

Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism

The making of a classic

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Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism: The making of a classic

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Abstract

In this introduction to the special issue, we review the various debates spurred by Esping-Andersen's *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism*. Tracing its impact since the book's publication in 1990, we show that *Three Worlds* continues to be the point of reference for comparative welfare state research. A content analysis of articles in the *Journal of European Social Policy* citing the book indicates that *Three Worlds* may even have obtained a paradigmatic status and that its claims and findings are often taken for granted rather than challenged. We conclude that *Three Worlds* has become a classic that is likely to continue to have a major influence on welfare state research in its next 25 years.

Keywords

Esping-Andersen, Three Worlds, welfare state, modern classic

Introduction

Few books celebrate their 25th birthday with a special issue. Most academic books have a short lifespan: soon after publication, they receive an early retirement into dusty library shelves. Only rarely does a book become a classic. But what is a 'classic'? Philosopher Allan Bloom (1987: 346) has famously claimed that there are no classics in the social sciences. This assertion might be true when social science tomes are compared to Plato's *The Republic* or

Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, but this may be setting the standard a bit too high. In response to Bloom, Gift and Krislov (1991) set up six criteria for what makes a classic in their field of economics. In their scheme,

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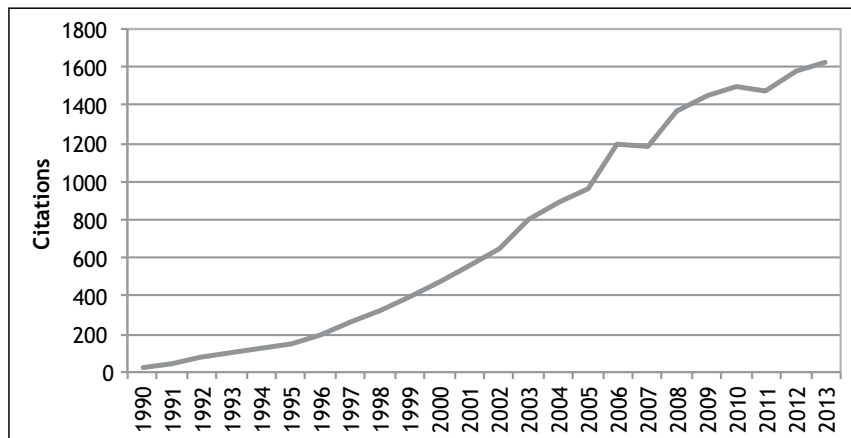


Figure 1. Annual citations of *Three Worlds* (1990–2013).
Source: Google Scholar (accessed on 28 February 2014).

a work can be called a classic if it has (1) advanced the methods of the discipline to produce new insights, (2) incorporated previous understandings of the topic by synthesis or antithesis, (3) has become a standard reference of the discipline for people outside the discipline, (4) has influenced the broader debate on the topic, (5) influenced research outside the core discipline and (6) if the work's impact is 'cross-cultural and timeless, and it must invite rereading' (Gift and Krislov, 1991: 30). We argue that Gøsta Esping-Andersen's (1990) *The Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism* lives up to all six of these criteria.

In fact, *Three Worlds* had an immediate impact on comparative welfare state research, and its status has only grown since. This is evidenced by a large and increasing number of references to the book, not only in scientific discussions but in public fora as well. In terms of citations, *Three Worlds* shows a remarkable pattern of growing interest reaching a breathtaking 1600 citations in Google Scholar in 2013 alone (Figure 1). Today, *Three Worlds* is a standard reference in virtually all social science disciplines.

Earlier discussions of the impact of *Three Worlds* on comparative welfare state research have looked at the origins of its framework and set out the empirical state of the art (Abrahamson, 1999; Art and Gelissen, 2002; Kvist and Torfing, 1996). However, they did not engage with the question of how *Three Worlds* has shaped our thinking about the welfare state.

What has been its impact over time, disciplines and subject areas? How is *Three Worlds* used? Is it simply a convenient tool for case selection for comparative welfare state researchers, or has it played a more substantial role?

We address these questions in this introduction to the special issue celebrating the 25 years of *Three Worlds*. In brief, we set out the main arguments of *Three Worlds*, describing its reception and the use of the book in academic writing. Subsequently, we introduce the other articles in this special issue.

Three Worlds and its main arguments

Already before *Three Worlds*, Esping-Andersen (1985) made a lasting impact on welfare state research with his historical analysis of the Scandinavian welfare states in *Politics Against Markets*. This book, based on Korpi's (1983) power resource theory, argued that the Scandinavian welfare model was mainly the result of strong, social democratic labour movements and that variation in the strength of the labour movement explained welfare state variation. Moving from *Politics Against Markets* to *Three Worlds*, Esping-Andersen addressed a major challenge to power resource theory, namely, that it worked better in Scandinavia, and best in Sweden, than elsewhere. *Three Worlds* provided an analytical framework to overcome this 'Swedo-centric' (Shalev, 1983) bias of power resource theory, allowing for a

more sophisticated understanding of what welfare states are and what they do.

The impressive impact of *Three Worlds* can partly be ascribed to three interrelated arguments. First, Esping-Andersen demonstrated that distinct historical-political developments in capitalist societies resulted in three types of welfare states: Liberal, Conservative and Social Democratic. He argued against the conventional wisdom of functionalist theories portraying the welfare state as a response to social, economic and demographic change (Flora and Alber, 1981; Gough, 1979; Wilensky, 1975). Instead, he proposed that a weak left led to the development of Liberal welfare states, mainly in the Anglo-Saxon countries with the United States as the main example. Strong conservative and Christian democratic parties led to Conservative welfare states in continental Europe, while strong left-wing parties led to a Social Democratic welfare state in the Nordic countries. One of the main contributions of *Three Worlds* is thus its insistence on distinct pathways having led to different welfare state types.

Second, Esping-Andersen argued that the three welfare state types reflect different political ideologies with regard to stratification, de-commodification and the public-private mix of welfare. In the Liberal model, the state serves only those persons in need when family and market solutions fail, mainly through minimum income schemes. In the Conservative model, the state focuses on maintaining the status of insiders mainly through social insurance schemes. In the Social Democratic model, the state plays a larger role for the whole population, combining minimum income for all with generous benefits for middle-income earners. With this tripartite scheme, *Three Worlds* broke with the idea that the relevant variation among welfare states consists in the timing of introduction of schemes or size of social expenditure. Differences among welfare states were not simply 'more or less' based on separate, one-dimensional aspects. Rather, there was a qualitative difference among them, with matching political ideologies.

Third, Esping-Andersen argued that welfare state types have systematically different economic, political and social consequences. In his analysis, the welfare state moves from a dependent to an independent

variable that can explain other outcomes. *Three Worlds* highlights that 'of the many social institutions that are likely to be directly shaped and ordered by the welfare state, working life, employment and the labour market are perhaps the most important' (Esping-Andersen, 1990: 141). Esping-Andersen implicitly suggested that the list of areas affected by the welfare state might be much longer; it was an invitation for further research.

The reception of *Three Worlds*

Leaving aside an astounding number of misspellings of the author's name, the overall reception of *Three Worlds* in reviews published in leading journals was quite positive. A notable exception is Cnaan (1992) who stated that 'the greatest weakness of this book is the author's failure to provide sound empirical support for his interesting theoretical formulations. The methodological concerns are so numerous that I can only list a few' (Cnaan, 1992: 69).

Most reviewers immediately recognized *Three Worlds*' innovative approach to comparative welfare state research and foresaw its impact. O'Connell (1991) stated that the book was 'destined to lay the groundwork for future generations of research into welfare policy' (p. 534). Baldwin (1992) praised it as a 'wonderfully stimulating, lucid, and path-breaking new book' (p. 702). Huber (1992) found *Three Worlds* 'a milestone that all future research on the welfare state will have to take as a point of reference' (p. 555), while Hicks (1991) predicted that 'Esping-Andersen's path-breaking dimensions for clustering should motivate a veritable cottage industry of more technically skilled cluster analyses' (p. 400).

Needless to say, these reviewers as well as other scholars (e.g. Klein, 1991; Offe, 1991; Schwarz, 1991) also criticized *Three Worlds*: the concept of de-commodification was underspecified, the historical durability of welfare regimes (including the possibility of change) was questioned, real and ideal types were confused, causal mechanisms were not sufficiently operationalized, mutual imitation was neglected and, of course, the tripartite scheme of welfare regimes was either too broad or too few.

Although these were substantial criticisms – including those of feminist welfare state researchers

– the sustained interest in *Three Worlds* is evidence of the versatility of its concepts. Criticism often (though not always) resulted in a fruitful dialogue and revision of the main arguments of *Three Worlds*. Different strands of critique of the book have established research topics in their own right. Thus, let us briefly take a look at the criticism of each of the three innovations in the book, that is, the causes, the types and the consequences of welfare states.

The first type of criticism concerns Esping-Andersen's historical argument. Several scholars questioned whether the actual development of countries' welfare states has followed the path of the 'world' they are conventionally seen as belonging to. These critics expanded the list of variables needed to explain welfare state development, including religion (Van Kersbergen, 1995), institutional veto points (Immergut, 1992), the feminist movement (Lewis, 1992) and war (Castles, 2010). Others have questioned whether Esping-Andersen correctly theorized the interests of relevant actors in welfare state development. For instance, Baldwin (1990), Nørgaard (2000) and Manow (2009) have reminded us that some universal social policies in the Social Democratic welfare states, most notably pensions, were the result of the political mobilization of farmers and not the labour movement.¹

Second, scholars criticized the argument that political ideologies are reflected in the policy configurations of three welfare regimes. Two issues were raised: how to operationalize the welfare state and how to classify countries.

'Hell has no fury like a mislabelled specimen', as Baldwin (1996: 38) noted when describing the often heated debate on country categorizations. With the transition of Central and Eastern European countries and the emergence of the Asian Tigers, the classification debate came to encompass both the correct categorization of 'old' welfare capitalist countries and a discussion of whether the 'new' ones could be included in the *Three Worlds* framework. In the course of these debates, several new welfare state types have been suggested, some of which entered the standard repertoire of comparative research. Cases in point are the 'Post-Communist Conservative-Corporatism' welfare states used to characterize some of the new democracies of the 1990s (Deacon,

1993), the 'Labourist' or 'Radical' type in Australia (Castles and Mitchell, 1993), the 'Latin Rim' label covering the less developed Southern European welfare states (Leibfried, 1993) and the 'Confucian' type welfare states in the Asian Tigers and Japan (Gould, 1993). Esping-Andersen (1993) attempted to counter these efforts by reminding critics that the goal of the original typology was complexity reduction. The marginal utility of a typology diminishes with an increasing number of types.

Three Worlds also shaped debates on how to operationalize the welfare state (compare Clasen and Siegel, 2007). Feminist welfare state scholars probably formulated the most prominent criticism of the operationalization of the welfare state as promulgated in *Three Worlds*, criticizing the theoretical framework and particularly the de-commodification measure as being gender-blind (O'Connor, 1996; Orloff, 1993; Sainsbury, 1994). They argued that traditional (female) caregivers were first to be commodified before they could benefit from de-commodification and that welfare states stratify men and women in terms of access to benefits. These feminist scholars also suggested that some welfare states provided public social services that de-familiarized care, thus enabling women to participate in the labour market (Anttonen and Sipilä, 1995; Lewis, 1992; O'Connor, 1993). As a consequence, some studies have tried to modify the theoretical framework behind Esping-Andersen's welfare state regimes along the lines of the feminist critique (Orloff, 1993), or they have suggested alternative 'gendered' regimes (Langan and Ostner, 1991; Lewis and Ostner, 1994). Some of this criticism spurred Esping-Andersen to revise his regime typology considerably by paying more attention to the family and gender (Esping-Andersen, 1999, 2009).

Scholars from many fields have studied Esping-Andersen's third argument that welfare states systematically influence social, economic and political outcomes. This literature typically tests the regime specificity of outcomes or uses the framework to study new areas. Welfare regimes have been found to correlate with a long series of variables (reduced social inequality, higher level of female employment, lower fertility and leftist political preferences

to name just a few). However, it is not always clear exactly how welfare states influence the outcomes. Indeed, the regimes are often represented by dummy variables whose impact is not theorized explicitly.

Empirical analyses have not always been able to support the regime theory, and some important debates linger on. Prominently among these are questions of whether and how welfare state institutions shape welfare state attitudes (Jæger, 2006; Larsen, 2008; Svallfors, 1997). Another prominent example is the ‘New Politics’ literature (Pierson, 1994, 2001), which claims that the ‘old’ explanatory models of welfare state expansion cannot explain the development of welfare states after the golden age. In this light, scholars have debated the extent to which welfare state retrenchment can be observed and whether partisan differences have ceased to explain cross-national variation. While authors working with social expenditure have typically found support for the ‘new politics’ thesis (e.g. Huber and Stephens, 2001; Kittel and Obinger, 2003), those scholars who have worked with social rights as their dependent variable – following Esping-Andersen – have observed considerably more retrenchment and have continued to emphasize the relevance of power resources (e.g. Allan and Scruggs, 2004; Korpi and Palme, 2003). Recently, scholars have argued that changes in the substance of the welfare state are more fundamental than foreseen by either Esping-Andersen or Pierson (Bonoli and Natali, 2012; Emmenegger et al., 2012; Palier, 2010; Van Kersbergen and Vis, 2013). At stake here is the value of *Three Worlds* for explaining contemporary welfare reforms.

The uses of *Three Worlds*

What role has *Three Worlds* played in comparative welfare state research? Are its insights taken for granted or challenged by new research? How has *Three Worlds* been used? We try to answer these questions by examining how the book has been cited in the flagship journal of comparative welfare state research: the *Journal of European Social Policy* (JESP). Between 1991 and 2013, *Three Worlds* has been cited in 152 JESP articles, one-third of all JESP articles during this period.² According to Thomson Reuters’ Web of Science, this makes JESP the

academic journal with the most references to *Three Worlds*.

To obtain a better understanding of how *Three Worlds* is used in comparative welfare state research, we have read and coded the 152 JESP articles that cited the book. As a first step, we distinguished whether or not articles engage with *Three Worlds* in a ‘strong’ manner, whereby we mean that an argument from the book is at the centre of the analysis. To qualify as ‘strong’, one of the article’s major themes has to be directly linked to *Three Worlds*. All other articles are classified as ‘weak’.

Figure 2 shows references to *Three Worlds* as a share of all articles in JESP per year (1991–2013), divided according to those with ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ engagement. The trend line shows that an increasing share of JESP articles have cited the book, reaching more than 50 percent of all published articles in 2013. This increase mirrors the general trend depicted in Figure 1 based on Google Scholar data. However, this increase is mostly driven by articles that do not engage directly with *Three Worlds*, in the ‘strong’ manner described above. Whereas the relatively few citations in the 1990s were often ‘strong’, this form of engagement stagnates in the 2000s.³

The group of articles engaging ‘strongly’ with *Three Worlds* covers different forms of engagement. These articles (1) discuss the book’s theoretical contributions (*theoretical discussion*), (2) empirically test whether countries cluster into the hypothesized ‘worlds’ (*empirical test*), (3) criticize the lack of gender discussion in the book (*gender focus*), (4) discuss the necessity to add further ‘worlds’ (*focus on fourth world*) or (5) use the book’s theoretical arguments to account for other outcomes, in which case we have coded the engagement as ‘strong’ only when the authors have used the book’s arguments to formulate their most important hypotheses in the empirical analysis (*as explanation*). A residual (sixth) category captures other uses of *Three Worlds* (*other*). If appropriate, articles have been assigned to multiple categories. Finally, we have coded whether articles are very critical of *Three Worlds* or whether the articles more or less accept the basic premises of the book.

Articles that do ‘weakly’ engage with *Three Worlds* may use the book for a multitude of reasons. We

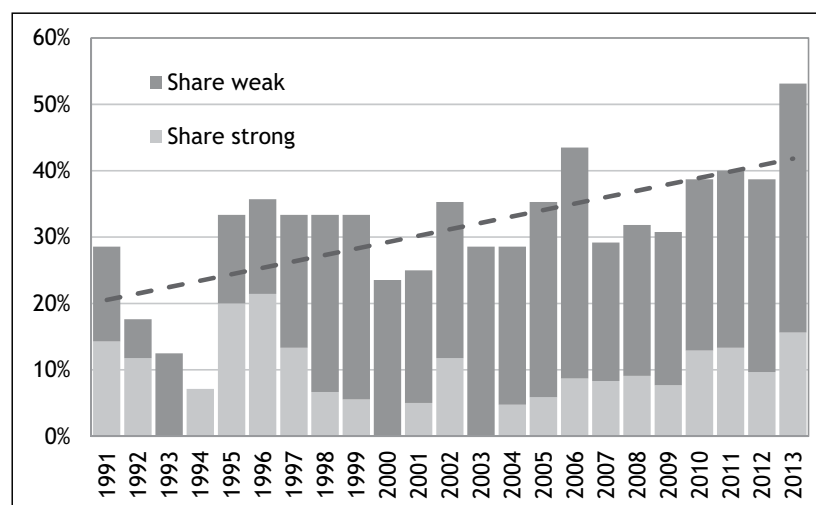


Figure 2. ‘Strong’ and ‘weak’ references to *Three Worlds* as percentage of all articles in JESP per year (1991–2013). JESP: *Journal of European Social Policy*. Authors’ coding and calculation (see text for details). Dotted line represents linear trend of combined share of ‘strong’ and ‘weak’ references.

distinguish between articles that use the book to (1) refer to comparative welfare state research in general and not specifically to the book (*general reference*), (2) discuss the empirical implications of the welfare regimes without examining their causal effects in great detail (*empirical implications*), (3) justify their case selection for the empirical analysis (*case selection*), (4) rely on *Three Worlds* to discuss how to capture welfare state generosity (*operationalization*) or (5) use the welfare regimes as independent (control) variables in their empirical analysis (*independent variable*). Again, a residual (sixth) category captures other (weak) uses of *Three Worlds* (*other*), and assignments to multiple categories are possible.

Figure 3 presents the more detailed coding results for the entire observation period. Within both types of engagement, we distinguish the non-exclusive types of references outlined above. The bars represent the relative frequency of any type of reference within the respective form of engagement. For instance, 23 percent of the articles which were coded as ‘strong engagement’ had a focus on a fourth world of welfare capitalism, and 30 percent of the articles ‘weakly’ engaging with the book used *Three Worlds* to justify case selection.

As noted above, the engagement with the book is often ‘weak’ (see Figure 2). In addition, only 6 out of

43 (14%) articles ‘strongly’ engaged with the book formulated some form of fundamental criticism. These critical articles hence make up less than 4 percent of *all* 152 JESP articles citing *Three Worlds*. Critical articles come in three main forms: first, some articles examine whether countries cluster as predicted. The results are mixed, with some confirming the *Three Worlds* conclusion, while others reject it.

Second, several authors use case studies to question the validity of *Three Worlds*. While most authors use their findings to suggest minor revisions to the theoretical framework or adding a fourth world, some authors have criticized the extent to which Esping-Andersen’s broad comparative analysis neglects national and subnational specificities, thus constituting an argument against the book’s choice of methodological approach.⁴

Finally, a few authors have criticized *Three Worlds* for neglecting gender and care work in its analysis. The small number of *strongly critical* articles might come as a surprise given the prominence of the debate in the 1990s but may be explained in part by feminist scholarship establishing their own journal (*Social Politics*). What is more, many articles in the feminist tradition have in fact refrained from ‘strongly’ engaging with *Three Worlds*, a view expressed by Lewis in her 2006 review essay on

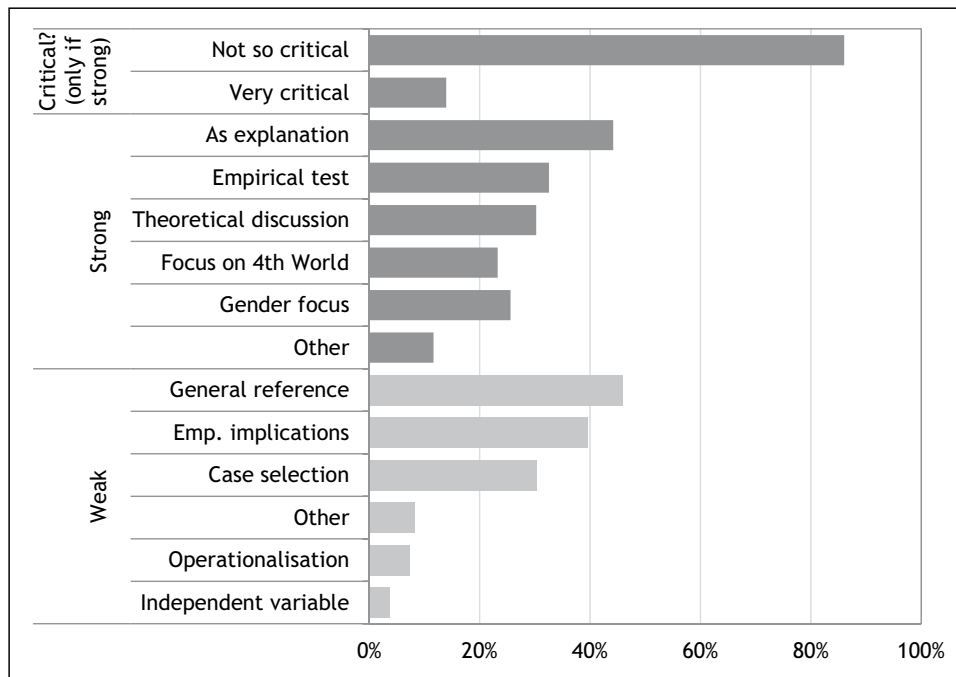


Figure 3. Different types of references to *Three Worlds* by type of engagement as percentage of all articles in strong/weak category (1991–2013).

Authors' coding and calculation (see text for details). In total, there are 43 strong and 109 weak engagements. Different types of references are non-exclusive within type of engagement.

gender and the welfare state, where she criticized many contributions for their 'lack of references to some of the latest literature and, less excusably, persistent reference to Esping-Andersen's (1990) welfare typologies as either rationale for country selection, or, worse still, as a factual reference point' (Lewis, 2006: 388).

The most frequent type of reference in the 'strong' category uses *Three Worlds* as an explanation of phenomena outside the scope of the original book (44% of all articles in the 'strong' category). Empirical tests of the book's major arguments, discussions of the book's main theoretical statements, explorations of the need to consider a fourth welfare regime and, finally, examinations of the relevance of gender and care are common as well (all between 23% and 33%). Again, what is surprising is how little fundamental criticism these efforts have produced. In our view, the results substantiate the critique formulated by Van Kersbergen and Vis (this issue), according to which *Three Worlds* has obtained paradigmatic status in welfare state research.

This interpretation is further strengthened by the analysis of the 'weak' references to the book. Whereas the majority of the references use the book as a general reference (e.g. to the welfare state literature or power resource theory), it is also quite common to use the book's framework to select countries representing different worlds of welfare or to organize empirical material by welfare regimes. One may add that the latter two types of use often do not contain any explicit theoretical reasoning and, hence, seem to be grounded in conventions rather than reflections. Probably, the most questionable type of reference is that which uses the three (or four) worlds of welfare as independent (control) variables in regression analyses without explicating the theoretical mechanism linking regimes with the outcome under scrutiny. However, such articles make up only a small share of the 'weak' category.

In sum, the influence of *Three Worlds* on comparative welfare state research can hardly be overstated. In recent years, almost 50 percent of all articles published in JESP have referred to the book,

and the proportion has been increasing. There is some evidence that *Three Worlds* evolved into a work that authors felt had to be cited in order to justify case selection or to serve as a shorthand for the organization of empirical evidence. *Three Worlds* has become a book whose findings are often taken for granted instead of constantly questioned (a situation that the book and its author can hardly be blamed for). At the same time, 25 years after its publication, *Three Worlds* continues to inspire innovative research and fruitful debates, as evidenced by the contributions to this special issue.

The contributions to the special issue

This special issue celebrates the 25th birthday of what is arguably the most influential book in comparative welfare state research. How should we approach such a task within the framework of a special issue? We have decided to bring together contributions that gauge the impact that *Three Worlds* has had on different debates. In addition, we have also sought contributions that could be forward-looking, advancing the debates initiated by *Three Worlds*. The contributions in this special issue were thus selected to reflect *some* of the most important arguments put forward in *Three Worlds* as well as the debates ensuing from them. However, each article goes *beyond* analysing these arguments' impact on the scholarly literature and makes an original contribution to the research agenda created by *Three Worlds*.

In the first article, Jennifer Hook takes her point of departure in the critique of *Three Worlds*' neglect of gender and care. While much of the feminist literature has subsequently developed alternative typologies of 'gender regimes', Hook defends the relevance of Esping-Andersen's work. Analysing work-family arrangements, she shows that in the absence of state-provided de-familiarizing care, economic inequality crucially influences levels of female employment. In her account, class inequality is the missing variable that connects *Three Worlds* and alternative typologies of 'gender regimes'.

Hook, however, postulates the existence of four, rather than three, different 'worlds' of work-family arrangements. In doing so, she follows the early (and

by now widely accepted) revision of Esping-Andersen's threefold classification by adding a fourth, Southern European 'world'. Despite the broad acceptance of this fourth world, we still know little about how it came into existence. In his contribution, Philip Manow departs from Esping-Andersen's assertion that political coalition building in the transition from a rural economy to an urban, industrial society with a middle class was decisive for the formation of different worlds of welfare. However, he argues that the more acute Church-State conflict in the South made impossible a coalition between pious farmers and anti-clerical workers, thereby setting the Southern European countries on a rather different development path from the countries of the north. This cleft explains why Northern and Southern European countries systemically differ with regard to the electoral success of communist parties and the subsequent impact on welfare state development.

Class and class coalitions are also at the heart of the contribution by Jane Gingrich and Silja Häusermann. Starting from the observation that class-based voting is universally declining, they analyse which occupational groups now form the coalitions supporting the welfare state. Gingrich and Häusermann demonstrate that socio-structural changes lead to a reconfiguration of modern welfare states, abandoning their focus on the interests of industrial male breadwinners and slowly moving towards a welfare state serving dual earner couples working in the public services.

There are not many recent contributions to the scholarly literature that rival *Three Worlds* in terms of impact. Among the few are the contributions to the Varieties of Capitalism literature (in particular, Hall and Soskice, 2001). Authors in this scholarly tradition have engaged with those, such as Esping-Andersen and others, who are close to power resource theory, in a very fruitful debate about the political determinants of cross-national variation in distributional politics in recent years. In their contribution to this special issue, Torben Iversen and David Soskice revisit this debate. In a novel theoretical argument that compares policies aimed at vulnerable low-productivity sectors with those for advanced, high-productivity sectors, they argue that both *Three Worlds* and Varieties of Capitalism might

be right. In particular, they argue that while policies for workers in vulnerable low-productivity sectors reflect the strength and composition of distributive coalitions, policies for advanced high-productivity sectors typically garner cross-class support. In this latter case, the welfare state is better understood as ‘politics for markets’, rather than ‘politics against markets’.

Few would associate *Three Worlds* with labour market research, but the book’s second part is in fact dedicated to employment structures. Here, Esping-Andersen has anticipated the scholarly and political debate on the effects of welfare institutions on (service sector) job growth and particularly the negative relationship between equality and employment growth. Daniel Oesch takes issue with some of the gloomy predictions about the ‘dilemmas’ (Esping-Andersen, 1999) or the ‘trilemma’ (Iversen and Wren, 1998) of the service economy. Instead, he shows that structural change in Denmark and Germany has led to occupational upgrading rather than polarization. He explains these divergent findings as a result of the neglect of changing labour supply and an undue focus on Baumol’s cost disease in the earlier literature. Thus, he challenges central assumptions in the debate about the welfare–employment nexus and the service economy.

Kees van Kersbergen and Barbara Vis take a step back and examine the overall debate *Three Worlds* has produced. They argue that some of these debates have evolved into what Thomas Kuhn (1970) has called ‘normal science’. Accordingly, welfare state research has come to accept the book’s paradigmatic status and all too often refrains from questioning its premises. Instead of producing fundamentally new knowledge, researchers tend to limit themselves to miniscule fine-tuning within the three-worlds paradigm. Van Kersbergen and Vis suggest that these risk-averse choices are the result of the expanding publish-or-perish culture in academia. However, without blaming Esping-Andersen for the reception of *Three Worlds*, they also identify weaknesses in his work that have impeded a more constructive engagement with the book. Their prime example is the confusion of typology and ideal type.

The special issue concludes with an essay by Gøsta Esping-Andersen, in which he picks up a topic

that, although central to comparative welfare state research, was somewhat underdeveloped in *Three Worlds*: what are the effects of welfare state regimes on post-industrial stratification scenarios? He shows that the Scandinavian Social Democratic welfare states have effectively equalized opportunity structures, whereas this is not the case in Conservative and Liberal regimes. In addition, his analysis suggests that this equalization is largely a ‘bottom-up’ achievement. While Social Democratic welfare states enhance upward mobility chances for working-class offspring, this equalization does not come at the cost of the advantages bestowed upon the privileged classes.

As we have shown in this introduction, *Three Worlds* lives up to Gift and Krislov’s criteria of being a classic. It has advanced the methods in comparative welfare state research, synthesized earlier work, turned into a ‘standard reference’ and has certainly inspired debates beyond the confines of its own discipline. And, as the contributions to this issue demonstrate, it also invites rereading. Therefore, we hope this issue makes a contribution to 25 more years of strong engagement with *Three Worlds*.

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Notes

1. This argument was actually a response to Esping-Andersen’s analysis of the formation of the Scandinavian welfare state in *Politics Against Markets* (Esping-Andersen, 1985).
2. Many more articles refer to other contributions by Esping-Andersen. In this analysis, however, we consider only references to *Three Worlds*. In three articles, *Three Worlds* is listed in the bibliography but not mentioned in the main text or endnotes. These three articles are not included in the analysis presented here.
3. The *absolute* number of articles ‘strongly’ engaging with *Three Worlds* has increased from 15 in the interval between 1991 and 2001 to 23 articles in the decade 2002 and 2012. However, the total number of published articles increased even faster.

4. The debate about the correct number of 'worlds' has arguably been one of the most prominent debates of the 1990s. However, the authors who have contributed to this debate have typically accepted the basic premises of the book.

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