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Social Theory: Central Issues in Sociology. John Scott.

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Book Notes

John Scott, *Social Theory: Central Issues in Sociology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2006. \$ 99.95 hardcover, \$ 37.95 papercover.

Academic scholarship into social welfare issues has long been criticized for its lack of engagement with theory. Drawing on the 19th-century pragmatist and empiricist traditions, social policy research for much of the 20th century was concerned with the collection of "facts" and the evaluation of interventions designed to improve social conditions. It was only in the 1970s that British scholars began to utilize the insights of sociological theory to analyze social policy and to explicate the normative bases of social welfare approaches.

Since then, theory has played a much more important role in social welfare scholarship, but few would claim that it has attained the sophistication that characterizes theoretical endeavors in disciplines such as sociology and political science. It is in this regard that John Scott's new book will be of particular value to social policy academics. Although intended as an introduction to the field, the book is astonishingly broad in its scope ranging in an encyclopedic way over the work of almost anyone who has contributed to social thought in the last three or four centuries. All the major classical thinkers are discussed, but the author finds room to cover the work of many others who are not frequently referenced in the literature. The author uses a broad interdisciplinary perspective to include the work of anthropologists, economists, philosophers and political scientists all within a book of relatively modest length. The material is organized chronologically and an attempt is made to identify key themes that characterize different periods of theoretical endeavor. While this is a valiant approach, it is challenging and inevitably, there is some repetition. However, the later chapters of the book are particularly impressive for providing an up-to-date and accessible account of leading contributions to current social thought. Anyone who has struggled with the

writings of contemporary social thinkers will be grateful for the author's ability to summarize and explain their complex ideas in a straightforward way.

Although this book is intended primarily for students of sociology and does not deal explicitly with the policy implications of social thought, it will be a major resource for anyone interested in the theoretical dimensions of social policy. The theorists whose work is described have almost invariably had an effect on the real world of policy and politics, and anyone concerned with social policy issues should be familiar with their ideas. The book's encyclopedic scope is a major strength, as is the author's ability to condense this material into an interesting and readable format. It makes a major contribution to the literature and should be widely consulted.

Carlos Martin Beristain, *Humanitarian Aid Work: A Critical Approach*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006. \$ 59.95 hardcover.

Natural disasters and armed conflict exact an enormous toll on human welfare, disrupting physical and social systems. For this reason, international humanitarian aid provided by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) has become increasingly important. Reconstruction efforts span a spectrum of interventions designed to meet the physical needs of survivors and refugees to the psychological toll of trauma, and the necessity of rebuilding the social fabric by dealing with the past, from criminal trials to truth and reconciliation commissions.

Seeking to bridge the professional, academic and cultural divides between the Global North and South, Beristain marshals an impressive array of data and field experiences from across the world on the topic of humanitarian aid work. In the first five chapters of his book, the author mobilizes a field of psychological and sociological theories elucidating the human response to complex, collective disasters, both natural and human-made. He offers a stage model of human reaction to complex and collective disasters, emphasizing the social