The Idea of Welfare and the Welfare State*

ALAN HAMLIN
School of Social Sciences
University of Manchester

Introduction

The economic, political and philosophical analysis of the idea of welfare has, for many decades, been conducted in the shadow of the welfare state; that is, in the shadow of the idea that the pursuit of welfare, or the support of welfare, or the guarantee of at least some minimum level of welfare is, or should be, the responsibility of the state. The relationship between the debate on the idea of welfare and the debate on the welfare state has several aspects – I will mention just three. First, in debating the idea of welfare, we might pay attention to the question of whether the particular idea of welfare that we are discussing fits comfortably with the idea of the welfare state. Second, in debating the welfare state, we might pay attention to the question of the role that any particular idea of welfare has in justifying the welfare state. Third, we might seek to understand the interplay between the idea of welfare and the idea of equality that are often brought together in discussions of the welfare state. In this essay I will provide some discussion of each of these three questions. Section 1 focuses on the idea of welfare, section 2 on the welfare state and, briefly, the relationship between democracy and the welfare state, and section 3 on the relationship between these two and equality, section 4 offers some final remarks.

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Welfare

The word ‘welfare’ identifies a particularly contested part of the conceptual landscape that has been much trampled by economists, philosophers and political theorists, as well as a wide variety of more practical politicians, policy analysts and social commentators. Each group might be conceived as engaged on the production of a map which charts the salient features of ‘welfare’ and places them in relation to other features of the normative terrain: ‘rights’, ‘needs’ ‘equality’, ‘justice’, and so on. Many maps have been produced but an inspection of these various maps might not convince the observer that all relate to the same landscape. Some of the apparent differences are no more than differences of emphasis or perspective, and might be thought of as differences in cartographic convention. Some result from simple confusions, but others are more foundational and reflect importantly different views of the world. In this section I provide a discussion of some of the existing maps of welfare, and some discussion of the use of these maps to guide the normative political debate.

The structure of welfare

I begin with a simple sketch of the standard economists' account of welfare, and consider a number of interpretations and criticisms and a variety of alternatives and embellishments. This way of proceeding does not presume that the simple economists' view is especially favoured. Indeed, in the caricature version presented here, it is both implausible and extreme. But it does have the merits of being relatively precisely drawn, and of identifying many of the key issues (Hausman and McPherson, 1996).

The economists' map of welfare focuses on three essential features: individual welfare, social welfare, and the relationship between the two. At the individual level, the standard economist identifies welfare with utility (Broome, 1991b,c and Sen, 1991 debate the use and meaning of ‘utility’), and argues for a preference satisfaction theory of individual welfare. On this narrow account individual welfare (or utility) simply consists in the satisfaction of the individual's actual desires - whatever they may be. Of course, even such a narrow argument depends on interpreting preferences generally, so that we are not restricted to the simple rankings of alternative bundles of consumer goods familiar from introductory economics texts. Preferences must be understood to

include preferences over alternative social arrangements, over alternative distributions of income; most generally, over alternative states of the world.

With a preference satisfaction theory of individual welfare on board, our simple economist turns her attention to social welfare. Here she makes two importantly distinct claims. First, that 'social welfare' is the ethical value or 'goodness' of the social state under consideration. And second that social welfare depends only on individual welfares. The first of these claims is simply stipulative. Social welfare, in the standard economist's usage, is intended to identify the overall good of society, all things considered, and not merely an aspect of the good. With this in mind, the second claim is clearly very strong. It says that the good of society depends only on individual welfare. This is the claim labeled 'welfarism' (Sen, 1979). Welfarism together with the preference satisfaction theory of individual welfare defines the core of the mainstream economists' account of welfare. Each provides the starting point for further debate.

Individual welfare

Before exploring further, it is important to expose an ambiguity in the relationship between preferences, choices and welfare. On the one hand (the one sketched above) preferences may be conceived as being substantively exogenous characteristics of individuals, defined independently of the individual's choices. This then leaves the relationship between preference and choice for separate theorizing: preference may be one among many potential motivators of choice, but there can be no *a priori* guarantee that individual choice will directly reflect preference. In particular, it is meaningful to suggest that an individual might choose to do **a** when **b** was available, despite preferring **b** over **a**. This is the use of preference that connects directly with desires or wants.

On the other hand, economists sometimes use preference (specifically, revealed preference) to refer directly to choice, so that a preference function simply represents individual choices, however those choices are motivated. In this usage, preferences are an analytic convenience rather than characteristics of the individual. To use preferences in this sense as the basis for welfare would be to elevate choice itself to normative significance. There may be some reason for such elevation, and I shall return to the point below, but it has no necessary connection with the satisfaction of

underlying desires or wants. Throughout the remainder of this essay I shall use preference in the first of these senses.

Two further points of clarification are in order. First, the significance of satisfying preferences is normally taken to be the benefit that is thereby conferred on the individual whose preferences they are. This may seem obvious, but it does point to some potential pitfalls. Preferences may be satisfied in a formal way without benefit to the relevant individual as when my grandfather's desire for me to marry was satisfied only after his death (or, less morbidly, only after his desires had changed). Alternatively, the benefit associated with the satisfaction of a preference may be achieved by means other than the satisfaction of that preference as when the object of my desire can be perfectly simulated so that it is as if my desire were satisfied although, in fact, it is not. These pitfalls are of significance in some contexts, but I shall not pursue them here (Parfit, 1984).

The second point concerns the aggregation of welfare over time and the possibility of discounting future welfare. Of course, it is accepted that the uncertainty of the future may lead one to discount future benefits relative to present benefits, and that investment opportunities would lead one to discount material goods in the future relative to the present, but the question is whether a pure discount rate that is intended to operate on welfare itself after all uncertainty has been accounted for should be zero or positive. This debate continues and has major implications, but I shall not go into details here (Sen, 1967; Parfit, 1984, Broome, 1994).

The most obvious question to ask of any theory of individual welfare is whether welfare is intended as a complete description of an individual's good or, if not, how good and welfare are related at the individual level. The plausibility of any particular account of welfare will depend on the answer to this basic question. If welfare is identical with good, the simple preference satisfaction theory of welfare is clearly open to attack from positions which identify aspects of the good claimed to be unrelated to preference satisfaction: ‘needs satisfaction’, ‘freedom’, and so on. But if welfare is held to be only one amongst several aspects of the good, such criticisms are easily avoided, and the real challenges to the preference satisfaction theory of welfare are to justify the attention paid to this particular aspect of individual good, and to discuss the relationship between welfare and other aspects of the good.

One criticism of the standard economists' account sketched above is that it tempts the reader to slip from the narrow usage of welfare as utility to the broad use of welfare as individual good. Although there is nothing in the preference satisfaction theory of welfare that commits one to the view that welfare is identical to good at the individual level, the welfarism that often accompanies the preference satisfaction theory of welfare might suggest that this is, in fact, the view taken. However, an alternative is available, which combines a preference satisfaction theory of individual welfare with welfarism without involving a commitment to the identity of individual welfare and individual good. This possibility might be termed the antipaternalist position (Dworkin, 1972). The argument is essentially epistemic. While it is accepted that there are aspects of the good outside the satisfaction of preferences, it is argued that it is impossible to know what these aspects of the good require. Preference satisfaction is not the only aspect of the good, but it is the only aspect of the good that is conceptually knowable to another individual. Any attempt to impute good to an individual on evidence other than that individual's preferences must be in some sense paternalistic. A possible response to this antipaternalist position is that some aspects of individual good are objective, and so may be known without reference to particular individuals. We may know that **a** is good for Anne simply in virtue of Anne being a person, even though we have no insight into Anne's mind or character.

Against this background, we may consider, very briefly, just three of the leading alternatives to the preference satisfaction theory of individual welfare: the informed preference theory, a theory based on needs, and a theory based on autonomy or freedom. (Griffin, 1986; Brandt, 1982; Schwartz, 1982).

An informed preference theory holds that actual preferences may be a defective basis for individual welfare just in case the actual preferences are not those which the individual would hold after full consideration and if she was fully informed. Actual preferences may be simply mistaken, as in the case where I prefer brown bread to white bread because of a mistaken belief that their nutritional properties differ. Actual preferences may also be ill considered, as in the case where I prefer smoking to nonsmoking without thinking through all the implications. The basic appeal of an informed preference satisfaction theory of welfare is that it eliminates these mistakes, and so

grounds welfare on the true preferences of the individual rather than those she happens to perceive at any given time.

While this appeal is strong, it also provides a target for the antipaternalist criticism. How are we to know an individual's informed preferences? One way out of this problem is to argue that while informed preferences are the fundamentally appropriate basis for welfare, actual preferences must be used as the only available guide to informed preferences. In this case, actual preferences will be accepted as the best available indicator of welfare, but the possibility of error will be built in to the analysis. A second escape route from the antipaternalist argument is that at least some informed preferences are, in fact, objective and so are knowable in principle, one possibility here relates to individual needs.

Most modern accounts of needs stress that preferences and needs are categorically distinct. So that, for example, "The concept of needs differs top and bottom from the concept of preferences" Braybrooke, 1987, p5), or "Needs are not a subclass of desires. They are not, say, strong or widespread or central desires" (Griffin, 1986, p41; see also Wiggins, 1985). This seems clear provided that we are referring to actual preferences. I might need medical treatment without being aware of this need, so that I do not actually desire or prefer the relevant treatment. But such examples rely on the gap between actual preferences and informed and considered preferences. Is it plausible to claim that my fully informed and considered preferences may not incorporate a genuine need for treatment?

A negative answer suggests that needs are just those objectively identifiable aspects of an individual's informed preferences. If so, the question arises as to the relationship between needs and other informed preferences. Some argue that needs should have priority over mere preferences or desires. But, at the individual level, it is difficult to defend this line of argument against the attack from the antipaternalist argument, since the preferences and desires involved are informed. If individual **A** needs medical treatment and recognizes this need, but nevertheless prefers (on the basis of full information and full consideration) to forego that treatment in favour of some alternative, it is difficult to see that insisting that **A**'s need be satisfied (and other informed desires sacrificed) would improve **A**'s welfare overall.

The relationship between welfare and freedom or autonomy raises rather different issues. In the extreme, a freedom based view might seem to deny the relevance of welfare altogether. What matters, in this view, is the individuals ability to act independently rather than the particular consequences of the actions taken. In more moderate views both freedom and the consequences of action might contribute to the individual good. In either case, what is significant is that freedom is valued intrinsically rather than instrumentally. A key question in this context concerns the appropriate method of conceptualizing freedom.

The standard distinction between positive and negative freedom is helpful here. Negative freedom simply requires the absence of coercion, and so choice or, more generally, voluntary action, is a direct indicator of freedom regardless of what is chosen or how the choice is motivated. The economists' second usage of (revealed) preference mentioned above connects with this view of the value of freedom. This view also suggests that expanding the range over which choice can be exercised will contribute to the good of the individual concerned regardless of the choices actually made. This is one aspect of the 'resourcist' position discussed by Dworkin (1981) and others, in which the extent of an individual's command over resources counts as an indicator of that person's ability to choose. The positive view of freedom, by contrast, would stress an individual's capabilities (See Sen, 1985a, 1985b, 2002, 2006; Nussbaum, 2003; Pogge, 2002, Qizilbash, 2006). In this context, capabilities indicate what an individual can do or can be, and so include elements that relate to characteristics of the individual talents and disabilities, for example and elements that relate to the resources and opportunities available to the individual.

At first sight it seems that any intrinsic evaluation of freedom must lie outside of the preference satisfaction theory of welfare, and this in turn suggests that welfare and freedom should be seen as two distinct aspects of the individual's overall good (Alkire, 2002). But if freedom is valued intrinsically, who values it? Presumably the benefit of freedom is a benefit to the person whose freedom it is, and, if this is the case, we might expect that person's fully informed preferences to reflect this benefit. Again, we could argue that the conceptualization of welfare as the satisfaction of fully informed preferences is capable of accounting for our common intuitions regarding the value of freedom, and maintaining the formal identity of welfare and good at the individual level.

The strategy of the preceding paragraphs should now be clear. If it is plausible to claim that **a** is good for individual **A**, where **a** may be needs satisfaction, freedom, justice, equality or whatever, it is equally plausible to claim that **A**'s fully informed and considered preferences will account for this fact appropriately (Griffin, 1996, discusses the strategy of improving our moral beliefs). Indeed, it is difficult to see what else "fully informed and considered" could mean in this context. Furthermore, **A**'s informed preferences will also identify the appropriate trade-off (if any) between the various components of the good. In this way, we can argue that the fully informed preference theory of welfare is capable of being extended to a plausible theory of personal good.

Welfarism and social welfare

The move from individual to social welfare raises a number of issues over and above those identified at the individual level. The Arrow theorem (Arrow, 1962) clearly constrains the interpretation of a social preference ordering, and the social setting also brings into play the relationship between social welfare and a more generally defined social justice (see, for example, Barry, 1989, 1995). The credibility of welfarism depends crucially on the interpretation of individual welfare. If individual welfare is read as individual good (whether conceptualized in terms of informed preferences or not) then the claim of welfarism reduces to the claim that social good consists in individual good. That is, all individual good contributes to the social good, and nothing else contributes to the social good. This interpretation of welfarism is nonstandard, since the term is used primarily in the context of the economists' narrow interpretation of welfare as utility, based on actual preferences. This nonstandard view of welfarism is much closer to the principle of personal good advanced by Broome (1991a), and to other statements of individualistic theories of good (Raz, 1986; Hamlin and Pettit, 1989); but even so it is contentious. This expanded notion of welfarism denies the existence of irreducibly social goods (Taylor, 1990 and related discussion); that is, aspects the social good that do not derive from the good of individuals.

If the distinction between welfare and good at the individualistic level is maintained, welfarism is clearly still more contentious. In these circumstances welfarism claims that while all social good is reducible to individual good, not all individual good is social good. Only that aspect of individual good that is included in welfare is to count at the social level. One possible defence of this version of welfarism builds once again on the antipaternalistic argument. If individual welfare

is defined in terms of actual preference satisfaction, then one might argue that although this misses some aspects of individual good, it is nevertheless the only solid foundation for the social good. Of course, such an argument may be attacked by claiming that some further aspects of the individual good are objectively knowable, so that these could, and should, be incorporated into the social good.

The move from individual welfare to social welfare also highlights the question of identifying the relevant population. This is of particular concern given the endogeneity of the population when considering some policy options, most obviously in the case of health policy and policy on contraception, but also in areas such as environmental policy, safety policy and so on. The questions raised in the discussion of future generations are amongst the most difficult faced by social scientists. In part they relate to the question of discounting the future, in part to the interpersonal comparability of welfare, but most problematically they relate to the question of the significance of personal identity (Broome, 1988; Dasgupta, 1988; Parfit, 1984; Sikora and Barry, 1978).

The issue at stake in the debate on personal identity, at its simplest, is just the issue of identifying the boundaries of the individual. Following Broome (1991a) consider welfare (whatever its precise content) as being distributed over three dimensions – people, time and states of the world. The first two of these might seem simple enough – any particular unit of welfare is located at (or belongs to) a particular person at a particular moment in time – so that attention often focuses on the third dimension – states of the world. These states are intended to index over uncertainty - so that each state of the world is a specific 'possible world' – and this points to the contingent, probabilistic nature of welfare. However, for our purposes here, it is the dimension of 'people' that is at issue – and the issue at stake is the extent to which individual people can be said to extend over time and over states of the world. Am I the same 'person' – for the purposes of welfare analysis – as the child that bore my name many years ago, or the elderly man that I may (all too soon) become? Or should the welfare of these three 'persons' be treated as separately as the welfare levels enjoyed by me and my wife and daughter at the moment? A major point here is that, while the aggregation of welfare within the traditional concept of a person over extended periods of time has often been seen as unproblematic, aggregation of welfare across persons is seen as deeply problematic by at least many theorists, and yet, it might be argued that the connections between me-now and me-as-a-child

are not necessarily stronger or more relevant that the connections between me and my wife. In this way, the debate on the identity problem serves to reduce the conceptual gap between the aggregation of welfare within the individual and the aggregation of welfare across individuals.

The Welfare State

Welfare enters the normative political debate at two distinct levels. The first may be summarized in the question 'is welfare the business of the state?', any affirmative answer to this question then opens up the second level of debate concerning the more detailed responses of the state to claims of welfare. The first of these levels identifies the location of the classic debate between teleological and deontological schools of thought as applied to the state. The standard notion that teleology is concerned with the good, while deontology is concerned with the right, is sufficient to remind us that while most teleological theories will regard considerations of welfare as a vital ingredient in the normative appraisal of the state, deontological considerations will work in quite a different way. Considerations of this kind would take us too far from the topic of the present essay, and so I shall simply assume that the answer to the first level question is yes.

This still leaves a wide range of possibilities at the second level. The simple fact that the state should recognize and respond to considerations of welfare, says nothing about the nature of that recognition, or its implications for policy. It is this range of possibilities that forms the subject matter of this section.

The first distinction to be made is that between a political commitment to individual welfare and a political commitment to social welfare. In the former case the state may be conceived as a collective means for the promotion of individual ends, as suggested by Rawls's well known phrase "society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage". While in the latter case one might conceive as the underlying purpose of the state as the maximization of social welfare (Sugden, 1989).

The political significance of this distinction is great, but not simple. At first glance it might seem that a commitment to individual welfare would lead to the politics of unanimity, with each individual able to veto actions which threatened her welfare; while a commitment to social welfare

would allow of a greater flexibility in trading off one person's welfare against another's, with a more redistributive and interventionist result. But this would be to confuse the subject of the commitment with the form of the commitment. We might consider a state that is committed to individual welfare in the sense that no social or aggregate measure of welfare is of political relevance, but is committed to, say, guaranteeing that no individual's welfare falls below a certain level (assuming this to be feasible). Such a state may be extremely interventionist and redistributive without being in the least collectivist.

With this in mind, a further set of distinctions to be made concerns the form of the political commitment to welfare. The most obvious thing to do with the good is to maximize it; and it is hardly surprising that maximization plays a crucial role in the debate on the commitment to welfare. But simple maximization is not the only possibility, and it will be useful to focus on three cases: simple maximization, maximization with minimum constraints, and maximization with equality constraints.

Simple maximization is precisely that in the case of a commitment to social welfare; but in the case of a commitment to individual welfare simple maximization may be interpreted as the maximization of each individual's welfare subject to there being no trade-off between individuals. Thus, in maximizing **A**'s welfare, we may not reduce **B**'s. This notion relates directly to the economists' notion of Pareto efficiency (which is more normally discussed in terms of the narrow concept of welfare as utility). All states of the world in which no further improvement in any individuals' welfare can be attained without reducing the welfare of another are Pareto efficient.

However, many have argued against the strict application of the Pareto criteria to allow at least some degree of redistribution - supporting the welfare of some at the expense of the welfare of others (of course, this debate is often conducted in terms of income, or wealth, rather than welfare). One way of implementing a limited degree of redistribution involves the imposition of minimum constraints on the level of welfare of any individual - which may be thought of as building an aversion to poverty into the general commitment to welfare (Barry, 1990; Sen 1981, 1983). The minimum constraint (which may be defined in absolute or relative terms) identifies the lowest level

of individual welfare which will be tolerated, and this constrains the maximization process in either its individualistic or social form. One point should be noticed here. In the broad understanding of welfare as good, we may assume that each individual's welfare already accounts for their own aversion to poverty, so that to impose such minimum constraints on the maximization process might seem to be a breach of the broad principle of welfarism. That is, we might seem to be importing some valuation of poverty onto the political calculus over and above those valuations held by individuals. And in one sense this is true, but it does not constitute a breach of welfarism. All that is required by welfarism is that social welfare depend only on individual welfare, it does not specify the form of that dependence. The imposition of a minimum constraint on the process of maximization merely identifies the form of the relationship between individual and social welfare (See Broome, 1991a for detailed discussion).

The imposition of equality constraints may be thought of as building inequality aversion into the commitment to welfare. The equality constraint identifies the maximal extent of interpersonal inequality that will be tolerated, and this constrains the maximization process in either its individualistic or social form. Of course, one might wish to incorporate both a minimum constraint and an equality constraint, and other forms of constraint may also be motivated; the point is simply that such concerns can be incorporated within the general structure of the maximization of either individual or social welfare.

With all this in mind, we come, at last, to the question of the appropriate response of the state to claims of welfare. Clearly any state that responds to claims of welfare might be said to be a 'welfare state', but that title tends to be reserved for states in which the response takes particular forms (contrast the discussions in Goodin, 1988; Barry, 1990; Weale, 1983 and Plant, 1985, 1991). We are now in a position to understand how different groups may come to widely different substantive positions on the particular forms of the response to claims of welfare by taking different routes through our discussion of welfare. Two examples will illustrate the point.

Case 1

Accept the broad definition of individual welfare as good, and the conceptualization of welfare as fully and considered informed preference satisfaction. But also accept the antipaternalist critique,

so that actual preferences are regarded as the only available guides to individual welfare. Furthermore, accept the political commitment to the simple maximization of welfare in the individualistic, Paretian, sense. In this case the appropriate political response to the acknowledged claims of welfare might be argued to be to rely on the market and other mechanisms based on voluntary choice as the appropriate means of achieving the desired objective (subject to the standard battery of qualifications concerning monopoly and other institutional market failures) *via* the standard result that the outcome of voluntary exchange via a set of competitive markets will be Pareto efficient relative to the preferences actually held by the participating individuals. In this case, then, a particular brand of commitment to welfare produces a political response of a market-liberal type normally held to be in sharp contrast to the 'welfare state'. The commitment to welfare is pursued only through policies that economists would regard as efficiency enhancing (interventions to overcome market failures and the like), rather than through any policies that are aimed at equity.

Case 2

Accept the broad definition of welfare as good, and the conceptualization of welfare as fully informed and considered preference satisfaction. Also accept that certain idealized preferences can be known objectively, and label these as 'needs'. Accept the political commitment to the maximization of social welfare subject to both minimum and equality constraints. In this case the appropriate political response to the acknowledged claims of welfare may involve the state in redistributive activity in response to the constraints on the maximization of social welfare, and in the direct supply of certain goods or services in amounts greater than would be consumed voluntarily so as to satisfy the objectively identified 'needs' for those goods or services. If we include education, health services and housing services amongst the identified 'needs' we can see that this case roughly approximates the political conception of the 'welfare state' (on the relationship between the specific 'goods' of education and health care and welfare, see Gutmann, 1987 and Daniels, 1985). In this case we can see that equity considerations, as well as efficiency considerations motivate welfare policies.

Clearly, these two cases are just two of many. There are many different routes that begin in our conceptual discussion of welfare, leading to a wide range of alternative political positions each of

which could legitimately claim to be a model of a 'welfare state' in that the role of the state is based on considerations of welfare, but each advocating a distinct approach to policy. At the same time it is possible to argue that the policies and structures that might be thought of as characteristic of the welfare state can be justified in a wide variety of ways, some of which might have little connection with welfare concerns. Again, an example may help to underline this point.

Consider the provision of health services via a system involving no fees at the point of service and financed out of income taxation. Such a policy might be justified in welfare terms by reference to an objective need for health care, perhaps combined with some commitment to positive freedoms and capabilities, or some commitment to equality of access. This would be a relatively standard way of embedding a health service within a conception of a welfare state. However, it might also be possible to justify an essentially similar policy from a starting point which accepted none of these commitments. It might be argued that the health care market suffered from a particular range of market imperfections and that the policy was a reaction to these market imperfections rather than a reaction to any particular characteristics of health care *per se*. Thus, it is the asymmetry of information as between the demander (the patient) and the supplier (the doctor), or the possible failures in the market for medical insurance, that are at the root of the argument for the policy, rather than any conception of a need for, or positive right to, health care (for related discussion see Culyer, 1989). Or we might base a health policy of the sort described on more deontological considerations which might operate to identify, say, a duty on the relatively rich to support the health of the relatively poor, without any consideration of the welfare implications of such a duty.

We are left, then, with a problem regarding the best way to define a welfare state. Do we categories states according to the arguments that are taken as valid in considering policies, or do we categorize states according to the policies that are enacted regardless of their origins? Both approaches have their merits, but they should not be confused. Claims of welfare do not necessarily give rise to what are normally regarded as welfare policies, and policies that might seem to be welfare policies may be derived from other starting points.

In order to make further progress with this problem, we need to set the normative politics of welfare in the context of a more positive political analysis. For example, if we conceive of

democratic politics in terms of the interaction of rational individuals within a framework of rules governing collective decision making procedures, then it is clear that policies are to be explained in terms of the interaction of the preferences of the individuals making up society and the rules of the political game - the constitution. In this framework there is no central decision maker who must respond to claims of welfare (or claims of any sort); rather the political decisions will emerge from the complex interaction within the political process. In this context, then, what matters are the political outcomes, the state will be a 'welfare state' to the extent that it enacts certain policies since no real sense can be given to the notion of the argument leading to that outcome. There is no single effective argument, just the myriad of particular actions of individuals within the political process.

Two points stand out in this setting. The first is that the actions of individuals within the political process are normally presumed to be motivated (at least in part) by their actual preferences over the considered alternatives, rather than any idealized or fully informed preferences; so that the welfare properties of political outcomes might be expected to fall short of the normative ideal to the extent that political choices do not reflect fully informed preferences. The second is that for any set of individuals the outcomes will depend on the design of the constitutional rules. This suggests that it is in the design of the political process itself that we can exert some influence over the extent to which the state displays the character of a welfare state. If politics is to be more sensitive to underlying claims of welfare (in whatever sense) this must be achieved by structuring the political process in such a way that it can distinguish true claims of welfare from observed political behaviour.

Considerations of issues of this sort lead to questions about the relationship between democracy and welfare policies - to what extent, for example, will the structures of democracy promote redistribution, or other aspects of welfare policy? And to what extent can we expect such policies to persist over time in democracies? There is now a burgeoning literature on these questions, One aspect of that literature focuses on the efficiency/equity trade-off following Meltzer and Richard (1981) Coughlin (1986) and Cox and McCubbins (1986) who view competition over tax and transfer schemes. To give a flavour of the current literature in this area I will mention just two recent arguments. Hassler et al (2003) provide a model which stresses the dynamics of welfare policy by analyzing the relationship between present and future redistribution in a model of

repeated voting - finding that while in some cases a redistributive welfare state can persist for ever, in other circumstances even those who benefit from the welfare state in the current period may vote to end it in the future. Conde-Ruiz and Galasso (2005) analyse redistributive pensions policy in an overlapping generations model in which the old, who form a relatively homogenous voting block, form an implicit coalition with the poor young to sustain a redistributive scheme. These papers share the theme of the dynamic sustainability of welfare policy. For a recent summary discussion of the political aspect of income redistribution see Londregan (2006), see also Sinn (1995), and Moene and Wallerstein (2001).

More generally, the point here is that the extent of welfare policy (however precisely defined) in any given state will reflect the political structures of decision making in that state. In this sense, the more philosophical discussion aimed at justifying welfare policies gives way to the more political discussion aimed at explaining such policies. However, these two approaches must relate to each other at some level if there is to be any overall evaluation.

Of course, the discussion of the last few paragraphs has taken place within the context of a particular positive model of politics (one associated with the rational choice approach to politics), and other models are available (such as the deliberative democracy discussed by Cohen and Rogers, 1983; Cohen, 1989, see also Frey, 1997, Brennan and Hamlin, 2000). The general point is simply that the factors which contribute to the realization of a welfare state will depend on the particular positive model of politics that is maintained, as well as the underlying conceptualization of welfare.

Equality

So far, I have focused on the flow of argument from the idea of welfare to the idea of a welfare state. In that flow, the idea of equality plays a relatively minor role. As already noted, it may be the case that the pursuit of welfare - in either its individual or social form - is informed and/or constrained by the consideration of equality, so that the distribution of welfare (or any component of welfare) may have value alongside welfare itself. But this role of equality is contingent: it is perfectly possible to develop an argument for a version of a welfare state that makes no significant reference to the idea of equality.

But there is another mainstream argument for the welfare state - one that flows much more directly from the idea of equality. Here the primary or driving idea is the idea of equality, and the natural first question is then 'equality of what?' (See Sen (1980), Dworkin (1981), Cohen (1989) for an introduction to the modern debate on this question). One possible answer to this question is that welfare (in one of its senses) is the relevant equilisand, so that, in this case we would again arrive at a conception of a welfare state that combined the ideas of equality and welfare. But, in this case, it is the role of welfare that is contingent: it would be perfectly possible to answer the question 'equality of what?' in a different way – perhaps focusing on the equality of resources, or equality of respect, or equality in some further dimension that is not directly related to welfare.

This contingency then alerts us to the possibility that we might arrive at a justification of something that is recognizable as a welfare state without any detailed or necessary reference to an underlying concept of welfare. This might be the case, for example, if we begin with the idea of equality and then answer the 'equality of what?' question by reference to, say resources and, in particular income. We might then interrogate the issue of what policies are most effective at ensuring movement towards the equalization of resources and find that among the policies that would be recommended are education and health policies that distribute education and health opportunities and resources in an essentially egalitarian manner (either in the sense that the distributions are themselves equal or equalizing, or in the sense that the education and health stats of individuals is set so as to equalize their wider opportunities and resources). Such education and health policies are often seen as a defining part of a welfare state, and yet here they have been defended as part of what might more properly be called an egalitarian state, without any real use of the idea of welfare.

So, while the two ideas of welfare and equality can be combined in various ways to generate support for (a variety of conceptions of) the welfare state, it is also possible to defend policies and institutions that are normally considered as central and defining features of the welfare state by routes that do not pass through the idea of welfare at all. In this way it is important that the debate on welfare is held separate from the debate on the welfare state – at least at some levels of abstraction. The welfare state may draw some of its justification from particular aspects of the debate on the idea of welfare, but there are certainly other sources of justification which are

independent of the specific debates on welfare. While I have only pointed to the idea of equality as an alternative source of argument for a welfare state, there are certainly others.

Final Remarks

The idea of welfare and the role it plays in normative political analysis are topics that are hotly debated. I have done no more than hint at some of the points under debate and their significance, and so provide a guide to the various maps of welfare in current use.

This brief tour of some of the key issues involved in the conceptualization of welfare suggests that the fully informed and considered preference theory of individual welfare together with the extended notion of welfarism provide a reasonably robust conceptualization of welfare at the individual and social level. One clear limitation of this position is indicated by the antipaternalistic, epistemic argument. It may well be the case that idealized preference theory provides an appropriate conception of personal welfare as good, but this may be of little practical significance if we do not and can not know an individual's fully informed and considered preferences.

This problem focuses attention on two alternative proxies for an individual's fully informed and considered preferences: that individual's actual preferences (or at least, those preferences that the individual actually expresses in a particular context, see Brennan and Hamlin, 2000); and arguments concerning the objectively good. Arguments of the second kind are often presented as arguments of need, or arguments of rights, or arguments of equality, but the framework sketched here suggests that they may be also be understood in terms of claims about the content of fully informed and considered preferences, so that they become claims about the substantive content of the idea of welfare. Much of the political debate concerning the appropriate response to claims of welfare derives from the tension between these alternative approaches to identifying the specific content of the idea of welfare.

The political role of considerations of welfare may be approached from either a normative or a positive standpoint. In terms of the normative evaluation of states and their policies, it is clear that a variety of positions can be defended depending upon the precise specification of welfare adopted,

and that even rather slight differences in this specification can lead to major differences at the level of policy evaluation. In this way the content of the concept of the welfare state may be seen to be very sensitive to the resolution of the debates identified above. At the positive level, the forces which tend to promote a welfare state (of whatever variety) will vary with the positive model of politics that is adopted. Democratic politics may be conceived, *inter alia*, as the aggregation of individual preferences over social outcomes, as bargaining within institutional constraints, or as a process of public debate aimed at consensus. Only when a specific conception of politics is defended, can the practical realization of a welfare state be debated without ambiguity.

Furthermore, the link between the idea of welfare and the idea of a welfare state is much less tight than is often supposed. There are routes to a welfare state that do not depend on a specific, or indeed any, reading of the idea of welfare and its normative significance. On such route starts form the idea of equality. It is by no means clear, in practice, whether the understanding of the welfare state prevalent in political debate owes more to a normative commitment to the idea of welfare, or to a normative commitment to the idea of equality – but I suspect that there is considerable lack of engagement within the debate, with proponents and opponents of 'the welfare state' differing as much on the question of what they take the underlying motivation of such a state to be as they do on the effectiveness of the various policies that make up 'the welfare state'.

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