David Willetts (2010), *The Pinch: How the Baby Boomers Took Their Children's Future – and Why They Should Give It Back*. London: Atlantic Books. £18.99, pp. 314, hbk.

STEPHEN MCKAY

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response from the centre in the form of Clinton/Blair's 'the third way', the pliability of which Lister is particularly adept at dissecting.

Lister's review of this history performs two useful functions. By highlighting the richness of past disputes about the welfare state, it illustrates exactly how narrow the accepted range of political discourse has become. In addition, her documentation of this enforced convergence creates space in Lister's narrative for an overview of some marginalised perspectives such as Marxism, Feminism, Anti-Racism and Environmentalism. Although Lister does not specifically ally herself with any of these viewpoints, she treats each fairly, and clearly believes that policy debates have suffered from their exclusion.

Lister knows, however, that it is not merely frank discussions of ideology that have been excluded. The modern conventions of social welfare policy rely heavily on quantitative techniques that often elide many of the most important questions. Among these questions are to what extent does social welfare control, regulate or encourage resistance among the population? How are social problems constructed? And how do we define highly contested concepts, such as needs, citisenship, liberty, equality and social justice? Since different ideologies predispose their proponents to define these concepts in different ways, Lister devotes several chapters to these critical questions. In each instance, she is to be commended for her principled and sophisticated treatment of these issues.

Her treatment of the issue of equality is especially noteworthy. At first glance, its meaning seems clear, but dig a little deeper, and it soon becomes evident that its meaning is not clear at all. Equalities not only come in many different forms – moral, legal, social, political and economic, but also the standards for judging them break down the moment we leave the abstraction behind. There is equality of opportunity and equality of outcome, a `complex equality' that accepts difference as long as it is restricted to separate spheres, and the principle of equity that sees the need to treat some people differently as the only path to true levelling. Attempts to reconcile these principles often lead to awkward hybrids, such as New Labour's meritocratic equality of opportunity, which, as Lister rightly notes, appears to beg more questions than it answers.

Lister's text concludes with a chapter on social movements – in particular, the disability movement and the movement for global social justice. Its inclusion represents a useful corrective to treatments of social policy in a vacuum, as if people, fighting to satisfy their basic human needs, had not brought about the social programs that policy analysts are now examining. Lister is determined to show that theories have relevance: they both inform social movements, at the same time that the endless cycle of theory and practice provides a test of a theory's validity. Like the rest of the text, this chapter is lucid, comprehensive and even-handed – an appropriate capstone to quite a valuable book.

JOEL BLAU
Stony Brook University, New York

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The central argument of this book is that a particular birth cohort, the generation of 'baby boomers' born 1945–1965, have amassed a disproportionate share of life chances (consumption, wealth, the 'best music') and that this has come at the expense of the next generation. David Willetts, an MP, Minister for Universities (at the time of writing), and baby boomer, argues that they need to take a lower, fairer share of the spoils.

The book includes analysis of many disparate but connected topics. It starts with the long-term population structure of England, before looking at more contemporary families and especially family breakdown, and the circumstances of the post-war baby boom. It goes on to look at wealth, patterns of change both within and between birth cohorts and the ethics of inter-generational justice. Towards the end, it laments the decreasing independence afforded to children, and moves to consider the role of schools and how they relate to social mobility. It also looks at the key role of housing and owner occupation, and how it is increasingly difficult to move into home ownership, and at the role of grandparents within three-generational families.

As this brief overview suggests, this is a wide-ranging book covering a multitude of disciplines and sources. It also includes diverse references to academics, literature and popular culture. It is well-written and the messages are clearly outlined and defended. Many 'great names' are credited within, ranging from Schumpeter on individualism, to Mannheim on generations, Putnam on social capital, Axelrod on game theory, to Giddens. The author also draws on examples and analogies from diverse media, including *South Park* and *The Simpsons*, T. S. Eliot and *Jean de Florette*, among others.

Chapter 1, on who we are, is an account of the long history of the nuclear family in England. It will be familiar to readers of Macfarlane (1978), but of strong interest to those unaware of these issues. Key elements are the absence of large family groups, geographical mobility and the ready transferability of property. It is not without criticism for its scope, given a regionally restricted evidence base. Willetts uses this account to set the scene for links to the different institutions that England developed, or at least developed at an earlier stage than in the remainder of Europe.

It is not always clear whether Willetts intends to argue that the baby boomers have just had spectacularly good luck in attaining their fortunes (avoiding war-time service, establishing careers pre-globalisation, having salary-related pensions prior to their widespread withdrawal, free higher education), or whether they have instead actively conspired to cement their position (through their political power as a large voting bloc), or may do so in future. In the same vein, baby boomers are described both as voracious consumers and as those who have built up substantial wealth – albeit the wealth was mostly acquired through house-price appreciation rather than active saving.

Of course, other authors have considered different aspects of the overall thesis, such as Thomson (1994) on how the welfare state may differentially affect different cohorts. It is the main strength of this book that it takes a broad overview, and provides a guide to both interesting research and implications. It is also important to note that Willetts challenges the view that a larger cohort *should* fare worse, on some level, since they will create greater competition for resources among themselves, leading to lower wages (e.g. as argued by Easterlin, 1980).

I suspect social policy readers will experience two areas of frustration. The first is partly process, and partly the limitations of the evidence compared to some of the claims made. There are a few places where quite limited evidence is cited. The claim or observation that the number of divorces tracks the female employment rate is backed only by the vague 'Office for National Statistics; Marriage Statistics' (note 19 for chapter 3). In the section on how people are spending wealth that might instead be bequeathed, the argument surely calls for something stronger than 'We do not appear to want to pass it on to our kids' (re. *financial* wealth). These are perhaps minor points, since the assertions made are *generally* appropriately referenced.

A second limitation is that relatively little attention is given to the policy implications of the analysis, and particularly at the practical means by which the baby boomers might more widely share their wealth. The book is, with one key exception, relatively short on policies to address these issues. That exception is policy towards education, where Willetts argues for a combination of a voucher system for parental choice and that 'We must make it easier for

people, including parents themselves, to set up new schools' (p. 206) – in clear anticipation of the free schools policy of the Coalition Government. Others reading the same evidence might look at the extent of windfall capital gains, and the ability to bequeath large capital sums, as justifying policy interventions of a rather different and more direct kind.

These possible limitations do not, however, detract from the overall ambition of the book and its strong features – a clear narrative covering an impressively wide range of material.

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STEPHEN MCKAY
University of Birmingham

Anna Minton (2009), *Ground Control: Fear and Happiness in the Twenty-First Century City*. London: Penguin. £9.99, pp. 240, pbk.
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This book deals with the very important topic of urban space and in particular the incremental changes to it that have occurred, often unnoticed and even invisibly, over the last three decades. Anna Minton writes in the first person and with passion about issues such as mixed communities, the privatisation of public space and fear in the city. The book's themes emerge from detailed considerations of specific locations in England, which Minton has visited and investigated, including London's Docklands, the new retail quarter of Liverpool One, the super-affluent gated community at St George's Hill, Surrey, trailer parks for the homeless in Truro, and Derker, an Oldham neighbourhood destined for demolition. Many of these locations are featured in the book's well-chosen black and white illustrations. 'Human interest' in the form of descriptions and interviews with residents and workers (including a family of five Minton admits to having invented to illustrate her points about fear and distrust) provides the springboard for more intellectual argument about particular issues.

Ground Control successfully synthesises a large amount of material. Minton makes use of the insights of urban theorists such as Jacobs (1961), Lefebvre (1991/1974), Smith (1996) and Graham and Marvin (2001). The book also extensively references policy and practice reports, research findings and scholarly analyses. Minton acknowledges 'the large body of excellent academic work on the subject, which does not get anything like the attention it should' (p. vii), and has interviewed many academics for the book. Minton's own sharp observations of the urban landscape weave together all these data with quotes from urban professionals, such as developers, council officers and property lawyers.

The book is divided into three parts: 'The City', 'The Home' and 'Civil Society'. In the first part, the privatisation of urban space is traced back to the Thatcher government's creation of Urban Development Companies in 1980. Minton outlines how weakened planning controls have allowed the construction of large out-of-town shopping centres. She contends that these, along with city centre 'malls without walls' created by local authorities in partnership with private sector developers and the Business Improvement District concept imported from the US, are all 'blatantly security-conscious environments . . . which are responsible for growing levels of fear' (p. 14). Architectural sameness characterises both housing and commercial developments.