

You are encouraged to read the whole book, and please make a proper citation if needed.

Leonard, P. (1997). *Postmodern welfare: reconstructing an emancipatory project*. Sage Publications.

Introduction and argument:

1. Is the emancipatory potential of the projects of modernity, which expressed its resistance to domination in the universal terms of justice, reason and progress, now at end? (xi)
2. Postmodernism challenges the modern idea of a universal, essential subject, common to all humanity, which has been at the core of a socialist belief in the possibility of a world-wide political struggle, and as well as underpinning the Western drive to colonizing the Other in the name of a single narratives of emancipation as espousing a singular idea of Truth which leads invariably to domination, thus fixing feminism and anti-racism with its beady, critical eye. (xi)
3. So the questioning of the problematics of modernity becomes increasingly urgent. Does the postmodern insistence on the recognition of difference and of cultural relativity rather than universal reason, which might initially appear to validate the perspectives of those confronting gender domination and racism, in fact spell an end to the chances of reconstituting a mass politics of liberation? (xi)
4. The postmodern emphasis on difference and its accompanying disillusionment with ‘big state’ solutions to social problems leads to a focus on the liberatory potential for local, small-scale forms of welfare – community-based advocacy and consumer-controlled projects and agencies. These organizations of welfare, close to the people they serve, are able, it is argued, to relate to the diverse needs and social identities of specific populations with their particular configurations of gender, class, culture, ethnicity and other social characteristics. (xii)
5. My perspectives must be seen, first as one which attempts a critical engagement with and within the Marxist tradition. It is not ‘postmodern Marxist’ in the sense that the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985) might be so described, a perspective which appears to give priority to postmodern critique over the potential which, I believe, remains powerful in the Marxist tradition. I do not see postmodernism as taking over the critical role of Marxism but as providing a now essential ingredient in a revitalized Marxism. My view of the relationship between Marxism and postmodernism involves a deeply felt critique of some of the ‘old Marxism’ which reflected the side of the project of modernity which was rooted

in domination. It is a perspective which engages with postmodernism alongside feminism and anti-racism, and demands the acknowledgement and celebration of diversity in cultures, sexualities, abilities, ages and other human characteristics which, within an unreconstructed modernity were excluded, suppressed or discriminated against. My view, unlike that of Laclau and Mouffe, is that we are not at the end of emancipation. The project continues, but under changed historical conditions – economic, cultural, social – and with a newly reflective ability (always existing at least as a potential in Marxism) to understand the contradictions of the emancipatory projects of the past as well as that of the present. A reconstructed project of emancipatory builds upon the liberatory potential of the whole idea of emancipation still expressed, sometimes in muted form, within socialist, feminist, anti-racist and other struggles against domination. (xii-xiii)

6. My argument is that in explanations of the state's retreat, or, more neutrally, of the changes in the idea of welfare that accompany the closing years of this century, the critical idea of welfare that accompany the closing years of this century, the critical role of the global economy is a necessary element, but that it is not sufficient to provide us with the depth of understanding that we need if we are to begin comprehend what is happening to us now. (1)
7. This New Right took command of the conservative discourse on welfare by reasserting what were after all fundamental Western bourgeois values: the rationality of market forces compared to the bureaucratic irrationality of state intervention; the moral superiority of individual choice compared to the tyranny of collective decision making; the necessity for a strong state apparatus in terms of law and order compared to the weakness exhibited by welfare models of justice...The effect of these profound historic ruptures was to call into question the socialist enterprise as a whole. Is socialism desirable or feasible – including socialism as a set of ideas and practices underlying the political programme of attempting to enhance people's welfare through state and other forms of collective intervention? (3-4)
8. The revolutionary rupture which enlightenment was to bring to anciens regimes can be glimpsed in Kant's philosophical work, which inaugurates the discourse on modernity. Osborne (1992) refers to Kant's 1784 essay 'An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment' in distinguishing between two aspects of his work. First, instead of looking backwards to ancient Greece and Rome for his philosophical foundations, or to the future as a place of decline and doom, Kant sees the historical present as the ground upon which a philosophy of knowledge can be established. Secondary, a consciousness of the present as a sources of

knowledge is the basis upon which is founded the conception of autonomous reason, able to establish its own law without reference to the past, to tradition. Thus reason creates its own independent norms and in principle the use of this autonomous rationality is available to all of humanity. Thus 'Enlightenment Reason' becomes universal in its claims to be the means by which knowledge is created as well as the standard against which knowledge is validated. (6)

9. Modernity's knowledge claims, from Kant onwards, are based upon the idea that language performs the function of representation... The aim of social or economic theory within this perspective, for example, is to provide accurate representation of an objective social world. (9)
10. If representation theory may be an example of reality determinism, its opposite, significatory theory, may be seen as a manifestation of the assumption of discourse determinism. (10)
11. My argument is that rather than be forced to choose between the extremes of 'reality determinism' and 'discourse determinism' we can construct an approach to discourse on welfare which suggests that understanding is not simply a matter of the reality of particular experiences of the world, nor only a question of the internal rules of scientific and professional discourses, but that what we consider to be the 'truth' is implicated in a set of political arguments which includes 'what is to be done'. Discourses are constructed through linguistic rules and social practices which direct our attention to the politics of knowledge producing activities. (11-2)
12. For Jameson, still maintaining a Marxist perspectives on the crucial significance of the economic, this period constitutes 'the cultural logic of late capitalism' whereby the production of culture has become fully integrated into community production – culture has become commodified. This commodification process may be seen as the reason why political struggle becomes increasingly expressed in the arena of cultural production – in literature, film, art, theatre, music, and in the work of cultural critics. (12-3)
13. If Jameson sees postmodernity as an economic and cultural formation inimical, at least in the short run, to the emancipatory projects of socialism, others see postmodernity in a more positive light. We can take the work of Bauman as an example of a commitment to embrace postmodernity precisely because of its 'all-deriding, all-eroding, all dissolving destructiveness'. It is an approach which finds the new uncertainty invigorating after the experience of the absolutist Truths of modernity... So postmodernity's iconoclastic stance is to be welcomed, Bauman assures us, because it get rid of the assumptions of an old, now discredited, order: a ground-clearing operation which, as the title of his essay

collection *Intimations of Postmodernity* implies, only hints at or suggests the possibilities which might emerge, the new ethical choices that become available with the collapse of the legislated ethical rules of once-dominant moral authority. (14-5)

14. If modernity, as an emancipatory project of progress and order, because the foundation upon which a belief in human betterment was constructed, then we can trace the ways in which its domain assumptions constituted the discourses on welfare and, more widely, the welfare state. (18)
15. We need to ask ourselves, however, whether the rhetoric of the universalism carried within it a certain assumption about homogeneity and an apprehension when faced with difference. We might enquire also whether the moral transactions of welfare required so much administrative and professional regulation, and the attendant forms of classification upon which the judgments of eligibility were founded, that exclusion of the Other remained fundamental to the system. (21)
16. The global market is a Oneness which is truly universal: it touches, through technology, cultural production and increasing market dependency, virtually all of humanity. Fewer and fewer can escape it. Although its origins lie in Western culture, in the logic of Enlightenment rationality, its universal principle of exploitation through the operation of market forces, now takes many non-Western forms...Although it reflects some cultural diversity, especially concerning conceptions of the subject, the Oneness of the global market is united in its commitment to the pursuit of the ideals of modernity: progress through scientific rationality and order. (25)
17. If we take cultural diversity as a central feature of human existence, then the first universal, constructed on this foundation must be the value of diversity. This might be seen as a universal in which humans take pride: the cultural achievement of human evolution unmatched by any other species. (28)
18. But the risk of solidarity must be accepted even as it is necessarily approached with great caution and a healthy skepticism about its objectives. Ultimately, the actual interdependence of individual identities and cultures means that emancipation from the late capitalism of global exploitation must be on a broad front and that nothing less can provide the degree of critique and political challenge which is necessary in order to have any impact at all. (29)
19. We can argue that discourses on difference and exclusion must be related to concrete practices which play their part in the constitution of the Other: racism, sexism, material exploitation and other forms of domination, usually closely interconnected with each other. (29)

Subject:

1. The first meaning of the term 'subject' is often referred to as the 'humanist subject' or the subject of modernity, because it rests upon an assumption of the existence of an essential, self-directly individual person, able to act in modern, 'advanced' societies with relative freedom of choice. This subject carries substantial individual moral and social responsibility for her or his conditions of existence. The second meaning of the term 'subject' to another's power or authority. (33)
2. We can avoid binary opposition in favour of a more dialectical understanding of the relationship between individual and society. (33)
3. We can see that the social constructionist views subjectivity as a product of the social relations characteristic of a specific social formation at a particular point in history. (34)
4. The central dynamic of capitalist societies involves activities directed towards the accumulation of capital and the reproduction and social regulation of the labor power upon which it rests and for which it requires the performance of various kinds of labor, both waged and unwaged. (35)
5. Bauman (1992:97-8) refers to the weapon of seduction to the market as a major mechanism whereby subjects are integrated into a consumer society. His argument is worth following in some detail. Seduction, together with repression, is seen by Bauman as replacing, under postmodern conditions, the political legitimation of 'universal' values which modernity once demanded. Instead, seduction becomes the paramount tool of domination, a possibility once the market is able to make consumers dependent on it. (37)
6. What emerges from this analysis of the manufacture of desire is that the need for the market is one of the most crucial needs which are socially created as a component of the subjectivity of individuals in late capitalism. (38)
7. Under the conditions of late capitalism this location provides a site for the continuing promulgation, though weakening and contested, of the 'ideology of familialism, a celebration of the virtues of the nuclear family, the nurturing roles of women, the subordination of children and other requirements of the social order'. (38)
8. The social worker's gaze is directed at the bodies of the poor, the rejected, the objects of discrimination, aiming to bring order to disorder. The therapist's gaze is, perhaps, the most penetrating and most powerful, a gaze directed, as it were,

inside the subject, searching for origins, for the very elements which constitute identity. For the representatives of state welfare in direct contact with the subjects for whose well-being they are concerned, observation of bodies is a crucial skill; 'the gaze' is both a literal description of social practices and a metaphor for the monitoring and surveillance of subjects undertaken by the state apparatus. (43)

9. Eagleton sees individuals in contemporary society as functioning simultaneously both as autonomous agents and as products of discursive power. He maintains a difficult balancing act when he writes that 'the subject of late capitalism is neither simply the self-regulating synthetic agent posited by classical humanist ideology, not merely a decentered network of desire, but a contradictory amalgam of the two. (45)
10. Within the intestines of the monolith, the Western subject of late capitalism is commodified and reproduced by mass culture and loses the capacity for resistance. Whereas Eagleton searches for the possibility of a certain social stratum – Left critics – being able as individual subjects to maintain the critical distance necessary for resistance, Jameson appears to consider this disengagement impossible. At the same time, the liberating figure of the proletariat, the revolutionary working class, is also abolished as a possibility because collective resistance inside the monolith is no longer feasible against the penetrating force of mass commodified culture. Perhaps Jameson speculates, liberation will come from the dominated populations of the Third world, in any event, only collective action is likely to produce the transformations whereby the subject gains or regains a degree of relative autonomy. (46)
11. In order to regain a notion of relative autonomy for the subject, it is important to shift attention from an exclusive focus on the major apparatuses of domination – the abstractions of the State, the world capitalist market, mass culture – and examine, rather, the micro-processes of power relations. Here, one is trying to render an account of the diverse everyday experiences of heterogeneous subjects as they struggle with the relationships between determining structures, that which is internalized from these structures, and what remains of their own intentions, albeit mediated in culture. (47)
12. The idea of contradictory consciousness is based on the need to explain how individuals come to resist the determinant social order, how it is that opposition to it is mounted, individually or collectively. (48)
13. The notion of contradictory consciousness points to the internalization of contradictions which the subject experiences as conflict or minimally as discomfort, the internalization of both compliance and resistance within the same

process. This dialectic of the incorporation and repulsion of dominant discourses may explain how some forms of resistance may be expressed and also suggest how significant to the subject of late capitalism a reflexive ability might be. (48-9)

14. If the welfare state is the product of modernity, of a liberal, humanistic individualism, then we can expect that the discourse of the welfare subject will embody these discursive characteristics. (49)
15. The subject position of 'welfare dependent', then, is one in which the individual is likely to experience, alongside the benefits that result from welfare payments, subjection to a discursive formation which addresses her or him as an object of both negative ethical judgment and of moral reform. (51)
16. In the postmodern discourse on 'bodies without organs' as political surfaces inscribed by power, the inscription is achieved not only by the direct intervention of the external forces of the welfare state – professional and administrative practices – but also by self-surveillance. (56)

Economy

1. We might, of course, attempt to deconstruct the dominant economic discourses on welfare so as to reveal the discursive rules underlying them, what is included and what is excluded, who speaks about the economy and within what processes of knowledge, power and resistance...What can be attempted, however, is a beginning exploration of some of the assumptions underlying discourses on the economy, which will involve discussion on globalization, flexible accumulation, 'post-Fordist' production methods and the consequences of these developments on employment, unemployment, wages and class relations. (114)
2. The economic logic of the organization of subjects to the requirements of the new forms of production and labor process is proclaimed, within dominant discourses, as not only necessary but also desirable. (126)
3. One important consequence of the transition to post-Fordism has been in the decomposition and restructuring of class positions and their intersection with the social divisions of gender, race, ethnicity and other socio-economic categories and sources of identity, subordination and resistance. (131)
4. In this chapter I have relied primarily on a Marxist analysis in order to attempt to describe, and more tentatively explain, the economic transitions we are experiencing. This is because I believe that no other perspective supplies at present the conceptual categories necessary to advance our understanding. (134)

Politics:

1. We have already acknowledged the omnipresence of a micro-politics of resistance to the exercise of discursive and institutional power, a form of individual resistance which feminism, above all, has enabled us to acknowledge as both political as well as personal. But if we go further and explore how a collective form of resistance is, or might be, mounted against dominant discourses and practices, are we going to collide, almost immediately, with the ghost of a politics already pronounced dead: the mass politics of the Left? (140)
2. So we have a difficult agenda for this chapter, one in which we may find that the serious political limitations of postmodernism will need to be balanced by a new application of a Marxist perspective on political intervention filtered through a postmodern reading of gender, cultural diversity and the organization of power/resistance. (140)
3. Within critical theory, the process of self-reflection refers not only to the individual subject attempting to struggle against the internalizations of dominant ideology, but is also seen as a collective enterprise...a class or other social grouping can develop reflexive knowledge of the dominant ideologies which constrain them and limit their freedom. (142)
4. In practice, the possibility of reinventing a politics of class struggle on a mass scale seems extremely difficult. It is, after all, one thing to identify, theoretically, a set of common class interests (of those impoverished, displaced and rendered redundant by the 'new economy') and it is another to assume a consciousness of these common interests. (144)
5. What is argued here is that the postmodern theorist's desire to attain 'culture distance' contradicts a view of subjectivity as so culturally conditioned and linguistically imprisoned that the required distance cannot be achieved. (145)
6. There are different versions of the postmodern perspective which deeply affect the kinds of politics that might emerge from them. I have focused on what might be termed a Left postmodernism, one which has ties with feminism and, more problematically, with Marxism and the struggle against racism and neo-colonialism. (147)
7. Insofar as the new social movements can be characterized as representing a politics of identity – gender, culture, sexuality, age, disability, race – they can be seen paradoxically both as a characteristics expression of postmodernism, and as its contradiction. (156-7)
8. Human rights might be seen as an expression of the mutual interdependency of human subjects, an interdependence which dominant discourses attempt to mask in their opposition to a politics of collectivity which ultimately rests on the mutual dependency of subjects upon each other. (159)

9. A concept of mutually interdependent subjects, then, is crucial to a politics of collective resistance and, in particular, community action...Is it possible to advance a discourse on welfare which is based, in other words, upon the interdependence of various social struggles as well as the mutual dependence of individual subjects? (159)
10. Given the massive hegemony of corporate capitalism, only the state might provide a terrain for some forms of resistance to the prodigious economic and political power of a capitalist global market. Certainly, without the state, even given its weakened ability to defend its populations from the consequences of economic growth, innovation and the recurrent crises of the system as a whole, effective collective resistance is impossible. (159-60)

Reconstruction

1. If a new, emancipatory project of welfare is to be developed it must be based upon a moral critique of modernity from within. This internal criticism directs its attention to the side of the Enlightenment implicated in domination and contrasts this with the emancipatory potential remaining in those critical discourses of modernity expressed in the revolutionary ideals of liberty, justice and equality. Internal criticism acknowledges that the project of modernity continues – no other appears available to us – but draws upon the interrogation of Marxism and feminism by postmodernism as its major source of critique. (162)
2. A conception of the subject as a resistant moral agent provides one means by which a welfare project can be reconstructed. Such a project does not accept that a description of the present can be reduced to one of monolithic domination, but emphasizes its contradictions, evidenced in part by the multiplicity of challenges to moral, political and cultural authority characteristics of present times. (162-3)
3. Reconstructing the project of welfare will be rooted in the possibilities emerging under present conditions. It will, in other words, emphasize process rather than plan, a process based upon certain culturally produced assumptions which act as discursive signposts to assist us in the pursuit of welfare as an emancipatory idea. It is a process, furthermore, which stimulates us to imagine diverse ways of meeting human needs and to explore the possibilities open to people in furthering their own welfare, moving on from resistance to the creation of change. (163)
4. It is when we begin to speak of an organized critical politics of welfare that the tension between the ethics of diversity and those of solidarity, of mutual interdependence, becomes sharply evident. It is not, I believe, a tension that can be overcome, finally transcended in the name of welfare as an emancipatory project. This is a necessary tension, an unresolvable contradiction between moral

imperatives which must, with whatever difficulty, be continually balanced against each other. (165)

5. The moral responsibility to acknowledge and act upon the mutual interdependence of human subjects should not, however, be seen mainly as a problem, a principle which we see primarily in terms of its tension with a responsibility to otherness. Recognition that mutual interdependence is at the core of our subjectivity and that it therefore constitutes a foundation for any reconstructed welfare project is a precondition for any effective ideological counter-move to the dominant, narcissistic individualism of the culture of late capitalism. (165)
6. Emphasis on commonality, solidarity and interdependence serves not only to counteract self-invalidating and destructive internalizing of shame and guilt, but also enables subjects to express individual resistance to domination and the possibility of participating in collective resistance in the pursuit of claims for welfare. (166)
7. And so with this objective we mount a major challenge to that role of welfare which, within the discourse of modernity, subordinated its subjects to the rules of rational, scientific knowledge and engaged in the development of apparatuses of surveillance, control and treatment within which the individual submitted to professional and bureaucratic power. To encourage and support the opportunities for agency involves particular attention to the power exercised by professional experts, and the resistance it encounters, because resistance is a foundational element in the striving for autonomy. (168)
8. These two types of strategy – collective resistance and welfare building – are, of course, dynamically intertwined, because collective resistance often implies a demand for a system change, and constructing and implementing new policies goes hand in hand with continued resistance to manifestations of a power which denies responsibility to human well-being, diversity and interdependence. (169)
9. I select three targets for discussion: the disciplinary power of professionals, the commodification of culture and the manufacture of desire, and the economic discourse of global market necessity. (170)
10. The first target of collective resistance is that which is closest to home: it is generated by the interactions which subjects experience when they receive a service from a professional expert... These collective forms aim to counteract, through intervention in the media, the organization of continuing education and the support of patients, clients service users and other subjects of welfare, the exclusive knowledge claims of experts. (170)
11. The strengthening of collective resistance to the power of dominant cultural

discourses is a necessary element in the struggle towards an emancipatory idea and practice of human welfare. (171)

12. Collective resistance must take the form of a fully articulated ideological critique of this discourse on the economy, one which consistently argues, through media and education, that economics are the results of acts of will...Collective resistance aims to move the dominant social discourse from one which speaks of the blind forces of the market to one which at least gives substantial space to the effects of human intentions and the consequent need for moral judgments on these intentions. (172-3)
13. Collective resistance will have been accompanied by efforts to establish some prefigurative policies, organization and practices – a process which enables the possibility of change to be grasped hold of, firmly. In the context of my attempt to envisage emancipatory possibilities already existing in current critiques and political activities in the field of welfare, I am referring to this prefigurative process as welfare building. (173)
14. In reconstructing welfare in an emancipatory form we need the power and resources of the state to provide a framework of services through which common needs can be met, risk and harm reduced and diversity and interdependence flourish, with health care, education, social care and income maintenance being the primary elements. But how can the state, locked into the contradictory legacy of modernity and implicated in the political economy of late capitalism possibly serve such an emancipatory purpose? (174-5)
15. But in order to overcome the limitations of identity politics, an organized solidarity would need to aim for the winning of state power through the electoral process: it would need, in short, to take the form of a political party committed to an emancipatory project of welfare expressed in concrete policies and underpinned by an ethics of diversity and mutual interdependence. (176)
16. The new kind of party, whether or not based on a pre-existing one, could be described as a confederation of diversities in which member organizations join together not to obliterate their separate identities, but to express them, in part, through solidarity... It would be based on the establishment of dialogue at every level between those who experience different forms of domination and exploitation. A confederation of diversities suggests a long-term commitment of participant organizations and individuals to a federation which is envisaged as representing their diversities as well as furthering their common interests. (176-7)
17. This would involve an abandonment of the urge to control and homogenize populations 'in their own interests' and instead return to those values which form

the critical, emancipatory side of modernity: a belief in equality and justice. It is because such a shift in the discourse which drives the state apparatus is a precondition of welfare as emancipation that achieving power over that apparatus is necessary. (178)

18. The establishment of a party as a confederation of diversities would be a difficult task but one which would be, after all, a particular discursive and material expression of present discontents and of a growing realization that establishing solidarity between particular interests is the only way to mount resistance to the depredations of a globalizing late capitalism and to establish the possibility of alternative forms of modernity. (178)