position vis-à-vis the world of post-industrialism, problems and conflicts are most marked in corporatist and Mediterranean countries where new risk innovations imply the strongest challenges to old social risk regimes (as is shown in the contributions by Andreas Aust and Frank Bönker on Germany, Giuliano Bonoli on Switzerland, and Luis Moreno on Spain). (5) New social risks may constitute a policy domain where the European Union could offer policy leadership and which it could use as a heavily needed source of legitimacy (an argument put forward in Larsen’s and Taylor-Gooby’s chapter on the EU). (6) Finally – and this is the editor himself speaking – policy making around new social risks reveals opportunities for dynamism and innovation within European welfare states that tend to be seen as ‘immovable objects’ (Pierson) in a ‘frozen landscape’ (Esping-Andersen): ‘The real progress in policy innovation indicates that the future of European welfare states continues to surprise’ (Taylor-Gooby, p. 237).

This being said, what remains to be considered is if the surprises ‘the’ European welfare state is supposed to give us in the future will indeed – as the editor seems to be convinced of – be good ones. As to this issue, to be honest I am slightly less optimistic than Taylor-Gooby – and the virtues as well as the shortcomings of his book tell me that my pessimism is well-founded. First of all, I am not quite convinced that – as Taylor-Gooby seems to suggest – a world of new social risks really provides opportunities for the development of ‘positive-sum policies’. On the contrary, most of the case studies, and most impressively Bonoli’s account of the Swiss experience, demonstrate that the conflict between actors and interests tied to ‘old’ and ‘new’ risks resembles everything else but a ‘win–win’ situation. It is not by chance that new risk policy making has been delayed (particularly in the heavily ‘old risk’ welfare states) by struggles between reformers and entrenched interests surrounding old risk policies. Interestingly enough, Taylor-Gooby’s overall optimism stands in contradiction with the scepticism he reveals when it comes to evaluate the British (New Labour) case, where his (and Larsen’s) conclusion is ‘that contradictions between commitment to market liberalism and commitment to social welfare lead to problems that appear insoluble’ (p. 56). In my view, the contradictions (‘second’ or ‘third order’), risks, and by-effects of New Labour-type new risk policies gradually spreading to all European welfare states should have been made much more prominent in the concluding chapter of the book – issues, to name only the most obvious ones, of inequality, coercion, and control.

To put it simply: I share Palier and Mandin’s assertion that the new recipes of new risk policies are pretty close to the liberal world of welfare – and it should be added that the ‘genuinely liberal genuine welfare’ state New Labour (and the European Union?) is striving for may be not so liberal (and possibly not so ‘welfare’) at the end of the day. This could be made clear most impressively by studying the policies around one of the most pressing new social risks which obviously (with the exception of Timonen’s contribution on Sweden and Finland) was left out of the co-operative project’s research agenda, and that is immigration. Apart from this issue, Taylor-Gooby and colleagues on the whole are too discreet when it comes to mention the perverse effects of social policies that are ‘positive-sum’ mainly in the sense of being ‘productive’ (meaning that they are designed to support economic competitiveness). To give only one example, when I read Timonen’s chapter reporting about increasing demands from Finnish dual breadwinner households doing shift-work for ‘twenty-four-hour creches’, I would have expected someone – the author or the editor – asking if this is what ‘work–life balance’ means – and should mean – in our post-industrial future.

‘Towards the Good Society, Once Again?’ was the title of Gösta Esping-Andersen’s recent plea for a new – new risk – welfare state architecture. We may not – and certainly I do
not – share Esping-Andersen’s answer to his own question. But we all should take this question seriously.

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How would you go about measuring the performance of a national meteorology service?

How do prisons and social security systems differ in terms of the relationship between political control and management authority?

Can governments effectively regulate services that require high levels of professional and technical expertise?

Can you re-brand a forest?

These are some of the fascinating questions raised by this rather mundanely titled book. Contrasts between four services across four European nations – Finland, The Netherlands, Sweden and the UK – throw key issues into much sharper relief than is possible when looking at a national management system from the inside. This is the true value of comparative research, and the book succeeds in transcending the normally dull work of describing structures and systems to open up lively debates about governmental and managerial power. For example, how far do different nations attempt to reflect the social value, as well as economic efficiency, of public institutions in the design of performance management systems? What tasks in services, the performance of which may affect the national interest, should be commercial and what retained as part of the state? How can services, the impact of which transcends the boundaries of the nation state – such as forestry or meteorology – be managed and regulated? What difference does it make whether services are highly politicised and subject to crises and media panics (prisons and social security) or can be conducted largely away from the public gaze? Why, and in what ways, does the UK continue to be ‘different’ from its European neighbours?

Such questions are opened up in the context of a well-structured and theoretically informed cross-national study designed to address three core questions: why has the agency form become so popular, how can agencies be best steered, and under what conditions do agencies perform best?. The approach is one designed to surface particularities – of the tasks undertaken in specific services, of the prevailing administrative cultures of the four nations, and of the strategies pursued by the managers of the organisations studied. Such particularities, they argue, are likely to have more influence on how an organisation behaves than does the generality of its organisational form (in this case its status as an ‘agency’ with devolved governmental powers). The study of particularities also makes the book a lively and interesting
read, but there are also important generalities that can be extracted in a series of highly quotable quotes, for example:

In a perfectly functioning democracy, parliament and citizen’s groups would be deeply and regularly concerned with the published information concerning the performance of public bodies [such as forestry agencies]. Their reports would be scrutinised and debated. Questions would be asked. Key items would be reported in the mass media. Following debate, if necessary, policies would be adjusted.

In the real world [of forestry programmes] little of this happens. (p. 211)

Social policy readers will not doubt be able to take a number of different messages from the findings set out in the concluding chapter. Those that most struck me were the impact of the specificity of the culture of agencies concerned with the management of prisons; the effects of the combination of flux and inertia in social security organisations; and the failure of performance management systems to assist agencies in making judgements when faced with value-based trade offs (for example between punishment and rehabilitation in prisons, or between commercial exploitation and environmental protection in forestry).

The book will also be of value to students because of the lucidity of its theoretical discussions. The introduction sets out three theoretical approaches that could be drawn on to debate the questions with which the book engages: economic approaches, ‘traditional’ social science approaches, and interpretive/social constructivist theories. The authors position themselves ‘somewhere on the borderline’ between traditional social science and social constructivism’ using this position to enable them to debate the differences between academic and practitioner (i.e. policy) models of agencies. In the conclusion the authors also test their own theoretical model – ‘Task Specific Path Dependency’ (TSPD) – in a lucid and rigorous theoretical engagement with bureau-shaping theory.

Combining the particular (with all its rich and fascinating detail) and the general (messages about how to classify and understand, not merely describe, difference) requires great artistry. It has succeeded here because of the strong research base and development – and testing – of a theoretical model (TSPD). As such the authors have contributed something new to fields crowded out with ‘big’ explanatory models – the New Public Management of public administration, the governance theory of political science, or the welfare regimes theory of comparative social policy. As such it is to be welcomed, both for a new take on services at the core of social policy (prisons, social security) but also for the insights that can be gleaned from the discussion of public services that have rarely been the subject of mainstream academic analysis and debate. It was these that most strongly reverberated for me after the book had been put away.

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This book has the general intent to establish the relevance of biographical work for a variety of forms of professional intervention. It contains twenty-nine chapters, including an Introduction
by the editors, with contributions from researchers in the UK, Germany, Denmark, Israel, New Zealand, France, Poland, Finland, and Russia. In addition to the editors a good number of the contributors are well known in the broad field of biographical research. The areas considered include social work, education and training, health and employment.

The editors are concerned with the application of biographical methods in the exploration and development of new types of professional practice as well as obtaining a different slant on organisational processes. To this end the various articles provide examples of how biographical methods may be of use within the training of professionals and the relations with service users. The book also attempts to show the utility of biographical work or practice within the development of policy while recognising the wider socio-political contexts framing professional interventions and experience. The breadth of international work contained in the volume is meant to allow some basis for a comparative analysis of different professional experiences and policy issues. Three main themes or ‘arenas of social change’ are identified in the articles: – ‘transformations from eastern to western types of society in Europe’, ‘major social shifts in social and welfare principles’ and ‘experiences of immigration and of new cultural diversities’. All are affecting, the editors argue, political and organisational contexts, employment structures, professional practice and social relations and experience. While, the volume seeks to explore these shifts through a cross-cultural approach, the biographical focus is not meant to limit the level of analysis. For instance, in Britain where social care and health provision are affected by a ‘managerialist dominance’ and notions of ‘user-empowerment and choice’ the editors argue that there are still possibilities for professionals to respond with new forms of sensitive practice.

The editors contrast their view on professional practice with a more conventional notion in which professionalism is conceived as different from other types of practice according to power and social influence. While accepting the role of professional knowledge and power relations (as in law and medicine), the editors seek a more ‘inclusive and extensive’ conception than that offered by a traditional focus on the characteristics of professions, such as codes of conduct, membership and training. This wider notion includes an historical perspective and considers ‘a wide set of social relationships that are better understood in terms of context and interaction, and consequently biography’ (p. 2).

A number of theoretical sources are used to understand professional practice in the articles: including interactionist, hermeneutic and psychodynamic conceptualisation. Similarly, the researchers draw upon diverse biographical approaches, such as oral history and narrative analysis. The editors state that the volume has a common notion of professionalism that ‘assumes that promoting a sense of individual autonomy in a context that encourages social solidarity necessarily involves a process of dialogue and interaction’ (p. 2). The perspective regards professional practice as ‘diaological and relational’ while sited in political and institutional shifts. Such ‘interactive contexts’ ‘include the agency and perspectives of users of services, students and professionals, and the interplay of policy frameworks with broader structural changes, such as labour markets, migration, class, ethnicity, age and gender’ (p. 2).

The articles in the book are organised into five sections: ‘Putting the subject into policy and practice’ – ‘tackles the conceptual and policy dimensions of using biographical analysis comparatively in order to understand the special dynamics of distinctive social processes’. Here, questions regarding national and organisational contexts and the degree to which they allow for biographically influenced and ‘action oriented’ practice are raised with examples relating to self-employment of women and minorities in several countries. ‘Subjectivity in context’ – includes the ‘internalisation’ of previous and current experiences and the effect on current experiences and developing identities – including the shifting appreciation of biographies; examples here include professional experience and ‘intersubjective group work’ in divided social situations (in Germany and Israel). ‘Self-awareness in research and practice’ – ‘follows the reflections of professionals and researchers as they encounter and learn from engagement with biographical
processes in their daily practice’ (e.g. in the research interview; in health settings). ‘Recognising trajectories of disempowerment’ – this part ‘takes a critical look at biographical work as a source of empowerment by raising questions about professional practice where biography has been used as a resource’. Here examples include work with lone mothers, hospice settings and work with the homeless. Issues include the relations between the setting, the wider agency and the degree to which biographical work hinders or supports a marginal grouping and assessment of need. Finally, ‘Biographical resources in education and training’ – ‘explores biography as a quality resource in the education and professional practice of teachers, social researchers and doctors’. Included here is work from France, which examines the interrelation between private life and the professional practice of teaching and research on the ‘emotional life’ of doctors in their stressful daily work London’s East End.

The editors have performed a major task drawing together such a rich range of biographically informed research on a variety of professional contexts across differing national contexts. The comparative analysis could have been developed somewhat in relating the main themes and the individual contributions, perhaps in the Introduction where in fact the UK and Germany are contrasted or as short additional introductions to sections. In turn this could have strengthened the conception of professional practice being offered and how a biographical approach can contribute to professional practice and social policy. However, the volume succeeds well in establishing the relevance of biographical research for social policy in relation to professional practice and its a broad comparative intent should be commended. It is also very useful companion to P. Chamberlayne, M. Rustin and T. Wengraf (eds) (2002), Biography and Exclusion in Europe, Bristol: The Policy Press.

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Issues associated with research ethics have recently been propelled up the agenda as part of an emerging preoccupation in the UK with ‘research governance’. These two quite different, but equally important, books are a direct product of that process. One is a research report. The other is an edited collection. Tinker and Coomber’s report relates to a questionnaire and telephone interview study funded by the Nuffield Foundation into the functioning of University Research Ethics Committees in the UK. The findings would indicate that four in five of the universities responding had established a Research Ethics Committee, though nearly half had done so only since 2000. Practice varied considerably between institutions. It appeared that scrutiny did not extend to all the research being conducted within or by the universities. Two thirds of the institutions made no special arrangements for the social sciences. The authors select ten
criteria by which to assess the level of scrutiny of research, including:

- Whether scrutiny is centralised or devolved.
- Whether scrutiny extends both to staff and to student research.
- The inclusiveness of the membership of the committees (and, in particular, whether they have lay members).
- Whether the committee has a dedicated administrator, and the standard and extent of the documentation, codes of practice, etc. published by the committee.

While they refrain from presenting a league table that names and shames under-performing institutions, the authors explain how they scored the universities for which sufficient data were available against these ten criteria. One in ten scored 10 out of 10, and six in ten scored 8 or better. However, one in ten scored 4 or less and two institutions scored 0 out of 10. As the report acknowledges, this is not a wholly satisfactory way to assess the effectiveness of ethical scrutiny, but the results are none the less telling and should rightly attract a great deal of attention from across the academic research and university administration communities.

The critical question that is raised in a foreword to Tinker and Coomber’s report by Sharon Witherspoon, Deputy Director of The Nuffield Foundation, is whether the increased attention that is now being given to research ethics scrutiny is ‘simply moral panic or a bureaucratic imperative?’ (p. 6). Does the research ethics debate reflect a set of concerns about the dangers posed in particular by social scientific research, or a commitment to better regulation and procedural safeguards? The contributors to Smyth and Williamson’s edited collection on research ethics touch upon this same question in a variety of different ways, though not always explicitly.

Smyth and Williamson’s collection contains 11 substantive chapters contributed by a total of no fewer that 26 different authors (including the editors). The book was inspired by the seminar on ‘Ethics and Research Guidelines’, organised in February 2002 by the Academy of Learned Societies for the Social Sciences. The collection is arranged in three parts. The first is concerned with ‘Participation and inclusion’, and includes accounts of research conducted on research participants as well as examples of participatory research initiatives. The second part of the book is concerned directly with ‘The review and governance process’ and demonstrates, inter alia, how the established research ethics scrutiny process that applies within the UK’s National Health Service (namely, its own Local Research Ethics Committees) can fulfil a gatekeeping function that does not protect the interests of service users so much as prevent critical scrutiny by social researchers of the practices of service professionals. The third part of the book is concerned with ‘Researchers’ relationships with participants’ and contains several powerful accounts of the ways in which social researchers and even journalists can – on a principled basis – give voice to vulnerable service users and marginalised or oppressed social groups. The editors provide an introduction and conclusion in which they attempt valiantly to establish the themes that bind this extremely diverse collection together. Several of the more stimulating individual contributions, however, stand on their own and clearly deserve to be included as such on the reading lists for research methods courses, particularly at postgraduate level.

Reading these two books has encouraged me once again to reflect upon the ethics of Social Policy research in particular. I am reminded of two kinds of danger. First, in Social Policy we should understand better than most that the proliferation of protocols relating to such matters as informed consent and confidentiality can drive researchers – just as much as service providers – into defensive modes of practice and a culture of risk management or counterproductive blame avoidance (e.g. Hood et al., 2000). The underlying principle that has informed medical and social research ethics is the Kantian imperative that human beings are to be treated as ends in themselves and never as means to an end. Research that involves
human ‘subjects’ or participants should do them no harm. There is a danger, however, that the procedural injunction that a researcher must do no harm might become so restrictively interpreted and applied as to inhibit researchers from exploring ways of achieving substantive benefits for people.

Second, there is conversely a danger that Social Policy research can become a business for ‘voyeurs, narks and do-gooders’ (see Mann, 1996). This is why it is so important that research that relates to the users of human services and to the needs of vulnerable or disadvantaged people should seek to engage its human ‘subjects’ as participants in the research process. It should aim not merely to spare them from harm, but to empower them as the creators of knowledge. However, giving them a say, for example, in how research is to be conducted is not easy. There is a fine line to be drawn between, on the one hand, an inclusive approach that ensures that the people involved in research are regarded not as means but as ends and, on the other, a process that shifts responsibility from the researcher to the researched. The danger at one extreme is that participants are subject to a benign form of manipulative co-option; at the other that extraneous demands may be allowed to displace or undermine the integrity of the researcher’s scholarly judgement.

In all the discussion of research ethics there really is very little attention given to what we understand by ethics – as opposed, for example, to morality. A customary code or moral consensus, whether it is promoted by a professional or academic body or espoused by a service users’ or community group, is not the same as an ethical paradigm. Perceptions of what is or what ought to be good for (other) people do not necessarily coincide with what is right. Ethics after all relate primarily to purposes, not processes, and the purpose of research is to contribute to knowledge. Social Policy research, I would contend, requires an ethical commitment to knowledge that promotes human well-being. Research processes and protocols must serve and should be commensurate with that ethic: but they cannot of themselves define it. We may possibly infer the ethic that informs research from the processes and protocols with which it complies, but such compliance does not necessarily make research ethical. This may be stating the obvious, but amidst the administrative turmoil that attends the rolling out of University Research Ethics Committees, and in the light of the increasingly challenging and intellectually absorbing debates about the propriety of different research methods, I thought it worth re-iterating.

References

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The fact that all members of the UK Social Policy Association receive this book as part of their membership puts me in a different position to the other contributors in this book review section, as a good number of you will have read this book. Not the whole book as it is only
the conscientious reviewer of the *Social Policy Review* who could be expected to do this. The *Social Policy Review*, like its predecessor the *Yearbook of Social Policy*, is a book to consult for individual chapters or, if you are a teacher, to advise others to consult. The new structure for this edition of the *Review* makes it a more useful resource. Part I is a review of developments in the key social policy areas of health, education, housing, social security and personal social services. Part II is devoted to what the editors call the ‘social policy research agenda’, which in this edition includes chapters on social policy in Scotland since devolution; social policy and the National Assembly in Wales; a comparison of the Attlee and Blair governments; Christian democracy and welfare to work; and, finally, labour market policies in western Europe. Part III is now be devoted to a particular theme and this year it is the legacy of Thatcherism, given that May 2004 marked twenty-five years since Mrs Thatcher’s historic victory. In some ways theming is a return to the organisation of some of the early volumes of the Yearbook in the early 1970s – the first edition had five or six chapters on the theme of the Seebohm Report and the reorganisation of social services, for example.

Inevitably the fact that each of the development chapters (Part I) has a different author means that there is going to be some variation in how their policy areas are reviewed. Given the online resources we now have at our disposal – government web sites, access to newspaper articles on social policy, pressure group material – a chapter has to do more than review the developments. What is required is a review coupled with a discussion that relates events to recent research. All of the five chapters do this, although some keep strictly to the last year or so, while the chapter by Bill Jordan on social care sets recent events in the context of the last thirty or more years since the establishment of the Seebohm social services departments.

In Part II ‘Social Policy in the wider context’ a welcome feature are the two chapters on social policy in Scotland and Wales. John Stewart provides a good analytical account of social policy north of the border since devolution. Stewart is able to show how the divergence in policy between Scotland and England built on the existent autonomy in government pre-devolution. Furthermore he points to the prevailing culture, which he claims is more resistant to the private sector and supportive of public services than in England. Paul Chaney and Mark Drakeford provide a complementary chapter on social policy and the role of the National Assembly in Wales, showing how social policy has dominated discussion in the Assembly. Naturally running through all of these chapters is the policy alignment of New Labour. Robert Page looks at the New Labour record so far by comparing and contrasting it with that of the Attlee government. This is a suggestive chapter, which is a contribution to a debate one imagines will continue for some time as to the continuities between New Labour and earlier Labour administrations. Inevitably this can only be an interim assessment but the chapter is a useful attempt to put New Labour into historical perspective.

Historical perspective is what informs the third part of the Review. Four essays by David Marsland, Howard Glennerster, Hilary Land and the American historian Joseph White assess the legacy of Thatcherism. I thought this section worked particularly well as it enables the authors to range across policy areas and the last quarter of a century, identifying trends and policy shifts. This is particularly the case in Howard Glennerster’s chapter where he makes a convincing case for the view that some of the market reforms introduced into welfare state services have made them more consumer responsive and as a result more secure.

The editors have done a good job in reorganising the *Social Policy Review*, although it has to be said that for most readers their opinion of a book of this kind is determined largely by the quality of the one or two chapters that one reads.

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The deepening of social divisions and the growth of poverty and inequality in both developing and developed societies in recent years has prompted a renewed commitment to tackling poverty both in the UK and at an international level. In this important new textbook Ruth Lister provides a lucid account of the key ideas and debates shaping current thinking on the nature and consequences of poverty. Drawing on a vast range of sources this book succeeds in providing an up-to-date review of the most important methodological and theoretical debates in poverty research and policy – and does so in a way that should be accessible to a wide readership, including academics, researchers, activists, policy makers and graduate students.

Whilst the definition and measurement of poverty have been subject to often intense controversy, the more general conceptual framework necessary to understanding poverty, both as a material condition and as a social relation, has remained relatively under-theorised. By developing a fairly tight definition of poverty alongside a broader conceptualisation of poverty that seeks to capture the multifaceted nature of poverty as a lived reality, this volume cogently outlines a focus on the ‘relational/symbolic’ aspects of poverty alongside more conventional understandings of poverty as an ‘objective’ material condition.

Ruth Lister begins by conveying often-complex ideas and disputes in the definition and measurement of poverty in an engaging and concise way (Chapters 1 and 2). In doing so, the author elaborates an analytic framework that informs the subsequent explication of poverty as both social phenomenon and lived experience. Crucially, it is argued that the absolute–relative dichotomy represents not two distinct forms of poverty, but rather different understandings of the nature of human needs. Moreover, the focus on human needs serves as a means of integrating the study of poverty within wider social scientific debates, centred upon notions of well-being, capabilities, social divisions, human rights and democratic citizenship. In doing so this volume repositions poverty research as integral to more general social scientific scholarship and policy research.

The broader structural context of poverty in terms of spatial difference, social divisions and inequality, their effects across the life-course, and their interaction with wider processes of exclusion are highlighted in Chapters 3 and 4. Accounts of poverty inevitably draw upon either individualistic or societal explanations. Clearly, however, acknowledging the structural roots of poverty whilst also giving due recognition to the active agency of ‘poor’ people in negotiating difficult circumstances raises some fundamental questions about the relationship between structure and agency. Arguably, structural accounts of the nature and causes of poverty have tended to underplay the active agency of people in poverty. If this is so, Ruth Lister’s book offers a powerful antidote by examining the ways in which people in poverty resist their oppression both in everyday life, and through individual acts of resistance and collective action.

The remainder of this volume (Chapters 5 to 7) therefore explores the symbolic/relational dimensions of poverty, both with respect to the politics of representation within poverty discourses, and in relation to the struggle against poverty by ‘the poor’ themselves. The ‘Othering’ of people living in poverty is integral to the social construction of poverty, in the process reinforcing negative stereotyping and the stigmatisation of poverty. In Chapter 5 Ruth Lister outlines this process of differentiation and demarcation by which the line is drawn between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by exploring its historical roots and contemporary synonyms in constructions of the ‘underclass’ and welfare dependency.

Of course, awareness of the political constructions of the ‘p’ words ‘poverty’ and ‘the poor’ is especially apposite in relation to the positionality of poverty researchers themselves.
Ruth Lister’s book deals with these issues in a sensitive way and in the context of an evident life-long commitment to ethical poverty research based upon recognition and mutual respect. This commitment is evident also in the focus upon how people experiencing poverty are actors in their own lives, but within the bounds of formidable and oppressive structural and cultural constraints, as outlined in Chapter 6. From the everyday level of ‘getting by’ to the strategic level of ‘getting organised’ the author documents the positive ways in which people in poverty seek to challenge the lack of voice, disrespect, humiliation, assault on self-esteem, shame, stigma, and denial of rights that are intrinsic to poverty as a lived reality. An alternative discourse, centred upon mutual respect and recognition within the context of human rights and citizenship, is then briefly explored in Chapter 7.

Underpinning the entire work, then, is a concern with conceptualising – and tackling – poverty both as an objective material condition, and as a lived reality and social relationship. Clearly, this reflects underlying social and political values centred upon a commitment to social justice and equality of human worth, which are preconditions of ethical poverty research. However, this agenda also has implications for the conduct of poverty research by giving genuine voice, and opportunities for participation, to people living in poverty. Equally, at the level of theory and policy it involves according a central role to the politics of recognition and respect, alongside continued advocacy of a politics of redistribution, for example as proposed by the political theorist Nancy Fraser. Arguably, this agenda and conceptual framework are equally pertinent to the analysis of poverty both in developed countries and across the global South. Although the content tends to reflect a predominantly UK focus, Ruth Lister nevertheless makes a substantial contribution to progress in developing an approach to the study of poverty capable of accommodating a truly global analysis. For this reason alone, this book should be essential reading for everyone committed to ending poverty and its consequences in both developed and developing nations.

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When I told my partner that I was reading a book about the impact of prison on families and communities, he said, ‘Do you mean it’s about whether prisons have provided jobs and saved local communities?’ I think a book critically addressing this dimension of imprisonment has yet to be written, but the comment shows that there are still novel and salient questions about prison to be asked, with answers we cannot readily anticipate. The book under review, whatever its particular merits, cannot really be said to be addressing the novel or offering new answers to old questions. The book adds, sometimes in a very engaging way, to the mass of literature on mass imprisonment, approaching it from this genre’s established perspective: what impact does incarceration have on the families and communities of the people sent to prison?

The overall message of the book is that imprisonment is bad for families and communities, even though this basic message is often diffusely expressed and profusely qualified through lengthy discussions of least squares coefficients, model specifications, predicted probabilities and standard errors. Reading through and around these diversions, we learn about the impact that putting people in prison has: on marriage stability or marriage prospects of those
incarcerated and their partners on the outside (pretty bad); on the relationships of imprisoned fathers and their children (not very good); on the at-risk status of children with a parent in prison (gets worse); on the amount of social control in communities that send lots of people to prison (not high); on the political views of incarcerated people (have negative attitudes about authority, especially criminal justice authority); on the willingness of employers to hire ex-cons (not strong). Does it really require reference to research to make credible the statement that, ‘families of prison and jail inmates are under considerable stress’ (p. 24)? Is it necessary to qualify a finding as based on only ‘raw data’ when it concludes, ‘as the number of risk factors rise, children are increasingly likely to be residing with someone other than a parent’, where the risk factors are incarceration of a parent, substance abuse or addiction, and physical and sexual abuse (p. 121)?

The book is at its most engaging when the subjects under study come into non-numerical view and express themselves individually. Edin, Nelson and Paranal’s chapter on fatherhood as a turning point in a criminal career may present a typically non-committal conclusion that incarceration ‘can result in several different pathways’ (p. 71), but the excerpts from their interviews are fascinating, vivid, enlightening and depressing. We learn that fathers in prison have complicated and conflicting views of their fatherhood. Sometimes it produces a reaction of uncertainty, or a real opportunity of maturation. One inmate describes an exchange he had with the mother of his child, ‘[She] said, “You are the adult. Go down there and talk to her and get y’all thing together so that y’all can have some kind of rapport.” . . . I had to go ahead and do that, and we talked, and she cried and she explained why she feel the way she feel . . . that she don’t have no dad and it hurted me to hear that, but it was the truth’ (p. 59). This passage will resonate with anyone navigating a relationship with children or parents. And it brings home the true horror of America’s (and increasingly also, the UK’s) addiction to prison: these are human beings whose lives are being slowly broken down, and this is the point that should inspire action as much as the fact that it is millions of human beings and that it is particular ethnic groups of human beings on whom a hopeless destiny has been laid.

Nearly all of the chapters in this collection share two qualities. First, they have a standard introductory statement on the rapid rise in the incarceration rate in America over the past quarter of a century. Second, they adopt uniformly positivist methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative. In all articles there is the similar format of establishing the significance of the social phenomenon (see previous point), a section reviewing the literature on this issue, a description of the method and sample studied, presentation of the data in tables and figures, and brief discussion and conclusion sections (sometimes these last two sections are collapsed into one). The standard format reflects the style of writing in much of positivist criminology towards an emphasis on study design and data presentation, with much less emphasis on, and a good deal of disclaiming about, findings or overall social implications. Often the strongest statements that were made in conclusions were not about the social problem being studied but about method. We are strenuously exhorted to define the research question in ‘greater detail’ (p. 159) and, above all, to replicate studies in order to verify results. The article by Lynch and Sabol about the effects of incarceration on informal social control mechanisms of communities captures the flavour running through most of the book: ‘Our answers are necessarily narrow and tentative, and more work with larger data sets must be done to replicate and elaborate the work done here’ (p. 157).

Positivism and statistical analysis are powerful tools, and have been successfully deployed to encourage rational and responsive criminal justice policy. But something important is getting lost here. As research questions become better defined, problems of serious consequence become hazier. Qualifications about how robust a finding is feel more like defensiveness than scientific integrity. The descent into methodological detail is not a necessary outcome of positivist
method, and I would like to see more social scientific work that is not afraid to express real curiosity and take on the big questions. This book should not take the blame for a trend evident in criminology generally, but I could not help but think how much more powerful it might have been as both an academic work and a resource for policy makers had it been less hemmed in by its method.

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As the concept of partnership working assumes ever-greater importance in the policy apparatus of the Labour government (Glendinning et al., 2002), increased academic attention is being concentrated on this area of work. Of course, numerous authors have worked in this field in the past, with a particular concentration of books focusing on interprofessional issues in the mid 1990s (including one by the editor of this volume: Leathard, 1994). However, the way in which the government appears to be fixated upon the benefits of interprofessional collaboration – despite the absence of hard evidence regarding the effectiveness of such processes in improving outcomes for people – has significantly sharpened the need to explore which mechanisms for collaboration are particularly effective in specific circumstances. This substantial text is an important addition to the literature on collaborative working, which is sure to attract a broad readership, professional as well as academic.

As an edited collection, the volume features the voices of numerous academic commentators, most with an established pedigree of writing about the sorts of themes that are the meat of the book. It is organised in three parts, moving from an examination of policy and interprofessional issues in the first part, to an exploration of how these issues have affected joint working in a range of different settings in the second part, concluding with discussions around interprofessional education in the third and final part. In total, there are 24 chapters, making it a substantial read. Given the breadth of coverage within a book of this size and scope, a reader will be inclined to focus most on those chapters that most reflect her/his interests. However, such a reader would be well advised to take account of the chapters in the first part, as they establish the context within which the book is framed. It is possible to be more selective thereafter, as the chapters tend to concentrate on issues that focus more on user groups or specific issues. Of the chapters in the first part, Engel and Gursky usefully highlight the pivotal – and often ignored or misunderstood – role of management in the development of interprofessional collaboration. Wall discusses the various dimensions of ethical behaviour in interprofessional practice, concluding with an important warning that the blurring of boundaries that often characterises joint working must not be allowed to dilute the ethical obligations of practitioners. Leathard’s two contributions – focusing on an overview of policy and on the various models that exist for interprofessional collaboration – are useful and detailed summaries of the issues. However, her conclusion that ‘one present drawback with models for interprofessional collaboration is the limited evaluation in practice’ (p. 115) leads to a critical problem that the literature on interprofessional working has failed to overcome: that while there is considerable evidence that interprofessional working is popular with practitioners,
there is relatively scant evidence that it produces improved outcomes for service users (see, for example, Brown et al., 2003).

The chapters in the second part maintain the standards of earlier contributions, with Miller and Freeman providing a chapter that stands as the highlight of the book for this reviewer. They explore in the way that governmental policies can potentially work against the promotion of effective joint working, an intellectual approach that has been given additional weight by the recent developments in the implementation of the Community Care (Delayed Discharges etc.) Act 2003. In this case, the policy of social services departments having to reimburse health trusts for delays to the discharge of patients from hospital beds clearly contains the seeds of discord between health and social care organisations (Glasby et al., 2004). Almost equally stimulating is Meads’ chapter in which he argues for the primacy of a revised conception of professionalism in collaborative working: ‘Professionalism, with its focus on function, is a far more important concept in the contemporary health system than that of a person-based profession’ (p. 134). This is an interesting notion, playing on the undeniable changes in the organisation of professional work, which Meads argues has taken a decisive move in the direction of ‘role flexibilities, virtual organisations and intersectoral alliances’ (p. 136). However, Meads is in danger of underplaying the continuing significance of the power of different professional groups, which remains a potent feature of interprofessional practice. In different ways, both Manthorpe and Weinstein also explore the importance of power, focusing on users and carers, and the relationship between the statutory and voluntary sectors respectively. The foregrounding of power in these chapters contrasts markedly with its absence in Meads’ contribution.

In the third part of the book, Barr is notably realistic about the challenges that confront interprofessional education, pointing out the difficulty in ensuring that it has a measurable impact on the quality of services received. Other chapters in this part concentrate on the development of interprofessional education on a country-by-country basis, placed into a global context by Goble. The book is rounded off by a chapter by Leathard that seeks to bring together the key themes of the book as a whole.

In summary, this is a stimulating read, addressing both the principles underpinning interprofessional working and numerous dilemmas that can occur in its practice. The general quality of contributions is high, with many of them adding significantly to the knowledge base on which good interprofessional practice depends. As such, it should become essential reading for managers, practitioners and students involved in interprofessional working. However, the volume also contains some critical limitations. There is relatively little interrogation of the nature of professions in interprofessional work, surely an essential element of any coherent analysis. In particular, there is an uneven recognition of the continued significance of power in professional formations and its consequent impact upon interprofessional practice. Finally, there is relatively little in the book that demonstrates the effectiveness of interprofessional working as regards outcomes for service users. Even though much current British policy in health and social care is predicated on the establishment of improved systems of collaborative working, the evidence that such processes actually produce improvements is relatively weak: for all its strengths, this book does not really change that picture.

References


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Books can never be judged by their covers, but the cover of this one is particularly misleading. This book is not about the ethics of welfare, and anyone looking for a discussion of ethics will be disappointed. It is not a conventional edited collection; it is much more the work of a research team. It does not do what the publisher says on the back: it does not discuss the relevance of the Human Rights Act (HRA) for social policy (there are five references to the HRA in the book), and it does not ‘draw together findings from a range of recent research’. This is a write-up of a research project, which is nothing to be ashamed of; it is disappointing that the writers and publisher didn’t feel able to describe it in those terms.

The core of the book is the report of an ESRC-funded research project on concepts of rights, dependency and responsibility. The main project reported here reviews discourses on the key concepts used by members of the public, social workers and benefit officials. There were 49 interviews with working-age adults, 14 with social workers and nine with benefits administrators. Part 2, the report of results, takes up 65 pages, a third of the book. The rest of the book is sandwiched around this core. Part 1 is devoted to theoretical issues, with one chapter on each of the main concepts. Part 4, the conclusion, tries to draw out general issues from the research and the theoretical discussion. That leaves only Part 3, ‘Service user experiences’, which is not really part of the same report. Chapters 7 and 9 describe related projects, both qualitative research based on small purposive samples. The only essay on a different theme is Chapter 8, on job-seeking.

The main study is a serviceable little project, which looks at the way different people use some thorny concepts. It tells us that people have diverse understandings of these issues; that people qualify those understandings to take conflicting considerations into account; and that applications of principles are contingent on circumstances. In the responses from the sample of members of the public, the most commonly occurring set of ideas was to accept that people are interdependent, but that individuals remain responsible for their circumstances, and that rights are almost never unconditional. Subject to the usual reservations about method – what are all those descriptive numbers doing in a sample drawn without reference to quantities? – this is interesting, not self evident, and thoroughly worthwhile. The other two research projects, covering views of dependency and social relationships, add further perspectives on related material. The book would have gained from a more serious methodological discussion about discourse and inter-subjective perceptions of social values.

The theoretical discussion of the concepts, however, is seriously inadequate. The essays attempt to discuss complex ideas without managing the complexity. The arguments are convoluted and verbose. The way the authors deal with difficult material is not to break it up so that readers can make sense of it, but to weigh it down with academic ballast. The essays depend heavily on references to external sources to make sense of the arguments. This is not adequate
for writing about theory, because readers of the same sources will often have understood people’s arguments differently (what does Sen mean by ‘rights’?). Worse, the arguments have to be deciphered through a blizzard of additional concepts. Let me take a small example – it is only one of many.

Within individualistic conceptions of justice . . . the grounding of social relatedness in reciprocal rights and obligations means that the self-interested individual enters into relationships with others only on the basis of consent rather than a sense of duty, whereas the roots of human connectedness in given rather than chosen kinship relations mean that the care ethic is largely based on the assumption that people recognise rather than choose their obligations to others. (p. 35)

There are at least 12 theoretical constructs in that sentence (there may be more, but I was trying not to double-count). This is truly awful writing. It is basic to theoretical work that writers have to explain what their concepts mean. The ideas have to be taken one at a time, because that is the only way to make sense of the material. Lump them together and all you get is fog.

The first rule in writing about theory is to avoid ambiguity. The second is to be as clear as possible. The third is to get the ideas into sequence so that the relationships can be explained. The theoretical essays in this book fail those tests on every count. When we are dealing with contested concepts, we cannot assume that readers share the same understanding. Ideas like human rights, dependency and responsibility do not have a single meaning; they have many. If the authors did not know that from the literature, they should certainly have known it from their own research report.

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I have to begin this review with a personal confession. Before starting to read Ferguson’s Protecting Children in Time, the title seemed to suggest that this was yet another book written with the social work practitioner in mind, ready to offer its gems of practical recipes for protecting children. This literature sometimes seems too easy to write after the event, allowing commentators to pontificate about the issues that produced, for example, the Victoria Climbié case and all those cases of child abuse leading to death that regularly hit the media, become political scandals and serve the purpose of decrying social workers and other professionals for not acting ‘in time’.

In the event, the book has not only surprised me for not being anything as I expected, but for being much, much more than that. The ‘How to deal with child abuse’ literature, brimming with practical solutions to perceived social problems, always shares a normative set of assumptions about the parameters of the so-called problem (read child abuse) and the state’s responsibilities to deal with it. As a result, these books tend to be ‘of their time’ and unable to think ‘beyond the box’. What Ferguson’s Protecting Children in Time does is to step out of this box and to theorise the concept of child protection as well as the state’s various responses to it since its inception to the present time. This ‘history’ of child protection
uncovers the sheer effort that has gone into keeping children alive in child protection cases, providing an overview of the development of an ideology of child protection across the twentieth century and examining the consequences of changing social practices aimed at reaching this ideal.

But the book goes beyond being a mere history of child protection. In fact, the author argues that understanding the nature of child protection is inseparable from understanding the nature of modernity itself. Thus, he takes Marx’s well-known maxim ‘all that is solid melts into air’ and uses it as a metaphor for exploring the consequences of modernity for child protection. As a result, successive chapters present child protection as ‘constituted by tangled networks of laws, procedures, offices, roads, cars, dwellings, children, adults, bodies, emotions and actions’ (p. 192). The objective, the author argues, is to grasp the level of dynamism, flux, movement and uncertainty that characterises modernity and – by applying it to the taken-for-granted concept of child protection – provide a full sociological interrogation of the Western ideal of protecting children in time. In late modernity, the argument goes, the administrative domain of instrumental reason has come to monopolise and limit our understanding of child protection as embedded in the state’s power through the law, a short-sighted vision that expects the flawless protection of children and explains, partly, the regular outrages in public opinion that follow each new scandal. According to the author, a fuller understanding requires that we take into account the ‘aesthetic’ – in terms of the experiences of time and space – and ‘expressive’ – or psychosocial fusion of body and social boundaries – dimensions of child protection as well.

This book will not be easy to grapple with for those potential readers interested in child protection who do not have some background in social theory. Indeed, readers would be helped by informing themselves of the work of Beck, Giddens, Foucault, Bourdieu, Urry and Bauman as the author moves between them and their contributions to build his theoretical edifice and further his case. And so it is, for example, that the modern social anxieties about professional failures to protect children in time are understood by the author in terms of what Beck calls the ‘risk society’ or that Bauman’s conceptual armoury depicting modernity as ‘liquid’ is endorsed to refer to the social practice that is child protection. The ‘sacrifice’, if required, will ultimately pay off as the full conceptual subtleties of what it means to protect children in time are teased out of our taken-for-granted understanding and the reader’s intellectual horizons expanded accordingly.

This theoretical complexity aside, the book will also be useful to practitioners of child protection as it contains descriptions and interpretations of numerous case studies used to illustrate the modernist theoretical understanding presented throughout. This constitutes a major advantage of the book as it builds a theoretical case deeply immersed in empirical evidence. For that, the author makes use of a wealth of primary material. Chapters 1 to 4 are based on archive material from the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) (Yorkshire Branch) containing case records between the years 1889 and 1914 and supplemented by police and Poor Law records. The rest of the book’s chapters and commentary are based on an empirical examination of social services and hundreds of child abuse cases referred to three separate social work teams over the years. It is, in short, a formidable base on which to erect his theoretical interpretation of child protection and one that adds real quality to the text. Furthermore, the book ends with a call for a critical theory of child protection that incorporates the multi-dimensional understanding of child protection presented in the book and results in real benefits to practitioners and families alike.

Never before has the issue of child protection been examined so thoroughly and so thoughtfully. In the last instance, Ferguson’s analysis serves as an appeal to all those who are too quick to judge and condemn professional ‘failings’ to celebrate instead the daily performance of social workers and other professionals whose job it is to translate into actions the ever-evolving
meaning of child protection in a context of increasing life ‘scripts’ and ways of living that are the consequence of modernity.

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Set within the context of challenges to how the very concepts of ‘retirement’ and ‘pensioner’ are understood, this book aims to provide undergraduates with an introduction to issues surrounding the meaning of retirement, how individuals and societies may approach it in the future and also to extend and promote debate. The theoretical perspective underpinning the work is Titmuss’s social division of welfare. The Introduction sets out the schema for the book’s seven chapters, and highlights some immediate limitations to the social division of welfare approach, particularly regarding care and gender. Chapter 1 examines in more detail the social division of welfare and what are argued to be four key challenges to it. These are described as: the structural constraints that individuals face (including gendered relations of care and power and recurring patterns of discrimination and advantage); the influence of choice and patterns of consumption on policymakers; the power of pensions experts; and the break up of traditional political constituencies that underpinned the welfare settlement advocated by Titmuss. Chapters 2 to 5 then consider approaching pensions and retirement policies based on these different challenges. Thus, Chapter 2 is titled ‘Two versions of political economy’, examining in turn an orthodox approach, drawing on Adam Smith and Malthus, and then more radical approaches. Chapter 3 focuses on consumption and choice, Chapter 4 on post-structuralism and chapter 5 seeks to identify key features of a post-modern perspective. Chapter 6 then provides an additional dimension by way of a comparative approach looking at policy trends in a number of OECD countries, using Esping-Andersen’s work as a template but concluding that searching for an appropriate comparative measure is pointless without a more sensitive theoretical model. The final chapter then seeks to reconcile the different approaches that have been described with a reconstructed account of the social division of welfare.

The book has many strengths. Contemporary debates about welfare have become very narrowly focused on social welfare, so the basic reassertion of the need to move beyond that narrow focus, and the particular attention given to occupational welfare, is to be welcomed. The location of the issues of retirement and pensions within broader debates about social policy and theory, along with the interconnection of retirement and pensions with paid employment and care, are also important in seeing them as part of a broader context, not a discrete and self-contained question of the ‘pensions crisis’ or ‘demographic time-bomb’ type headlines that characterise much of public debate (and which Mann points out are themes that have been heard, and rebutted, before). The critical attention given to pensions’ experts is certainly timely, and throughout the book is thought provoking in highlighting issues such as, in contrast to the normalising and inflexible provision of public welfare, private insurance companies have seen market opportunities in catering for same-sex couples, single professional women and people with disabilities. At the same time, the pensions industry also offers all too many case studies of market failure. The style is readily accessible, and on a more pragmatic note the regular highlighted key points and summaries of issues at the end of each of the substantive chapters will be attractive to the undergraduate target audience. That the book is highly readable is
a significant achievement given the complexity of the subject matter, i.e. pensions, and the breadth of the theoretical perspectives that are examined.

The aim of providing an introduction to contemporary debates about retirement and pensions is certainly achieved, and Mann also sets out his case for a more theoretically informed debate based on a revision of Titmuss’s social division of welfare approach. Where the book could be criticised is in relation to its claim relating to how individuals and societies may approach retirement and pensions in the future. At different points, implications of what the future might hold are considered, e.g. a deserving citizen being defined by way of being a good actuarial risk, and the concluding chapter argues in particular for a situated ethic of care as a principle to guide policy. But the book ends with current policy offering a pessimistic scenario of the ending of a right to retire, leading to the poor being compelled to work till ‘they drop’, whereas optimism is argued to hinge on solidarity and social justice combined with ideas of shared identities and the collective experience of uncertainty. Remembering that this is a book aimed at undergraduates, it is perhaps churlish to criticise it for not offering a policy alternative to the present position. The book does tell us a great deal about pensions and about social divisions. The different theoretical perspectives outlined in the book each provide, as Mann puts it, a lens through which to study and understand policy. However, in order to promote debate questions remain as to the way forward: how is a generous system of retirement pension credits/transfers that recognise and value care to be achieved; how is a working life to be defined so as to include time spent caring? In the Journal of Social Policy Craig (2004) has recently attempted to outline how citizenship for older people might be defined and Rowlingson (2002) has set out the inadequacies of New Labour’s emphasis on individual planning for pension provision, the implication being that greater collective provision is required. The fact that I was left thinking about these issues after reading Mann’s book is in fact perhaps not a criticism but testament that the aim of promoting debate had been achieved. As such, this is a book with very considerable strengths.

References

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