

Book Review

Stoesz, D. (2018). *Pandora's dilemma: Theories of social welfare for the twenty-first century*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

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When reading *Pandora's Dilemma*, one can be reminded of *Unfaithful Angels* by Specht and Courtney (1994), which outlines the problem of social workers moving from their roots in social justice to the independent focus of clinical practice. In part, *Pandora's Dilemma* by Dr. David Stoesz, Fulbright distinguished chair at Carnegie Mellon University–Australia and Flinders University, articulates social work institutions' role in the failure of advocacy efforts on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed people and failure of the alleviation of poverty.

The story of Pandora's box is premise for the text, whereupon reluctance to look deeper at the contents of the box results in avoiding actual examination of the process and, instead, focuses on criticism of efforts. Because of the dilemma caused by this avoidance, improvement to general welfare is stagnant, and people remain vulnerable to and oppressed by poverty. Stoesz presents sometimes scathing commentary, supported by research, as to the inadequacy of policy efforts to truly promote social welfare. In this truly timely text, he highlights how polarity of political ideologies results in failure to make positive substantive change. Stoesz concludes that deep analysis is needed to promote recognition of the depth of services currently being provided so that all stakeholders can be involved in the solution.

Stoesz theorizes that current social welfare efforts have evolved from research that lacks an underlying theoretical foundation. He tracks the root of the issue to professionalism efforts and to the subsequent role of experts in defining social programs. He notes that

political ideologies connect to the key think tanks that define research aimed at elimination of poverty. Stoesz contends that evidenced-based interventions are then subject to the structures involved.

Stoesz presents theories to explain the lack of progress in poverty elimination. *Structural interest theory* posits that the primary groups of influence have shaped welfare over time, using different ideological stances, resulting in pluralistic approaches. *Process theory* highlights how policy decisions have served to undermine true democracy. The polarity based on ideology is highlighted in the *political theory* of social welfare, and *economic theory* explains the impact of the financial services market in eroding the financial stability of the working poor and those on welfare. Social welfare institutions' involvement is outlined through *cartel theory*. *Devolutionary theory* focuses on pressures based on needs of the population that impact the welfare system, and *evolutionary theory* explains the stagnation currently present as being due to the many barriers discussed throughout the text.

Of particular interest to social workers is Stoesz's discussion of social work professional and educational institutions as they relate to cartel theory. He describes Title IV-E training restricted to social work as a monopoly without sound basis and with the contention that perhaps other disciplines could be just as effective within the child welfare system. The author further claims that a focus on postmodernism within social work education has compromised development of the social work knowledge base.

The conclusions within the book are at times disheartening. The analysis may be considered somewhat controversial, but the author ultimately prescribes progressive efforts to do good works through collaboration across ideological lines and avoiding the appeal of expediency over collaboration. Ultimately, this advanced-level text fosters commitment to challenging the status quo and critically examining policy and the structures surrounding policy efforts. Anyone interested in policy practice would benefit from reading *Pandora's Dilemma*. Stoesz fosters the premise of hope once examination occurs; the ideal outcome is ultimately to promote social welfare and improve systems to meet the needs of vulnerable and oppressed people.

Reference

- Specht, H., & Courtney, M. (1994). *Unfaithful angels*. New York, NY: Free Press.