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BOOK REVIEW COVER PAGE

Book Review: *Goodin et al.* Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom.

Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0521882989, £47 (HBK)

Reference

Goodin, R., Rice, J. M., Parpo, A. & Eriksson, L. (2008) *Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

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Biographical Note

JENNIFER WHILLANS' multi-method PhD research explores the synchronisation and coordination of daily life by 'young, independent, singles' in UK.

Book Review: *Goodin et al. Discretionary Time: A New Measure of Freedom. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0521882989, £47 (HBK)*

Poverty in terms of money is readily understood to affect well-being. In *Discretionary Time*, Goodin et al. underscore the relationship between welfare and time by arguing that time poverty is a critical issue. The central concern of the book is with 'discretionary time', as a manifestation and indicator of 'temporal autonomy', and its unequal distribution across different countries and under different living conditions. Goodin et al. take a particular stance to temporal autonomy as being the control over the resource of time as a mediator between goods and services (Adam 1990, 1995). Consequently, time is decontextualised as a quantifiable, standardised and universal unit of measurement, and conceptualised as a currency that can be spent and exchanged in ways similar to money.

Temporal autonomy is the ability to make choices over how to spend one's time; acting out of necessity implies a lack of choice. Time left over after having done what is strictly necessary in paid labour, unpaid household labour and personal care is time over which people have autonomous control. This is discretionary time. More discretionary time equates to greater temporal autonomy. Differences in household income and household structure make it necessary for some to spend more time in paid labour and unpaid labour than others to meet a common standard of living.

One of the ways in which the authors distinguish themselves from existing thinking and quantitative research around the issue of time poverty is to position discretionary time as manifestly different from 'spare time' (Robinson 1977). Consider the scenario where

someone chooses to spend time in ‘necessary activities’, exceeding what is strictly necessary to achieve a higher standard of living. Spare time captures the amount of time left over having deducted all the time spent in paid labour, unpaid household labour, and personal care, both *necessary and superfluous*; discretionary time captures the amount of time left over having deducted only that time which is *necessary*. ‘Need’ is pivotal in this research.

Using this distinction, Goodin et al. controversially discuss whether the experience of time pressure is inevitable or optional and in some way chosen. A conventional position in time-use studies states that those with less spare time are more time pressured. This approach would define someone as time pressured even where an individual had chosen to spend their discretionary time doing extra work in order to achieve a higher standard of living, and consequently had little spare time. The authors argue that the conflation of actual spare time and potential discretionary time is erroneous and leads to an illusion of time pressure.

The authors go to great pains to define and operationalise what is a necessary amount of time for an individual to spend in paid labour, unpaid labour, and personal care. ‘Necessary’ relates to a social standard that is relative rather than absolute. Income poverty is conventionally defined in relative terms, as half the median equivalent income in one’s country. Necessary time in unpaid household labour is modelled in the same way. They note that necessary time in paid labour and time in unpaid labour is exchangeable: You can spend time minding your own children or pay a childminder to spend time minding your children.

Goodin et al. move from the analysis of equality in terms of money to equality in terms of time in an original and ambitious way. Using the Multinational Time Use Study (MTUS) and Luxembourg Income Study (LIS) datasets, they index each individual's necessary time in paid labour to their wage rate and each individual's necessary time in unpaid household labour to their household structure. The same 'necessary time in personal care' is ascribed to everyone in the country. The analysis across the entire book focuses on six selected countries, which reflect liberal, corporatist, and social-democratic welfare regimes: United States, Australia, Germany, France, Finland, and Sweden.

Discretionary Time is structured into six parts, which unravels as 17 chapters. Parts I and II introduce the research. Parts III to V analyse in detail the results of the distribution of discretionary time across democracies by focusing on three distinct influences on people's temporal autonomy: welfare regimes, gender regimes, and household regimes. The first concerns whether living under different welfare systems influences the amount of discretionary time one has; the second, whether regimes tend to favour and promote the temporal autonomy of males or females; the third, whether dividing daily tasks of paid and unpaid labour differing ways between adults in a household makes a difference to discretionary time. They devise four alternative and broad negotiated household 'rules': breadwinner rules, conventional dual-earner rule, egalitarian rules, and withdrawal (divorce) rules. The aim of focusing on household regimes is to determine whether people can make a difference to their discretionary time through their own household's choices, by arranging their household on one set of rules rather than another.

The book concludes that temporal autonomy varies widely between countries. Discretionary time is highest in Sweden and lowest in France. Welfare regimes appear to increase the discretionary time of certain subgroups more than others. However, people's temporal autonomy depends mostly on life-cycle choices, particularly whether they have children and a partner to help care for those children: those with children have less discretionary time than childless adults, and single parents have even less discretionary time than parents whose partner is present. Life-cycle choices have similar effects across all six countries, except when it comes to divorce: a woman would lose over 14 hours more discretionary time a week in US than in France. The most pronounced conclusion, related to part V, was that there is relatively little an 'intact, non-divorcing household' can do, by choosing to change the household rules to alter the temporal autonomy of its members taken as a whole. For example, having undergone a transition from running the household on Conventional Dual-earner rules to Equal Temporal Contribution rules women have 1.2 hours more discretionary time per week (or 10 minutes more per day) and men can expect 2.40 hours less discretionary time per week (20 minutes less per day) (p.249).

For some, the most contentious part of this research and book will be the way in which the authors assume the commodification of time. This alignment underpins 'discretionary time' to create a decontextualised measure of temporal autonomy and equality. As a result, for example, the conclusion is made that male breadwinner model would be to the wife's advantage and the husband's disadvantage (p.263); that is, if a woman under a Conventional Dual-earner household chooses to be a full-time homemaker, averaging across all six countries, she can expect an extra 30 minutes a day of discretionary time whilst her partner loses almost 1 hour 15 minutes per day

(p.246). However, the indicator is not able to account for the socio-cultural meaning of reverting to this household rule and its impact on temporal autonomy, in the more holistic sense. Women might have more discretionary time but less ‘discretion’ over how they use it.

‘Discretionary time’ as an indicator is unable to consider *when* the hours of necessary paid labour or unpaid labour occur. A means to achieving a healthy work-life balance is having the ability to choose the number of hours in paid employment and to set or shift the timing of work. This facilitates the synchronisation of work commitments with the daily temporalities of other household members and household activities. Having autonomous control, in this sense, is a privileged position to be in and enables the easing of points of local time pressure brought about by the juggling of family and work. Therefore, treating time as a resource is one approach to a complex and multi-faceted debate on the relationship between welfare, time-use and temporal control.

One of the most poignant features of this book is that it raises the questions and substantiates a pertinent issue of the differentiated experience of time pressure. In particular, it emphasises the critical difference between someone who is ‘time poor’, using discretionary time as an indicator, and someone who is ‘time poor’ because they have little spare time. On the one hand are those who do not have enough time in the day to meet poverty-line needs. On the other are those who have little spare time because they spend time in labour and personal care to exceed poverty-line standards in aspiration and attainment of more.

Discretionary Time demonstrates originality in conceptualising and theoretical grounding time poverty and welfare. Goodin et al. are ready to acknowledge and highlight the limitations and caveats of their data, analysis and conclusions. This humility in the authorship of the book helps the reader to grasp the remits of this research and weigh the impact of the argument. The extended appendices, containing the methodology in detail and a comprehensive set of tabulated outputs, will indulge the reader more apt and curious about the ins and outs of the data. At the same time, the strong and systematic structure of the book unfolds the thesis for those who are more inclined towards the substantive issues raised by the research. This ambitious comparative empirical analysis is therefore accessible to a wide audience of time-use scholars, those interested in the impacts of public policy, and those with an interest in gender inequalities.

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