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Community Development in a Global Risk Society Conference

An International Conference hosted by the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights, Deakin University, held in Melbourne on 19 - 22 April 2006.

Andrew Hewitt, Professor Joan Beaumont, Professor Sue Kenny, Dalal Smiley, Meas Nee, Jacques Boulet, Azwar Hasan

The conference, hosted by CCHR, was another success following on from the previous conference in 2004. With overall attendance of approximately 300 with 50 academic speakers and 25 grassroots workshop presenters it provided a great atmosphere for delegates to explore theory and practice issues and ideas energetically and creatively in an atmosphere of collegiality.

The nine keynote presentations provided general focus for the conference themes and plenty of food for thought. Exploring the role of community development in a global risk society was particularly topical and provided an array of perceptions that were picked up by the keynote speakers and developed by the academic papers and workshops.

Often there is an artificial bifurcation between academics and practitioners that some conferences exacerbate; this was certainly not the case. The conscious decision to combine the streams worked well and feedback has been very positive. Indeed there have been a growing number of interested parties inquiring about the next conference.

The mix of international and local issues highlighted the similarities more than the differences facing community development in the context of risk society. There was lively debate around Beck's conceptualisation of risk society but overall there was broad agreement that risk, however it was defined, was having an impact on community development in a multitude of ways. These range from the impact on participation in community events through increasing costs of public liability insurance and the impact of new anti terrorism legislation on human rights and civil society, to the role of community development in post tsunami Aceh, the ongoing difficulties faced by women in democratic Afghanistan and the difficulties faced in developing third sector organisations in Iraq. The breadth and depth of issues covered in the three days was as diverse as it was engaging.

One highlight that deserves particular mention was the performance of “The Murdoch Report 2040” by a group of community activists at the conference dinner. The satirical production was thoroughly enjoyed by all patrons at the venue.

Finally thanks to all those who were involved in the organisation and smooth running of the conference, CCHR, Borderlands Cooperative and the International Association of Community Development (IACD). Special thanks particularly to Anne O’Keefe and Rob Budd for their expertise and good humour in organising the rest of us, and Kazumi Jushi and Rosa Alice for all their work during the conference.

■ ***Phil Connors, Deakin University***

Elites and EU Enlargement Conference

Dr. Carol Strong, a Research Fellow in the Centre for Citizenship and Human Rights at Deakin University, attended an international conference held on 17-18 February 2006 at the Institute for Sociology at the Czech Academy of Sciences in Prague (Czech Republic), entitled ‘Popular Opposition to, and Support for, Different Types of Integration into the European Union among the New Member States of Central and Eastern Europe’.

The primary objective of the conference was to explore popular perceptions by the elite and people of Central and Eastern Europe of European Union integration and how they differ from those held in western Europe.

Dr. Strong presented a paper on behalf of CCHR, entitled, ‘Václav Klaus, Lech Kaczynski, and the Future of the European Union’. In this paper, she firstly examined how EU integration is influenced by national interests, as understood by the political and economic elites of Central and Eastern Europe, with this augmented by a discussion of how political leaders can influence public opinion.

Her primary focus was on the views about the EU, as held by the current President of the Czech Republic, Václav Klaus, and the newly elected President of Poland, Lech Kaczynski. While both men express negative opinions of EU integration, so far, they do not represent the general will of the people in the Czech Republic or Poland respectively. In this paper, Dr. Strong considered the possibility that as the negative consequences of EU integration are experienced throughout the CEE, popular opinion might also shift in favour of the ‘euro’-scepticism expressed by Klaus and Kaczynski.

This was the third in a series of six conferences related to the topic of EU elites and European expansion. The next conference in the series will be held in Ukraine in October 2006.

■ ***Dr Carol Strong***
CCHR researcher, Deakin University

Australian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP) Conference 12 - 14th July, 2006

The Australian Society for Continental Philosophy (ASCP) Conference 2006 is to be held at Deakin University’s Waterfront campus, Geelong, Australia, from Wednesday, 12th July to Friday, 14th July 2006.

Guest speakers at the conference will be
Drs. George Markus, Agnes Heller and Robert Pippin

The topic of trauma was raised to the centre of twentieth century European thought by Sigmund Freud, particularly in his work after the First World War. Yet, as the earlier work of Hannah Arendt or, more recently, Giorgio Agamben’s and Alain Badiou’s writings emphasise, the last century was a century of traumas: the traumas of world war, of economic crises, of state-sanctioned genocides, of displaced and stateless peoples, the Cold War and the nuclear cloud. A sense of trauma pervades much twentieth century European thought. Heidegger, following Kierkegaard, elevates angst to a kind of privileged phenomenological instance. Levinas speaks of the trauma or “traumatism” that attends the ethical encounter with the Other. Adorno and Benjamin each conceive of history as importantly “one single catastrophe”, from the Stone Age to the age of total war. Lacan founds his conception of a ‘decentered’ subject upon a properly traumatic event.

Lyotard and Jameson differently highlight the primacy of an aesthetic of the sublime to “postmodernism”. Post-war European thought indeed increasingly comes to address itself to what is exceptional, sublime or different — that which, when it is not expressly traumatic, is inassimilable to metaphysical, political or administrative calculation. Today we are being served notice by the news media and politicians that we live under the threat or the sign of a new kind of trauma, that of global terror(ism). Attempts to come to terms with this trauma occupy increasing amounts of public space and political debate. Today’s post-secular turn in different theoretical paradigms, meanwhile, is doubled by the more troubling rise of forms of religious fundamentalism across the globe, movements whose visions are steeped in traumatic recollection and pre-millenial foreboding.

Registration details are on the Conference website:
http://www.deakin.edu.au/conferences/ascp06/index.php

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The Longing to Belong

The year 2006 marks the 30th anniversary of my migration to Australia. Thirty years ago when I arrived at Melbourne Airport, fleeing the civil war in Lebanon, I was excited about the possibilities this new country had to offer. I remember vividly the sense of relief I felt that I finally reached a safe destination where I no longer had to worry about the danger of walking down the street. I could finally get on with my life. Three years later I officially became an Australian citizen. Looking back at that time, I felt a sense of achievement. The event was similar to a graduation ceremony. You feel elated to be handed out a beautiful certificate with your name proudly imprinted in the middle and with signatures of important people on the same page. I cherished that moment and considered it a milestone in my life. But what does it really mean to be an Australian citizen? How does one measure the extent to which one feels as a citizen of a country? Did I feel like I belonged once I was handed out an official certificate? How does one know if he/she belongs? I asked myself many of these questions over the years.

T. H. Marshall in "Citizenship and Social Class" (1949), presented a classic text on citizenship. He distinguished three types of citizenship which evolved one after the other during the past three centuries. Civil citizenship in the 18th century established the rights necessary for individual freedom, such as rights to own property, personal liberty and justice. The second type (political citizenship) emerged in the 19th century encompassing the right to vote and exercise political power,. The third type, was social citizenship in the 20th century and emphasized the citizen's rights of economic and social security as articulated in the modern welfare state (Steenbergen, 1994). Marshall refers to the ideal citizenship as full participation in the community. This shifted the definition from a strict political definition of a citizen which refers to the relationship between the individual and the state, to a broader sociological definition which involves the relationship between the individual and society as a whole.

Following Marshall's work, new forms of citizenship unfolded. Other notions such as; neo-republican citizenship, cultural citizenship, active citizenship, race neutral and gender-neutral citizenship, global, European and ecological citizenship have been added as additional concepts to the classic aspects of citizenship as civil, political and social (Steenbergen, 1994).

I would like to add another aspect of citizenship to the list; Emotional Citizenship. I think we under-estimate the value of belonging as a key determinant in one's sense of attachment to a country. Belonging is an emotional experience. It is not something one can easily define nor understand. I know that over the years my feelings of belonging have fluctuated dramatically. My sense of belonging is dependant on my perception of how I fit in, in the Australian society. I noticed for example that my feeling of belonging was fragile. It came under serious doubts during Pauline Hanson's time. I was deeply disturbed by the attacks on migrants, immigration and multiculturalism. I seriously considered packing up and leaving. I wondered whether I was kidding myself by pretending that I belonged/pretending I was a genuine citizen of Australia. I so much longed to belong yet I felt totally cut off from the world I lived in.

Then I began to recover and slowly regained my positive outlook on life. I rationalized the Hanson phenomenon. After all, it was reflective of no more than a mere 10% of the Australian population. We will always harbour such elements in our society. So, instead of letting Hansonism chip away at my feeling of belonging I started attending the protest marches and took my children along with me.

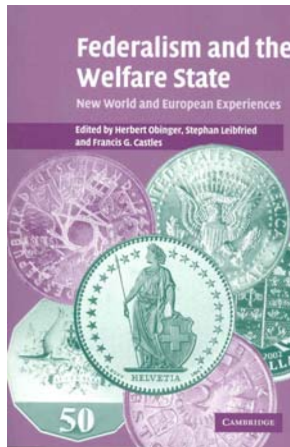
Then came the Gulf War 1, September 11, Gulf War 2, the War on Terror, the Australian Values debate, the proposed Australian Citizenship test, Border Control, Detention centers, the anti-terror laws, the attacks on multiculturalism, the Cronulla Riots, and the temporary protection visas. Each one took away a piece of my feeling of belonging. My emotional Citizenship was decimated. At times like this I feel pushed back to the margins of society. I feel like I am asked to crawl back into my migrant designated box, behave, know my place and my limits. Most of all I feel pressured to declare my loyalty and allegiance to Australia first and foremost, otherwise I am just confirming the critics' assessment of a type of migrants who are incompatible with Australian values and Australian way of life. Do people out there who are quick to denounce immigration and multiculturalism as positive factors in Australia's development as a modern nation, know or even begin to understand the longing felt by migrants to belong? Does it occur to any of them that the process of belonging is not entirely up to the migrants but also to the settlers who should show hospitality, helpfulness, friendliness and make an effort to welcome and embrace the newcomers? How about if the government for a change begins to educate the general Australian population on their role and responsibilities towards newcomers? The Federal Government should run and fund advertising and education campaigns and programs on the kind of contribution, adjustments and efforts the general population needs to make to facilitate the successful settlement and belonging of newcomers into this country.

Just like any other type of emotion, Emotional Citizenship needs to be nurtured and cared for. For a long time, human emotions have been ignored as important indicators of human performance. Then in 1985 Wayne Payne an American academic used the term "emotional intelligence" in his doctoral thesis. (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_intelligence). Emotional Intelligence gave recognition to the role, power, importance and functionality of the human capacity to use and understand emotions.

Emotional Citizenship to me is the ultimate stage one can reach in the process of settling into a country, a final

(continued on page 4)

Federalism and the Welfare State ; New World and European Experiences edited by Herbert Obinger, Stephen Leibfried and Francis G. Castles, Cambridge University Press, 2005



This is a comparative study by ten authors of the relationship between the evolution of political systems and welfare states in the six oldest federal states- Australia, Austria, Canada, Germany Switzerland and the USA. It is always welcome to have studies which place the Australian social security system in comparative perspective, especially in the present period when the Howard government is implementing radical changes. The central issue for comparison in this study is whether federalism inhibits the growth of social solidarity especially as federal states generate tensions over which tier of government should get what and who should pay.

The authors identify two eras in federal welfare state development. The first is an early era of welfare state consolidation and expenditure growth – the golden age. The authors call this the 'old' politics of the welfare state where state protection and funding was widely accepted. The later era – largely since 1975 - has been a time of expenditure retrenchment and social policy reform, called the 'new' politics of the welfare state. The book argues that some federal systems were able to avoid expenditure retrenchment in the new politics era largely because of the division of powers between different levels of government ' and that federalism may actually protect the welfare state and welfare states may enhance national integration.' In Canada where there is joint decision-making between provinces and the federal government, social welfare programmes have effectively been retrenchment proof. In the USA while means tested welfare programmes have been vulnerable, Social Security programmes which impact on the majority of the population have been remarkably resistant to 'reform' and cost cutting pressures from the Reagan, Clinton and Bush administrations.

The Australian chapter is written by Francis G. Castles and John Uhr. Castles (now Professor of Social and Public Policy at the University of Edinburgh) was for many years director of the Public Policy Program at ANU and has written widely on both the old and new eras of the Australian welfare state. Castles and Uhr conclude that in Australia in the early era the federal structure actually inhibited welfare state development with low spending and poor co-ordination. However, in the new politics era the authors argue that the system conforms to the experience of other federal systems studied in the book and has been able to resist expenditure cutbacks. The study shows this resistance was effective mainly due to post -1970s governments not having a Senate majority, allowing the 'state house' to modify legislation. However, the successful dismantling by the Howard government of 'old politics' legislation in industrial relations since returned with a Senate majority at the last election suggests that the Australian federal system may not be as resistant to change in the future.

The authors write in the introduction that 'the idea that all citizens share responsibility for the welfare of their fellows and the impulse to unite in federations have, on occasions, been historically conjoined.' While this could perhaps be argued for the early years of Australian federation, there seems little sign that the idea of a 'commonwealth' carries any purchase in contemporary Australia. Perhaps the most important change in Australia has been the incorporation of the non- government welfare sector into government administration of welfare, arguably compromising resistance to welfare cutbacks by this important sector in the Australian system. Such considerations however, are outside the governance framework used in this book although there is acknowledgement that regulation rather than legislation may become the more important area of influence on social provision.

The conclusions of this comparative study are that federalism has generally fostered the growth of the welfare state in all countries and in all eras and that federalism can facilitate as well as impede social policy development. The impact of federalism is contingent on time dependent factors, especially the degree of democratisation, type of federalism, stage of welfare state development and distribution of social policy responsibility. These conclusions are so general that they make the value of this comparative study problematic. Perhaps the main insight for Australian social policy is an awareness of how far we have moved from the 'old 'politics. The term 'welfare state' is now rarely used in Australian social policy discourse and the European concern for social solidarity has little resonance in current debates.

Reviewed by
■ ***Renate Howe, Deakin University***

(continued from page 3)

stage of attachment that is resilient and unshakeable. It is when one feels than their existence in the country they live in is not negotiable or debatable; it is not a political football to be kicked around. It is not subject to any review or regrets. It is rather an endowment that is earned and kept for life. It is a right to be respected, valued and protected. It is more than a certificate. It is even more than a mutual contract of rights and responsibilities between a citizen and a country. It is an emotional journey of bonding. It's subliminal and reciprocal. It is how one internalizes the experience of being a citizen. It is omnipotent, precious and empowering.

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Steenbergen, V. (1994), *The Condition of Citizenship*, Sage Publications, London Wikipedia, Emotional Intelligence, (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Emotional_intelligence)
Accessed on 22 May 2006

■ ***Dalal Smiley, Multicultural Relations Officer, City of Darebin***

***Human Rights in International Relations*, Forsythe, D. P., (2000), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (247pp)**
and
***The Politics of Justice and Human Rights*, Langlois, A. J., (2001), Cambridge University Press, Cambridge (214pp)**

The recent push by the Victorian State government to introduce a Charter for Human Rights may be viewed within a broader international context that is increasingly dominated by discourses and counter-discourses about the universality and applicability of human rights in an increasingly inter-connected world order. The two titles under review here (Forsythe 2000 and Langlois 2001) are concerned respectively with the international policy-making process and the so-called tension between local cultures and universal human rights tools. To this end, the two titles are complementary in the sense that they provide a broad overview of human rights as a feature of international relations as well as human rights as a domestic political issue shaped and driven by local values and social imperatives.

Forsythe's book is built around a set of core beliefs that stress the permanent place of human rights within international relations, the impact of human rights on state sovereignty, the importance of diplomacy in effecting human rights and the vital role of non-state actors in the development of international human rights. Still, in Forsythe's view, international relations view the state, rather than the individual as the basic unit. That is, many scholars and actors involved in international relations adopt a position of "realism" – asserting that state sovereignty and non-interference in the domestic affairs of other states is the key principle. "Liberalism," by contrast, is a framework for directing attention toward personal rights. Issues of international human rights, therefore, will require a limitation of state sovereignty where this conflicts with upholding human rights.

One of the key arguments put forward by Forsythe is that international concern for human rights is here to stay. The 'staying' power of human rights in world affairs can be seen as a result of: 1) the weight of international institutions (the cumulative weight of international law and organisations), 2) the political influence of the most powerful states; 3) political theory and personal values; Fukuyama argues that liberal democracies have been instrumental in the institutionalisation of human rights because they have adopted an ideology of human respect that cannot be improved upon. This is because all persons have a desire to be respected and the ultimate form of human dignity and respect is manifested in the ideal of human rights – human rights are the best way to legitimate power (p.9).

Forsythe suggests that human rights would not have fared so well, and international relations would have taken a different form if the Cold War was won by communists or if Islamist actors had proven dominant. The affluent liberal democracies of the OECD have constituted a caucus or interest group as well as exercising considerable military, economic and diplomatic power (p.7). Thus they have made a "liberal imprint" on international relations (p.8).

Forsythe's book highlights the gap between ideals and practice and engages with long-running debate about the universal as opposed to local manifestation of human rights norms. As a way of avoiding the clash between Western conceptions of human rights that dominate the universal discourse and local cultural resistance in particular in Eastern/Islamic societies, Forsythe argues that ultimately one should appreciate human rights as important and pervasive soft law, not just the occasional hard law of court pronouncements. That is when it comes to achieving progress on the international human rights agenda, diplomacy and soft power are more likely to produce results than 'hard' legal pronouncements through international courts and institutions. This is of course a point made in a pre 9/11 word which is now dominated by aggressive interventionist foreign policy agendas that list human rights as a primary goal.

Our moral imagination has been transformed since 1945 and the growth of a language of moral universalism (p.217). Dichotomies and paradoxes characterise the turbulent international relations at the turn of the century. State sovereignty is being transformed by transnational interests and movements, but states and their conceptions of sovereignty remain important. Contrary to some realist principles, rational states do not always adopt similar foreign policies despite their existing in anarchic international relations. Because of history, culture, ideology, and self-image, some states do identify strongly with international human rights. Increasingly many states wish to stand for something other than independent existence and power. In a shrinking world, states that profess humane values at home find it increasingly difficult to completely ignore questions of human rights and dignity beyond their borders (p.223). States that initially seek to bypass human rights issues, find themselves drawn into a process in which they at least endorse, perhaps in initially vague ways, human rights standards. The idea of human rights is a defence against abuse of power everywhere. Yet human dignity and human rights are contested constructs whose meaning must be established in a never ending process of moral, political and legal debate and review (p.219).

Perhaps this contested debate is never more visible than in the context of the 'Asian values' debate of the 1990s, a theme explored in detail in Langlois' book which is concerned with the tension between the universal nature of human rights discourse and its applicability within non-Western societies in particular those located in the Asian region.

Langlois argues for an understanding of human rights which is able to encompass both the fragmented and global nature of the discourse of human rights – allowing for unity and diversity without reducing the moral force for emancipation (p.2). It is possible to develop an

understanding of human rights which provides for the pluralistic social practice of human rights in the world today and is consequently free from philosophical bankruptcy and inapplicability. The way in which to approach the universality of human rights is to examine the philosophical and historical milieux from which it emerged (p.6). It is with the political thought of the Enlightenment that the understanding of human rights common in contemporary western political philosophy was established. Human rights are the outcome of a theory which seeks to establish a universal civilisation based on autonomous and critical moral rationality. The grand project of the Enlightenment failed because it was unable to sustain the claims it made on behalf of autonomous human reason: that it could ascertain and justify an independent rational morality (p.7). The consequences of this for human rights are profound, as they are profound for the whole of the political philosophy in which human rights are based – liberalism.

One of the main points Langlois makes is this: human rights should not be thought to exert a universal claim on reason such that it has universal moral, social and institutional application. For as long as human rights is centred around a particular non-universal tradition – western liberalism – it cannot be universal (p.7). While espousing universality it is limited by particularist rationality; while espousing egalitarianism it judges other ways of thought and practices as unequal; while espousing freedom it forces silence on non-liberal voices. Among the human traditions there is often ethical overlap about the substantive content of human rights values, despite fundamentally antithetical philosophical groundings; and secondly, diverse human traditions which people use to ground their understandings of human rights often lead to great difference about the proper substantive content of human rights and that this difference is non-reducible and intransigent (p.8).

Inasmuch as the literature on the Asian values debate reduces the issues to defenders of human rights versus authoritarian governments it does an injustice to the issues at stake (4). The views of those other than state elites (NGOs, religious leaders, academics, public intellectuals,dissidents, prisoners of conscience, politicians, foreign and expatriate representatives of all the previous) cannot be reduced to one unified set (4-5). There are Asian values other than those promoted by state elites, but these are sometimes closer to what is said by those elites than by their western opponents (43). Violations of issues such as religious freedom, marriage, homosexuality, the death penalty, abortion, freedom of expression, and minority rights, may flow from genuine cultural differences (43). It is going too far however, to say that certain positions on these are intrinsically Asian (43). Asian values are extraordinarily diverse (45).

Much of the literature on the Asian values debate argues along a simple dichotomy: that proponents of Asian values are using the idea for political purposes and that the idea is demonstrably wrong; furthermore that human rights are the same for all of us (p.46). There is a failure to recognise the diversity of positions within Southeast Asia. The complexity of Southeast Asian thought has been ignored by academics because they do not always recognise as valid the starting assumptions of many of the voices in the region – i.e. those that have a religious approach to life. Similarly, some voices in the region are not heard because they do not speak the correct conceptual language – that of human rights (p.47). The question, therefore, becomes: how are we to conceptualise an inclusive human rights framework?

The alternative model highlighted by Langlois is to argue for a theory of human rights, the focus of which, is the shared ethical commitments we already have, not the way in which these were derived. A secularist and theist can both affirm many of the same values, though for different and often antithetical reasons. This approach is developed by Cass Sunstein - the "incompletely theorised agreement" approach. Through the mechanism of incompletely theorised agreement, parties to a legal judgment are able to accept the judge's sentence, despite coming from diverse backgrounds and having different worldviews (p.8). The great value of an incompletely theorised model of human rights is that it allows for any given ethical position, or substantive human rights value, to be indigenously justified by the various human rights traditions. It does not require people to assent to one specific political philosophy in order to arrive at a human rights conclusion. The limitation of the incompletely theorised agreement model is that it does not speak to the issue of which substantiative values are included and which are not included as human rights values (p.9). This approach views the human rights discourse as relatively fixed, certain values have been privileged, by affirming those values you join the discourse, regardless of which resource you use to affirm the values. The human rights discourse however is not fixed. This is perhaps the greatest asset of Langlois' book that it managed to develop an intermediary stance between universalism and relativism.

Like Forsythe's book, this is a very readable and accessible book that succeeds in linking case study literature to a well argued theoretical approach.

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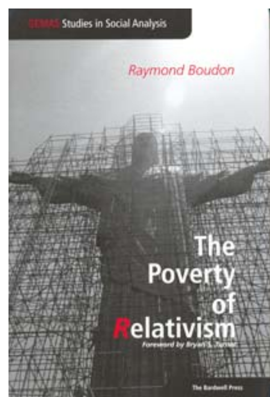
***The Poverty of Relativism*, *GEMAS Studies in Social Analysis*, Boudon, Raymond (2004), The Bardwell Press, Oxford and Cambridge**



Relativism, Tocqueville taught us, is the 'natural' philosophy of liberal democratic societies. Once everyone's opinions are judged equally as respectable as they are diverse, it will be accepted that there can be neither truth nor objectivity. As the authority of the 'grand' narratives of enlightenment, rationalism, modernisation and Marxism have steadily shattered, relativism has emerged with postmodernism to view the world as discontinuous, multiplicities of localised fragmented and diverse un/realities. Or as one commentator, paraphrasing Marx's vision of the modern city says, "*all that is solid melts into air.*"

Professor Raymond Boudon, in *The Poverty of Relativism,* published by Bardwell Press in 2004, intervenes powerfully with rigour and passion in the paucity of sociological debate about relativism to critically evaluate its contemporary fashionability. Boudon argues relativism is the "*new secular religion*" fuelling the success of the *"new sociologies*", which he identifies as the "*new sociology of science*", the "*new sociology of art*", and the "*new sociology of norms*". He traces the pervasiveness of relativism in the context of 'globalisation' whereby the West nourishes a demand for relativist thought which is in turn supplied by approaches in the social sciences uncritically validating of relativism. The '*new sociology of science'* he argues tells us that reality is a series of constructions and that ideas of 'truth' and 'objectivity' mere illusions. The *'new sociology of norms'* he tells us suggests all norms are culturalist spectacles and that moral values lack objectivity. Boudon tracks the intellectual threads nourishing relativism as the new dominant mode of thought in the social sciences, from its roots in Nietzsche's assault on bourgeois Prussian values to its branches into postmodernist thinking.

In his Foreword, Bryan Turner argues that relativism in its various guises from contextualism to pragmatism, has been a dominant epistemological framework for decades but one not subject to sufficient critical analysis or substantive critique. Turner welcomes Boudon's exposure of relativism's failure to adequately address the contemporary challenge of contributing to human rights and justice while simultaneously balancing respect and tolerance for cultural and political diversity. What role does 'moral value' and rational human choice have, if any, in a pluralist post modern world?

Boudon dissects both cognitive and cultural relativism with precision in this book, which forms part of the Groupe d'Etude des Methodes de L'Analyse Sociologique (GEMAS) Studies in Social Analysis series dedicated to the production of sociological knowledge and renewal of sociological theory. He refers in depth to the works of Weber, Durkheim and Marx. He draws on classical sociology, philosophy and psychology in what is a succinct, readable but complex argument. He defends his case in an elegant conclusion entitled "*An Archaeology of the Concept of Common Sense*" which sets out in short from the sum of his critique: if we adopt the Nietschean precept that *there are no facts only interpretations* in the social sciences and apply this to the notion of human agency as capable of reflecting cultural context then in moral philosophical terms: relativism is one step from nihilism. He argues that social and political nihilism resulting from the widespread uncritical adoption of relativism in the social sciences leaves us moribund. He contends that preoccupation with relativism leaves social scientists lacking the rigour to critically comment on contemporary national institutions or contribute effectively to international human rights challenges. With illustrative examples drawn from the social organization of science to the question of what constitutes a work of art, Boudon examines the consequences of relativism across a number of issues key to the future of sociology. He wryly suggests that relativism represents the paradoxical merger of literary postmodernism, bourgeois liberalism and the American pragmatism of social philosopher Richard Rorty. As Turner says, Boudon recognises the appeal and spread of relativist thought as a *'secular religion'* ideologically suited to liberal democracies in which '*any belief is as good as any other'*. He implies that the pervasiveness of nihilism and pessimism is possibly politically useful to those in dominant cultures.

Attacking relativism therefore goes against the grain of the times. As an advocate of sensitivity to cultural relativism myself and one used to questioning the embedded dominant culture slant in most social science approaches other than relativism, I found this book confronting and challenging. While Boudon touches on the importance of cultural relativism debates to a postcolonial sensibility he unfortunately uses the usual hoary anthropological chestnuts about the normalisation of 'abuses' in minority cultures and the inadequacies of relativism to envisage any transcendence or progress for the collective good. He evaluates and critiques relativism but fails to fully enunciate a new paradigmatic shift. It is to that extent a revisionist text. Nonetheless the book is refreshingly candid, pulling apart with extraordinary skill the *'taken for granted'* wisdom of both cognitive and cultural relativism. It is worth reading for the archaeology of ideas and methodological approaches in critical sociology alone. It challenges social scientists to think with more depth and rigour about methodologies and important notions like irrational vs rational choice. It deconstructs assumed sentimentalities: for example:

colonialism was possible because cultures were considered unequal; if cultural relativism is right no culture *is* better than any other and no society better than any other; therefore an opponent of colonialism should support cultural relativism. But Boudon contends this is an example of adopting a theoretical framework (in this case relativism) because it is useful rather than because it is 'true'; arguing instead that one can be an opponent of any institution or enterprise threatening to human dignity without rejecting the observation that some aspects of some cultures serve people's individual or collective rights and well being better than others.

Professor Boudon defends his version of a social science that does not end in pessimism by reviving notions of moral sentiment and promoting common sense knowledge. He poses the question: is universal benevolence and/or pessimism of relativism the most useful present Western intellectualism can make to the rest of the world? Like others no doubt, I can only reconsider my perhaps too simplistic/idealistic assumptions about the tolerance espoused by cultural relativism after reading such a well argued case against my own orthodoxy. *The Poverty of Relativism* should be read by social activists and active socialists alike for the challenge it offers to woolly thinking and smug notions of assumed progressive principles creeping into some postmodern and cultural relativist circles.

■ **Reviewed by**
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Books Available for Review

Double Shift: Working mothers and social change in Australia, edited by Patricia Grimshaw, John Murphy & Belinda Probert

Australian Outlook: A history of the Australian Institute of International Affairs
by John Legge

Island in the Stream: Australia and Japan Facing Globalisation
edited by Stephen Alomes

A History of Modern Indonesia, by Adrian Vickers

Human Rights in the 'War on Terror', editied by Richard Ashby Wilson

Violence in Between: Conflict and security in Archipelagic Southeast Asia, edited by Damien Kingsbury

On Feminism and Nationalism: Kartini's letters to Stella Zeehandelaar 1899-1903, translated by Joost Cote

**** to obtain a copy, please contact the Centre***

Research Grants awarded to CCHR members

MAV- Municipal Association of Victoria
'Local Government, Volunteering and Community Strengthening'

This joint research project between CCHR and the Municipal Association of Victoria investigates the changing nature of volunteering, considers how these developments can contribute to community strengthening, and seeks to identify the unique opportunities that this may present for local government both now and in the future. Also included will be research about the requisite enabling attitudes, structures and conditions that have the potential to facilitate a meaningful and sustainable approach to volunteering by local government so that Councils can foster community development and use existing resources to their best advantage.

Fieldwork report from - ***'Temporary protection of refugees in the European Union and Australia: a comparative policy analysis'***

This grant - the first major comparative study of temporary protection (TP) mechanisms in Australia and selected European jurisdictions - investigates policy developments and trends in the use of TP mechanisms in Denmark, Germany and Australia.

A/Professor Fethi Mansouri, Deakin University; Deputy Director (Elise Bittenginder) and Field Researcher (Katarina Rafailovic) of the German Association of Psychosocial Centres for Refugees and Torture Victims (BAFF)

A/Professor Fethi Mansuri, Deakin University; Joachim Rüffer, Chief Researcher, "Treatment Center for Torture Victims" (bzfo), Berlin -Germany