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*A Short History of Distributive Justice.* Samuel Fleischacker.

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Samuel Fleischacker, *A Short History of Distributive Justice*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004. \$39.95 hardcover.

The term, social justice, is now widely used in social work circles. It is hardly possible to attend a social work conference or read a social work journal without finding reference to the term. Unfortunately, social workers have a very vague idea of what the concept of social justice entails or an appreciation of the extraordinarily complex and difficult issues it raises. Consequently, there has been little rigorous analysis or scholarly debate about the topic in academic social work circles and today many social workers use the term in an imprecise and even rhetorical way.

Samuel Fleischacker's engaging and very readable *Short History of Distributive Justice* should be an essential reference for all social workers who use the concept of social justice. At the very least, his book will help social workers to clarify the meaning of the term. Fleischacker uses the term 'distributive justice' as a synonym for social justice and stresses its economic connotation. For Fleischacker, social justice is about income, wealth and property, and about the way existing patterns of distribution can be altered. In turn, this involves state intervention based on clearly articulated and socially acceptable principles. It is in this regard that scholars in philosophy, political thought and the social sciences have made an enormous contribution. Their scholarly deliberations have identified the principles on which redistributed policies might be based and current ideological and political debates about social justice draw extensively on their work.

Fleischacker makes the point that the concept of distributive justice is a product of 18<sup>th</sup>-century Enlightenment thought, and particularly of the claims of the radical French revolutionary "Gracchus" Babeuf who, Fleischacker contends, was the first to use systematic moral and political reasoning to argue that it is the task of government to achieve economic equality. Although notions of distributive justice can be traced back to Aristotle, the author believes that Babeuf's argument for economic equality laid the foundations for subsequent debates on the issue which led at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to the highly sophisticated accounts by

Rawl's, Nozick and others. Although Fleischacker's views on the origins of the concept may be disputed, the importance of his book for social workers lies not in these and many other interesting scholarly points, but in the way the author provides an accessible account of how the concept of social justice has been used and what it means. This is a marvelous book which should be read by all social workers. By causing social workers to consider the complex issues the concept of social justice raises, Fleischacker's book may facilitate a more nuanced and sophisticated understanding of what has become a central concept in the field.

Robin Lovelock, Karen Lyons and Jackie Powell (Eds.), *Reflecting on Social Work: Discipline and Profession*. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Publishers, 2004. \$ 79.95 hardcover.

Since the profession's inception over a hundred years ago, social work scholars have generated a huge literature about the nature of social work, its goals and mission. Although most social work practitioners have a fairly good idea about their role in society, and the tasks they are required to perform, social work scholars have long agonized over the issue and very divergent views about the nature of social work have been expressed. As the editors of this book point out in their introduction, the search for meaning and identity is an ongoing one, and there is a continual flow of texts reevaluating and reappraising the profession's identity. The primary purpose of the book is to contribute to the ongoing debate about the fundamental nature and scope of social work, and to consider its future in the light of rapidly changing social economic and political realities. Accordingly, the editors commissioned ten chapters that address diverse aspects of contemporary social work with reference to the book's theme. Most of the chapters are written by British scholars who raise many interesting issues related to contemporary social work.

The ten chapters are very wide ranging. Following an interesting introduction by the editors, the book begins with a discussion by two leading British social work authors, Bill Jordan and Nigel Parton, on the relationship between social work, the public-sector and civil society. This chapter is followed by a lively contribution on the MacDonalidization of social work by Adrian James. Several articles deal with research issues. Ian Butler and Richard Pugh