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Postmodern Welfare: Reconstructing an Emancipatory Project.

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the care and rehabilitation of the violent are themselves not averse to the condoning or even participating in such violence.

Peter Leonard, *Postmodern Welfare: Reconstructing an Emancipatory Project*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1997. \$23.95 papercover.

In certain circles, postmodernism has nearly attained cult status. The term is now widely bandied about at conferences and in discussions about the human condition. However, it remains poorly defined and relatively few social workers who use it know what it means. Equally few understand its implications for social policy and social welfare. While postmodernism is lauded for being anti-positivist and for promoting identity politics, its relevance for the future of social welfare is poorly understood.

Peter Leonard bravely attempts to explain what postmodernism means for social policy and social work. Wading through jargon and rhetoric, he manages to reduce postmodernism to its basic elements and to interpret its meaning in ways that are comprehensible. Of course, many other commentaries on postmodernism have been published, and while some of these provide even more comprehensible explanations, Leonard's book is useful for its discussion on the implications of postmodernism for human well-being. Coming as he does from a Marxist persuasion, Leonard's account of the normative implications of postmodernism is not an entirely happy one. He clearly recognizes the inability of postmodernism to offer a viable alternative to the social democratic project which he and many other Marxists defended against the radical right's onslaught. But, like many others, he recognizes that social democracy is increasingly ineffective and unappealing to electorates, and that alternative paradigms are needed. While he suggests that postmodernism can provide a normative basis for reconstruction, his argument is not wholly convincing. Nevertheless, his attempt to harness the potential of popular social movements to engage in effective activism is an interesting one. It is one of the few coherent explications not only of how postmodernism can provide a normative basis for social welfare but of how activism can be kept alive in a world which is increasing indifferent to human suffering, social causes and collective action. It remains to be seen whether his ideas and

prognostications will be translated into a viable emancipatory project.

Gordon Marshall, Adam Swift and Stephen Roberts, *Against the Odds: Social Class and Social Justice in Industrial Societies*. New York: Clarendon Press, 1997. \$29.95 hardcover.

Although utopians have long dreamed of creating a world where all citizens are equal, this dream has not been realized. Instead, inequalities of various kinds continue to characterize contemporary societies. It is partly for this reason that the debate is no longer concerned with the possibility of attaining equality, but with the arguments that justify inequality in terms of acceptable social justice criteria.

On argument of this kind invokes the notion of equality of opportunity. Proponents of this view believe that inequalities between human beings are fair if everyone has equal opportunity to succeed. Usually this means open access to education and equal opportunity to utilize the knowledge and skills offered by schools, universities and other educational institutions. If everyone has equal opportunity to achieve, unequal outcomes may be justified.

This book examines the equality of opportunity argument with reference to a massive amount of statistical data for countries as varied as Britain, Japan, Russia, the United States and several East European nations. Although these studies show that educational opportunities have increased significantly in recent decades, they reveal that those who come from higher class families continue to have better life chances than those who come from lower class families. In addition, it found that people born into upper class families continue to do well even if they do not utilize educational opportunities. The authors conclude that class continues to be a fundamentally important determinant of success, and that enhanced educational opportunity is not an adequate justification for inequality.

This important book is not only academically interesting but important for social policy making. It suggests that the provision of educational opportunities is not a quick solution to the problem of inequality. Class barriers and other structural impediments continue to play an important role and must be addressed if equality and its negative consequences are to be overcome.