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students of the Department. His respondents offered insights into their experiences and gave their professional opinions about many aspects of pluralism. In addition, Merelman provides a useful theoretical perspective to frame his account. Indeed, despite the important insights the book offers into the work of Yale's leading scholars of pluralism, Merelman's account is all the more significant for exploring the question of how those who exercise power are able to secure legitimation for their actions. Drawing on the writings of Marx and Engels, Gramsci, Mannheim and others who have addressed this question, Merelman shows that academics often provide the intellectual arguments on which legitimation is based. It is not that they merely serve as lackeys to the powerful but rather that their normative theories are viewed as congenial and are often adopted to legitimate political decisions. Pluralism, Merelman argues, offered a legitimating discourse which was highly suited to its time. It accompanied other legitimating discourses which were then in use. These included Keynesian economics, functionalist sociology and systems theory in administrative science.

Although Merelman's insights may not at first appear to have much relevance to social welfare, his analysis of the role pluralism played in offering a legitimating discourse for the wider political process has relevance to the way pluralism is today used to legitimize the retrenchment of state responsibility for social welfare. Those who oppose government involvement in social welfare frequently point to the way a multiplicity of welfare providers ranging from the churches and charities to commercial insurance firms and for-profit social agencies now contribute positively to a supposedly happy equilibrium which has emerged in the wake of state retrenchment. As in politics, pluralism in welfare has become a legitimating discourse which should be understood by scholars and students of social policy. This readable and insightful book will help promote this goal.


In the decades following the New Deal, it was widely accepted that government would be the primary funder, administrator and provider of a range of social services designed to meet the social
needs of citizens. The institutionalization of this idea resulted
in the equation of term ‘social welfare’ with the public social
services. Although the contribution of non-profit organizations,
religious charities and commercial providers to social welfare was
recognized, their role was not given much prominence and in
some quarters it was even believed that they would eventually
wither away as government services expanded and encompassed
even greater responsibility for people’s well-being.

As Sanger argues, the dominance of the state in social welfare
provision has been dramatically modified over the last twenty
years. Although the state remains a primary funder of social ser-
vice, a new and much more fluid pluralism has emerged in which
non-profits and commercial providers compete in a new welfare
market place to secure funds for social service programs. Con-
tracting is not only widespread but it has changed the way public
agencies operate. It has also a major impact on the non-profit
sector changing what Sanger describes as the very soul of vol-
untarism. Of course, the engagement of for-profit firms in social
service provision has also altered the way the welfare sector was
previously viewed. While commercial providers such as private
health and life insurance firms worked directly with consumers
and, apart from tax subsidies, were limited in the advantages
they secured from government, they now derive substantial funds
and profits through their role as social service contractors. The
involvement of large commercial firms such as Lockheed Martin
in social service contracting suggests that the welfare market is a
lucrative one for providers motivated primarily by profit.

Sanger’s book is concerned with the way contracting out is
affecting traditional public welfare programs, non-profits and
commercial providers in the new welfare market place. The book
is based on studies of contracting out in four urban areas namely,
Houston, Milwaukee, New York and San Diego. Interview were
conducted with public officials and the managers of commercial
and non-profit contractors in each area and public documents
relating to social service contracting were scrutinized. The study
focused on the TANF programs administered in each area. It
sought to determine first, how significant contracting out has
become; second, what do public agencies seek to achieve through
contracting; third, how have non-profit and for-profit providers
responded and fourth, what are the risks and challenges involved. However, the study did not assess the performance of contractors with regard to client outcomes.

In seeking to answer these questions, Sanger provides a great deal of useful information about the growth of social service contracting and the way federal, state and local governments have promoted the growth of the welfare market. She demonstrates that contracting has grown enormously and that it has radically altered traditional modes of public and voluntary provision. Contracting has changed the character of government and non-profit agencies as well and created a complex and fluid situation which is not always conducive to effective service delivery. Despite some advantages, the widespread use of contracting has also had a negative effect on continuity, staffing and accountability. Although Sanger’s study does not reach definitive conclusions about the impact of contracting out on the welfare of clients, it cautionary findings should be heeded by those who believe that social needs can best be met through competitive social service provision in the welfare market.


Global aging is all-encompassing and will affect every man, woman and child anywhere in the world. It will affect everything from individual life plans to international security. The steady increase in the number of older people will have a direct bearing on family relationships and solidarity, generational equity and lifestyles. It will generate important opportunities while at the same time it will create unprecedented challenges. Increases in old age in many countries can be attributed to advances in science, medicine, and technology that have lead to reductions in infant and maternal mortality, infectious disease, and occupational hazards, as well as improvements in nutrition and education. Decreases in fertility combined with increases in aging may shrink the numbers of workers and consumers, creating unprecedented challenges to national and global economies. At the same time, with the advances in health and medicine, current populations will live longer and remain healthier than previous generations.