

**‘Discretionary Time. A New Measure of Freedom’
Cambridge University Press, 2008**

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‘Discretionary Time’ is a book that combines originality in conceptual and theoretical terms with comparative empirical analysis of temporal autonomy in six democracies (Australia, USA, France, Germany, Finland and Sweden). Discretionary time is ‘...time the use of which is not dictated by the ‘necessities of life’. Necessities of life are the needs to access enough income to meet the minimum requirements embodied in the ‘poverty’ line, to do household labour including minding the children and personal care (eating, sleeping, bathing etc.) (p. 34f).

The international team that wrote this path breaking analysis argues that there is not only the risk of poverty in terms of money but also – and in Western democracies probably more importantly – the risk of poverty in time. Building on innovative work on time use and extending it in a systematic fashion, the authors demonstrate that ‘time matters’. They measure and study discretionary time in six democracies based on the combination of various data sets on time use and income. Discretionary time varies considerably between societies. Goodin et al. find that life cycle decisions are the most important determinants of the amount of discretionary time. However the welfare state is also a major determinant. On average, citizens enjoy five hours a week more discretionary time in social-democratic and female-friendly welfare regimes than in liberal or conservative regimes. Slightly parodying their own results, the authors summarize: ‘To maximize temporal autonomy and discretionary time, people should: marry but never have children; if they do have children, never divorce; and maybe consider.... moving to Sweden’ (p. 263).

Building on Marx’ insight ‘Oekonomie der Zeit, darein loest sich schliesslich alle Oekonomie auf’^[1] ‘Discretionary Time’ shifts the emphasis of welfare state analysis from money to time in a highly original way. The book is not only a pleasure to read and a masterpiece in comparative secondary data analysis, it is also an eye-opener which generates empirically novel and conceptually innovative perspectives on welfare regimes, gender regimes and household regimes.

[1] Grundrisse der Kritik der Politischen Oekonomie, 1857/1858, Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1974: 89