

historical dead-end in which all alternatives to the biological family are seen as both immoral and unworkable.

By reminding us that the tradition of the spiritual family and nonnatal parenthood is perfectly consistent with Judeo-

Christian tradition, Boswell helps us to revise our unnecessarily rigid notions of good parents, making a place once again for the kindness of strangers.

—John R. Gillis, '88

A New War on Poverty?

POOR SUPPORT: Poverty in the American Family. By David T. Ellwood. Basic. 1988. 271 pp. \$19.95

STARTING EVEN: An Equal Opportunity Program to Combat the Nation's New Poverty. By Robert Haveman. Simon and Schuster. 1988. 287 pp. \$19.95

If persistent poverty at the end of the 1980s and its implications for U.S. social policy are not sufficiently interesting to attract a wide readership, the spectacle of liberals revising their thinking may be. Haveman, an economist at the University of Wisconsin, and Ellwood, a professor of public policy at Harvard, are both specialists on social welfare policy. They are also liberals who, it seems, are changing their minds.

Writing in the wake of neoconservative indictments of Great Society welfare programs by authors like Charles Murray, Lawrence Mead, and George Gilder, Haveman and Ellwood also identify themselves as critics of the status quo. Both reject the argument of Murray's *Losing Ground* (1984) that welfare, as enlarged during the 1960s and 1970s, deserves greatest blame for a growing poor population and for a disturbing pattern of long-term dependency. But if the current welfare system does not, in their view, cause poverty, it does a bad job of lifting the able-bodied out of it. Treating symptoms rather than causes, it allows dependency and leads to the result that, in Ellwood's words, "everybody hates welfare."

By welfare, Ellwood means not support for the aged and disabled but aid to the

"healthy non-elderly"—costing four percent of the federal budget, 1.5 percent of GNP. No gigantic sum, compared to outlays for defense or agriculture, it is still hated because it supports programs in conflict with "our values," defined by Ellwood as individual autonomy, work, family, and community. Ellwood thinks the government should promote individual responsibility and not be in conflict with work-oriented beliefs. He argues that long-term, cash-based support for the healthy young should be replaced with a system that "expects more."

Ellwood, it should be noted, limits his proposals to the problem of families with children. Single males require another yardstick, he believes. This confession reveals a refreshing candor in face of plain facts. Social and economic changes during the past three decades have tended to "increase the independence and economic position of women and decrease the economic status of men," and to make "marriage look less essential" to women. But this female (and, in a strange way, male) "liberation" has ended up plunging millions of children and young mothers into poverty. These poor, moreover, are disproportionately black, since "marriage declined massively in the black community."

Ellwood's policy proposals seek, among other things, to make marriage "look better." They include virtual elimination of income taxation among the poor, raising the minimum wage so that "work pays," expanding child-care subsidies and medical insurance.

But where enters responsibility? Ellwood proposes that fathers of illegitimate

children—the kids who are the prime victims of poverty, along with their young mothers—must be made to support their children. (Haveman agrees. Liberals apparently are ready for a national tax-based system for finding and dunning fathers who are delinquent on child support.) For the healthy non-elderly, Ellwood suggests that government limit public assistance to 18–36 months. After that, it should “provide minimum-wage jobs.” The cost? “Over \$20 billion or even \$30 billion to do everything right.”

While Ellwood offers a cogent summary of the changing demographic and gender characteristics of the poor, Haveman is interested in the general picture of income distribution. His analysis of trends during the Reagan years, though not news, is sobering. “The economic tide turned against youth in general,” he summarizes, and other big losers have been single mothers. Income and wealth shifted steadily toward the elderly, who make no more economic contribution, and away from the young who are the nation’s economic future.

Haveman’s program resembles Ellwood’s: refundable tax credits to take the poor entirely out of the tax system; child-care subsidies; the withholding of wages from fathers delinquent in child care; the creation of a “capital account for youths,” a grant of \$20,000 to all needy 18-year-olds, to be used for education and medical

services, according to the recipient’s choice. The cost? Roughly \$20 billion, the same figure Ellwood uses.

These are all wise suggestions for welfare reform. Words like “responsibility” and “self-sufficiency” register a healthy change in the liberal vocabulary, once limited to such ideals as “justice” and “security.” But welfare policy supporters have only begun the necessary rethinking. Both books avoid volatile ethnic questions, particularly the challenge posed by new Asian and Hispanic populations. Both authors confront the issue of socially and parentally unwanted births but ignore the controversy over birth control.

Most fatal to their hopes for effective reform, however, is their parochial view of American society. They ignore international economic and demographic factors. Immigration, for instance, not only shapes the U.S. labor market but can produce unintended consequences. Imagine the impact in the Caribbean or Mexico of news of the adoption of Haveman’s \$20,000 “universal personal account for youths.” (And surely, the courts would rule illegal aliens eligible for such grants.) A major influx of immigrants would overwhelm America’s puny barriers, teaching a costly lesson that welfare reforms must be connected to other elements, including secure borders. Such tough trade-offs remain the ultimate liberal conundrum.

—Otis Graham, '83

Empire in Decay

RETURN TO DIVERSITY: A Political History of East Central Europe since World War II. By Joseph Rothschild. Oxford, 1989. 257 pp. \$24.95

As Soviet troops advanced into Europe during World War II, the Hungarian historian Gyula Szeku calmly observed: “We are to wait half a century before any real change occurs in Eastern Europe.”

Ahead of schedule by a few years, that change is already the subject of a numerous articles (including those by Timothy Garton-Ash in *The New York Review of Books* and William Pfaff in the *New Yorker*) and now a book-length study. In this, the first comprehensive political history of the Soviet empire in decay, Rothschild, a professor of political science at Columbia, tells a story of disintegration