



Article 1

CONCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL WELFARE

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What is meant by social welfare? Is it relief, and just for the poor? Is social insurance included? What of public recreation and parks? And if these are social welfare, why not public highways and the Tennessee Valley Authority? How about private industry's pension plans? And what of fee-charging social agencies and the "private practice" of social work?

We are not concerned here with formulating a view of what social welfare ought ideally to involve, but rather with its existing outlines and trends in the United States. Specifically, we will: (1) point out what seem to be the currently dominant concepts of welfare, and (2) state some criteria for delineating social welfare. Later chapters will discuss the implications of the dominant American conceptions of social welfare for the services and for the professional practice of social work.

Current Conceptions

Two conceptions of social welfare seem to be dominant in the United States today: The *residual* and the *institutional*. The first holds that social welfare institutions should come into play only when the normal structures of supply, the family and the market, break down. The second, in contrast, sees the welfare services as normal, "first line" functions of modern industrial society. These are the concepts around which drives for more or for less welfare service tend to focus. Not surprisingly, they derive from the ethos of the society in which they are found. They represent a compromise between the values of economic individualism and free enterprise on the one hand, and security, equality, and humanitarianism on the other. They are rather explicit among both social welfare professionals and the lay public.

The residual formulation is based on the premise that there are two "natural" channels through which an individual's needs are properly met: the family and the market economy. These are the preferred

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structures of supply. However, sometimes these institutions do not function adequately: family life is disrupted, depressions occur. Or sometimes the individual cannot make use of normal channels because of old age or illness. In such cases, according to this idea, a third mechanism of need fulfillment is brought into play—the social welfare structure. This is conceived as a residual agency, attending primarily to emergency functions, and is expected to withdraw when the regular social structure—the family and the economic system—is again working properly. Because of its residual, temporary, substitute characteristics, social welfare thus conceived often carries the stigma of “dole” or “charity.”

The residual concept was more popular in the United States before the Great Depression of 1929 than it is now. That it is consistent with the traditional American ideology of individual responsibility and by-your-own-bootstrap progress is readily apparent. But it does not reflect the radical social changes accompanying advanced industrialization, or fully account for various aspects of contemporary social welfare activity.

The second major formulation of social welfare is given in a widely used social work textbook as “the organized system of social services and institutions, designed to aid individuals and groups to attain satisfying standards of life and health. It aims at personal and social relationships which permit individuals the fullest development of their capacities and the promotion of their well-being in harmony with the needs of the community.” (2: p. 4; cf. 3.) This definition of the “institutional” view implies no stigma, no emergency, no “abnormality.” Social welfare becomes accepted as a proper, legitimate function of modern industrial society in helping individuals achieve self-fulfillment. The complexity of modern life is recognized. The inability of the individual to provide fully for himself, or to meet all his needs in family and work settings, is considered a “normal” condition; and the helping agencies achieve “regular” institutional status.

While these two views seem antithetical, in practice American social work has tried to combine them, and current trends in social wel-

¹This is a typically vague definition of the “institutional” view. Contemporary definitions of welfare are fuzzy because cultural values regarding the social responsibilities of government, business, and the individual are now in flux. The older doctrines of individualism, private property and free market, and of minimum government provided a clear-cut definition of welfare as “charity for unfortunates.” The newer values of social democracy—security, equality, humanitarianism—undermine the notion of “unfortunate classes” in society. All people are regarded as having “needs” which *in fact* become a legitimate claim on the whole society. Business and government as channels to supply these needs have vastly broadened their responsibilities. Both the older and newer doctrines coexist today, creating conflicts and ambiguities in values which are reflected in more definitions of social welfare.

fare represent a middle course. Those who lament the passing of the old order insist that the second ideology is undermining individual character and the national social structure. Those who bewail our failure to achieve utopia today, argue that the residual conception is an obstacle which must be removed before we can produce the good life for all. In our view, neither ideology exists in a vacuum; each is a reflection of the broader cultural and societal conditions described in . . . and with further industrialization the second is likely to prevail.

Criteria for Delineating Social Welfare

Keeping in mind this ideological dualism, we can now look at the substance of social welfare. What are the main distinguishing characteristics of activities which fall within the range of welfare practice in America today?²

1. Formal Organization. Social welfare activities are formally organized. Handouts and individual charity, though they may increase or decrease welfare, are not organized. Likewise, services and help extended within such mutual-aid relationships as family, friends and neighbors, kinship groups, and the like are not included in the definition of social welfare structure. It is recognized that there is a continuum running from the most informal to the most formal, and that in-between cases—the mutual-aid welfare services of a small labor union, church, or fraternal society—cannot be precisely classified. The distinction is clear in principle, however, and important.

Modern social welfare has really to be thought of as help given to the stranger, not to the person who by reason of personal bond commands it without asking. It assumes a degree of social distance between helper and helped. In this respect it is a social response to the shift from rural to urban-industrial society. Help given within the family or friendship group is but an aspect of the underlying relationship. Welfare services are a different kind of “help.” We must think here of the regular, full-time, recognized agencies that carry on the welfare business.

²All institutions, of course, undergo change over time, both in form and function. However, some continuing identity is usually clear. Thus, the historical continuity and interconnection of social welfare institutions can be traced—from hospitals first designed as a place for the poor to die, to modern community hospitals serving the health needs of all; from sandpiles for the children of working mothers, to the tennis courts and baseball tournaments of a modern recreation program; from poorhouses to Social Security.

2. **Social Sponsorship and Accountability.** Social auspice—the existence of socially sanctioned purposes and methods, and formal accountability—is the crucial element in social welfare service versus comparable service under profit-making auspices. If mobilization of resources to meet needs is not accomplished by the family or through the market economy, some third type of organization must be provided, and this is typically the society as a whole acting through government (city, state, federal), or a smaller collectivity operating through a private social agency. (Cf. 5; p. 13.)

Some mechanism for expressing the public interest and rendering the service accountable to the larger community is an essential part of social sponsorship. For public welfare services in a democratic society, the mechanism is simply the representative structure of government. For voluntary agencies accountability is typically, though less certainly, achieved through a governing board. That some of these boards are self-perpetuating, unresponsive to changing needs and isolated from constituencies, does not deny the principle of accountability; any more than oligarchy denies it in the public welfare arena. The principle is acknowledged in privately as well as publicly sponsored organizations.

3. **Absence of Profit Motive as Dominant Program Purpose.** Just as the needs-service cycle within the family is excluded from the concept of social welfare, so generally are those needs which arise and are fulfilled within the bounds of the three enterprise system. The services and goods produced by the market economy and purchased by individuals with money derived from competitive participation in that economy are not social welfare. Profitable and most fee-for-service activities are excluded. But there are cases difficult to classify.

Social welfare objectives can be intimately associated with what is basically profit-making enterprise, as when a private business provides recreation facilities, pension plans, or nurseries for its employees. The view may be taken, on the one hand, that since such services attend human wants quite peripheral to the purpose of the organization, they neither share in nor alter the nature of the underlying profit-making activity. The latter remains nonwelfare, while the former are essentially social welfare programs under business auspices. This view gains support from the observation that separate structures for the administration of welfare services often develop within the business enterprise, and constitute a kind of "social auspice." An industrial pension plan, for instance, usually has a trust fund separate from the financial operations of the company; a separate office with its own physical facilities will be

set up to administer it; the policy-making group—board or committee—will often have employee or union representation, especially if the plan is collectively bargained; and its operation will likely come under some degree of government regulation.

On the other hand, the view may be taken that industry-sponsored welfare programs are simply part of the conditions of employment, a substitute for wages. Industries provide restrooms and run recreational programs to compete for a labor supply and maintain employee morale and efficiency. Pensions, in this view, are a kind of deferred wage. Programs are often administered not through separate administrative offices, but by the business accounting or personnel office. Even when separate administrative structures are created, this does not alter the underlying program purpose of facilitating production.³

Thus, the degree to which an industrial welfare program may be considered social welfare varies inversely with extent of emphasis on a contractual relationship between two parties seeking a mutually rewarding arrangement, and directly with extent of social sponsorship and control. It is clear, nevertheless, that industrial welfare programs affect the development of social welfare institutions. The Supplemental Unemployment Benefits scheme, for instance, creates pressure for expanded unemployment insurance, and private pension plans are integrated with OASI in planning for retirement. Our discussion of social welfare expenditures . . . will therefore include data on industrial welfare programs.

Some aspects of professional fee-for-service practice are also difficult to classify. Most Americans probably would think—and without derogatory implication—that professions as well as trades are primarily ways of making a living (often a kind of small business), and thus nonwelfare in nature. Yet it is a fact that many individual professional practitioners—physicians, lawyers, and dentists particularly—observe what appears to be a semi-social welfare practice of scaling fees according to ability to pay. Fee-scaling in private practice, however, is often a professional norm, part of a formal code of ethics. As such, its meaning and nature

³It is true that men's motives vary, and businessmen are not an exception. What we are talking about here is not individual motives but organizational purposes. Many business leaders may acquire a sense of trusteeship going beyond their obligations to the shareholders. Thus, multi-plant companies have been known to avoid shutdown of an unprofitable unit because of major disruption to the local community. But one cannot say that the enterprise purpose is to save declining communities, any more than one can call dropping 50 cents in a blind man's hat Aid to the Blind.

derive from a different context—professionalism—and it can be seen as a device by which a group with a monopoly of an indispensable service protects its fee-taking privilege. Where the professional "charges what the traffic will bear," there is no ambiguity, and his activity is clearly nonwelfare in nature.

To the extent that the private practice of social casework resembles other fee-for-service professions, it, too, is rather clearly outside the field of social welfare. Solo practice of social work is as yet so little developed, however, that it cannot be seen how close it will hew to the model of the other professions.

4. **Functional Generalization: An Integrative View of Human Needs.** Since almost any of the gamut of culturally conditioned human needs may be unmet and since human capacities which can be developed are many, welfare services to meet needs and enhance capacities will be varied. Placing babies in foster homes, operating a recreation program, administering social insurance, developing medical service in a rural community—the substantive activities here have little in common; a great variety of activities may take on a social welfare aspect. From the standpoint of the welfare structure as a whole, these activities are properly described as "functionally generalized"; that is, welfare services are found attached to, or performing in place of, medical institutions, the family, education, industry—wherever there is "unmet need." It will be noticed that this concept is closely related to that of residuality discussed above; what other institutions do not do, it is the job of welfare to do. To the extent that it is the function of social welfare to come in and "pick up the pieces" in any area of need, it must lack attachment to any given area.

From this characteristic derives, in part at least, the comprehensive view of human needs and personality that distinguishes social work from other professions. An international study by the United Nations of training for social work concludes that social work seeks to assist

... individuals, families and groups in relation to the many social and economic forces by which they are affected, and differs in this respect from certain allied activities, such as health, education, religion, etc. The latter . . . tend to exclude all save certain specific aspects of the socio-economic environment from their purview. . . . The social worker, on the other hand, cannot exclude from his consideration any aspect of the life of the person who seeks help in solving problems of social adjustment . . . [or any] of the community's social institutions that might be of use to the individual. . . . (5: p. 13)

Individual agencies are, of course, specialized and limited in function, but the welfare field is inclusive. It is because social welfare is "functionally generalized" that we exclude the school system, which tends to be segmental in its approach to its clientele.

5. **Direct Concern with Human Consumption Needs.** Finally, how are government welfare services to be distinguished from other government services, since all are socially sponsored? It is possible to place governmental activities on a continuum which ranges from services primarily concerned with the functional requisites of the society . . . and only indirectly with the fate of the individual, to those which provide direct services to meet immediate consumption needs of individuals and families. At the "indirect" end of this continuum, following the analysis of Hazel Kyrk, are government activities "inherent in the nature of the state . . . such as the national defense, the preservation of law and order, the administration of justice, the exercise of regulatory functions. . . ." Intermediate are road building, flood control, forest conservation, and other such services, "the benefits of which are so remote in time or diffused among the population that they will not be privately provided." At the direct services end are those where "specific beneficiaries can be identified, although there are also general benefits. . . . Schools and universities, recreational facilities, libraries, museums, concerts, school books and lunches, subsidized housing, medical and hospital services. In this last group of services described are those which are distinctly for consumer use and enjoyment." (4: pp. 148-149)¹

In the last group fall the welfare services. Of course, social welfare programs serve the needs of both the larger social structure and the individual consumer. The unemployment compensation program in the United States, for example, has been designed as an anti-depression weapon as well as a means of alleviating the

¹An interesting parallel to the distinction Kyrk makes here has been noted with respect to Soviet state institutions where, since "everything is government," it might also be expected that everything would be social welfare. Sociologist Vuchetich observes, however, that in the U.S.S.R.: "Soviet experts in jurisprudence make a sharp distinction between social institutions . . . and Soviet enterprises. Institutions (post offices, telegraphic services, scientific laboratories, schools, and the like) are, in the economic sense, nonproductive units which draw their funds from the state budgets and are not considered independent juridical persons. Enterprises, on the other hand, have their 'own' budgets . . . , their 'own' basic capital (machines, tools, etc.) and working capital." (6: pp. 9-10)

individual distress accompanying unemployment. But it is the latter, rather than the former, aspect of the program which from the present point of view qualifies it as a social welfare activity.

A nineteenth century view of government in the United States saw its functions restricted to "activities inherent in the nature of the state." The veto of Dorothea Dix's mental hospital bill in 1854, it will be remembered, was based on President Pierce's belief that the life conditions of individuals were no proper concern of government. Today many government services are directed specifically to individuals, and it is these which tend to be identified as social welfare.

It is thus an additional distinguishing attribute of social welfare programs that they tend to be aimed directly at the individual and his consumer interests, rather than at the general society and producer interests; that they are concerned with human resources as opposed to other kinds of resources. Soil conservation, subsidy of the merchant marine, development of water power resources, much as these redound ultimately to human welfare, are not typically defined as social welfare; but feeding the hungry, finding homes for dependent children, even provision of recreational facilities are so defined. This is the point of the stipulation in the definition of welfare given by Kraus,⁵ that welfare services have "direct effects on welfare and health of individuals and families," and of Cassidy's definition of the social services as "those organized activities that are primarily and directly concerned with the conservation, the protection, and the improvement of human resources." (1: p. 13)

In sum, the major traits which, taken together, distinguish social welfare structure in American (made explicit here as criteria to define the field of analysis) are:

1. Formal organization
2. Social sponsorship and accountability
3. Absence of profit motive as dominant program purpose
4. Functional generalization: integrative, rather than segmental, view of human needs
5. Direct focus on human consumption needs

The major weakness in definition occurs in the area of socially sponsored, nonprofit services which affect nearly everyone in the so-

ciety. It would seem, for instance, that public education might be classed among the social services, as it is in England (and by a few American welfare experts, for example, Ida C. Merriam). In the U.S. there is apparently a tendency to exclude from the welfare category any service, no matter how identified with welfare it may have been in origin, which becomes highly developed, widespread in its incidence among the population, and professionally staffed by persons other than social workers. Helen Wilmer notes social insurance as an example of a welfare service which has tended to move out of the welfare area after it became a "usual institutional arrangement." (7: pp. 484-486) This seems to be consistent with the residual conception and its view of the welfare services as emergency, secondary, peripheral to the main show. As the residual conception becomes weaker, as we believe it will, and the institutional conception increasingly dominant, it seems likely that distinctions between welfare and other types of social institutions will become more and more blurred. Under continuing industrialization all institutions will be oriented toward and evaluated in terms of social welfare aims. The "welfare state" will become the "welfare society," and both will be more reality than epithet.

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⁵At a meeting of the United States Committee of the International Conference of Social Work, New York City, June 17, 1955.