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## BOOK REVIEW/COMPTE RENDU

Royce, Edward. *Poverty and power: The problem of structural inequality*. Lanham, MD, USA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, 378 pages, paper, (9781538110454).

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In *Poverty and Power: The Problem of Structural Inequality*, Edward Royce tackles the debate on the causes of poverty by criticizing individualistic approaches to understanding poverty, and instead argues that we ought to explain poverty through a structural lens. In a political and cultural climate where the causes of poverty are predominately attributed to individual deficiency, Royce aims to expose the inner workings of the overarching structural systems that legitimize the stockpiling of power and wealth. Such inequitable systems leave millions of Americans without the political voice, cultural currency, and economic assets necessary to rise above the poverty line. Consequently, Royce advocates that the only means to eradicating poverty is through confronting the institutions of inequality that hoard wealth, power, and opportunity from the working class and the poor. Integrating a diverse range of research throughout his work, Royce situates the reader within the broader literature on poverty. Royce organizes his argument into three parts, which together make the case for viewing poverty as a structural problem.

In part one, Royce confronts the arguments of the individualistic approach to poverty by dissecting three theories, each blaming the poor for their impoverishment. The biogenetic theory nominates inherited cognitive ability as the chief culprit of economic outcomes; the cultural theory blames the immoral values and corrupt lifestyle of the poor; and human capital theory attributes poverty to a lack of education and skills. In Royce's rebuttal to individualistic approaches, two main themes stand out and help form his convincing case for subordinating them to structural approaches. First, he claims that the individualistic theories often invert the relationship between cause and consequence, viewing intellectual, moral, or skill-based deficits as causes of poverty. Royce argues that these deficits are better understood as consequences rather than causes of poverty, explaining that we should look to the structural circumstances of poverty, such as resource constraints and lack of opportunities for job training that consequently limit the ability of the poor to obtain human capital. Second, Royce argues that individualistic approaches, to a

limited degree, may be able to predict those most at risk for falling into poverty assuming its presence, but cannot explain why poverty exists in the first place, or why poverty rates are so high. This discrepancy results from individualistic theories failing to acknowledge the external forces that shape individual outcomes.

While Royce spares no detail in describing the flaws of the individualistic approach, he fails to flesh out a comprehensive explanation of what exactly a structural account does. Beyond describing the structural perspective as attributing poverty to forces removed from the control of individuals, referencing job shortages and inadequate safety nets, Royce devotes little space to clarifying the nature of the structural approach he advocates for. Rather than providing the reader with a clear theory of why poverty exists, Royce focuses on providing examples of structural forces, bypassing a discussion of what qualifies a given phenomenon as structural to begin with. To solidify his stance, Royce would do well to provide readers with a solid theoretical basis for a structural account of poverty. Given that power is a critical aspect of Royce's work, he ought to emphasize the relational nature of structural accounts that connects the prosperity of a few to the hardship of many.

In part two, the high point of the book lies in Royce's ability to efficiently present interrelated areas of poverty discourse by organizing the structural causes of poverty into four succinct systems. The four systems explain the existence and severity of poverty in terms of ideological, economic, social, and political mechanisms. Royce conveys to the reader how the unfortunate circumstances of the poor are not a result of their individual shortcomings, but are rather the product of decisions made by elites who dominate the economic and political atmosphere. Throughout these chapters Royce touches on many subtopics of interest, such as the threat of automation and financialization in the economic realm, and the tendency of the media and right-wing ideology in mainstream culture to portray the poor in a negative manner. Royce makes a convincing case for the structural approach, illustrating how institutions from all sectors of society function to create largescale gains for a mighty minority, and consequently leaves a majority with inadequate job prospects, a political system that excludes and works against them, a stigmatizing culture, and weak social ties to the privileges of mainstream society.

In part three, Royce deviates from macro-level systems and focuses on everyday examples of how poverty is structurally produced. Royce outlines ten obstacles that exist simultaneously as both consequences and reinforcers of poverty and inequality, from education and healthcare to residential segregation and racial discrimination. The inclusion of racial and ethnic discrimination in poverty discourse is critical, and Royce

analyzes Black and minority experiences by noting the substantially increased impact of poverty and inequality on minorities in a multitude of circumstances. A future edition could broaden the discussion on the history of racism in America. Including a deeper analysis of the history of race would help provide a structural account of racial inequality. Royce describes poverty as a social justice issue, and what better way to do this, as well as further illustrate the structural argument he's advancing, than to prioritize a group that has experienced vastly disproportional injustices and bears the brunt of systemic inequality.

Providing a brief list of policy recommendations, Royce concludes his work by connecting the structural origins of poverty to the necessity of developing policies that would function as mechanisms of redistribution of power into the hands of the poor and working class. Importantly, Royce stresses that the development of reforms is one thing but mustering the power necessary to implement them is quite another. For Royce, the perpetuation of poverty occurs because the power needed to initiate change is concentrated within a small group. Accordingly, meaningful reform cannot develop until the unequal distribution of power that is structurally legitimated is abolished. Royce therefore advocates for collective action, arguing that the poor retain power in their capacity to disrupt capital through mechanisms such as union organizing and social movements.

Overall, *Poverty and Power* is an excellent introduction to issues of poverty and inequality. Written to be used in undergraduate classrooms, Royce succeeds in producing an accessible guide for navigating theories of poverty. But the wide scope of his work functions as both an advantage and limitation. *Poverty and Power* covers a sweeping range of the core topics in poverty literature, making it a must have for introductory coursework. Although intentional, the breadth of information compacted into the work comes at the price of brevity, and so readers and instructors should note that supplementary work may be necessary for specific areas of interest. Given its approachable quality, accessibility is one of the greatest strengths of this book, making it excellent for any reader interested in educating themselves on issues of inequality and poverty. As Royce argues, getting the broader public interested in poverty is an essential prerequisite for future reform, and so he does well to write in a manner that encourages inclusion and provides an opportunity for non-academics to better understand the research on inequality and injustice.

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