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Abstract

The formation of the Big Society is presented as necessary to address social ills. This article argues that rather than being a doctrine, forcing through punitive policies which undermine the collective provision against risk that constitutes the ‘just’s umbrella’. However, arguments for reduced consumption and self-organization in civil society have purchase partly because of real needs for sustainable development and human well-being. Reading austerity and the Big Society through a ‘hermeneutics of faith’ rather than a ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’ opens up the utopian possibility of thinking holistically about an alternative, equitable, sustainable future radically different from that offered by conventional politics.



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Biographies

Ruth Levitas is Professor of Sociology at the University of Bristol. Her research straddles political theory, transformative ideas and utopianism, and poverty, inequality and social exclusion. She is co-investigator on the ESRC-funded 2011 Poverty and Social Exclusion Survey. Her 2010 essay 'Back to the Future: Wells, Sociology, Utopia, Method' won the Sociological Review prize for outstanding scholarship. Her new book, *Utopia as Method: The Imaginary Reconstitution of Society* will be published by Palgrave Macmillan in 2013.

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