outsider. The ‘reading of the numbers’ was a regular and valued practice at management meetings in the hotel, yet no one seemed to take much notice of, or even understand the significance of, the actual numbers. Bunzel argues that this practice orchestrated a collectively meaningful rhythm to activities in the hotel that were, in fact, operating within ‘multiple temporal frames’. This could have served to fragment a coherent organizational identity but the rhythmic simultaneity provided by the reading of the numbers ‘allowed different departments to run on different clocks while it also provided a common sense of “how we are going”’ (p. 176). Bunzel ends by suggesting that these insights have implications for doing management research in the future, for instance (according to Bunzel) encouraging an emphasis on individual creativity, agency and meaning rather than relying on ‘objective’ measurements of organizational life.

Taken as a whole, the collection is original and provocative. Never more so than in Rehn’s amusing and refreshing defence of linear time in the face of ‘postmodern moralizing and dogmatism’. Whilst the articles in this book do not, on the whole, adopt the demonization of linear time that Rehn suggests is rife, his rally against orthodoxy serves as a timely (sic) caution against new absolutisms in conceptualizing time.

However, I wonder if the insights of the book don’t overload the concept of time. In the introduction to their paper, Hedaa and Torroos argue that management needs a new theory that will enable us to recognize ‘heteronymous’ actors in a world of complexities, surprises and inter-dependencies. They go on to suggest that it is time that offers this way forward. But time not should be made to carry all this weight alone. Other theoretical interventions, such as the critiques of rationality made by postfoundational and feminist writers on organization as well as parallel debates about identity (central to Odih and Knights and tantalizingly present in several other papers) and about power, obviously also offer ways to think about these complexities, interdependencies and surprises. It is not always clear what time offers specifically in the context of these other interventions, or whether it is even possible to delineate such distinctiveness.

Gosta Esping Andersen with Duncan Gallie, Anton Hemerijck and John Myles
Why we need a new welfare state
Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002, paperback £50.00, £17.99 xxvii +244 pp.

Reviewed by Peter Taylor-Gooby, University of Kent, UK

This book results from the 2001 report on ‘A New European Welfare Architecture’ commissioned by the Belgian EU Presidency. It is written by some of the leading writers in the field and presents the thoughts of those at the heart of European policy debate about where next for welfare in the emergent super-power. It will obviously be required reading for anyone interested in the politics of welfare among advanced industrial countries.
There are two views on how welfare states have coped with the various pressures they face from population ageing, labour market and family change and globalization. One is summed up in such books as Kuhnle's *The Survival of the European Welfare State* (2000): business as usual. Although the pressures are real, state spending continues to expand, governments offer the same or an expanded range of provision and the welfare state is proving remarkably resilient in the face of threats. The other might be found in such studies as Pierson’s *The New Politics of the Welfare State* (2001). Although state services are highly popular they face continual pressure from declining economic growth rates and increasing dependency. The future is one of ‘permanent austerity’ and this is not a sanguine prospect.

The study led by Esping-Andersen offers a different perspective. The central point is that the whole context of state welfare has changed. This makes a difference not only to the demands on social provision and on governments’ capacity to supply it (as the writers mentioned above recognize), but also to the impact that welfare policies can have on society as a whole. Welfare systems face obvious problems: child poverty; unemployment and the sub-employment of unskilled groups; the problem of managing pensions when older people are more numerous and better organized politically and when the imposition of further taxes or social contributions on those of working age is seen to undermine national competitiveness in an increasingly stringent market. The book points out that the challenges for family policy are emerging at a time when most women are in paid employment. The rational solution is to enhance support for working women, which produces higher incomes, better life-chances for both adults and children in families and also expands the labour force at a time of population ageing, when rising dependency is construed as a problem. Such a social investment is a departure from the approach of the established European welfare state, which traditionally supplied benefits to support those outside the labour market. It can be seen not as a ‘burden’ (the conception of social policy which underlies the predictions of ‘permanent austerity’) but as an investment that produces a real return to society.

Duncan Gallie, in an analysis of ‘the quality of working life’ produces a complementary argument. He demonstrates, using data from the 1996 *Employment in Europe* survey, that those at the bottom of the labour force are much more likely to experience a poor quality of working life and that their disadvantage is reproduced over the course of their working lives. An investment strategy designed specifically to improve skills would meet the welfare ends of improving work experience and reduce the malaise associated with poor working conditions, and would also in the longer term upgrade the quality of the labour force. This approach of course tells against the ‘work first’ strategy exemplified, for example, by the UK’s ‘welfare to work’ programme, where the emphasis is on labour market entry at all costs, rather than labour market experience after entry. It shows a real possibility for extending the EU’s own action plan for employment into working life in a way that would enlarge opportunities for some of the more vulnerable groups of citizens at a comparatively cheap price.

John Myles examines pension issues and particularly the problem of assuring intergenerational equity in the face of rising dependency ratios and pressure on
spending. Drawing on Musgrave's life-course approach, he argues that the costs of demographic shifts should be allocated to ensure that the relative position of the retired generation and the contributing generation remain constant. This outcome differs from that of the fixed replacement rate model (embodied in social insurance in much of Europe) in which an increase in the number of pensioners implies an increased burden on current workers, or a fixed contribution model in which the burden falls on those retired. Thus the current settlement is insulated from variations in population structure or in labour-force participation.

The various chapters of the book are concerned with current policy issues. Three ideas underlie the arguments, and these go together to make up a new approach to the role of government in welfare. First, investment: rather than being understood as a burden on the productive economy, welfare spending should be seen as an investment. Social spending on child-care can increase the numbers of adults available to work; improvements in working conditions and in training can improve the productive capacity of the labour-force. Second, a life-course approach: traditional welfare arguments often deal in terms of a contrast between dependants and contributors. The approach of the book links life-stages together, demonstrating that investment in the quality of childhood will produce benefits in the capacity of adults to contribute, or that current and future generations of pensioners are inter-generationally linked. Third, in contrast to traditional arguments, which have stressed the cost of the welfare state as far and away the biggest component in state spending, the book emphasizes ‘win–win’ arguments, in which relatively small welfare investments can produce current welfare gains and also offer the potential to create future economic and social benefits.

Taken together these arguments offer a new approach to the welfare state, that takes seriously the pressures currently experienced, but offers the opportunity to move away from the ‘public burden’ notion of social provision and the prospect of ‘permanent austerity’ that it implies. The next interesting question is how far the EU will be able to achieve agreement among member states – and with the European Central Bank – on taking them forward in concert.

References

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