

Book Review

Alcock, P. (2016). *Why we need welfare: Collective action for the common good*. Chicago, IL: Policy Press.

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Dr. Alcock is a professor emeritus at the University of Birmingham, United Kingdom. He has done research and written extensively on social policy for more than 30 years. He has researched in the areas of voluntary organizations and their role in welfare provision. His publications include *The Student's Companion to Social Policy, 5th edition*, a widely used text.

This book summarizes the development of welfare programs, especially in the United Kingdom, after World War II. It discusses recent efforts to reduce state involvement in welfare provision and proposals to change welfare provision. It argues that welfare is necessary to civil society.

The introduction provides the ethical and social arguments for providing for the welfare of all through individual and collective action. Without the provision of welfare for all, a decent and civil society is not possible. The author acknowledges that the provision of welfare is a complex issue. He argues that we need to understand the common good and promote collective action to sustain the common good.

In the chapter "What do we mean by welfare?" the author explains "...the dual nature of welfare as both an individual concern and the collective good" (p. 15). The author discriminates between welfare and well-being. Welfare addresses social problems or issues. Well-being addresses individual needs. The two are not necessarily mutually exclusive, but they do address different concepts. The author

argues that societies have developed programs to address both in order to have a just and civil society.

The issues of health, education, and welfare are examined. "The provision of services to meet our key welfare needs is at the heart of public welfare and it constitutes the core of social policy" (p. 57). Societies have used both public provision and private provision to address these basic welfare issues.

It is argued that the key issue in welfare delivery is whether services are effective and accessible to those in need. The author posits that post-World War II services were primarily driven by "top down" management practices. Recently "bottom up" approaches have been developing. They represent the idea that those who receive the service should have a voice as to how the service is delivered. The chapter discusses both vertical redistribution and horizontal redistribution.

The chapter "Where should planning and delivery take place?" argues that local and community planning is important, as is supranational planning, to developing effective welfare programs. However, it asserts that national planning is crucial to effective welfare delivery. "It is national welfare planning that will continue to provide the only effective and legitimate basis for the collective investment and distribution that the public provision of welfare requires" (p. 112).

The author argues that all residents and citizens benefit from various welfare programs. Although some programs are designed to address the needs of particular groups, it is important that welfare programs be available to all when the need arises.

“There is much that we share, despite our differences, and collective welfare policy must recognize the need to balance responsiveness to difference with shared investment for all” (p. 131).

In the final chapters, the author discusses how the changing economy (globalization) and neoliberal philosophy have led to widespread attacks on and reductions in the welfare state. There is diminishing support for collective investment in welfare. “The main challenge that we face in promoting such investment is the need to reestablish popular support for collective, rather than individual, responses to the challenges welfare faces” (p. 157). The relationship between a civil society and a welfare state is established to assert that we need welfare programs. The civil society is where individuals meet collective organization. There is a need to rethink welfare and how it is to be accomplished, but civil society requires welfare.

The book does an excellent job of reviewing the development of the welfare state and establishing the need for welfare. It focuses primarily on the U.K., but many of its arguments are applicable to other welfare states. Because the summaries assume a fair amount of knowledge of the welfare state, I would not use it with undergraduates. I do think it could be a good starting point with graduate students to encourage them to think about how we develop or redevelop welfare programs necessary to maintain a civil society. Especially in the era of a Trump presidency, it seems important that we seriously explore how to maintain civil society.