

## POVERTY AND POLITICAL THEORY

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### ABSTRACT

Poverty is a leading issue in American politics and in Europe. The role of political theory should be to elevate issues to a philosophic level, yet theorists have said little about poverty. The authors of the theory canon discuss mainly the basic institutions and values of the society, not the issues of the morality and capacity of the poor as persons, which underlie poverty politics. This is also true of most recent theory, including Rawls and his critics, and even of most theorizing about the welfare state. The best sources for a true theory of poverty are writings by sociologists about culture of poverty or the ethnicity of the poor. Other resources include various versions of economism and the discussions of the formation of citizens in ancient theory. At the end of history, politics is less and less about fundamental values, more and more about personal probity and competence. Political theory must shift likewise.

In this paper, I argue that poverty has become a central problem in the politics of Western countries, but political theory has said little about it. Political theorists have largely avoided discussing the innermost issues raised by poverty, which concern the personality of the poor. This has made it more difficult for politicians and citizens to do so. To probe poverty and its solutions more seriously, a new political theory must be written.<sup>1</sup>

The discussion below first sets out a crucial set of empirical premises about the nature of the poverty problem and the issues it raises. I define the role of political theory as raising to a philosophic level the actual issues of politics. However, past political theory does not address the issues raised by poverty seriously. Nor does recent theory, including Rawls or his critics. A political theory of poverty must focus on questions of personal responsibility and strength, not the issues of rights and claims that pervade established theory. Theorists who focus on the welfare state sometimes touch on personality issues, but writers about the culture of poverty or ethnicity actually address them best, even though they do not think of themselves as theorists. Finally, I suggest some further resources for a theory of poverty in economics and ancient political philosophy. With the narrowing of fundamental alternatives in world politics, the importance of personality issues in politics can only grow.

### **THE POVERTY ISSUE**

The main reason theorists have mostly ignored the politics of poverty is probably that they refuse to accept that it is in any way distinctive. Typically, they take it to be a left-right dispute over the proper scale of the welfare state, not different from other disputes over the scale of government such as how far to regulate the economy. I think, rather, that poverty is a different kind of issue.

To establish this, I state the following presumptions. They may be more contentious than the conclusions I draw from them about theory. This fact is itself a sign of how small a role theory, in the sense of normative disputes over values, plays in today's affairs. The supreme question in social politics is not whether justice should be based on Rawls' difference principle or some other. It is whether a lack of jobs or child care can explain why few poor adults work.

The empiricism of disputes reflects a political world where the range of permissive principles has been narrowed by the victory of democratic capitalism over the socialist left. It also, however, reflects the rising seriousness of the poverty problem. The presence of destitution in an affluent society raises disputes over whether opportunity is fair far more than it brings the nature of that society into question. Beneath these disputes lurk questions about the identity of the poor that are properly philosophic, but political theorists have not addressed them.

***Poverty means more than low income***

The term "poverty" connotes low income, but poverty as a political issue centers on behavior more than economics. It concerns people who are not only low-income but fail to function socially in expected ways. That is, they drop out of school, offend the law, or subsist on welfare without employment, even though employable. What above all places this behavior outside traditional theory is that it is dysfunctional. That is, it harms the interest of the individuals involved *as well as* that of the society. Most of the controversy about poverty is about who is responsible for this lifestyle.

The federal government defines the poor as people falling below a certain minimum of income. Fifteen percent of the American public was poor by this standard in 1993.<sup>2</sup> However, most people who enter poverty leave it quickly and are not distinct from the better-off population. The controversial poor are those who remain poor long-term, and especially those who are able-bodied and working-aged. Perhaps 4 to 5 percent of Americans remain poor for more than two years at once but are not elderly or disabled.<sup>3</sup> This is the group--largely made up of welfare mothers and single, nonworking men--on whom controversy centers. While children comprise 40 percent of the poor,<sup>4</sup> the dispute is much more about their parents. Why don't the adult poor do more to provide for themselves and their families, and who is responsible for this, them or the society?

Politically, the most salient fact about poor adults is that they seldom work. In 1959, 68 percent of the heads of poor families worked at some time in the year, and 31 percent worked full-year and full-time. By 1975, those levels had declined to only 50 and 16 percent, respectively, and have changed little since. In 1993, only 41 percent of poor adults worked at all, only 10 percent full-year and full-time, compared to figures of 69 and 42 percent for the general population.<sup>5</sup> It is lack of

employment more than low income as such that seems to cause many of the other problems of the poor, such as marital instability.<sup>6</sup> Since work levels among nonpoor adults run much higher, there is pressure to require welfare recipients to work. But dispute rages over why the poor so seldom work and what can be done about it.

***Poverty has different causes than low income or inequality***

If poverty were caused by some clear and remediable feature of society, it would not be a distinct sort of issue. If, for example, it were caused by government spending too much or too little on social programs, then it would not be distinct from other issues of a left-right character that center on the proper role of government. Government might solve the problem simply by transferring more resources to the needy, or by denying them aid. Whether to do this could be debated in terms of competing principles of justice of the sort already discussed by political theorists.

Unfortunately, the causes and cures of poverty are far from clear. Conservatives contend that government has created poverty by giving support to the dysfunctional,<sup>7</sup> liberals that it has done too little to help the deprived or to abate such barriers to working as racial prejudice or lack of jobs or child care.<sup>8</sup> Both sides think that welfare creates incentives against work and marriage by supporting mainly the nonworking, unmarried poor. But there is little evidence for any of these theories. Government policies and social or economic barriers appear to explain at best only part of the poverty problem.<sup>9</sup>

Equally, solutions are unclear. While government could simply eradicate income poverty with transfers, this would not solve the dysfunctional behavioral patterns that are more controversial. Since the Great Society of the 1960s, thirty years of "compensatory" education and training programs have failed to show much impact on the wages or work levels of poor adults. Reductions in welfare's disincentives to work have not raised work levels. Efforts to "make work pay" such as raising the minimum wage or subsidizing wages also do not raise work levels; the benefits also fail to reach most poor adults, just because they work so little.

These disappointments have driven the options available to government down to essentially two: toleration and enforcement. Society can simply endure the disorders associated with poverty, or it can attempt to change the behavior of poor adults through involuntary methods. In the last

twenty years, social policy has moved that way. Tougher law enforcement has filled the prisons, and programs to enforce work in the welfare system have developed. Mandatory work programs do more to raise actual work levels than any voluntary benefit or program. The trend is to intensify these paternalistic policies yet further.<sup>10</sup> But whether to demand that poor adults behave better remains bitterly divisive.

***Poverty generates different politics from low income or inequality.***

The political disputes raised by poverty are different from the type political theorists usually assume.<sup>11</sup> Again, poverty is not a standard left-right issue about the proper scope of government, such as whether to enforce affirmative action or enact national health insurance. These "New Deal" issues, what I call progressive politics, form the staples of partisan politics. They are very important, as they shape the basic institutions and values of the society. They establish what, if any, protections citizens enjoy against the insecurities of private life. If government establishes a social safety net for those who fail to earn enough, or if it outlaws racial discrimination, it changes the meaning of justice for the community. Government imposes a certain morals on private persons or firms. There is no assumption that the interest of those regulated necessarily coincides with that of the society, although they share in the common interest defended by the rules.

Poverty raises very different disputes, which I call dependency politics. The controversy is much less about fundamental institutions and values, much more about how to restore social order. Typically, the poor are not radicals who demand a more egalitarian society. Rather, they appear as offenders against values, such as law-abidingness or the work ethic, that are not in question. The dispute is how order can be rebuilt, whatever one believes about justice. Where progressive disputes are ideological, pitting contending visions of the society against one another, dependency disputes are moralistic, about who is to blame for bad behavior. The contestants initially dispute whether the poor have the opportunity to work or otherwise behave better than they do, but under these issues lurk deeper questions about who the poor are as persons.

Progressive politics is impersonal. The meaning of justice may be disputed, but the identity of citizens usually is not. What I call the competence assumption is made. Everyone treats other participants as more or less reliable and self-reliant, even if they disagree with their positions. I may

regard my opponents' view on a progressive issue as misguided or self-interested, but I do not doubt that they know their own interest and what serves it, and I would trust one of them to give me a ride home in the evening. Political values may be at issue, but not personal competence. This is the situation that political theorists routinely assume.

Dependency politics, however, is much more personal. Crime and welfarism raise issues of personal coping much more than justice. The surface dispute is usually about whether social or governmental "barriers" impede the poor getting ahead on their own. But beneath that, the real issues concern "deservingness." One question is moral responsibility. Do the poor believe in the right values? Who is responsible for the disorders of the inner city? Liberals say the society, conservatives the poor themselves. Note that morals here can assume a harmony of interests between the individual and society that is lacking in progressive issues. Typically, if the poor did work or obey the law better than they do, it would serve their interests and values as well as those of the collectivity.

Moral responsibility in turn rests on judgments of personal competence. The innermost issue of dependency politics is whether the poor are able to cope with life without aid. Are they overwhelmed by the forces of an unjust society, as liberals say? Or are they miscreants who would behave better if society insisted, as conservatives say? The latter position, while more hostile to the poor, is actually more optimistic about their capabilities.

To speak of the "welfare state," as theorists tend to do, muddies the difference between progressive and poverty issues in social policy. Some social programs are aimed at the middle class, some at the poor. The former actually predominate. In 1995, the Federal government spent \$515 billion on Social Security, the massive pension and disability program, Medicare, which funds health care for the aged and disabled, and Unemployment Insurance for jobless workers. It spent only \$93 million on means-tested aid to the needy, what is normally known as "welfare."<sup>12</sup> It is the middle class programs that raise progressive issues, about how much social spending government can afford. Welfare and other antipoverty programs raise very different conflicts, focused far more on the lifestyle of the recipients than on the cost of supporting them.

The debate about poverty often suggests that the contestants reason from barriers to identity. That is, they decide whether jobs are available, and then they decide whether the poor are able to cope. I believe, rather, that the inference usually runs the other way. Read closely, debates about welfare or poverty suggest that the contestants have mental images of the poor as able or unable to cope, and from this they infer their views of the opportunity structure. Liberals see the needy as helpless victims of an unjust society, so they tend to say jobs or child care are lacking for people to work, whatever the hard evidence about these "barriers." Conservatives see the same people as confident maximizers taking advantage of a sentimental society, so they assert that opportunity is available.

The reason the personality images seem to be prior is that they are typically unswayed by large swings in the objective opportunity situation. No matter how much is done to help poor adults, few liberal experts or politicians will agree to *require* them to work, because that violates an inner picture of these people as passive sufferers of social injustice. Conversely, conservatives go on saying that the idle can work if they choose, however little is done to help them. That is the tip-off that the real issue concerns identity rather than social fairness.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Poverty has risen in political importance***

Poverty is not a new issue. It is a longstanding dilemma in America, and in other Western societies. But poverty and the associated social problems are vastly more important to politics today than they were a generation or two ago. Traditionally, crime and welfare were local issues. They became critical national issues only in the 1960s. To the distress of the left, these questions have since operated to suppress structural issues about economic inequality. After the mid 1960s, it became difficult to argue for redistributive social policies, because rising crime and welfarism and falling work levels in the cities made the low-income people who would benefit appear "undeserving." The claim to be tough on crime and welfare is one of the appeals that Republicans used to win most presidential elections since 1968 and, after 1980, to expand their power in Congress.<sup>14</sup>

Some on the left see poverty politics as no more than a conservative political tactic. Attacks on crime or welfare are a red herring used to distract attention from ongoing injustices due to class,

race, or gender.<sup>15</sup> If this were true, dependency politics would be only a facet of progressive conflict and have no autonomy. There certainly remain unresolved issues of justice and equality for politicians to address, such as gay rights, the lack of guaranteed health care in America, and growing inequality in the distribution of wages and incomes.

But poverty has clearly become an important dimension in politics in its own right, often cross-cutting the usual liberal-conservative divide over the role of government. Crime, welfare, and other disorders linked to poverty frustrate reformism from the right as well as the left. The public may be unwilling to transfer more money to the poor, but it is also unwilling to abandon them. Poverty blocked liberal social reforms after 1970, but it also blocked Ronald Reagan from gutting the welfare state. The public wants government first to work better in elemental ways, to achieve work and law-abidingness in the cities better than it has. Progressive reformism in either a liberal or conservative form will have to wait.<sup>16</sup>

### **THE TASK OF THEORY**

Political theorists should discuss poverty more seriously than they have. They should not write in isolation from real politics. Neither should they be so close to current controversies as to have no distance from them. Rather, theory should elevate the issues raised in politics to a philosophic level. That is, it should define and resolve them with greater generality and depth than politicians or citizens can do in the heat of battle. Philosophers can help us look past the personalities and disputes of the moment to what political struggles are most deeply about. Whether political theory is analytic or normative, about actual politics or an ideal politics, is less important than that it state what is fundamental about the conflicts of the moment.<sup>17</sup>

The greatest theorists addressed the controversies of their own eras, but in terms that were also universal. Machiavelli and Hobbes plumb the construction of political order on a post-medieval basis, the chief task of European states in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Locke and Rousseau address the construction of government by consent, the chief agenda of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, while the American Founders consider the extension of democracy to a

continental nation. Marx and T.H. Green address the new issues of class and redistribution that arose in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries as government was democratized, and so on.

Theory helps the political process define the chief options and values at stake in a conflict. For example, to leaders who have absorbed Locke, John Stuart Mill, and the American Founders, "democracy" means some combination of the rule of law, majority rule, and minority rights. Imbued with that tradition, American policymakers seek to democratize South Africa or Haiti by promoting those values. Similarly, to leaders influenced by Adam Smith or the collectivist tradition, the basic alternatives for producing or distributing goods or services are the free market and bureaucracy. Proposals to expand or reduce the welfare state are debated in terms of the relative balance of the market and government provision in the society.

When a theoretical discourse surrounds an issue, it guards access to the public agenda. It specifies the key values that must be satisfied before a demand for redress from a group or interest is taken seriously. Demands for special political rights, for example, will receive special scrutiny in a polity committed to democracy in the above sense. That is one reason why majority-black voting districts, created under the Voting Rights Act, are currently under challenge. Similarly, industries asking protection from competitive pressures have to answer the theory developed by economists, which descends from Adam Smith, that government should intervene in the market only to rectify "market failures." This theory justified important cuts in budget and tax subsidies for business in recent decades. The ability to claim support in prevailing political and economic theory is as important as political muscle in pushing through or resisting a demand.<sup>18</sup>

No theoretical tradition of the same weight surrounds poverty politics. Demands to help or deny help to the needy are constantly made with little sense of what is and is not a good public ground for them. The only policy idea of any generality that has appeared in the poverty arena is "social contract"--the idea that welfare recipients should have to do something to help themselves in return for support from the society. That notion justified recent attempts to require that welfare recipients work. It appeared spontaneously in 1986, owing little to theoretical reflection.<sup>19</sup>

A serious political theory of poverty must resolve the crucial identity issues in poverty politics. Who do we presume the poor to be, and why would this conception integrate them into the

community?<sup>20</sup> Especially, do we take poor adults to be morally responsible or not, competent or not? To take liberal positions on these issues requires some version of what I call sociologism--the projection of personal problems onto the environment. One interprets failure to work, for example, not as an individual failing, but as a feature of the opportunity structure, in which jobs, child care, or some other resource is lacking. Conversely, to take conservative positions means in some way to moralize, to reprove the poor for failing to do right. Either position, to be philosophical, must rest on a well-grounded image of who the poor are as persons. Ideally, that image should be set out as fully and generally as Hobbes anatomizes "masterless men" in the early chapters of the Leviathan.

The voters, impatient with social problems, want the poverty issue addressed candidly and seriously. More often than not, politicians disappoint them. When they discuss poverty, they usually debate whether to spend more or less on social programs, or whether various "barriers" exist that prevent the poor working or marrying. They seldom discuss openly the behavioral problems that worry the public, and they rarely admit the personality issues that in fact divide them from their opponents.<sup>21</sup> That diffidence has obstructed the reform of welfare, and it builds public distrust. To citizens and officials struggling with crime, welfarism, and failing schools at the local level, the reluctance of national leaders to discuss conduct problems candidly sounds evasive. That has been a chief cause of the cynicism about government that has grown up since the late 1960s.<sup>22</sup>

Perhaps leaders evade the personal issue because they are not conscious of it, or because it is so terribly sensitive. To reflect on the morality or competence of fellow citizens in a democracy is inherently invidious. But another reason for the evasion is lack of theoretical leadership. Political thinkers simply have not provided the conceptions, the language, that could have helped politicians stake out compelling positions about the nature and solution of the social problem.

### **THE THEORETICAL TRADITION**

The main source of our theoretical tradition is a corpus of famous theorists of the past. Unfortunately, this canon applies much more clearly to the structural questions facing politics, including progressive, size-of-government issues, than it does to the more personal issues raised by poverty. This is because when the received theorists wrote, structural concerns about how the polity

or economy should be arranged were far more salient than the problems of social order we face today.

The classic Western theorists address what political and economic rights the citizenry should have. Is political or economic inequality acceptable? Should governance be democratic? To what extent should government intervene in the market to alter outcomes? In the past, these were central issues in America and other Western countries. The question whether to extend formally equal rights to education and job opportunity to women and minorities also raised disputes of this kind. As mentioned, structural issues persist, such as whether to enact national health care, abate growing wage inequality, or guarantee gay rights. Such questions touch basic institutions and values, not the competence of citizens, and the traditional discourse is adequate to debate them.

It is inadequate, however, to discuss issues such as poverty where personal adequacy comes into question. Our tradition questions boldly whether government or the economy is just to this or that element of the society. It seldom questions that individual citizens are morally responsible for their behavior or competent to pursue their own interest. In the world of theory, people do not lead self-destructive lives. Some theorists authorize disobedience to government--what Locke called the "appeal to heaven"--but not deviance that is merely harmful, without a political purpose. Yet whether to hold people accountable for dysfunctional behavior is the issue in much of poverty politics.

Theorists make the competence assumption: individuals are presumed able to advance at least their own self-interest as they judge that, if not society's. Individuals seek material advancement, and they are presumed to do so effectively given opportunity. There are variations on the theme, but overwhelmingly the constituent figure of Western political understanding is a competent, self-seeking man or woman engaged in getting ahead. The image of the individual as an energetic pursuer of personal advantage appears most graphically in Hobbes, who posited as "a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire of power after power, that ceaseth only in death."<sup>23</sup> But much the same presumption is made in Rousseau, the American Founders, and Marx, however they differ about other matters. In general, the Western tradition debates how rights,

power, or reward are to be allocated among competent citizens, but not the basic nature of those citizens.

Society in modern theory is individualist and competitive. In the economy, producers and consumers vie for advantage. In politics, people and parties seek control. They are willing to assume leadership of the society if they can get it. On the world scene, nations struggle for independence and, if they can get it, sway over other nations. The image is all of an assertive, power-seeking politics in which players willingly seek responsibility for themselves and others. The classic question "who shall govern" presumes that individuals are willing and able first to govern themselves. But such a vision hardly applies to the passive world of the inner city, where, for mysterious reasons, people commonly do not govern themselves let alone others.

The competence assumption, one could argue, is a good deal more fundamental to traditional theory than the overt values it serves, chiefly freedom and equality in varying definitions. Neither of these values is as much an absolute as the image of the person as competent at least in a selfish sense. Our tradition can contemplate curbing personal freedom to serve moral purposes. Theorists all wrestle with what I call the moral problem--how to ensure that people pursuing their own advantage serve the social advantage also. In modern thinking, the preferred solutions are the free market or bureaucracy. Either economic competition will force individuals to serve the social interest as well as their own, what Adam Smith called the "invisible hand," or the visible hand of government must suppress damaging forms of self-seeking.

This sense of morals questions the intentions of individuals but not their capacity. The very incentives or prohibitions government uses to protect important public values presume that individuals can respond to its cues. Those regulated and the rest of society may disagree about ends, but they share a common human nature. Poverty disputes, however, reverse those presumptions. Poor adults do not respond well to the strong incentives they have to avoid crime and welfare, even when these are augmented by policy.<sup>24</sup> The competence of the poor is debated, not assumed, and the values involved do not pit the interests of the poor against those of the society. The poor do not consistently do what they themselves seek, which is to work and get ahead like other people. And if they did so, everyone would gain.

This confident image of the individual runs strongest in the classical liberal tradition that developed chiefly in Britain and America. Here, the image of society and politics as arenas in which individuals compete is particularly strong. There is little notion that people need be remade to solve the moral problem. The social interest is not different in kind from individual interests, only broader. To achieve it requires changing policy, not personality. Helvetius rebuked moralists for inveighing against the "badness" of people who were merely "subject to their own interests." Instead, "legislators" should align the interest of individuals with the "general interest."<sup>25</sup>

As Alexis de Tocqueville stated his competence assumption, each person possesses the "reason necessary for him to look after himself in matters of his own exclusive concern." He adds, truly, that "That is the great maxim on which civil and political society in the United States rests . . . ." He believed that, in American conditions, virtue was consistent with "self-interest rightly understood."<sup>26</sup>

The American Founders constructed the federal Constitution using a political mechanics that was cynical about the morality of political interests but sanguine about their capacity to pursue their own advantage well. The very idea that "Ambition must be made to counteract ambition" presumes that politicians are effective at least on their own account. The Federalist is a paean to the competence assumption. Note the impersonality of this premise. Ever afterwards, Americans assumed what J.R. Pole calls the "interchangeability principle," the view that citizens of any ethnic origin were essentially alike, that all could command from others an equal respect for their "personal bearing."<sup>27</sup> That is precisely the assumption violated by the growth of dysfunctional poverty in American cities.

The conservative tradition embodied in Edmund Burke and his heirs is less sanguine about individualism but equally wedded to competence. Where proponents of *laissez-faire* say self-interested interaction in the market can be the basis of society, traditionalists say there must be a common morality that goes beyond self-interest. Modern liberal polities are "ill-founded," George Will writes, because they assume only a self-seeking human nature. Government must instill the "second nature" of citizenship. The contradiction, William Waldegrave says, is that "the Liberal system must rest on moral foundations . . . which cannot be derived from it."<sup>28</sup> Yet, the Burkeans address the moral problem more than the poverty problem. They talk more of inculcating values

than personal capacity. They do not doubt what is in doubt, namely that the poor can achieve at least their own self-interest as they define that.

On the left as well, an elemental competence is assumed. The traditional left believes, as Vernon Parrington put it, is that there is a "perennial conflict between economics and justice."<sup>29</sup> The market cannot be allowed to govern society unaided. Government must intervene in production and distribution to assure fair opportunity or mitigate inequality. This is the conviction that animated progressive reformism for two centuries everywhere in the West. Government regulated the economy for egalitarian ends and furnished a welfare state, and in the U.S. it also intervened to mandate fairness to women and minorities.

But liberals and radicals, like conservatives, have largely evaded the behavioral issues raised by poverty. That is partly because they, more than the right, have been committed to tolerance. They cherish the conviction, classically stated in John Stuart Mill's On Liberty, that the only just ground for curbing the behavior of people is to protect the rights of others. Probably more important, incompetence at the bottom of society has been a problem for the left only recently. Historically, reformers saw themselves as celebrating civic values, not undercutting them. Radical politics called on ordinary people, through political action, to assume responsibility for their lot. In American politics, the labor, civil rights, and feminist movements did exactly that, by organizing to govern their own affairs and put pressure on the regime.

Above all, the left, like the right, assumed that the people they spoke for were employed. Marxism is the template of modern radicalism, but Marxism is a theory of the *working* class, not of today's nonworking poor. For Marxists, the moral position of the people is entirely connected to labor. Only workers generate a product that employers can appropriate, so only they are exploited by capitalism. Employment also formed workers as producers and citizens. They gained from the factory the discipline, not only to produce at unprecedented levels, but to shape through politics a different society. They could not expect any other class to help them. "The emancipation of the working class," Marx wrote, "is the work of the working class itself."<sup>30</sup>

Marx looked down on the groups that we today call poor or underclass. Those without regular connection to the economy could only be the lackeys of the middle-class, the inevitable rulers of

capitalism. He wrote a withering critique of the marginal social groups that Louis Bonaparte mobilized to take over the French government in 1851--"vagabonds, discharged soldiers, discharged jailbirds, escaped galley slaves, swindlers, . . . pickpockets, tricksters, gamblers, . . . brothel keepers, porters, . . . ragpickers, knife grinders, tinkers, beggars."<sup>31</sup>

In much the same spirit, the founders of British socialism insisted that workers, indeed, work. Beatrice Webb worried that society would ensure health care and jobless benefits to workers "without any corresponding obligation to get well and keep well, or to seek and keep employment."<sup>32</sup> William Beveridge, whose wartime planning shaped the British welfare state, warned that "Men and women in receipt of unemployment benefit cannot be allowed to hold out indefinitely" for preferred jobs; they should have to accept available jobs or, at least, enter an employment program.<sup>33</sup>

Later Marxists, faced with the fading radicalism of workers, had little choice but to build up marginal elements as agents of change. Herbert Marcuse hoped that "the substratum of the outcasts and outsiders, the exploited and persecuted of other races and other colors, the unemployed and the unemployable" might yet transform the society.<sup>34</sup> Piven and Cloward argued that assistance recipients should be understood to be potential workers; the welfare system expanded to serve them in hard times, then contracted to force them to work when the economy improved.<sup>35</sup> But without a steady work history, few of today's poor, on or off welfare, can really claim the dignities of employment. The politics about their claims, therefore, centers on their "deservingness" rather than justice. For that debate, our tradition does not prepare us.

## QUALIFICATIONS

The idea that traditional theorists neglect poverty must be tempered in several respects, but the qualifications leave our argument standing.

### *Classical theory and poverty*

First, the major writers of the canon do not entirely ignore poverty. The problem of destitution existed in their own day, and most say at least something about it. Although they affirmed a self-seeking, market society, liberal theorists from Locke through Mill all admitted a public responsibility to support the poor.<sup>36</sup> Locke, for example, ". . . gives every Man a Title to so much out

of another's Plenty, as will keep him from extream want, where he has no means to subsist otherwise . . . ."37 At the same time, he demanded severely that the idle poor, and even their children, be required to work in return for parish relief.<sup>38</sup>

Other writers feared that poverty would prove incompatible with the free society. Tocqueville believed that public aid for the poor would inevitably be corrupting, because aid administrators could never know enough about individual cases to deny aid to the undeserving.<sup>39</sup> Hegel saw that a dependent poor contradicted the assumption of civil society, which was that people worked for a living and thus enjoyed "individual independence and self-respect." The danger was that, despite "an excess of wealth," society would generate a "penurious rabble."<sup>40</sup>

But too much must not be made of these comments. None of the canonical theorists made more than passing reference to poverty in the current sense of dysfunctional destitution. It simply was not central to the conflicts of their times. Their preoccupations remained structural, about basic institutions and values. None of them reflected in any depth on the damage that poverty does to assumptions of competence. We cannot find in them the identity-based philosophy of poverty we need.

### ***Social formation***

A second rejoinder is that the theory tradition is not without all concern for the capabilities of individuals. While liberal authors tend to take personal mastery as given, other authors had a lively sense of the social formation of the individual. For Rousseau, citizens are the children of the moral community they have known; for Marx, of their position in the class structure; for T.H. Green, of the social position in which they realize, or fail to realize, their human potential. One might see in these authors' determinism or materialism a capacity to address the issues of capacity raised by poverty.

But in general, the collectivists address the problem of morals, not of competence. They meant that an adverse environment could explain individuals' lowly economic position, or their immorality, meaning their unwillingness to sacrifice for the whole. They did not mean that it could explain an inability to function for one's own ends. Even thinkers who say most firmly that identity is a social product, such as Rousseau or Hegel, still assume the individual as economically rational. Their interest is mostly in how to steer self-seeking toward the greater good. They hardly imagined or

discussed true incompetence--an inability to advance even one's own interest, let alone society's. It simply was not then the issue it has since become.

Liberals of the later nineteenth century developed an idea of "positive" as opposed to "negative" liberty. Society had an obligation to give people, not only freedom, but, as T.H. Green put it, "a positive power or capacity of doing or enjoying something worth doing or enjoying."<sup>41</sup> This idea helped justify the early rise of the welfare state in the U.S. and Britain. But the implication was largely that government should support people in material ways, by guaranteeing adequate jobs, wages, housing, health care, and so forth. There was little idea here of the therapeutic social policies favored by today's liberals--early childhood enrichment, family interventions, mentoring programs.<sup>42</sup> Such measures reflect on the essential competence of the poor as "positive freedom" does not.

Admittedly, there was in Green, J.S. Mill, and also in John Dewey an anxiety to educate the proletariat for its own good as well as society's. Ordinary people had to be equipped to participate in the modern world. But no one questioned that they were competent to function in the old social order. The stress was mostly on morals rather than competence, on elevating commitment to the common good, not on overcoming disorders in personal life. None of these thinkers confronted the level of disarray now found in American cities. Dysfunction was not then great enough to put the competence assumption in question. Now, at least for the long-term poor, it is.

One reason the poverty problem was not clearly perceived was that before the mid twentieth century the poor in today's dysfunctional sense were hardly separable from the laboring class. Most people of very low income still worked, and although there was talk of the behavioral side of poverty ("pauperism"), the economic face of poverty still dominated. It was postwar affluence that finally separated the poor from the proletariat. Only then did low income as such become an anomaly in need of explanation and redress.<sup>43</sup>

Before the current era, furthermore, the infancy of the welfare state worked to conceal the intractability of poverty and, with it, the question of competence. A century ago, it was far more possible to assert the malleability and improvability of the lower orders than it is today. Government had not yet done all the things it has since tried to uplift the poor. J.S. Mill or Dewey could believe in the transforming powers of education because the school system was just expanding

to universality, and it was easy to exaggerate its potential. We now realize that improved schooling did much to improve the prospects of workers and their children. But it has not resuscitated the inner city.

Evaluation research since the 1960s establishes that how much children learn in school is determined partly by the quality of the school but mainly by the students' family background. Schooling, however well-funded, cannot overcome the disadvantages that poor children bring with them from home.<sup>44</sup> The small effects of compensatory education and training programs teach a similar lesson. Research and the policy history show that the potential of individuals is formed far earlier in life and far more intractably than nineteenth-century social reformers imagined. Inheritance and early family experiences are paramount; and everything that society does later has only marginal influence.<sup>45</sup>

Again, if society had a power to overcome poverty by some act of commitment, the problem would not be distinct or require any special theory. It is precisely the disappointments of past programs that pose the stark options facing antipoverty policy today--either to tolerate urban disorders or enforce changes in behavior. These are the hard choices that flush the sensitive issues of responsibility and competence out into the open. Standing far earlier in political and policy history, the theorists in the traditional canon could imagine more attractive options.

### *Nietzsche*

Finally, one might claim that there is one theorist who did address personality issues of the same sort as those raised by poverty. The Western tradition generally assumes that strength is needed for success in politics. Those who get things from government are those who muster the will to take power or put pressure on the regime. Friedrich Nietzsche is the first thinker to see that, in modern politics, vulnerability can also be a resource. In a modern regime with moral intentions, one can get attention by claiming that this or that group is victimized. In much of his work, Nietzsche attacked that sort of appeal. Overtaught by religion, Victorian culture attached such value to pity and humility that it valued weakness more than strength, courage, and self-reliance. This effeminacy helped control the masses, but it also fostered "ressentiment" among them, finally demoralizing the

strong. Nietzsche hoped that new leaders--the "overman" or "blond beast"--would reassert aristocratic hardihood.<sup>46</sup>

With appeals to justice blocked by dysfunction, most advocates for the poor in today's politics appeal instead to guilt--the belief that social unfairness is somehow responsible for poverty. They appeal to disadvantage and demand redress, but they count on the oppressors themselves to respond and they do not define or defend any new political order.<sup>47</sup> This dependent sort of appeal is what Nietzsche criticized. His bracing tone, and his appeal to strength, matches that of contemporary conservatives as they reject such demands and exhort the poor to help themselves. Thus, Nietzsche's polemic does address questions of personal responsibility and competence, at least at a general level.

But like the other theorists, Nietzsche does not wrestle centrally with poverty. His chief enemy is religion and not--as with today's conservatives--the permissiveness of public policy. He was more of a philosopher and cultural critic than a political philosopher. And he wrote amidst a highly conformist society, long before urban breakdown became the serious problem it is today.

Overall, it is still fair to say that Western political writers take little notice of what we today call poverty. In the canon, much attention is paid to the claims of common people, including peasants, laborers, and industrial workers, but almost none to people who do not function economically. How to grapple with bad behavior rather than political conflict is never the main subject. In the world of theory, the dysfunctional poor are beneath notice or offstage.

Because our theoretical tradition is blind to incompetence, policymakers confront today's social problem intellectually unprepared for it. The behavioral models they learned in social science courses do not apply. Today's poverty does not result, in the main, from a market failure, nor is poverty politics like the self-reliant pluralism described in Madison's Federalist #10. The subject requires grappling, rather, with who the poor are. When politicians, against their instincts, are forced to do that, they engage in a discourse without serious precedent in the Western tradition.

## **RECENT THEORY**

Many would suppose that recent political theory developed by John Rawls and others provides the thinking we need. After all, Rawls and other recent liberal theorists manifest a special concern

for the "least advantaged," a code word for the poor. The new thinking was published mostly after 1970 when poverty was already a paramount issue in American politics and a rising one in Europe. If we need a political theory for poverty, perhaps these recent authors provide it.

### *Liberal theory*

The Rawlsian discourse, however, does not really apply to the issues raised by poverty as I have defined them.<sup>48</sup> It is a throwback to the concerns of earlier theory about the basic institutions and values of the society. Rawls attempts to model how modern societies choose their principles of justice. He says they will select the norms individuals would choose behind a "veil of ignorance" where they did not know what position they would occupy in the resulting society. He argues that they would choose principles to make liberty as great as possible and equal for all, and to permit economic inequality only to the extent it served the interests of the "least advantaged."<sup>49</sup>

Rawls' liberal critics provide variations on this theme. Robert Nozick imagines a state of nature in which wealth cannot be redistributed and government arises only to deal with practical disorders, a theory reminiscent of Locke.<sup>50</sup> Bruce Ackerman says justice should be seen as arising from a conversation among citizens, not from their decisions in isolation.<sup>51</sup>

Such a theory is appropriate to discuss the establishment of a welfare state or recent American reforms to guarantee more equal opportunity to minorities and women. But it hardly applies to controversies about the inner city. Here the main issue is not what justice should mean. It is to how to restore social order in a society whose principles are agreed. It is how to cope with the manifest inability of some citizens to function. One might say it is to make society "well-ordered" in Rawls' sense, that is able to realize its own principles.<sup>52</sup> Good behavior is at issue, not the good society.

Rawls and his critics fail to address these issues because, no less than earlier theorists, they assume personal competence. People, says Rawls, are to be seen as "free and rational persons" who act to "further their own interests" and pursue a "plan of life."<sup>53</sup> Nozick assumes, like other conservatives, that individuals are able to advance their own interests in a free market. Ackerman says that everyone has his own view of the good, and government must treat these conceptions impartially.<sup>54</sup> People are also civic and responsible for themselves. Most have, Rawls says, a "capacity for moral personality," or a sense of the good and of justice. They observe a "principle of

fairness," according to which they must adhere to moral behavior if others do. The person is "someone who can be a citizen, that is, a fully cooperating member of society."<sup>55</sup>

But in poverty politics, competence and moral responsibility cannot be assumed. The chief issue is precisely whether people are functional enough to be held responsible for themselves. Many would doubt that the seriously poor are able to choose a "plan of life" or to live it out. The trends in social policy are to give the poor direction about how to live, a paternalism alien to Rawls and other modern theorists. But Rawls refuses to discuss these issues. He pointedly excludes "moral desert" from his definition of justice.<sup>56</sup>

### *Communitarianism*

Communitarian critics say that the new liberalism is too procedural. Justice has meaning only within a specific community. The individual should be seen, not as an abstraction deliberating about justice, but as "constituted" by that community.<sup>57</sup> Communitarians talk of obligations to the collectivity as well as rights. It is a throwback to the concern for social formation shown by Rousseau and the other collectivists of the theory canon. But in its own way this school, too, presumes competence. Walzer, like Rawls, assumes that justice is to be framed by a "self-respecting citizen" who is an "autonomous" member of his community and "a free and responsible agent"; "citizenship" assumes "self-possession," or the capacity to "hold ourselves responsible" and be "held responsible" by others. "What is dishonorable, above all, is the claim of irresponsibility, the denial of self-possession."<sup>58</sup>

But in poverty politics, the dilemma is precisely how to deal with people who are not self-respecting. When advocates for the poor attribute their problems to the environment, effectively they do make a claim of irresponsibility. To say that justice comes from a dialogue among concrete citizens still assumes that the citizens are able to enter into that dialogue. It still assumes that they are members of the community, above all that they have an economic function within it. That is exactly the dignity that today's nonworking poor cannot claim. To address the actual issues in poverty requires grappling with identity issues that are defined off the table by both the liberals and communitarians.

### *Post-modernism*

The other prominent strand in recent political theory is post-modernism. At its most general, the term connotes recent authors who deny that culture contains any universal meanings; all representations of reality express individual viewpoints that are ultimately arbitrary.<sup>59</sup> I concentrate here on political forms of the creed, according to which political institutions or values have no objective reality. These features are not to be seen as given, "out there," but as constructed by the power relations behind a particular regime. Politics is a struggle, not so much over power, as to determine whose meanings or "signs" will rule. Downtrodden groups are oppressed not so much physically as by the derogatory labels that the regime fixes upon them.

To a great extent, post-modernism is another structural theory, addressed to issues of basic justice. Much of this work asserts that women or minorities are oppressed, that gender and race are denied realities in today's apparently-liberal politics, the same thing radicals asserted about class in an earlier era.<sup>60</sup> It is another upsurge of the critical impulse, the urge to devalue received institutions, that found earlier expression in Marxism. Post-modernism differs from traditional radicalism mostly in that it makes no claims to be "scientific." Marx said that his predictions of class conflict and revolution were "objective" because they were corroborated by economic and social developments within capitalist societies. Any socialism not based on such an analysis, but only on good intentions, was "utopian." Post-modernism is unabashedly utopian. It denies the possibility of objective knowledge of the political world.

Could post-modernism furnish a theory of poverty? In Michel Foucault's version, it may seem to. Foucault argues that modern societies control the poor, not so much by overt repression, as by the imposition of "disciplines," or standards of behavior monitored by institutions such as schools and prisons. The lower orders are constantly rated and measured by those standards. Partly they conform, and the remaining social problems are contained and depoliticized. "The judges of normality are everywhere"--teachers, judges, social workers--and the individual must subject his "body" to "the universal reign of the normative."<sup>61</sup>

Post-modernism does express powerfully the sociologism that liberal interpreters use to exonerate the poor from their problems. It projects onto the environment the inner fears of the social

groups for whom the writers speak. Those fears may seem self-indulgent, inasmuch as they depict as oppressive Western societies that, most would say, are the most desirable in the world. Yet this imagining of an insidious social control does capture the sense poor adults say they have that they are surrounded with special difficulties. Post-modernists do find a way to say with some depth that this inner unfreedom is fathered by the outward society. To Foucault, delinquency is not a feature of the offender but an "institutional product," an identity imposed on the poor by the "custodial institutions," such as prisons and reformatories, that manage their lives.<sup>62</sup> To this extent, post-modernism can be a theory of poverty.

The theory, however, is also evasive. The social control Foucault speaks of is located initially in the past. While his theory applies to the current society, he documents the assertion of social conformity through "disciplines" mainly in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, when prisons and other "carceral" institutions replaced corporal punishment as the basis of penal justice.<sup>63</sup> He also talks more of social control than lack of control. It is the rise of the urban ghetto and associated disorders, not their suppression, that provokes current controversies about poverty. And Foucault, for all his talk of the "body," does not focus very concretely on the identity of the poor. He does not reckon closely with their functioning problems, so his views of the key responsibility and competence issues have to be inferred. His image of the identity of the poor remains abstract.

### **TOWARD POVERTY THEORY**

How might a theory more relevant to poverty be written? It must above all address the questions of personality that pervade poverty politics. It must speak to the issue, not whether society is fair or free, but whether people at the bottom of that society are "deserving." In politics, left and right already divide bitterly over this issue, but seldom openly. One side always says that opportunity for the poor is lacking, the other that it is not, but the real issue is whether the poor are victims or victimizers. These underlying convictions about persons must be defended more openly.

Experts who deal professionally with poverty are a bit more candid. They, too, debate whether the opportunity structure is open or closed, but their writings give more hint where the real differences lie. To a Michael Harrington on the left, the poor have been so beaten down that they

live "beneath moral choice."<sup>64</sup> To a Charles Murray on the right, the poor are "not inherently hard working or moral"; rather, they "respond to incentives and disincentives" and they "must be held responsible for their actions."<sup>65</sup> In shaping policy positions, as noted above, these differing views of personality shape views about the facts of opportunity more than the other way around.

How to craft theoretical statements that plumb these positions in more depth? The right needs an image of the individual as amoral but tough, thus without claims to public solicitude. The left needs a more dutiful but more vulnerable person, someone who wants to "do the right thing" but cannot, who thus possesses the dignity to make claims as an equal. The first is tempted into dysfunction by misguided public policy, the second driven into it by a hostile society. The first will respond positively to the withdrawal of permissive programs and the enforcement of values, the second to new benefits and services, and especially to the moral commitment embodied in them.

To speak of persons rather than social structure involves a reorientation for both right and left. Both sides must speak of fiber rather than freedom. The right must speak less of liberty and more of strength. Its assertion must be, not that people should be rid of government, but that they can cope with life. They can fulfill the same obligations, including work, as the better-off. The left must speak less of injustice and more of weakness. It must show why, despite affluence and equal opportunity reforms, the poor can be overmatched, unable to work, and hence deserving of aid.

The essential insight of the left is to focus on the substance of life, as against its forms. In legal terms, society may be "free," but life *in* that society is felt as burdensome. The idea of freedom, the totem of the right, suggests that people make their way without hindrance, as if through a void. Actually, they struggle forward with constant effort, as if through a solid substance. Every day is an battle. Whatever the Constitution says, most of life is not about rights, but obligations--to family and employer if not government. In this elemental sense, it is quite true, as the left says, that life in the market is bondage while welfare is freedom--from the market's pressure to perform.<sup>66</sup>

The essential insight of the right, however, is that the struggle is inevitable, even good, and can be borne. Men and women usually do not wish exemption from the daily effort to function at home and on the job. To fulfill the expectations of friends, family, and employers is most of the satisfaction life affords. The left's aspiration to be free of struggle, to find freedom on the other side

of change, is an illusion. "Strength, in all its forms, is life and manhood," wrote James Fitzjames Stephen, a late Victorian utilitarian.<sup>67</sup> Conservatives do not ignore the poor, but they always seek some way, usually through the market, to make them stronger.

The two sides tend to debate these issues only indirectly, in terms of the evidence about opportunity. But images of personality are philosophic questions. Each side still has to craft a view of poverty personality consistent with its vision.

### **THE THEORY OF THE WELFARE STATE**

One resource for reasoning about poverty should be theorists who focus on the welfare state. I refer to authors who argue for or against the provision of income and services to the needy or vulnerable. Some authors have justified the welfare state as essential to equality or community, while others oppose it as contrary to freedom or the efficiency of untrammelled capitalism. In the first camp are representatives of the traditional left such as R.H. Tawney or Richard Titmuss,<sup>68</sup> in the second libertarian economists such as Friedrich Hayek or Milton Friedman.<sup>69</sup>

On the whole, though, this is theory appropriate to progressive politics, not current disputes over the inner city. It addresses how ambitious government should be in social policy, not who the dysfunctional poor are or what to do about them. Much of the polemics is actually directed to wider manifestations of "welfare" than aid to the needy. The left seeks to justify a wide range of interventions in the economy in the name of socialism, while conservatives oppose these. The main focus is on benefit programs for the general population or regulation of labor or consumer markets, not on aid for the destitute. Some of the conservatives do not even oppose public relief, provided the market is left free to operate.<sup>70</sup> Typically, the discussions focus little on the personality of the poor and take competence for granted. They are almost as abstract as recent political theory.

To the extent the focus is on poverty, the main bone of contention is whether there should be a right to welfare, not the more tragic disputes of actual poverty politics about good conduct. On the left, advocates for welfare argue as if an indifferent political process were their main problem. They strain to convince the nonpoor that the needy have a claim.<sup>71</sup> On the other side, opponents either deny entitlement in principle or assert that it is too corrupting to be contemplated.<sup>72</sup> But we know

from polls and studies that most voters and politicians already accept the principle of aid. If they do not do all that advocates wish, it is because they are conflicted. They want to help the needy but are deterred by "deservingness" doubts or fear that welfare cannot overcome these.<sup>73</sup> Theorists who refuse to address those concerns do not address the real politics of welfare.

Some recent welfare state theorizing says that the aim of policy is to achieve "agency." To Donald Moon, that means "our capacity for choice, for self-determination and decision, that is essential to our identity as persons"; welfare should somehow enhance agency rather than depress it with "paternalism."<sup>74</sup> That shows a commendable sensitivity to the issue of functioning that has erupted in welfare politics. But most theorists who raise the question facilely assume, as political theorists of the Progressive era did, that government has the power to confer agency through education or other benefits if only it will do so. That presents the issue again as a battle over the scale of government.

Perhaps the welfare state promotes agency for the working population that is already functioning. It has manifestly failed to do this for the welfare dependent. The "disappointment of the welfare state," Michael Walzer admits, is precisely that it has not made the dependent "significantly more independent, more responsible, more capable of shaping their own lives and joining in the common work of citizenship." Welfare is no solution to agency if the recipients remain "passive."<sup>75</sup> With that admission the poverty debate shifts away from the scale of government and toward the question who the poor are. Political theory must also shift.

Here and there, an author suggests what a true philosophy of poverty might mean. On the left, Robert Goodin justifies welfare as a way of protecting the vulnerable. The task of the welfare state is to shield those who are dependent from exploitation. This tacitly recognizes the "deservingness" problem because it grounds welfare on society's obligation rather than justice or the rights of the recipients.<sup>76</sup> Goodin also deals explicitly, if briefly, with the concerns about "desert" and "self-reliance" that conservatives--and much of the public--raise against welfare.<sup>77</sup> Not by accident, Goodin's animus is the polar opposite of Nietzsche's. Where Nietzsche celebrates self-reliance as an expression of the "will to power," Goodin rebukes it as a "pernicious doctrine" that "does nothing to

prevent vulnerability and dependency."<sup>78</sup> One may disagree, but at least the core issues in poverty have been addressed.

On the other side, Charles Murray became the most celebrated of recent opponents of welfare. But his Losing Ground is based mostly on the economic notion that welfare disincentives explain the dysfunction of the poor. At best, it is a work of social theory, and does not plumb the deeper issues in poverty. But following it, Murray wrote another book where he lays out his presuppositions about human nature much more fully. He sees the point of the current poverty debate that "Policy analysis is decisively affected by the analyst's conception of human nature." And whereas liberal defenders of welfare see a vulnerable and threatened self, in need of protection from government, Murray posits that "humans acting privately tend to be resourceful and benign." Leave them alone, and they will pursue happiness by a thousand personal choices and initiatives. That premise leads to a vision of a society of decentralized communities and no welfare other than local and private aid.<sup>79</sup> One may find it utopian, a throwback to the close-knit towns of the midcentury Midwest, where Murray grew up. But again, the fundamental issues in poverty have been addressed.

Goodin and Murray are exceptions. In general, the theoretical argument over the welfare state, like Rawlsian political theory, is highly evasive, refusing to address the *personal* tragedy embodied in the poor of the inner city. As Claus Offe asserts, the reason for the conservative turning in recent social policy is not that the right won the traditional battle over the scale of government but that solidarity between the poor and the middle class has crumbled. The voters no longer accept "sameness" with the poor in a "collective identity."<sup>80</sup> Why are the identities different, and how might they coalesce again? That is the real poverty issue. Theorists have to speak to it much more directly before they can resolve--even on paper--the central dilemma of our times.

## CULTURE

As the basis for a poverty theory, the most useful literature is not past political theory, with its abstract character, or even general reasonings about the welfare state, but social science writings about the actual causes and character of poverty. This again reflects the brutal empiricism that now

dominates social debate, threatening to marginalize all differences over norms. If the initial issue in poverty politics is whether jobs exist, then philosophers must dirty their hands with data.

### *Early writings about poverty*

Significant reflections about the nature and causes of poverty go back at least to the late eighteenth century. From Adam Smith and Malthus onwards, a steady stream of inquiries into the poverty problem appears. These writers faced the questions of how to relate the disordered poor or “paupers” to the more respectable working classes, and whether to emphasize personal morality or social causes in the explanations of poverty--issues we still face today. Speaking generally, authors of the nineteenth century do distinguish pauper from poor and are highly moralistic, stressing the need for the moral “improvement” of the disordered.<sup>81</sup>

Over time, the urge to assert social causes grows, until in the early twentieth century the conviction forms that poverty should be dealt with in nonmoral or secular ways. Already in the Progressive and New Deal periods, American social reformers developed an economic interpretation of social problems that can sound quite contemporary. In opposition to conservatives who said inequality or poverty was inevitable, dictated by genetics or the marketplace, liberals asserted that it was due to the social system, and even that “environment shaped human character.”<sup>82</sup> Then the welfare state arises that would eventually distribute income and other benefits to the bulk of the population with only limited attention to “deservingness.”

All these reasonings are still available to theorists today. All are statements, grounded in evidence, about the identity of the poor, in the sense of their psychology and formation as persons. Liberals will naturally favor the sociological readings that project social problems onto the environment, conservatives the more moralistic ones that assume greater competence and responsibility and, thus, more onus to “help oneself.”

The main limitation of these earlier reflections is that they occurred in a progressive era when the working class was less distinct from the long-term poor than it is today. The major political battles were still over basic institutions and values, including the legitimacy of a welfare state, in the sense of benefits for the broad public. It was easier in that age, when the constraints on incomes and mobility were far harsher than now, to assert collective causes of poverty than it would be after

1970. It was also easier, in the infancy of the welfare state, to imagine collective solutions. The tone of the early literature is thus more confident, as well as more moralistic, than most experts or politicians would want to be today.

### *Culture of poverty*

A more useable resource, therefore, is likely to be the sociologies of poverty developed by experts since the 1960s. This is the era when the poverty problem assumes its current shape--largely urban, nonworking, and--in the U.S.--nonwhite. These commentators grapple most seriously with the identity issues that underlie poverty controversies. The most penetrating writing about poverty that has emerged from the academic world is the "culture of poverty" literature of the 1960s. Oscar Lewis, Lee Rainwater, Herbert Gans, and others explained the persistence of poverty in terms of a distinctive worldview held by poor adults. Much of this work used ethnographic, field research where the actual behavior and conversation of the deprived were observed. Such methods drive out abstraction.

These authors differ about details, and they disagree strongly about the extent to which social barriers explain the culture of poverty. But they essentially agree about the content of this mindset. All say that the poor have orthodox goals; they seek to work, keep their families together, obey the law, get ahead, etc., just like the middle class. But at the same time, they feel unable to do these things in practice due to the circumstances they face. So the values remain aspirations, while in actual life people remain dependent on welfare, nonworking, and so on. This inconsistency explains why the poor appear less competent and responsible for themselves than the better-off. And because parents socialize children in the same attitudes, poverty could persist even in the 1960s, even though the chances for the poor to get ahead, due to affluence and civil rights reforms, had actually improved.<sup>83</sup>

The theory fell into disuse in the 1970s and early 1980s because some said it "blamed the victim" and because economists took over poverty research. Economists made the competence assumption that poor adults were efficient maximizers rather than conflicted, so they argued that poverty was due more to economic disincentives than defeatism. But the evidence that disincentives shape poverty behavior is weak. Without more support that these or other barriers explain poverty,

some appeal to culture cannot be avoided. The life of the ghetto has become still more distressed due to a rise in drug addiction and child abuse. No barriers could make these lifestyles plausibly "rational." Liberal sociologists have returned to the idea that, in part, the poor defeat themselves. Even if adverse opportunities ultimately explain why they cannot work and marry like other people, a destructive "social milieu" contrary to work and family compounds the injury.<sup>84</sup> Culture thus joins with economic isolation in explaining the acute deprivations of the inner city.<sup>85</sup>

Culture of poverty should be attractive to liberals because it explains dysfunction in ways consistent with a claim to aid. The poor are credited with moral intentions, while the obstacles to realizing those values lie outside themselves. Conditions *in the present* largely prevent poor families showing the self-reliant qualities that the society prizes. Even if defeatism causes people to underestimate their chances, that feeling too has social causes. Society therefore bears the onus to beat assuage the crime, joblessness, and collapsing schools of the ghetto so that families can in fact "do the right thing."

### ***Ethnicity***

Conservatives wish, rather, to minimize claims against society. So they want to frame a poverty personality where need stems from the features of the poor themselves rather than outward unfairness. A century ago, Social Darwinists did this by arguing that the poor were genetically inferior. Supposedly, they lacked the intelligence or other strengths needed to take care of themselves. Today, some still argue that the poor, or minority groups that are heavily poor, have lower average intelligence than other groups for reasons of inheritance.<sup>86</sup> But this theory cannot explain the vast variation in intelligence or success within social groups, which dwarfs the differences between group averages. Since civil rights, too many members of minority groups have succeeded in professional careers and entered the middle class to make inherent inferiorities seem plausible.<sup>87</sup>

More promising is to blame poverty or inequality on the culture or attitudes held by the heavily-poor groups. Sociologists know that ethnic groups are not equivalent. They continue to have separate identities, or views of the world, even after they are assimilated into American society.<sup>88</sup> Thomas Sowell has argued that the differing fortunes of ethnic groups in America largely

reflects differences in how they define and pursue their opportunities, not in how they are treated by the society. Jews and Asians generally outperform blacks and Hispanics because they work harder in school and on the job. They look to themselves and their families in adversity, not government.<sup>89</sup>

Sowell says that the differences largely predate the groups emigrating to America, others that they reflect differing opportunities in America.<sup>90</sup> But either way the theory is attractive to conservatives. Where culture of poverty traces defeatism to environmental constraints in the present, ethnicity locates it in group identities with a long history. That minimizes the claims that the heavily-poor groups can make for redress now.

### ***Brutal empiricism***

So far, I have suggested that the main fault of existing theory is its abstraction about personality. Perhaps one might use concrete evidence about the poor to argue for a wide range of possible identities. Perhaps the calculating image of personality assumed by Rawls and preferred by economists is not so much wrong as undefended.

But if sociology might empower poverty theorizing, it also restrains it. Not all images of who the poor are defensible. If one observes how needy adults live and what they say about themselves, it is difficult to maintain that they are amoral bohemians, without attachment to prevailing mores.<sup>91</sup> It is also unreasonable to maintain that they are rational optimizers who can be assumed to maximize their own utilities. The contours of the culture of poverty--dutiful but defeated--inevitably emerge. That limits the range of permissible interpretations.

This may explain why very little writing of a theoretical cast about poverty or social policy has made use of field research. A close observation of how poor people live may simply compel the conclusion that they are different from other citizens. And that may defeat the project of forming any general reasoning about poverty. Perhaps theorizing is possible only if a universal personality can be assumed. Without the competence assumption, perhaps political theory can never get beyond sociology.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

There are some resources in past theory that might help construct persuasive visions of poverty personality. Perhaps the demonstration of competence or its lack must begin with evidence, but conceptions from theory can still help draw the full implications for poverty and policy.

### *Economic theory*

One resource, especially for liberals, is economics. At the core of traditional political theory, I have argued, is the competence assumption, the view that individuals are normally able to advance at least their own self-interest, if not society's. Today's serious poverty violates that premise, and this is the reason the old theory does not apply well to it. It is also the reason why assumptions of community that would merge the interests of the poor and better-off have broken down. The middle class simply does not see much to *identify* with in the current long-term poor.

But competence admits of degrees. Liberals want to argue that the poor have difficulty coping and deserve public aid, but also to rebuild a sense of solidarity linking them with the rest of society. One way to do that is to break down the enormous gulf that appears to separate the assumption of personal rationality that we make about the middle class from the dysfunctional lifestyle of the long-term poor. Political discourse exaggerates how masterful a self is really assumed in "economic man." Most economists do not even say that people actually calculate their behaviors in the way supposed in economic theory, only that they behave on average "as if" they did.<sup>92</sup>

Several readings of rationality are possible. Harvey Leibenstein argues that people optimize with varying diligence, and this explains much of the variations in productivity across firms and countries. In a profit-making firm, the very meaning of "rational" behavior will vary depending on the setting people work in and how much pressure they feel to compete.<sup>93</sup> To Herbert Simon, optimization by people in organizations may be thorough but "bounded"--based on unquestioned assumptions and data sources and hence limited to the details of policy.<sup>94</sup>

Others have probed the idea at the core of competence, the presumption that behavior is consistent, that people do what they want to do. Thomas Schelling points out that preferences are seldom simple. People are conflicted. They want to observe conventional mores yet being tempted to deviate. To control themselves, they seek to bind their own impulses almost as if they were

negotiating with a different person.<sup>95</sup> The perception that temptation can override intention is, of course, central to culture of poverty. On these interpretations, the middle class differs from the poor only in degree. By using such ideas, liberals can narrow the gap between the defeated behavior of poor adults and motivations that average citizens might recognize. They can also argue that the various benefits they recommend for the poor could help them achieve their goals, much as mainstream social benefits are popular among the middle class.

Admittedly, such arguments shift the attention of liberal analysis from outward to inward constraints, from the environment to psychology. But this shift from the impersonal to the personal, from opportunity to motivation, is unavoidable now that social “barriers” do not explain poverty well. It allows a far closer grappling with the real issues in poverty politics.

### *Ancient theory*

A comparable resource for conservatives is the writings of Plato and Aristotle about citizenship. In constructing a picture of poverty identity, conservatives want to emphasize that all persons are *not* alike. The poor differ in unfortunate ways, and the roots of difference lie in the past or in fundamental attributes beyond the reach of government.

One way to state this is that the formation of the individual is critical to his or her potential. Perhaps poor adults believe themselves trapped by the current society, but the real origin of that feeling is probably the neglectful way they were treated as children. The child is father to the man, Wordsworth wrote, and the formation of the child is chiefly the work of family, a private institution, rather than the economy or any public institution. Perhaps bad parenting ultimately has social causes. Children are raised poorly because their parents were, and their parents were, going back to the straitened economy or Jim Crow social conditions of 50 or 100 years ago. But, again, the connection to social injustice lies in the past. In the present, family forms the connection between society and the self, and government can do little to influence it.

Plato and Aristotle stress the power of upbringing to determine what function an individual is able to discharge later in life. Civic capacity is not taken for granted, as it tends to be modern, liberal politics, and it can be exclusive. Plato's Republic defined a special education and lifestyle for the philosophers destined to rule. They were to live communally, just so family life did not

compromise their dedication to affairs. The guardians or soldiers, who served the rulers, received quite a different upbringing, attuned to dutiful obedience.

To Aristotle, the citizen was one who "shares in the administration of justice and in the holding of office." The hallmark of the good citizen was the "double capacity" of "knowing both how to rule and how to obey." Citizens were to participate in politics but also to obey legitimate authority. Whereas modern politics emphasizes citizenship rights, Aristotle emphasizes function. Citizenship "cannot be attained" by everyone but only those who meet its demands. Greek politics typically excluded women, aliens, and slaves from citizenship because their functions did not allow them to perform the civic and military services expected of citizens. Aristotle would even have excluded mechanics and laborers because of their "menial duties."<sup>96</sup>

Viewed narrowly, the ancients are concerned more with the moral than the competence problem. Like the modern tradition, they tend to assume that people can achieve their personal interest; whether they would also serve the collective interest was more problematic. But this focus on formation is still suggestive. The ancient theorists have the virtue that they emphasize obligations rather than rights. They thus touch closer on the questions of personal capacity raised by poverty than rights-oriented modern theory. The reason may be that Greek politics, which focused on the city, allowed citizens to know each other as individuals, so their expectations could be more intimate.

The idea that citizenship was exclusive and demanding was powerfully restated by Hannah Arendt. Citizens were those who took care of their personal needs, then ventured forth into the public arena. The first existence was a realm of bondage, where people engaged in "labor," or elemental struggles to support and reproduce themselves. The second was a realm of freedom where citizens engaged in "action," or the competitive display of excellence. Citizenship had to be limited to those who could escape labor and thus have freedom for action. To the Greeks, that meant men of some substance, with families and slaves to support them.<sup>97</sup> Today, in Western societies, we would include women, and people regard work as another arena for citizenship, since employment has become a vital dimension of public "standing."<sup>98</sup> We would also accept a less rigid division between the public and private spheres, since social policy has concern for some areas of private life.

Nevertheless, the insight of the ancients that citizenship is demanding remains valid. The individual must put out energy to deal with private life, then escape it to participate in affairs outside the home, both occupational and political. For those who seek full acceptance by the society, those burdens cannot be delegated. Public responsibility for private life cannot mean that some people have only private lives, that they do not contribute to the collectivity. To a conservative, the claims of the poor to "deservingness" cannot be granted so long as they lack this ability to get outside themselves.

It is because "deservingness" depends on activity outside the home that *participation* is such a crucial dimension of the new, paternalist social policy. Schools and welfare employment programs battle to keep poor people involved, rather than dropping out. The more the dependent participate in these activities, the more go to work. But even to enter a program and stay there is already to fulfill some of the expectations of others. It is to begin to function as a citizen, to be more than a victim with needs. A doctrine of personality that speaks of citizenship in these terms can help justify the conservative will to levy greater expectations on the poor.

### A NEW POLITICAL AGE?

Francis Fukuyama wrote that history had ended, and in one sense it has. He meant history in Hegel's sense--the evolution of human consciousness to higher levels through contention over basic principles. Now that fascism is no more, the major Communist powers have accepted liberalizing reforms, and apartheid is abolished in South Africa, such conflict is receding. Western norms of political and economic freedom are recognized in principle almost worldwide. Fukuyama does not mean that all war will disappear, only that conflicts will no longer occur over basic principles.<sup>99</sup>

Much the same might be said of domestic affairs. In the West, socialist and even Communist parties have accepted capitalism, and political division is no longer structured around opposed ideologies. In the U.S. and Europe, elections are fought mostly through publicizing leaders and vague issue appeals, not through mobilizing constituencies behind opposed social visions. Parties still differ over how much government should do, and who should pay. They no longer offer radically different views of the world.

But perhaps principled conflict is dying out in one political dimension only to arise in another. While there is substantial consensus about the outlines of a just society, there is rising disagreement about how to sustain social order. American disputes about the inner city are mirrored by poverty-like controversies in Europe, where recent immigrants from the Third World are often blamed for crime, welfarism, and declining schools. On both continents, political dispute centers more and more on questions of personal behavior, less and less on structural fundamentals.

On the world scene, too, a language of competence is driving out the traditional language of freedom and power. Americans worry about their "competitiveness" against Japan and the Europeans, their rivals in world trade. The post-Communist nations of Eastern Europe are seen as economic basket cases in need of new investment, not as pawns in a contest between Great Powers. Russia appears no longer as an ideological rival but as a developing society dependent on Western aid. The Third World no longer asks for independence from the West, but for subsidy from it. The U.S. and other Western countries intervene in Somalia or Haiti to restore order in a situation of breakdown, much as social programs are trying to do in the inner city. Only, Iran and China, perhaps, break the consensus about the fundamentals of the world order. The current question is much more how weak regimes can be brought to function within that order.

History is over only if one looks for political disputes of the kind Western theorists traditionally wrote about, where self-reliance is assumed. If one looks for the politics surrounding poverty and disorder, then a new history may be beginning. It is not a politics to which our tradition is sensitive. It is a personal politics, as our tradition has been impersonal. It is about strength and responsibility, not values or social structures. The current task of political theory is no longer to debate the nature of justice, but instead to define the personality that must be assumed, perhaps created, before order can be restored. Only when the person has been redefined and order recovered can the quest for justice resume.

NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> I gratefully acknowledge comments on earlier drafts of this paper from Peter Berkowitz, Amy Gutmann, George Kateb, Andrew Koppelman, Mark Lilla, Harvey C. Mansfield, Jr., H. Mark Roelofs, Michael Sandel, Paul Sigmund, Steven Teles, Michael Walzer, and Mark E. Warren.

<sup>2</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Income, Poverty, and Valuation of Noncash Benefits: 1993, Series P-60, No. 188 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, February 1995), table C.

<sup>3</sup> Isabel V. Sawhill, "Poverty in the U.S.: Why Is It So Persistent?" Journal of Economic Literature 26, no. 3 (September 1988): 1080-1; idem, "The Underclass: An Overview," The Public Interest, no. 96 (Summer 1989): 5.

<sup>4</sup> In 1993, 40 percent of the poor were under 18, 50 percent aged 18-64, and 10 percent 65 or over. See U.S. Department of Commerce, Income, Poverty, and Valuation of Noncash Benefits: 1993, table D-5.

<sup>5</sup> U.S. Department of Commerce, Bureau of the Census, Characteristics of the Population Below the Poverty Level: 1984, Series P-60, no. 152 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, June 1986), table 4; U.S. Department of Commerce, Income, Poverty, and Valuation of Noncash Benefits: 1993, tables 14, 19. Much of the work fall was due to rising wages in the 1960s, which lifted most of the working poor out of poverty and left fewer but mostly nonworking poor behind.

<sup>6</sup> Lawrence M. Mead, The New Politics of Poverty: The Nonworking Poor in America (New York: Basic Books, 1992), chap. 3, and William Julius Wilson, When Work Disappears: The World of the New Urban Poor (New York: Knopf, 1996).

<sup>7</sup> Charles Murray, Losing Ground: American Social Policy, 1950-1980 (New York: Basic Books, 1984).

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<sup>8</sup> Douglas S. Massey and Nancy A. Denton, American Apartheid: Segregation and the Making of the Underclass (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); William Julius Wilson, The Truly Disadvantaged: The Inner City, the Underclass, and Public Policy (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> The following surveys all come roughly to this conclusion: Isabel V. Sawhill, "Poverty in the U.S.: Why Is It So Persistent?" Journal of Economic Literature 26, no. 3 (September 1988): 1073-1119; Christopher Jencks, Rethinking Social Policy: Race, Poverty, and the Underclass (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1992); Lawrence M. Mead, "Poverty: How Little We Know," Social Service Review 68, no. 3 (September 1994): 322-50.

<sup>10</sup> Lawrence M. Mead, Beyond Entitlement: The Social Obligations of Citizenship (New York: Free Press, 1986), chaps. 6-7; idem, New Politics of Poverty, chaps. 8-9.

<sup>11</sup> This discussion summarizes Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chap. 10. For a similar interpretation from the left, see Michael B. Katz, In the Shadow of the Poorhouse: A Social History of Welfare in America (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

<sup>12</sup> Office of Management and Budget, Budget of the United States Government, Fiscal Year 1997 (Washington, DC: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1996): Budget Supplement, pp. 141, 168; Appendix, pp. 240, 494, 677, 940.

<sup>13</sup> I base this conclusion on reading thousands of pages of Congressional hearings and floor debates on welfare reform, summarized in Mead, Beyond Entitlement, chaps. 4-6, and Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chap. 9.

<sup>14</sup> Mead, New Politics of Poverty, pp. 33-42.

<sup>15</sup> Michael B. Katz, The Undeserving Poor: From the War on Poverty to the War on Welfare (New York: Pantheon, 1989).

<sup>16</sup> Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chaps. 2-3.

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<sup>17</sup> For a conception of the role of theory alone these lines, see Mark E. Warren, "What is Political Theory/Philosophy?" PS 22, no. 3 (September 1989): 606-12.

<sup>18</sup> Robert B. Reich, ed., The Power of Public Ideas (Cambridge, MA: Ballinger, 1988).

<sup>19</sup> To my knowledge, the first recent discussion of an idea of social contract as a basis for welfare reform was in speeches on the race problem by Gov. Charles Robb of Virginia in 1986. See press accounts in the New York Times, April 13, 1986, p. 28, and the Washington Post, October 1, 1986, p. A18. Robb cited Mead, Beyond Entitlement, which was published late in 1985, but he clearly had hit on the idea himself. Equivalent notions appeared among some members of Congress discussing welfare reform as well as 1967; see Mead, Beyond Entitlement, ch. 10.

<sup>20</sup> To some extent, Mead, Beyond Entitlement, and Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chap. 7, addresses these questions, but with less theoretical content than I advocate here.

<sup>21</sup> Mead, Beyond Entitlement, chaps. 8-9.

<sup>22</sup> Mead, New Politics of Poverty, chap. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, or the Matter, Forme, and Power of a Commonwealth Ecclesiasticall and Civil, ed. with an intro. by Michael Oakeshott (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), p. 64 (part 1, chap. 11).

<sup>24</sup> For the failure of work incentive experiments to affect work levels among the poor, see Robert Moffitt, "Incentive Effects of the U.S. Welfare System: A Review," Journal of Economic Literature 30 (no. 1, March 1992): 1-61.

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in George H. Sabine, A History of Political Theory, 3rd ed. (London: Harrap, 1966), pp. 564-5.

<sup>26</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, Democracy in America, ed. J.P. Meyer, trans. George Lawrence (Garden city, NY: Anchor Books, 1969), vol. 1, pt. 2, chap. 10, p. 397; vol. 2, pt. 2, chap. 8, pp. 525-8.

<sup>27</sup> J.H. Pole, The Pursuit of Equality in American History (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), p. 293.

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- <sup>28</sup> George F. Will, Statecraft as Soulcraft: What Government Does (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), pp. 18, 40, 68, 95, 134-6, and *passim* ; William Waldegrave, The Binding of Leviathan: Conservatism and the Future (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), p. 62
- <sup>29</sup> Vernon Louis Parrington, Main Currents in American Thought, Volume Two: 1800-1860, The Romantic Revolution in America (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1954), p. 149.
- <sup>30</sup> Quoted in Sabine, History of Political Theory, p. 813.
- <sup>31</sup> Karl Marx, The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte (New York: International Publishers, 1963), p. 75.
- <sup>32</sup> Quoted in Daniel Patrick Moynihan, "Toward a Post-Industrial Social Policy," The Public Interest, no. 96 (Summer 1989): 18 n. 1.
- <sup>33</sup> Quoted in John Burton, Would Workfare Work: A Feasibility Study of a Workfare System to Replace Long-Term Unemployment in the UK (Buckingham, England: University of Buckingham, Employment Research Center, 1987), pp. 28-9.
- <sup>34</sup> Herbert Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man: Studies in the Ideology of Advanced Industrial Society (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964), pp. xi-xiii, 256-7, and *passim* .
- <sup>35</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, Regulating the Poor: The Functions of Public Welfare, updated ed. (New York: Vintage, 1993).
- <sup>36</sup> Thomas A. Horne, "Welfare Rights in the Liberal Tradition," PS 3, no. 1 (Winter 1990): 10-11.
- <sup>37</sup> John Locke, Two Treatises of Government: A Critical Edition With an Introduction and Apparatus Criticus, 2nd ed., ed. Peter Laslett (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1967), p. 188 (First Treatise, para. 42).
- <sup>38</sup> John Locke, "Draft of a Representation Containing a Scheme of Methods for the Employment of the Poor. Proposed by Mr Locke, the 26th October 1697," in John Locke, Political Writings, ed. with an intro. by David Wootton (New York: Mentor, 1993), pp. 446-61.

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- <sup>39</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, "Memoir on Pauperism," The Public Interest, no. 70 (Winter 1983): 102-20.
- <sup>40</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, The Philosophy of Right, trans. T.M. Knox (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1952), paras. 238-45. This passage was called to my attention by Donald Moon, "The Moral Basis of the Democratic Welfare State," in Democracy and the Welfare State, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), chap. 2.
- <sup>41</sup> T.H. Green, "Liberal Legislation and Freedom of Contract," in The Political Theory of T.H. Green, ed. John R. Rodman (New York: Appleton-Century-Crofts, 1964), 51-2; Isaiah Berlin, Two Concepts of Liberty (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).
- <sup>42</sup> Lisbeth B.Schorr with Daniel Schorr, Within Our Reach: Breaking the Cycle of Disadvantage (New York: Doubleday, 1988).
- <sup>43</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, The Affluent Society (New York: Mentor Books, 1958), chap. 23.
- <sup>44</sup> James S. Coleman, "Equal Schools or Equal Students?" The Public Interest, no. 4 (Summer 1966): 70-5; Eric A. Hanushek, "Throwing Money at Schools," Journal of Policy Analysis and Management 1, no. 1 (Fall 1981): 19-41.
- <sup>45</sup> James Q. Wilson and Richard J. Herrnstein, Crime and Human Nature (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1985).
- <sup>46</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morals, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), and *idem*, Thus Spoke Zarathustra: A Book for All and None, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Viking, 1966).
- <sup>47</sup> Lawrence M. Mead, "The Politics of Disadvantage," the John L. Weinberg/Goldman Sachs & Company Lecture, Woodrow Wilson School of Public and International Affairs, Princeton University, Princeton, NJ, April 19, 1995.

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- <sup>48</sup> The following comments on recent liberalism and communitarianism summarize Lawrence M. Mead, "Dependency and Liberal Political Theory," paper prepared for delivery at the 1992 annual meeting of the American Political Science Association, Chicago, IL, September 3-6, 1992.
- <sup>49</sup> John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971).
- <sup>50</sup> Robert Nozick, Anarchy, State, and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974).
- <sup>51</sup> Bruce A. Ackerman, Social Justice in the Liberal State (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980).
- <sup>52</sup> Rawls, Theory of Justice, pp. 4-5.
- <sup>53</sup> Rawls, Theory of Justice, pp. 11, 399-424.
- <sup>54</sup> Ackerman, Social Justice, pp. 10-11.
- <sup>55</sup> Rawls, Theory of Justice, pp. 342-3, 505-7; John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political not Metaphysical," Philosophy and Public Affairs 14 (no. 3, Summer 1985): 233, 243-4.
- <sup>56</sup> Rawls, Theory of Justice, pp. 310-15.
- <sup>57</sup> Michael J. Sandel, Liberalism and the Limits of Justice (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1982); Michael Walzer, Spheres of Justice: A Defense of Pluralism and Equality (New York: Basic Books, 1983).
- <sup>58</sup> Walzer, Spheres of Justice, pp. 28-9, 279.
- <sup>59</sup> David Harvey, The Condition of Postmodernity (Cambridge, MA: Blackwell, 1990).
- <sup>60</sup> Susan Moller Okin, Justice, Gender, and the Family (New York: Basic Books, 1989).
- <sup>61</sup> Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1977), p. 304 and *passim*.
- <sup>62</sup> Foucault, Discipline and Punish, pp. 257-92.
- <sup>63</sup> For a parallel account of American developments, see David J. Rothman, The Discovery of the Asylum: Social Order and Disorder in the New Republic, revised ed. (Boston: Little, Brown, 1990).
- <sup>64</sup> Michael Harrington, The Other America: Poverty in the United States, rev. ed. (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1971), p. 171.

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- <sup>65</sup> Murray, Losing Ground, p. 146.
- <sup>66</sup> Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward, "The Contemporary Relief Debate," in Fred Block et al., The Mean Season: The Attack on the Welfare State (New York: Pantheon, 1987), pp. 94-6.
- <sup>67</sup> James Fitzjames Stephen, Liberty, Equality, Fraternity, 2nd ed., ed. R.J. White (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1967), pp. 199, 258.
- <sup>68</sup> R.H. Tawney, Equality, 4th ed. (London: Unwin, 1971); Richard M. Titmuss, Commitment to Welfare (London: Allen and Unwin, 1968).
- <sup>69</sup> Friedrich A. Hayek, The Road to Serfdom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1944); Milton Friedman, with the assistance of Rose D. Friedman, Capitalism and Freedom (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962).
- <sup>70</sup> Hayek accepted some minimal forms of social provision, according to Robert E. Goodin, Reasons for Welfare: The Political Theory of the Welfare State (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), p. 18 n. 17, and Friedman, in Capitalism and Freedom, chap. 12, was one of the first to advocate a negative income tax as a reform of welfare.
- <sup>71</sup> Raymond Plant, Harry Lesser, and Peter Taylor-Gooby, Political Philosophy and Social Welfare: Essays on the Normative Basis of Welfare Provision (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1980).
- <sup>72</sup> George Gilder, Wealth and Poverty (New York: Basic Books, 1981); Murray, Losing Ground.
- <sup>73</sup> Fay Lomax Cook and Edith J. Barrett, Support for the American Welfare State: The Views of Congress and the Public (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).
- <sup>74</sup> J. Donald Moon, "Introduction: Responsibility, Rights, and Welfare," in Responsibility, Rights, and Welfare: The Theory of the Welfare State, ed. J. Donald Moon (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1988), chap. 1. Several other chapters in this volume touch on this theme.
- <sup>75</sup> Michael Walzer, "Socializing the Welfare State," in Democracy and the Welfare State, ed. Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), pp. 16, 26.

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- <sup>76</sup> Robert E. Goodin, Protecting the Vulnerable: A Reanalysis of Our Social Responsibilities (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985); idem, Reasons for Welfare.
- <sup>77</sup> Goodin, Reasons for Welfare, chaps. 10, 12-13.
- <sup>78</sup> Goodin, Reasons for Welfare, p. 357.
- <sup>79</sup> Charles Murray, In Pursuit: Of Happiness and Good Government (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988), pp. 17-18, *passim*.
- <sup>80</sup> Claus Offe, "Democracy Against the Welfare State: Structural Foundations of Neoconservative Political Opportunities," in Responsibility, Rights, and Welfare, ed. Moon, chap. 8.
- <sup>81</sup> Gertrude Himmelfarb, The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age (New York: Knopf, 1984); idem, Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians (New York: Vintage, 1992); Marvin Olasky, The Tragedy of American Compassion (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1992), chaps. 1-9.
- <sup>82</sup> Eric F. Goldman, Rendezvous With Destiny (New York: Knopf, 1953), pp. 85-160, 330.
- <sup>83</sup> Daniel P. Moynihan, ed., On Understanding Poverty: Perspectives from the Social Sciences (New York: Basic Books, 1969), chaps. 7-10.
- <sup>84</sup> William Julius Wilson, "Studying Inner-City Social Dislocations: The Challenge of Public Agenda Research," American Sociological Review 56, no. 1 (February 1991): 9-12.
- <sup>85</sup> Wilson, Truly Disadvantaged; idem, When Work Disappears; Jencks, Rethinking Social Policy.
- <sup>86</sup> Arthur R. Jensen, "How Much Can We Boost IQ Scores and Scholastic Achievement?" Harvard Educational Review 39, no. 1 (Winter 1969): 1-123; Richard J. Herrnstein and Charles Murray, The Bell Curve: Intelligence and Class Structure in American Life (New York: Free Press, 1994).
- <sup>87</sup> If the poor were really inferior, this might strengthen rather than weaken their claim to aid. In Losing Ground, pp. 227-33, Charles Murray denied that the poor have any right to cash assistance. In The Bell Curve, pp. 547-9, after arguing that the poor are disproportionately of low intelligence, Herrnstein and Murray recommend a negative income tax for them, a form of welfare.

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- <sup>88</sup> Nathan Glazer and Daniel P. Moynihan, Beyond the Melting Pot: The Negroes, Puerto Ricans, Jews, Italians, and Irish of New York City, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970).
- <sup>89</sup> Thomas Sowell, Ethnic America: A History (New York: Basic Books, 1981).
- <sup>90</sup> Stephen Steinberg, The Ethnic Myth: Race, Ethnicity, and Class in America (New York: Atheneum, 1981).
- <sup>91</sup> This is a problem with very hostile, conservative images of the inner city such as Edward C. Banfield, The Unheavenly City Revisited: A Revision of the Unheavenly City (Boston: Little, Brown, 1974), and George Gilder, Visible Man: A True Story of Post-racist America (New York: Basic Books, 1978).
- <sup>92</sup> Milton Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics," in Essays in Positive Economics, ed. Milton Friedman (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953), pp. 3-43. For a discussion of various meanings of the expected utility presumption in economics, see Paul J.H. Schoemaker, "The Expected Utility Model: Its Variants, Purposes, Evidence, and Limitations," Journal of Economic Literature 20, no. 2 (June 1982): 529-63.
- <sup>93</sup> Harvey Leibenstein, Beyond Economic Man: A New Foundation for Microeconomics (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980).
- <sup>94</sup> Herbert A. Simon, Administrative Behavior: A Study of Decision-Making Processes in Administrative Organization, 3rd ed. (New York: Free Press, 1976).
- <sup>95</sup> Thomas C. Schelling, "Economics, or the Art of Self-Management," American Economic Review 68 (no. 2, May 1978): 290-4; *idem*, "The Intimate Contest for Self-Command," The Public Interest, no. 60 (Summer 1980): 94-118.
- <sup>96</sup> Aristotle, The Politics of Aristotle, trans. Ernest Barker (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), book 3, chaps. 1, 4-5.
- <sup>97</sup> Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), chaps. 2-3, 5.

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<sup>98</sup> Judith N. Shklar, American Citizenship: The Quest for Inclusion (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), chap. 2.

<sup>99</sup> Francis Fukuyama, The End of History and the Last Man (New York: Free Press, 1992).