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***Rethinking Welfare: A Critical Perspective.* Ian Ferguson, Michael Lavalette, & Gerry Mooney.**

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in welfare states and popular support for the welfare state. These tropics are thematically linked by a theoretical commitment to historical institutional analysis which is used to frame the discussion. Historical institutionalism differs from other dominant theories in political and public policy such as pluralism and rational choice in that it stresses the role of historically institutionalized practices in the analysis of policy decisions. This is undoubtedly a worthwhile enterprise but the reader is left with a sense of disappointment that bigger issues such as the future of the welfare state have not been addressed.

Nevertheless, the book does shed light on how historical institutionalism guides social policy thinking in political science circles today. In addition, some of the contributions address topics of current importance. The chapters on privatization, race and immigration are particularly useful. Some of the chapters also bring a welcome comparative perspective to the discussion, focusing on developments in Europe and the United States and also on Japan and other countries. Although this is not a book for undergraduates, it will be of interest to scholars concerned with political theories and the way they affect social welfare policy.

Ian Ferguson, Michael Lavalette and Gerry Mooney, *Rethinking Welfare: A Critical Perspective*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2002. \$92.00 hardcover, \$27.00 papercover.

The last decade has offered fertile ground for the continuing debate between the political Right and Left over the role and function of the welfare state. As Neo-Liberalism has become the dominant economic policy around the globe, welfare and welfare state policies have been redesigned. Fiscal austerity measures in the United Kingdom and the United States have resulted in planned reforms aimed at minimizing welfare state functions. The classic tension between those who advocate for an expanded state and those who view the state as exacerbating already existing inequalities has begun to play out on a global scale. Most of the welfare reform efforts have been driven by a dynamism from within the private sector, heralding consumer choice over state control.

Scholars working from the Marxist tradition have continued to provide critical analyses of these trends, which aim to identify

and explain the cultural, economic and political forces of modern capitalism. In this way, *Rethinking Welfare* provides researchers and practitioners a compelling reminder of the largely structural and material forces that shape our welfare states. The authors respond to claims that Marxist analysis is no longer relevant or capable of understanding the complexity of present day capitalism. They reflect on the familiar structure of this over-celebrated, 'new world order' and marshal evidence to suggest that, despite ardent attempts by Western Democracies to celebrate difference, empower women and minimize state authoritarianism, 21st century social welfare has not escaped the grasp of larger political economic forces.

On a more academic note, *Rethinking Welfare* argues against civil society led reform measures and theoretical paradigms that fail to consider structural forces and class conflict. The authors articulate a systematic critique of the new Left and its affection for postmodernism. They argue that after years of promoting excessive cultural relativism and what the authors dub as 'the new essentialism', postmodern theory has undermined the gains made by the working class and the poor. The cost of adopting postmodernism has been an eroded social contract. By applying a structural Marxist analysis of postmodernism the authors conclude that, in fact, postmodernism has really functioned as Neo-Liberalism's lap dog than as an effective political force.

Rethinking Welfare provides a thoughtful and emerging resistance to the identity politics and vulgar social constructionism that has pervaded the academic world and also taken hold in many professional social work schools. The book's inclusion of recent political developments on the world scene, such as the G8 summit and the Seattle protest, will be welcomed by current students of social policy trying to understand the impact of large scale social movements on national policy making. However, in some chapters the authors have drawn excessively on anecdotal and dated research thus leaving parts of their argument on shaky ground. Scholars looking for strong empirical support for the book's arguments will be disappointed if not all together skeptical. Nonetheless, the book provides a convincing caveat to the alleged success stories of free markets, structural adjustments and globalization.