

Welfare, Work and Family

I. Welfare Policy

Welfare systems differ on:

- (a) who is eligible to receive benefits (are the benefits available to all, or are they distributed based on need?)
- (b) the source of the monies to be distributed (is the money obtained through taxation or contribution?)
- (c) the justification for the system (does the system administer an entitlement, is it an efficient way to organize charity, is it a practical economic tool?)

For example:

- Social insurance models (such as social security in the US) draw on individual contributions and are available to all (or all who work).
- Social democratic (“social welfare”) models emphasize universal entitlement, e.g., paid parental leave.
- Residualist models aim to provide a “safety net” for those who cannot otherwise manage.

Libertarians tend to oppose welfare entirely (“end it, don’t mend it”), emphasizing the value of liberty over equality. (Is there a conflict between liberty and welfare? What is it?)

“*New Paternalists*” favor welfare with “incentives and constraints” that are designed to lead the poor to act in a way that brings their interests into line with society’s interests.

Liberal Egalitarians tend to favor welfare schemes that provide at least a “safety net” while also allowing individuals to pursue their own conception of the good.

II. Libertarianism and ownership

A. Recap: historical entitlement theory of distributive justice

It is tempting to think that what makes a distribution of goods just is a matter of how much of them each person gets. If someone gets too much or too little, redistribution is called for. We saw before, however, that the libertarian disagrees with this. According to the libertarian, what makes a distribution just is a matter of a:

- Principle of justice in original acquisition
- Principle of justice in transfer
- Principle of rectification of injustice in holdings.

We distinguished:

Historical v. end-state principles: According to a historical principle, what matters in determining the justice of a holding is how it was acquired. According to end-state principles, justice depends on whether the distribution corresponds to a pre-defined structure.

Patterned v. non-patterned principles: Patterned principles require a distribution to correlate with some “natural” (pre-existing?) quality in the relevant population, e.g., distribute according to intelligence, or distribute according to moral merit. Non-patterned principles require no such correlation.

Libertarians favor historical non-patterned principles because “liberty upsets patterns.”

B. Property: use and benefit ¹

To hold a “property right” in something is in fact to hold a “cluster” of rights concerning it. It is somewhat controversial what should be included in the cluster.

- Some rights to *control* should be included. But how far do these go? E.g., do I have a right to sell myself into slavery? Do I have a right to kill myself? I own my pet, but can I do anything I want to it?

¹ See also Josh Cohen’s lecture notes: “Possessive Libertarianism,” http://stellar.mit.edu/S/course/17/fa03/17.01j/courseMaterial/topics/topic5/lectureNotes/possessive_libert'ism/possessive_libert'ism.pdf

- Some rights to *benefit* should be included. But how far do these go? If we are in a drought and it turns out that I own the only working well in a region; am I entitled to gouge others for whatever I can get them to pay for the water?

Maximal right to benefit: I have a right to *all* that I can get others to pay for what I own (my labor, my property).

Minimal right to benefit: I have a right to the minimum I can get for what I own (my labor, my property) that provides an incentive for me to use/transfer it.

C. *Welfare and Self-ownership*

For the libertarian, welfare is illegitimate because (a) the taxation required to pay for welfare schemes is unjust. I am entitled to what I have justly acquired and the government does not have a right to take it; and (b) the poor do not have a right to the property of others, even to secure their own basic needs. The poor may ask for help and hope that the rich will be kind enough to share with them, but they are not entitled to anything, even though we say that all have the right to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.” Some of the poor have just failed to “exercise previous options prudently” (Machan, 559), and although others are “truly needy,” their needs can be addressed through charity.

Note that the libertarian is presupposing a very strong property right. On what basis?

- Self-ownership argument
- Meaningful life argument

Moreover, what about mothers’ labor? Does society steal from mothers the fruits of their labor if we depend on them to raise the children who will keep the economy afloat, pay into Social Security to support us, and become the professionals we will depend on as we age? If taxation is “slavery”, what is motherhood? In general, is it reasonable to allow some to have more than is required for a meaningful life while denying the resources for a meaningful life to others?

D. *Welfare and efficiency*

Are there arguments from efficiency to support or challenge welfare policies?

Against:

- “perverse incentives” to not work
- “crowding out” personal responsibility, family ties, charity
- “rent-seeking,” e.g., freeloading, cheating the system

For:

- Quality childcare, public education, and job training programs contribute to economic growth.
- Violence and crime are reduced when poverty addressed.
- Health care costs reduced when poverty addressed. (Although on the libertarian view health care is not a right, the ill health of the poor can be bad for everyone.)
- Relying on many independent private charities to address the needs of the poor is inefficient.

III. Models of Work-Family Balance (Old and New)

| Traditional 1 | Traditional 2 | Universal Breadwinner | Integrated |
|---|---|--|---|
| Full-time (male) breadwinner + Full-time (female) caregiver | Full-time (male) breadwinner + part-time (female) breadwinner + Part-time (female) caregiver. | Dual full-time breadwinners + non-family caregiver | Dual breadwinners + Dual caregivers |

Contrast caregiver parity with unpaid caregiving.²

What would caregiving parity involve?

- “Caregiver allowances to compensate childbearing, childraising, housework, and other forms of domestic labor, with allowances sufficiently generous to support a family”
- Flexibility: mandated pregnancy and family leave, retraining, mandated flex-time.
- Social insurance benefits (e.g., unemployment, pensions, healthcare, disability) available to caregivers as well as wage workers.

In terms of justice and efficiency, liberty and equality, how do these different models compare?

² For further details, see Nancy Fraser, “Reinventing the Welfare State,” *Boston Review* Feb/Mar 1994.
<http://www.bostonreview.net/BR19.1/fraser.html>. Also linked on Stellar site under “recommended readings”.