



# Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis

*Nancy Fraser*

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**Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis** Nancy Fraser  
Charts the history of women's liberation and calls for a revitalized feminism.

Nancy Fraser's major new book traces the feminist movement's evolution since the 1970s and anticipates a new—radical and egalitarian—phase of feminist thought and action.

During the ferment of the New Left, "Second Wave" feminism emerged as a struggle for women's liberation and took its place alongside other radical movements that were questioning core features of capitalist society. But feminism's subsequent immersion in identity politics coincided with a decline in its utopian energies and the rise of neoliberalism. Now, foreseeing a revival in the movement, Fraser argues for a reinvigorated feminist radicalism able to address the global economic crisis. Feminism can be a force working in concert with other egalitarian movements in the struggle to bring the economy under democratic control, while building on the visionary potential of the earlier waves of women's liberation. This powerful new account is set to become a landmark of feminist thought.

## Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis Details

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## From Reader Review Fortunes of Feminism. From State-Managed Capitalism to Neoliberal Crisis for online ebook

### Stephanie says

Some of the ideas and essays in this book have so thoroughly restructured the way I think about gender and labor, especially reproductive labor, that I can't remember what it was like not to have read it. Amazing, incredible, work, especially the following essays:

- "A Genealogy of Dependency: Tracing a Keyword of the US Welfare State" - a how-to manual for how Democrats and Republicans successfully dismantled a social safety network by twisting words and meaning
  - "After the Family Wage: A Postindustrial Thought Experiment" - if you're ever frustrated with the leftist tendency to end stirring, tear-down critiques with feeble hand-motioning towards a "sketch" for the future, look no further than Nancy's thorough outline for a future society that is clear, cogent, and just may save us all
  - "Feminist Politics in the Age of Recognition" - swoon. for everyone sick of the schism between identity and class politics (it's yes AND, friends, yes AND)
  - "Feminism, Capitalism, and the Cunning of History"
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### Emma Sea says

NTS: requested via library

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### Anna says

This is a good collection if you don't understand what feminism and neoliberalism have to do with each other. However, it is very strange that Fraser co-wrote an entire essay on the rhetoric surrounding welfare "dependency" and did not examine or even refer to the similar rhetoric about disability payments and/or SSDI. Feminist theory seems to CONSISTENTLY leave out disability and disabled people, which is a shame--but the absence is even clearer in this collection. Given that there are many feminist economic and disability-related economic issues that intersect, I wish Fraser had at the very least acknowledged those connections.

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### Muireann says

This rating reflects the poor selection of essays that make up this collection, rather than a judgement on Fraser's writing as such, which probably can't be ranked by stars!

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### Georgina Jiménez says

Nancy Fraser es indispensable para analizar críticamente el (los) feminismo(s) y el concepto de justicia desde una mirada de interseccionalidad.

En algunos momentos el libro tiende a repetirse (entendible en una colección de ensayos escritos a lo largo del desarrollo de sus propias teorías) pero es un excelente desarrollo cronológico de cómo las intenciones, los fines y las interpretaciones del feminismo y la justicia van cambiando de acuerdo al encuadre ideológico predominante; los errores que se cometen, las posibles soluciones y el porvenir teórico y práctico completan el análisis de lo que hace falta y lo que se puede hacer. Muy recomendable.

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### **Nathan Fisher says**

I didn't find this a particularly well-selected or structured collection -- at times, begging for elaboration; at others, noticeably redundant -- but Fraser remains a clear-headed and bold thinker; while I think some of her attempts to 'unify' disparate tendencies remains incomplete, some of the work here is fantastic -- particularly the sections on competing notions of social 'needs,' the genealogy of notions of 'dependency,' her uncompromising corrective to certain Lacanian feminists, and her ability to identify exactly the tendencies within second-wave feminism that so neatly dovetailed with those of neoliberalism (while refusing to collapse the movement into those).

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### **Lechiot Volant says**

Bon aperçu historique. La critique du féminisme de 2ème vague est intéressante. Moins convaincue par les concepts de justice sociale et de reconnaissance trop moraux à mon goût

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### **Daniel says**

Some writers circle gently around an argument, inviting the reader to figure it out well before it's spelled out explicitly. Nancy Fraser does not do that. This is an impressive collection of essays which leaps for the throat, tearing through philosophers and generally coming out on top. She does a superb job of challenging the work of both Judith Butler and the Lacanians. I agree with most of Fraser's conclusions: the chapter on dependency (co-authored with a historian, which shows) is excellent, and her arguments for a 'universal caregiver' model are well-made. Her central argument - that feminism has been resignified in a dangerous liaison with neoliberalism, simultaneously a movement for emancipation and increasingly an 'empty signifier of the good' - is, I think, correct and worth making. Perhaps above all, Fraser emphasises the importance of 'process' in a way which chimes with my own thoughts - and, unsurprisingly, I appreciated her several references to Raymond Williams...

At the same time, there was also quite a bit that I took exception to. I was initially uncomfortable about her recourse to a Weberian distinction between 'class', 'status' and 'party' (and especially the narrow economic view of class which this can leave unchallenged), although I was somewhat persuaded by her argument that this is a historically specific phenomenon. Still, I'm not sure she does enough to show that this holds - it certainly feels like the opposite, that claims about 'class' and 'status' in the contemporary situation are usually rolled together, inseparable. It isn't quite like the distinction between 'the economic' and 'the political' or the other distinctions which Fraser discusses - it isn't a distinction which feels like the common sense of capitalism.

Another problem emerges in Fraser's description of three kinds of injustice: maldistribution, misrecognition, and misframing. I think this is useful analytically, although per Fraser's quasi-Weberianism these are ideal-typical distinctions rather than in any sense distinctions which emerge out of the logic of capitalism - it wouldn't make sense to talk about maldistribution and misrecognition diverging, etc. Still, the notion of 'misframing' is particularly useful and Fraser is right to try and understand the significance of globalisation for notions of justice. Fraser spends a lot of time making clear that none of these forms of injustice is primary, but I fear that was time wasted - although it's fraught with danger, it's useful to try and establish what's determining 'in the last instance' as opposed to surrendering to a messy totality. More significantly, perhaps, I think there's a severe limitation in the way that Fraser discusses 'maldistribution' - something which she pushes up against when discussing the 'universal caregiver'. Fraser, for all her discussion of need, still tends to conceive of justice in terms of work rewarded - taken a few steps further, her argument could have been more forcefully made into an attack on capitalism and production-for-profit. I don't see how there can be any just distribution based on rewarding work (whether that's productive in the Marxist sense or otherwise) in a world dominated by markets: how could you possibly avoid inequality between families headed by two-workers and those headed by one? I suspect that's Fraser's point, but I'm not sure this comes through with much clarity - the answer isn't just a 'universal caregiver' model in which everyone is potentially a care-worker and where care-work is rewarded as productive work, but a society in which production is for need and not profit and where distribution is according to need and not ability. Ultimately that means shifting from Fraser's notion of 'maldistribution' towards a sense of production-injustice; away from the sphere of distribution, towards the sphere of production.

Relatedly, I found the final chapter engaging with Karl Polanyi to be - at least by comparison - very poor. Although I agree with the criticisms that she makes, there's still too much which Fraser accepts needlessly - we can agree that Polanyi poses a useful challenge to mainstream economic thinking without having to start adopting his terms and methods. She describes Polanyi as detailing a capitalist crisis which stretched from the industrial revolution to the Second World War - it's a sense of crisis which can be rhetorically useful (i.e. capitalism is crisis) but analytically a bit weak, losing the specificity of crisis events like 1929 or 2007. More significantly, I do not think there are adequate grounds for Fraser's wholesale acceptance of Polanyi's marketization/protection distinction. Marketization is relatively coherent as a phenomenon arising from the logic of capitalist accumulation, but 'protection' is such a messy idea that it really defies attempts to make use of it. It is futile to try and discuss the protectionism of some parts of the capitalist class, and the 'protections' sought by e.g. peasants resisting enclosure, as if they are part of the same movement. They are not. Fraser's articulation of 'emancipation' poses a useful challenge to Polanyi, but the idea that marketization/protection/emancipation are three different forces pulling in three different directions (and sometimes the same ones) is next to worthless. By focusing on these forces - described largely in policy terms - Fraser (and Polanyi) avoid talking in terms of class (or race or gender). Rather than a transnational capitalist class competing (through marketization \*and\* particular protectionisms) with a nationally-restricted capitalist class (which again relies on particular combinations of marketization and protection), and both against a proletariat which can form alliances of convenience with either of them, there are advocates of 'protection' and advocates of 'marketization'. Rather than an internally differentiated proletariat struggling continuously against itself over gender, race, etc - there are advocates of 'emancipation' and its opponents. Even a two-dimensional approach (in which marketization/protection form one axis, domination/emancipation another) would be more coherent than what Fraser offers - but I still don't think there is a need to resort to focusing on 'forces' in this manner. Fraser's use of Karl Polanyi comes across as the work of someone afraid to refer to Karl Marx except in a footnote.

For all Fraser's astute description of the turn in second-wave feminism, in combination with neoliberalism, away from 'social justice', it's a turn which she remains locked within. She is right to suggest that much of Western feminism has been bureaucratised, made to serve the interests of capital, divorced from the masses, etc. But her appeal remains sadly limited to the academics and GNO workers whose influence she has lamented - it winds up as less an appeal to the masses, more an appeal for better policy. Brenna Bhandar and Denise Ferreira da Silva were right to rebuke Fraser for failing to cite feminist thinking emerging from the

Third World (<https://www.versobooks.com/blogs/1438...>). Fraser is right to place emphasis upon 'process' in her conception of justice, but she doesn't do enough to integrate and interpret the feminism emerging from real processes of struggle. If she did so, this book would be even more useful - a real work of feminist philosophy, and not merely a (very good, worthwhile, well-argued) dispute with feminist philosophers.

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### **Sara Salem says**

Last time I read a book that is a collection of essays just thrown together. Her intro was brilliant which is why I decided to read the book, only to find out that the chapters don't match because they are all essays on different topics and are not brought together well. Sad, since her work is so important.

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### **Rafaella says**

Some essays in this collection are better than others (I personally skipped over most of the first chapter on Habermasian philosophy, while I found the chapters on "dependency", the family wage, and feminist politics "in the age of recognition" particularly useful). Overall an important read that shows how feminism, which once drew upon Marxist thinking, can and must be reconciled with political economy. Also great for anyone interested in the problem of "identity politics": Fraser asserts that we need identity politics (or rather, a re-worked politics of "recognition", as she would call it) but we need to go beyond neoliberal interpretations of identity to re-assert a "politics of redistribution" (as she would call it, maybe a bit reductively) if we want true social justice.

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### **Emily says**

don't feel like i can really offer a rating on this because a lot of it went straight over my head. i was expecting it to be a little more aimed at laypersons, and it really, really isn't - incredibly dense text that i struggled to parse, no doubt because i have basically no education in sociology. so i struggled with the technical terms, i guess. on the few moments that i could grasp the gist, it seemed comprehensive, literate, powerful. but for the most part i had trouble keeping up.

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### **Benjamin Eskola says**

This book is actually a collection of essays, and so its quality is slightly variable; although there is an overarching theme with several of the essays building on those which came before, in places it can be repetitive and in others it feels disconnected. At times, also, it could be excessively philosophical: critiques of Habermas and Kristeva were mostly over my head, having read no Habermas and almost no Kristeva; and the language used in places is oddly linguistic (the author talks, for example, about the 'grammar' of social movements, as if social movements are nothing but discussion). However, the chapters that dealt with more concrete matters were interesting; she begins to flesh out a model which could be used to address both economic and social/cultural issues, avoiding the tendency to focus on either one to the exclusion of the other; later, she expands on this model to address the tendency of globalized neoliberalism to negate responsibility for both economic and social issues.

## Steffi says

Nancy Fraser is without a doubt one of the most original and exciting critical theorists of our time.

Premise: the current crisis of neoliberal capitalism is altering the landscape of feminist theory, i.e., feminist theorists cannot avoid the question of capitalist society (I wish!).

In her ten essays in three parts (all great reads) which span 25 years of her writing, she traces the radical origins of second wave feminism which sought to enrich rather than supplant Marxism/materialist paradigms before feminism was drawn in the orbit of 'identity politics' ending up with today's degenerated neoliberal 'feminism' and 'gender studies' as a ridiculous branch of cultural theory which has lost its historic links with Marxism/ political economy (e.g. from redistribution to recognition).

Fraser then goes on to outline a two-dimensional conceptions of gender and justice: class-like within the political economy (distribution) and as status subordination (misrecognition), the latter not being merely superstructural to the former (breaks my Marxist heart). As such, redressing gender injustice requires changing both the economic structure and the status order of contemporary society (dialectics, surprise, surprise). Something along the lines of Gramscianizing Foucault and Foucauldianizing Gramsci :)

Finally, Fraser brings in Polanyi's account of capitalist crisis as a starting point for feminist theorizing on the 21st century capitalist society.

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## Charlie Sanjaya says

Fortune of Feminism is a thoroughly great read. More than ever, we need a feminism that is critical to neoliberalism yet able to explore alternative beyond tamed capitalism under social democratic model. The last chapter is especially important and highly recommended to be a central question we need to ask as a movement.

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