

should be determined through political argument and compromise. Economic factors are important, of course; they may not be decisive but they should be taken into account. These economists contend, moreover, that the regulatory agencies should do the will of the legislature at the least social cost.

Economists of the second kind believe that cost-benefit analysis can take the values, arguments, and convictions of citizens into account. These economists sometimes try to estimate moral and ethical values on the basis of market data, for example, by looking at prices paid for property in the range of a protected species. The primary technique, however, is to ask citizens how much they are willing to pay for the satisfaction of knowing that the government has acted consistently with some principle, for example, to preserve wilderness. Even if citizens would pay only a few dollars each for these moral "satisfactions," the aggregate sum might be very substantial.

This approach to cost-benefit analysis—which regards the ideals and aspirations of citizens as "externalities" consumer markets have failed to "price"—rests on three mistakes. First, it allows economists to justify virtually any policy at all or its opposite, for it is easy to find "fragile" values, "intangibles," and "moralisms," to support almost any position.

This ambitious approach to cost-benefit analysis rests also on what philosophers call a category-mistake. This is a mistake one makes in describing an object in terms that do not appropriately apply to it, as when one says that the square root of two is blue. It is

nonsense to test the worth of an ideal or a principle by asking what people are willing to pay for it. As well try to establish the truth of a theorem by asking what it is worth, in economic terms, to mathematicians. Nobody asks economists how much they are willing to pay for their view that cost-benefit analysis should form the basis of regulatory policy. No, the views of economists are supposed to be judged on the merits not priced at the margin. Why shouldn't this courtesy extend to contrary opinions as well?

Third, cost-benefit analysis, insofar as it "prices" our convictions as citizens along with our interests as consumers, confuses the economic with the political process. Political decisions have to be cost-conscious; they need to take economic factors into account. But this does not reduce them to economic decisions. To think otherwise would be to suggest that economic "experts" should take the place of elected representatives as interpreters of the public interest. This would replace democracy with a kind of technocracy. It would deprive us of our most cherished political rights.

Conflict in our society involves ideological contradiction as well as economic competition. The one cannot be understood in terms of or reduced to the other. Cost-benefit analysis may be used to give us information about values for which markets exist and are appropriate. But this use is limited. We must otherwise rely on political argument and compromise in Congress ending in a vote and not resort to cost-benefit analysis terminating in a bottom line.

—Mark Sagoff

How Fair is Workfare?

As the Reagan administration budget is debated in Congress and the media, much of the discussion concerns the relationship between welfare and employment. The president supports optional workfare programs, in which individual states are permitted to require food stamp recipients to "work off" the value of food stamps received. AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) recipients are already required under the WIN (Work Incentive) program to register for and accept training and employment as a condition of eligibility (if not needed at home for the care of a young child). Such requirements have generated heated arguments for both their expansion and elimination, on both moral and pragmatic grounds.

Arguments for Work Requirements

A first argument for work requirements, which may implicitly underlie many other arguments, is that

a welfare recipient owes something to society in exchange for a guarantee of subsistence. On this view, food stamps, housing assistance, and the like are privileges extended by the taxpaying public to the indigent, and it is only fair that those conferring a privilege should be able to set conditions governing its receipt.

A second cluster of arguments appeals to the many benefits to be obtained through a system of work requirements:

(1) *Benefits to other, more needy recipients.* If we assume that the welfare budget is relatively fixed, a greater number of recipients means a smaller share for each. If the welfare pie is sliced thin enough, the neediest recipients may be threatened with inadequate benefits. If able recipients are required to work in the regular labor market, their wages free welfare funds to aid their needier fellows. (The creation of public



Courtesy USDA

service jobs, however, may actually raise rather than lower welfare costs.) Baruch Brody, chairman of the philosophy department at Rice University, argues that this alone should justify imposing such requirements: "In a just society . . . the sole goal of the requirements to seek work and accept it is to make more available to those who are truly needy."

2) *Restoration of equity.* AFDC recipients are a favored target for the imposition of work requirements. The AFDC program was originally instituted to permit mothers deprived of male support—usually widows—to remain at home to care for their children. But as more and more mothers work outside the home, this objective has seemed increasingly unfair to middle- and lower-income taxpayers. James A. Rotherham, Deputy Associate Director for Human Resource Programs on the House Budget Committee, points out that "AFDC recipients with children under age six are not expected to work outside the home even though more than one-third of the women in the general population with children under age six do work outside the home." Many of these working mothers regret that economic necessity forces them to abandon traditional roles. They also resent subsidizing other mothers' full-time child care. Work requirements are perceived as reducing the overall tax burden while restoring fairness between the two groups of mothers.

3) *Benefits to working welfare recipients themselves.* Work requirements are also claimed to bring considerable gain to the workers themselves. Many welfare families remain below the poverty level, and any move toward their economic self-sufficiency is to be welcomed. As Martha H. Phillips, Assistant Minority

Counsel of the Committee on Ways and Means in the U.S. House of Representatives, observes: "A young woman or teenager with several small children can look forward only to a life of being ground down by the welfare system, inadequate income, and eventual unemployability years hence when her youngest children are grown if she does not find employment now." The benefits of work are psychological as well as economic. Active participation in the work force is a source of pride and satisfaction, and work is an important ingredient in positive self-image and morale.

4) *Benefits to welfare children.* The children of working welfare recipients benefit from the additional income their parents bring home and the broader opportunities it makes possible. They also benefit from having "the cycle of dependency" broken, by having as role models parents who are attaining self-sufficiency.

Arguments Against Work Requirements

Opponents of work requirements reply that welfare is not a *privilege* for which labor is owed in payment, but a *right*. Brody insists, "Our fundamental assumption is that welfare is a right of the indigent, and not a privilege, so no appeal to the rights-privileges distinction can justify enforcement of the work requirement."

They charge furthermore that work requirements will not in fact provide any of the benefits cited by their defenders, because work requirements simply don't work. The indigent are for the most part uneducated and unskilled, unable to compete in the private market or to perform public service jobs of any great value. Thus their work is unlikely to provide any savings in government expenditures. (The workfare plan has not been assigned any savings value at all by the administration.) Taxpayers will not gain, except in smug self-righteousness, and fellow welfare recipients would not have gained under the current system anyway, since any savings would not have been divided up among the needy.

The benefit to the workers and their families is also dubious. Phillips notes, "It is doubtful that the family will come out ahead financially, at least in the



Courtesy USDA

short run." This is especially true under the administration's proposals, which call for reducing assistance to the working poor, thereby penalizing them economically for their efforts. Since most public service jobs are "make work" jobs with no realistic future, they are not meaningful or satisfying enough to provide any psychological rewards to welfare families.

Finally, opponents of work requirements argue that they punish the victims of injustice or discrimination for their poverty or unemployment, holding them responsible for social conditions for which they are not to blame. Norman Daniels, Associate Professor of Philosophy at Tufts University, argues that in a society that is seriously unjust, as he takes ours to be, "the assignment of responsibility—even blame-worthiness—to those who fail to work seems highly problematic. It is certainly problematic when jobs are scarce or unavailable, and it remains problematic when available jobs are hard, burdensome, unrewarding, and often dead-end. . . . We may be making the worst-off members of a society pay twice for their circumstances."

Rotherham agrees. The poorest groups in America—blacks, Hispanics, and women—are the groups most discriminated against in our society. "The fact that welfare is a form of compensation to victims of discrimination [becomes] increasingly evident. Viewed from this perspective, the emphasis on work requirements . . . may be misplaced. An extreme categorization of the work features . . . is that they blame the victim for the crime."

Conclusions

Many defenders of work requirements hold that welfare is a privilege for which payment is owed in return; opponents claim it is a right. But it may be the case that welfare is both a right *and* that something is owed for it in return. Many rights are contingent upon one's respecting the rights of others. The right to be assured a minimal level of well-being may likewise be contingent upon the responsibility to assist others in need if able to do so. Henry Aaron, Senior Fellow at the Brookings Institution, explains: "The argument that a work requirement constitutes

'forced labor' rests on the presumption *both* that the government ought to provide a guarantee against destitution *and* that nothing should be expected in return from the beneficiaries for that guarantee. . . . The idea that . . . nothing is expected in return for such a guarantee seems to me to have very little justification."

The second charge, that work requirements don't work, seems more serious. If work requirements are to meet the goals of benefiting needier individuals and allowing workers to become self-sufficient, steps must be taken to ensure that the work performed is indeed of some genuine worth and that revenues received from it are indeed returned to the welfare pool. Manpower programs like WIN are specifically designed to meet this first condition, by aiding in the development of marketable skills, and a full 20 percent of AFDC recipients leave the rolls as a result of increased earnings. The second condition is not met at present, thus considerably undermining the justice of current work requirements. Surely at the very least, work requirements should not be imposed at the same time that job training programs are cut or curtailed, and workers should not be financially penalized for their contributions.

Finally, it seems indisputable that the poorest members of our society are all too often the victims of racial, sexual, and linguistic discrimination. But work requirements constitute a *punishment* for society's victims only if work itself is a punishment. But this need not be the case, unless the work required is exceptionally soul-wearying. The Spanish philosopher and theologian Miguel de Unamuno wrote, "That saying, 'In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread,' does not mean that God condemned man to work. . . . It would have been no condemnation to have condemned man to work itself, for work is the only practical consolation for having been born."

The views of Baruch Brody, James A. Rotherham, Martha H. Phillips, Norman Daniels, and Henry Aaron are drawn from their contributions to Income Support: Conceptual and Policy Issues (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981), a collection of essays by philosophers, social scientists, and policymakers on issues in the recurring welfare-reform debate. To order, see p. 15.

Book Review

Duties Beyond Borders: On the Limits and Possibilities of Ethical International Politics by Stanley Hoffmann (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 1981).

Duties Beyond Borders is a book about compromise. Confronted with the grim realities of contemporary international relations, Stanley Hoffmann raises Kant's question: can one be a moral politician, "who

employs the principles of political prudence in such a way that they can coexist with morals"? His response is a cautious, qualified optimism. In every area of international diplomacy, the statesman is caught in a vicious web of incompatible obligations and interests. But "the duty of the moral politician is to turn the evil circle gradually into an ascending spiral."

Two compromises emerge from Hoffmann's discussion as central. The first bridges the idealistic demands of morality and the realities of international competition, the ends toward which we aspire and the means of attaining them. In the domain of inter-