
Jessop's book is a sympathetic and convincing analysis of the development of Nicos Poulantzas's political thought that, paradoxically, is not likely to find much favor among those Marxists most influenced by Poulantzas.

A major figure in the resurgence of Marxist political theory during the 1970s, Poulantzas had enormous impact upon contemporary conceptions of the capitalist state through his difficult books and celebrated debate with Ralph Miliband. For many young Marxists, deeply disenchanted with the crude "theory" of orthodox Marxism-Leninism, Poulantzas seemed to offer a methodologically rigorous and comprehensive approach to the state in capitalist class society that recognized both the complexity and "relative autonomy" of the political sphere. At the same time other Marxists, disturbed by what they saw as a formalistic displacement of class struggle from politics, were increasingly obliged to confront the ideas and language of Poulantzas's analysis.

In the years since Poulantzas's untimely and tragic death, a new debate has emerged among theorists of the Left, between those who continue to insist on the primacy of class struggle and working class movements in making a transition to democratic socialism and those who reject such "class reductionism" and instead advocate broadly based "democratic struggle," especially involving "new social movements," as the way towards socialism. Jessop writes from this latter perspective, and argues that the central point of reference in the development of Poulantzas's political theory was his commitment to the politics of class alliance, which in the end leads towards just such a reformulation of the socialist project.

Jessop bases this claim on a close and systematic reading of Poulantzas's work, from student articles to unfinished research notes, taken in the context of his developing political strategy. He critically examines Poulantzas's Sartrean, "existential-marxiste" period; his Althusserian "regional theory of politics"; later theoretical reformulations influenced by Foucault; and the strategic/theoretical problems of his final work. This focus on Poulantzas's development—through the influence of French philosophy, Italian Marxism (della Volpe, Gramsci, and Ingrao), and his early training in Romano-German law—imposes a sometimes awkward structure on the book. Yet these diverse elements are handled clearly and without heavy reliance on Poulantzas's jargon.

In key chapters on "Social Classes and Class Alliances" and "The Democratic Transition to Democratic Socialism," Jessop explores the underlying connection between Poulantzas's conception of "relative autonomy" and his left-Eurocommunist political strategy. At issue is the relationship between what Jessop refers to as class determination and class practice. Jessop recognizes that Poulantzas from the start embraced the idea of relative autonomy in order to escape from the "economism" of orthodox Marxism-Leninism. He argues, however, that Poulantzas never resolved the theoretical problem of treating class determination in the economic sphere and class practices in the political sphere as different aspects of the same phenomenon—that political practice is autonomous, but only relatively.

Jessop convincingly establishes the priority of a strategic continuity in Poulantzas's theories, with his rigorous methodological insistence on the determinacy of class "in the last instance" serving largely as a Marxist anchor for an otherwise unfettered politicism. In Jessop's view, though Poulantzas moved away from Althusserian structuralism, towards a "relational" theory of the state, he finally failed in his effort to develop a consistent political theory corresponding to his strategy of class alliance because of his "reluctance to abandon what he believed were the essential principles of historical materialism, namely, economic determination in the last instance and the primacy of class struggle" (p. 146). Jessop argues that initially this was integral to Poulantzas's problematic structuralism, but subsequently, after self-criticism, "Poulantzas treated the articulation between class determination and class practice as contingent and conjunctural" (p. 188), and came to recognize the importance of "new social movements," making this "class reductionism" theoretically inconsistent.

Recognizing that Poulantzas himself never resolved the problem, Jessop alternates be-
tween sympathetic appreciation for the direction of his thought, and sharp criticism of its inconsistencies. Those who have questioned the usefulness of Poulantzas’s theoretical formulations may be wryly amused by the extent of this criticism, which locates Poulantzas’s real contribution in the trajectory away from class struggle. Marxists who accept Poulantzas’s framework, but reject Jessop’s political view, might well be discomforted.

Whatever one thinks of Jessop’s views, the great weakness of the book is its failure to consider other criticisms of Poulantzas. Incredibly, Jessop excuses himself from any discussion of the Miliband debate—on grounds that it captured Poulantzas at his most structuralist, making it irrelevant to his work as a whole. Critics of Poulantzas’s displacement of class struggle are simply ignored, although Ellen Meiksins Wood had earlier examined the link between Poulantzas’s political strategy and his theories of class and state, and the implications of the political shift away from the working class (“Marxism without Class Struggle,” Socialist Register [1983]).

Despite its strengths, therefore, Jessop’s book falls far short of being a definitive critical study of Poulantzas’s contribution to Marxist political theory. Perhaps ironically, however, Jessop—with his injunction to move “Beyond Poulantzas”—helps to make clear just how untenable a midground “Poulantzasian Marxism” has become.

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This volume collects a sample of papers from a 1983 University of Florida conference on social and legal philosophy. Conference collections usually display certain characteristic flaws. This volume is largely free of them. Fully a third of the 18 chapters are brief comments on the other papers, it is true. But most make points that strike deeply at the main thesis of the papers, points that the main authors would have had a hard time accommodating in their revisions. Some of the best moments in the book come in these exchanges. For once, the generality of the title does not mask any great disparity of themes. Virtually all the chapters concern economic justice, welfare rights, and cognate problems of social policy. Stylistically, virtually all operate in the mode of modern analytic philosophy; even Timo Airaksinen’s Hegel (substantively, definitely one of the outliers in the set) gets analyzed very much in the mode of G. A. Cohen’s Marx. Finally, and most importantly, the quality of the various chapters is surprisingly consistent. Virtually every chapter is perfectly sound, though few are exciting. All the basic points have been heard before, often (as with Gewirth’s lead essay) from the very same authors.

Lack of originality makes this more a collection for libraries and students than for research scholars. But for teaching purposes, this is a very serviceable collection. Alan Gewirth’s summary of how to derive welfare rights from his principle of generic consistency is delightfully paired with Virginia Held’s sharp riposte, “What is the political power of pure reason?” Theodore Benditt’s defense of justice as reciprocity evokes a nice reply from Bruce Landesman arguing for a more thoroughgoing egalitarianism; and the cognate question of where the needs of nonproducers fit into the Rawlsian framework is taken up again by Rex Martin. The basic logic of Henry Shue’s important argument in Basic Rights (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980) is set out succinctly by James Nickel. There is little new in any of this, but the uninitiated would enjoy and profit from it all.

One of the exchanges in the book does strike me as particularly novel, though. The burden of Lawrence Becker’s paper on “Property Rights and Social Justice” is that since justifications for property rights are largely based on considerations of social welfare in one way or another being served by such an institution, the selfsame social-welfare considerations that ground property rights themselves should be able to justify us in overriding those property rights from time to time to promote social welfare in other ways. Like can override like, morally speaking. Putting Becker’s point even more pointedly, Diana Meyers distinguishes