

Book Review

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Mohan, B., & Bäckman, G. (2020) *Social Policy on the Cusp: Values, Institutions and Change*. (Social Issues, Justice and Status). New York, NY: Nova Science Publishers. 327 p. ISBN: 978-1-53617-468-7

Social Policy on the Cusp: Values, Institutions and Change consists of three parts: Part One written by Brij Mohan and has five chapters. Part Two written by Guy Bäckman also consists of five chapters. Part Three consists of two chapters and the contributing authors are Stan Weeber (USA) and Eleni Makri (Greece), respectively.

The chapters of Part One are eclectic, deeply analytical, and mixed with anecdotal interfaces. In Prof. Mohan's own words, it "gives a perspective in light of ideas that usually escape critical examination" (p. xvi). He emphasizes de-mythologizing of social phenomena. By digging into the past, in Foucauldian manner, the aim is to uncover root causes of human problems. Part One has two key themes. First, it is a critical reflection of enlightenment, hope, happiness, modernity, nihilism, post-colonialization (mainly Indian sub-continent), racism, and *artificial intelligence* (AI)-techno totalitarianism. Prof. Mohan laments human absurdity and material progress. Owing to "the loss of civility" (p. 44), current human condition is but "a paradoxical outcome of dysfunctional development" (p. 44), and that "modernity, however, sharpens the jaws of oppressive machinery" (p. 50) is represented by authoritarian policies. Second, it examines social policymaking, social work education, and social work practice. The author notes that the decoupling of micro-individual problem from the macro-societal sphere produces a therapeutic society, constituting individual–therapist dyad (ITD). Wellness of being is a shared responsibility manifested by policy choices (p. xvi), and ITD is a piecemeal individual problem-solving, which undermines holistic development of social policy and cultural change.

In Part Two, Prof. Bäckman's writing is a combination of comparative-historical and empirical-evaluative approach. He highlights the plight of risk

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society (Beck, 1992) and the runaway world (Giddens, 2000) as scenarios of chaotic world. Three of the chapters are historical accounts of social policy development ranging from post-war western welfare countries to post-industrial and digital society. The comparison is country-/region-based (the United Kingdom, the United States, Nordic, Southern and Eastern European, China, and Japan) with a focus on social welfare, social policy, and social work. Comparative statistical data are employed in the analysis of issues such as poverty, social exclusion, refugees, migrants, aging, and child poverty. One chapter is about the inertia of change. He argues that this inertia can be overcome by new social hope, trust (p. 92), and human centeredness (p. 97). Another chapter is about digital economy and social policy. It mentions digital revolution, algorithmic solution, robotic technology and human relationship, elder care, and the dark side of digital culture (p. 180). Painstakingly, Prof. Bäckman reminds reader of the relevance of Myrdal's (1968) work, such as *Asian Drama*, and the value-based social policy. Globally, no matter whether it is global north or global south, poor governance and developmental issues are everywhere. Thus, values for the betterment of humankind should be the top priority of social policymaking.

In Part Three, Weeber examines the social policy implications of the development of smart cities, resilient city movement, and the 5th Generation (5G) wireless network in the United States. Weeber warns that the pro-business agenda which facilitates the development of a community digital infrastructure would leave the poor and vulnerable people behind. Climate change, digital surveillance, and citizen privacy are discussed, and, because of neo-liberal thinking in policymaking, community resilience becomes individual's and family's responsibility. The chapter by Makri is about religious diversity and new global media workforce. Makri argues that a policy of religious diversity could be a good inclusive force for the globalized digital workforce, including the millennials and older employees. The strengths of different religions are outlined. They may motivate people to be caring and loyal toward their colleagues and organizations.

Implicit among the arguments, the book continues Polanyi's (2001) analysis and argues that the current economic market and its related policies have created enormous social and economic inequality because of the state's neglect of her role in the protection of society. The book also depicts a picture which resonates Benjamin's (1986) concern for the future of humankind as personified by the portrait of *Angelus Novus* (Paul Klee) that the past and the present of the world are bitter and the future looks bleak. However, in a different note, the book is optimistic that if stakeholders could come together to "share a common vision about the world's cohesiveness despite grave inequalities around the globe" (p. xvii), and to act collectively, to reformulate policies that could "annihilate social and economic injustice to achieve universal human dignity" (p. xiv). In sum, the book conveys a strong message that by picking up the broken pieces of society, and through collective effort in reconstructing a new global moral order, a social policy for people could be realized.

References

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