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New Approaches to Welfare Theory. Glenn Drover and Patrick Kerans (Eds.).

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BOOK NOTES

Glenn Drover and Patrick Kerans (Eds.) *New Approaches to Welfare Theory*. Brookfield, VT: Edward Elgar Publishing Co., 1994. \$69.95 hardcover.

There are, as social philosophers assert, many different ways of comprehending the real world. These ways are, of course determined by the theoretical perspective employed by the observer. The same phenomena have been viewed and interpreted differently, and this has often resulted in the adoption of quite different policy responses.

The study of social policy has long been dominated by a macro-statist perspective in which social welfare is viewed as the prerogative of government and its administrative apparatus. Drawing on the insights of the major social sciences, the analysis of social policy has focused largely on the study of the modern welfare state, its origins, scope, size and impact.

In this book, Drover and Kerans approach the study of social policy from a radically different viewpoint. They focus on the subjective experiences of those groups of people who make claims on society in order to promote their own well-being. This perspective asks different questions and yields quite different insights from the traditional social policy approach. Instead of analyzing the state-bureaucratic welfare system from the macro-level, this approach deals with individuals, their experiences, the moral basis of their claims and the results they achieve.

To foster this perspective, Drover and Kerans utilize a long standing subjectivist tradition in social theory which can be traced back to Weber's seminal work on human action, the symbolic interactionism of Cooley and Mead, phenomenological sociology and ethnomethodology and the contemporary constructivism of Kitsuse. By adopting this perspective, the book makes an important contribution. However, like many other publications based on conference proceedings, it has some weaknesses. The individual contributions do not fully answer the formative questions asked by the editors, and despite a helpful introduction, the book lacks coherence. Nevertheless, this pioneering work deserves to

be widely read. Hopefully it will stimulate further analyses based on the subjectivist tradition.

William A. Kelso, *Poverty and the Underclass: Changing Perceptions of the Poor in America*. New York: New York University Press, 1994. \$34.95 hardcover.

Countless books and academic papers have been written on the subject of poverty in the United States. Most experts agree that poverty is a huge and apparently intractable problem. Many also believe that compared to the other advanced industrial nations, America has a higher incidence of poverty, its consequences are more severe and it has been singularly unresponsive to policy solutions.

William Kelso offers one of the most wide-ranging analyses of poverty in America to date. This prodigious work provides information on nearly all aspects of the problem. It provides a current statistical profile of the poor; examines theories of the nature and origins of poverty; and analyzes policy approaches for its amelioration. The comprehensiveness of the book will be appealing, particularly to students, who will thank the author for squeezing so much useful information into a single volume.

However, Kelso is not only concerned with summarizing the vast literature on the subject but seeks to make his own contribution to the poverty debate. He contends that the problem of poverty has mistakenly been attributed to single causes and that this simplistic analysis has effectively stymied the formulation of workable policy solutions. He also contends that ideologically determined views of poverty have provided an ineffective basis for action. To make matters worse, these perspectives have been reversed over the years. The traditional liberal view that poverty can be eradicated through employment and upward mobility has been replaced by a subsidization approach which seeks to mitigate its worse excesses. On the other hand, the conservative view that poverty cannot be solved has been replaced with a belief that employment and increased opportunities can abolish want. These shifting ideological perspectives have confused efforts to reduce poverty and need to be addressed if the poverty problem is to be effectively addressed.