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Book Review: Paul Michael Garrett, *Social work and social theory: Making connections*. The Policy Press: Bristol, 2013, ISBN 9781847429605

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## Book Review for Journal of Social Work by Nigel Parton, University of Huddersfield

**Paul Michael Garrett, *Social Work and Social Theory: Making Connections*, Bristol: The Policy Press; 2013, pp254; Price ?; ISBN 978 1 84742 960 5 (pbk), 978 1 84742 961 2 (hdc).**

It is important to state at the outset that I enjoyed this book, or at least large sections of it, but I also found it rather frustrating. The book is made up of eleven chapters and following an introductory chapter is split into two parts. The first is concerned with 'Debating Modernity' made up of four chapters which critically analyse some of the most high profile social theorists of recent times and their approaches to understanding contemporary society and recent social change – Giddens, Beck and Bauman in particular - together with some of the social work writers who have drawn on this body of work. The remaining two chapters in Part One are then concerned with drawing on Marx, particularly *Das Capital*, for making sense of modernity and convincingly argues for replacing the concept of modernity with an explicit use of the term capitalism. This is then used for a helpful analysis of neo-liberalism and its impact on current society including social work. I found these chapters the most incisive and helpful in the whole book; particularly in the context of the Conservative-led Coalition government which has been in power in the UK since 2010.

Part Two is concerned with a series of European 'theorists' who are seen as particularly relevant for casting further light on our current times, though in relation to each Garrett has a number of interesting critical comments. Gramsci, Bourdieu and Habermas have individual chapters in their own right; Honneth and Fraser share a chapter; while the least known of the theorists – Boltanski, Chiapello, Negri and Badiou - are all included in chapter ten. I found each had some interest and there were some helpful ideas presented.

There is no doubt that the book aims to be provocative and it is stated that it aims to 'displace the Giddens-Beck-Bauman orthodoxy that has dominated the profession's social theory repertoire in recent years' (p15), an assumption I find somewhat inflated. While such ideas may have informed some social work academic writing over the last fifteen years rarely, in my experience in the UK, will such theorists have received any concentrated attention on social work courses. Beyond this the book aims to provide a 'radical and disruptive read, situated among those books, actions, thoughts and dispositions that are irrevocably anti-capitalist' (p15). I am certainly in much sympathy with the assumption that 'in a neo-liberal world, it is vital for social workers (and social work and social policy academics) to try and theoretically comprehend the nature of their work and their role in society' (p215) and that it is important that social workers should be critical thinkers.

In many respects the book can be read alongside a number of other recent texts which are trying to revive the radical social work tradition and, in particular, rehabilitate ideas associated with Marxism back into social work in a context where social work is operating in an increasingly unequal and class divided society and where the role of the market is dominant. This, to me, seems thoroughly important. What the book does not really do is provide a textbook on *Social Work and Social Theory*. Not only is the choice of theory partial but the way it is brought together seems rather patchy and uneven and the book is littered with over-long quotes. What we have, in my opinion, is series of interesting essays but the author does not really work hard enough to bring them together and provide a helpful overall analytic framework and argument. In many respects this is perhaps not

surprising as eight of the eleven chapters are based on previous chapters or journal articles which the author has published in recent years. The only new chapters are the Introduction, the chapter on Boltanski, Chiapello, Negri and Badiou and the Conclusion chapter which is just two and half pages long. So while I found much in the book of interest I also felt that rather more thought was required to transform the previously published material into a much more coherent and convincing book . In the process it was probably important to recognise that the prime focus of the book was not 'social work and social theory' but something rather different.

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