

Guest Editors' Introduction

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In the last three decades, real-world welfare states have undergone serious retrenchment almost everywhere. Recently, however, and connected to the global financial crisis which started in 2007, there has been a new wave of reflection on, and criticism of, the theories of unrestrained markets that motivated much of this retrenchment — both in academic circles, and among the wider public, where new movements and campaigns protesting against it, and demanding more egalitarian public policies, have sprung up. Now is a good time, then, to discuss what social justice requires, in terms of welfare state policies and institutions, and policies that might go beyond more traditional welfare state arrangements: to investigate the implications of theories of social justice for these fields, and to reflect on the ways in which theorists of justice can hope to contribute to, and have an impact on, broader public policy debates connected to the welfare state.

While the debates that have received most attention in the political philosophy of social justice in the last decades have focused on relatively abstract issues, such as principles of just distribution (equality, priority, sufficiency), the currency they range over (opportunities for welfare, resources, capabilities, primary goods, something else), or their scope (global, domestic, something in between), there has also been a lot of work on the implications of theories of social justice for changing and transforming familiar institutions and policies associated with the welfare state, down to concrete policy proposals, such as an unconditional basic income, or stakeholder grants.¹ More recently still, the debate about the institutional implications of Rawls's theory of social justice has been revived, focusing on Rawls's dismissal of welfare state arrangements as an adequate implementation of 'justice fairness', and his own proposal of a 'property-owning democracy' as better suited to that task. 'Property-owning democracy' denotes a regime in which productive capital is evenly spread among all members of society.²

The question of which institutional arrangements are required from the point of view of different theories of justice may appear to be relatively straightforward. However, upon reflection, it raises a host of conceptual and methodological issues that introduce significant complications. Among these are the following: should political philosophers interested in justice and the welfare state start, in their assessment of policies and institutions, from comprehensive ideal theories of social justice? Or should theories of justice, already at the level of theory, draw on existing experience and empirical evidence regarding the functioning of differing institutional arrangements, in order to avoid merely issuing normative demands 'in a vacuum', as it were? What is the appropriate unit of analysis and assessment in terms of justice? Is it single policies, sets of policies, or whole institutional set-ups (regimes, basic structures), as Rawls

seems to have held? To which extent does the advocacy of policies and institutions as most justice enhancing here and now have to draw on specific considerations of historical context, including non-ideal contextual features, such as the prevalence of attitudes and norms in a given society that might block the way towards even better policies? Questions such as these are made more pressing by the plausible thought that the political philosophy of justice and the welfare state should have among its aims, to an extent that is probably greater than for many other branches of political philosophy, the formulation of proposals that latch on to, and can influence, wider debates in society about desirable reform. This raises the further question of the ways in which political philosophy can realistically hope to have such an influence.

This sets the stage for this special issue.³ Its aim is to make progress both on the substantive normative question and the methodological questions raised above, discussing them in tandem, and showing how they can shed light on each other. The issue is divided into two parts. The articles in the first part, by Andrea Sangiovanni and Jonathan Wolff, discuss conceptual and methodological issues that are of general importance for all philosophical work on the welfare state, concerning the nature of solidarity, and the ways in which political philosophy of the welfare state have can hope to have an impact on the real world. The articles in the second part, by Anders Molander and Gaute Torsvik, Christian Schemmel with a response by Thad Williamson, and Stuart White with a response by Erik Olin Wright, examine and assess specific policies that are part of the welfare state, such as mandatory activation policies, proposed policies to go beyond it, such as basic capital and an unconditional basic income, and the question of how just welfare states can be, taking on Rawls's criticism of the welfare state, and advocacy of 'property-owning democracy'. These articles discuss specific methodological issues as they arise from the substantive questions that they seek to answer.

All welfare states need solidarity. Andrea Sangiovanni's article analyses what it is to act in solidarity: persons act in solidarity when they share a goal requiring the overcoming of significant adversity. They are committed to the goal, intend to do their part in ways that are compatible with other persons doing theirs, and are willing to incur significant costs, and to share each other's fate, on the way to the goal; but they do not need to know that all this is the case for the other parties, as well. This sets solidaristic action apart from the more familiar cases of small-scale joint action and institutionalised corporate action. The article then asks what can ground obligations of solidarity, as expressed in the maintenance of welfare state arrangements. Sangiovanni argues that the often adduced considerations of shared experience, especially of human suffering, or of shared identity, especially national identity, do not deliver independent reasons to join in solidarity for those who are not yet committed to do so — while natural duties of justice to overcome the adversity of common existence without adequately functioning state institutions do. We have reasons of solidarity to share each other's fate within the continuous shared action of maintaining the state institutions required by such natural duties.

The reach of Sangiovanni's analysis of reasons for solidarity is not restricted to the welfare state, but it has particularly important implications for it. If the operation of redistributive arrangements is not to be conceived of as merely feeding off a stock of pre-existing solidaristic dispositions that are ultimately morally groundless, then these arrangements must themselves be assessed also on the basis of how well they assure citizens, and make it easy for them to recognise, that they are indeed engaged in an enterprise of just mutual provision: of how good they are at generating, and reproducing,

justice-based solidarity.⁴ This question is, for example, also taken up in the articles by Molander/Torsvik, and Schemmel.

Jonathan Wolff's article examines the ways in which political philosophy can have an impact on broader public policy debates. It notes familiar difficulties with moving from ideal theories depicting the best possible arrangements to policy proposals for improving the *status quo*, and goes on to argue, by drawing on examples in the recent history of political philosophy, that the impact of political philosophy is often conditioned by the balance of opposing values in public political discourse at the time of intervention. When things go well, political philosophy succeeds in drawing attention to currently neglected values; when they go badly, it emphasises values that are already overstressed. The article traces how, in recent public debates about the values underlying the welfare state, the pendulum has swung from emphasising solidarity to emphasising individual responsibility, and how, consequently, 'luck' egalitarian theories, which set out to use the ideal of personal responsibility for the purposes of equality, might have in the end merely contributed to the current overemphasis on this value — while what is needed is reemphasising solidarity. As in Sangiovanni's case, the analysis is general; the welfare state is used as a particularly pertinent example. Wolff's aim is not to argue that individual political philosophers should consciously tailor their proposals to this model of impact, but to deliver reflection on how the discipline as a whole is likely to have influence. If correct, the analysis implies that the methodological issues mentioned above about how to go from theories of socio-economic justice to particular policy proposals are not the only ones that matter in the transition from theory to practice, and may not even be the ones that matter most for impact.

The articles in the second part of the issue then grapple with precisely these issues of going from theory to particular public policies, and vice versa, that Wolff's approach seeks to put into a larger perspective. Anders Molander and Gaute Torsvik take on one set of policies which have become prominent in almost all welfare states in the last decades, and which exemplify the focus on individual responsibility whose overemphasis Wolff criticises: 'mandatory activation policies' implementing compulsory job training for all welfare recipients deemed able to work, and penalising refusal of job offers. They deliver a comprehensive survey and assessment of empirical evidence and normative arguments that have been brought forward in favour of such policies, in terms of efficiency, sustainability of welfare state arrangements, benefits for subjects themselves (paternalism), and fairness/justice. Considerations of fairness/justice turn out to be important for the assessment of all purported arguments. Molander and Torsvik argue that current liberal egalitarian theories of social justice, due to their emphasis on individual responsibility and reciprocity, are not in principle hostile to such policies, but impose important requirements: job offers must themselves be fair, and activation policies must be targeted as much as possible at those unemployed who are indeed merely unwilling to work, which requires overcoming serious informational difficulties. Therefore, it turns out that what can be justified in ideal theory might not be justifiable in practice. Molander and Torsvik do not deliver a final verdict on the question of justification, but their analysis demonstrates that justification is much harder than public discourse in all welfare states seems to assume.

In the two debates concluding the special issue the direction of inquiry runs the other way round, from theories of social justice to the question of how they might be implemented in practice.

Schemmel's article criticises Rawls's dismissal of welfare state arrangements as a possible implementation of his conception of social justice as methodologically and normatively flawed. In line with his general holistic focus on the basic structure of society, Rawls's case against the welfare state and for 'property-owning democracy' is made through a comparison of ideal-types of regimes understood as comprehensive institutional set-ups. Schemmel agrees that there are good reasons for a focus on regimes, such as that it allows us to examine interaction effects between different policies. Yet he argues that, if we look to comparative welfare state research on different regimes, it becomes clear that Rawls has failed to identify the best existing type of welfare state: the universal welfare state. This type is not vulnerable to some of Rawls's criticisms, and has desirable stability characteristics. It embodies inter-class solidarity and has a propensity to generate and sustain stabilising beliefs in its justice. Schemmel concludes that reform towards such a regime should be the first reform target of all welfare states, but concedes that it cannot implement Rawlsian justice fully. However, he delivers some reasons to think that the universal welfare state should be combined with democratic socialism rather than with 'property-owning democracy'.

Thad Williamson's response disputes the methodological claim that regime comparisons have to focus on the best existing ideal type. Instead of looking to comparative research for the best regime, we should focus on the specific contextual features of single societies, in particular historical reasons why a certain regime type is prevalent there, and should then ask which better alternative, in Rawlsian terms, is accessible from there. Importantly, this includes non-ideal features such as widespread unjust attitudes among the population. For cases like the US, Williamson argues, this tips the balance of reasons decisively against trying to move towards a universal welfare state and against democratic socialism, and in favour of trying to attain some form of property-owning democracy. An open question is how the balance of reasons falls out for all those societies that find themselves somewhere in the middle between a universal welfare state and a very residual welfare state, such as characterises the US.

Stuart White also examines the implications of 'property-owning democracy', but takes a different, more relaxed, methodological approach. He focuses not on regimes, but on single policies conceived of as parts of a broader 'egalitarian toolkit', in which welfare state, liberal socialist, and property-owning democracy policies all have their place. White argues that basic capital grants are a particular important constituent of the property-owning democracy part of the toolkit, because of the contribution they can make to equality of opportunity and individual autonomy — in particular, to equal opportunity for ambition formation. However, to reduce the risks associated with the danger of losing one's capital, basic capital policies should not stand alone. Citizens should receive a basic income and should be allowed to convert part of their overall lifetime basic income into such a capital grant.

Erik Olin Wright comments on this article by once more broadening the focus, so as to bring the likely effects of such policies against a background of a capitalist economic order into view, and relates them to a variety of different possible criticisms of capitalism. He argues that, while both basic capital and basic income would make important contributions to a more just distribution of resources, basic capital would strengthen the reproduction of capitalism, while basic income would, for a variety of reasons, deliver better prospects for 'eroding' it: for weakening the dominance of capitalist economic organisation so as to make genuinely alternative ways of life available to all. On this basis,

he rejects White's more ecumenical 'toolkit' approach, and argues that basic income policies should enjoy priority over basic capital policies.

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NOTES

- 1 See, for example, Philippe van Parijs, *Real Freedom for All* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1995); Bruce Ackerman & Anne Alstott, *The Stakeholder Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press 1999), and Bruce Ackerman, Anne Alstott & Philippe van Parijs (authors), Erik Olin Wright (ed.), *Redesigning Distribution — Basic Income and Stakeholder Grants as Cornerstones for an Egalitarian Capitalism* (London: Verso 2006).
- 2 John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, rev. edn. (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Preface and pp. 234–251, *Justice as Fairness — A Restatement* (Cambridge (MA): Harvard University Press 2001), pp. 137ff. For discussion, see especially Martin O'Neill & Thad Williamson (eds), *Property-Owning Democracy: Rawls and Beyond* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell 2012), Alan Thomas & Thad Williamson (eds), 'Symposium on Property-Owning Democracy', *The Good Society* 21 (2012): 1–89, and Francis Cheneval & Christoph Laszlo (eds), 'Property-Owning Democracy', *Analyse & Kritik* 35 (2013): 1–269.
- 3 It was inspired by a 'Priority in Practice' workshop on the same topic that took place at the University of Frankfurt in January 2012, organised by the Centre of Advanced Studies *Justitia Amplificata — Rethinking Justice*. We would like to thank the *German Research Foundation* (DFG) for generous funding of the event. Both the list of contributors and contributions have changed significantly on the way from workshop to special issue. We should like to think that the articles brought together here already reflect progress made since then.
- 4 See Bo Rothstein, *Just Institutions Matter — The Moral and Political Logic of the Welfare State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1998).