

Hartley Dean, *Social Rights and Human Welfare*, Abingdon: Routledge, 2015, 194 pp., £32.99, pbk.

Ideas and notions of ‘rights’ in one form or another underpin most of the debates in social policy, a discipline principally concerned with social justice and human flourishing for all. Navigating the literature is potentially hazardous. The field is not easily landscaped and usually involves crossing deep into the terrain of other academic subject areas. The complex debates in political philosophy, for instance, law, economics, and sociology, to name but a few. Universal human rights are incredibly contested, the vast literature stretches back to the very beginnings of the written record. Boggled down in seemingly complex philosophical debate, attaining any sense of clarity presents a challenge. Where do we even begin?

Fortunately, this new text *Social Rights and Human Welfare* by Hartley Dean provides a comprehensive introduction to rights-based approaches in social policy. The book project we are told, has evolved over a 20 year period; the successor to his two previous works published in 1996 and another in 2002. However, this particular reincarnation is a radically different take on the subject matter that reflects the author’s own intellectual journey (p.xii).

*Social Rights and Human Welfare* explores how social rights underpin conceptions of ‘human welfare’, a term that captures the essence of ‘wellbeing’ as Dean explains, which can only be fulfilled through the realisation of specific rights: to livelihood, to health care, education and cultural participation, housing and a safe environment. For Hartley Dean this is the basis of social policy. Indeed, the elaboration of wellbeing, understood as welfare, is a core theme in Dean’s programme of written work, familiar to readers of his introduction to *Social Policy*, 2006 and 2012.

This new book elaborates on how *social rights* as rights of citizenship have advanced in modern societies and modern welfare states, but it also attempts to capture important aspects of the international *human rights* and development agenda. Part One of the book focuses on theory. It examines how social rights can be understood and critiqued in theory, discussing ideas (and disputed key concepts) such as ‘citizenship’ (Chapter 1), ‘human needs’ (Chapter 2), collective welfare responsibilities and ethical imperatives (Chapter 3), and there is a chapter dealing with some of the critiques of social rights (Chapter 4).

Part Two of the book then looks at social rights in practice. Here Dean considers how social rights are being promoted on the global stage (Chapter 5), before moving on to consider fundamental human needs translated into the right to livelihood, covering the right to ‘work’ (not just paid labour) and subsistence to sustain life itself (Chapter 6). In Chapter 7 Dean looks at rights to social and human services (shelter, education, health and care), and Chapter 8 considers how rights might be implemented and enforced in law. The final part, Part Three, turns to rights-based approaches to poverty alleviation – poverty represents a clear violation of rights (Chapter 9) – and Chapter 10 considers the future of social rights.

More substantively in this book Dean claims to offer a radical new perspective, what he calls a ‘post-Marshallian’ theory of social rights (p.148). The Marshallian account, he claims, is no longer suited to the post-national global era we find today. For Marshall, social rights were institutional, understood largely as normative prescriptions, rather than social constructs. As we understand them today, social rights are socially negotiated or collectively understood

expressions of human need, framed by legislation and articulated *through* social policies under contemporary welfare regimes.

Dean concludes that there is much more work to be done to promote the social rights agenda (Rethinking social rights, what is to be done? p.156). International treaties and the UN machinery of the UN could be strengthened reformed to work better, the international monitoring framework could be work better to ensure better accountability for rights-related responsibilities. However, Dean recognises that social rights – whether for established citizens or recent migrants – will for the most part continue to be framed in a national context. Here constitutional frameworks, and written constitutions (lacking in the UK context) are needed to protect social rights – along with the relevant monitoring bodies. These national frameworks may take different forms, e.g. Social Charter, Bill of Rights, and Human Rights Commissions – and Guy Standing’s notion of global occupational citizenship rights are all vehicles for promoting rights in the new global order his proposed charter for the ‘precariat’ (see Standing, 2014 proposed charter for the ‘precariat’). Even with such national/international frameworks in place however, it is usually down to the determination of welfare rights workers and legal experts that we have to thank for advancing social rights in our societies: ‘social legislation is but the means, not an end’ as Dean reminds us (p.159).

With growing political debate over income rights (‘citizen’s income’, ‘basic income’, ‘participation income’ etc.) I would have liked to have seen more discussion of these concepts and the related philosophical debates and the references underpinning them: do those who spend their days surfing have a right to be fed or only those that make a social contribution? That said, Dean’s new book offers an accessible introduction to rights-based approaches in social policy, and students of social policy may want to add this book to your reading lists.

## References

Standing, G. (2014) *A Precariat Charter: From Denizens to Citizens*. London and New York, NY: Bloomsbury.

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