



Well-Being and Fair Distribution: Beyond Cost-Benefit Analysis

By Matthew Adler

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In *Well-Being and Fair Distribution: Beyond Cost-Benefit Analysis*, author Matthew D. Adler provides readers with a comprehensive, philosophically grounded argument for the use of social welfare functions as a framework for governmental policy analysis--a framework that is welfarist but not utilitarian, and sensitive to the distribution of human well-being.

Well-Being and Fair Distribution addresses a range of relevant theoretical issues, including the nature of well-being and the possibility of interpersonal welfare comparisons; the moral value of equality, and how that bears on the form of the social welfare function; social choice under uncertainty; and the integration of individual responsibility into the social-welfare function approach. Adler also explores issues of implementation by looking at how survey data and other sources of evidence might be used to calibrate both a well-being metric and a social welfare function, and discussing whether distributive goals are ever best pursued through regulation rather than the tax system. In working through this range of theoretical and practical issues, *Well-Being and Fair Distribution* draws from a wide variety of literatures, including philosophical scholarship on equality, "prioritarianism," responsibility, well-being, and personal identity over time; the social choice literature within economics; applied economic literatures concerning the measurement of inequality and poverty; legal and policy-analytic scholarship on cost-benefit analysis, environmental justice, and the choice between regulation and taxation; and the burgeoning field of "happiness studies."

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Editorial Review

Review

"Matthew D. Adler's exceptional book offers both an in-depth exploration of the foundations of welfare analysis and an engaging plea for a particular approach, with refreshing constructive proposals. Masterfully done."

--Marc Fleurbaey, Laurance S. Rockefeller Professor of Public Affairs and the University Center for Human Values, Princeton University

"In Well-Being and Fair Distribution Matthew D. Adler holds up a very simple and plausible idea and defends it with strong analytical intelligence, technical skill, humane passion and philosophical savvy. The idea he defends is that law and institutions should be set to maximize a prioritarian social welfare function. We should seek to increase aggregate well-being for people, and in doing so, give extra weight to achieving gains for a person, the worse off she would otherwise be. This outstanding book makes this idea vivid and precise and indicates its main implications for public policy."

--Richard Arneson, Distinguished Professor, University of California, San Diego

"In Well-Being and Fair Distribution, Professor Matthew Adler develops a compelling alternative to CBA -- the Social Welfare Function (SWF) -- which expands upon and refines the welfarist framework to incorporate fairness and distributional concerns...The result is a creative and commanding (if technical) reconstitution of welfarist policy analysis that should give practitioners a useful new tool and academics a fresh perspective on an old debate."

--Harvard Law Review

"Matthew Adler develops and defends a particular view on how the appraisal of social policies should be performed and in doing so offers a new and refreshing take on the subject of fair distribution."

-- Efsthymios Athanasiou, Erasmus Journal for Philosophy and Economics

"In its ambition -- to defend within the four corners of welfarism a particular version of the social welfare function (SWF) -- this book represents a stunning achievement. This book is so definitive that further discussion of welfarism must reckon with it. Anyone who wants to comment intelligently on the welfarist program from within it must first master the intricate and difficult argument of this book -- a bar to market entry so high that it ought to dissuade all but the most erudite or intrepid theoreticians."

--Mark Sagoff, George Mason University, Notre Dame Philosophical Reviews

"Well-Being and Fair Distribution is a remarkable achievement. It is several books in one, drawing on many

different literatures in philosophy, economics, decision theory and law. The vast knowledge that it demonstrates and the care, persistence and precision of its argumentation are hard to convey. I know of no work in its field that compares with it. A less brilliant and comprehensive treatment would leave one wondering if the project might be made to work by a smarter and more diligent author. Adler's remarkable efforts leave those who wish to rely on social welfare functions with no such hopes. Despite the genius with which the approach is developed, the approach is, I believe, hopeless; and the very genius with which it is developed establishes this conclusion."

-- Daniel M. Hausman, *Economics and Philosophy Journal*

"[Adler's] arguments are forceful at every turn. The book certainly deserves to be read by academics with interests in the concept of well-being as well as approaches to making large-scale public decisions. The book is masterful. Its value is not primarily in its originality...but rather in its impressive exposition, synthesis, and defense of those ideas."

--Ty Raterman, *Ethics*

"*Well-Being and Fair Distribution: Beyond Cost-Benefit Analysis* is an important book that effectively highlights both the significance and the difficulties of building fair social policies that improve well-being. It is admittedly a challenging read, which is to be expected, given the hard and complex questions it tackles. The reader who perseveres will be rewarded with a rich appreciation of these critical issues."

--Arden Rowell, *Risk Analysis*

"*Well-Being and Fair Distribution* displays a breathtaking knowledge of philosophy, law, decision theory, and social choice. I predict that engagement with the book will prove similarly rewarding for anyone in the field."

--Alex Voorhoeve, *Social Choice and Welfare*

"Adler's book is state-of-the-art...[it] does a superb job at presenting issues in highly intuitive terms. Anyone with serious interests in consequentialist moral theory should read this book."

--Peter Vallentyne, *Analysis Reviews*

"This book may be the work that will truly raise the profile of post-CBA welfare economics within economics-including prioritarianism, of course, but perhaps beyond. With Adler's book and his successful challenge to frame a truly pluridisciplinary, non-technical and complete analysis, we can hope that this considerable area of research may become better understood and more widely recognized. At the very least, we may say that this book is what was needed to mark the start of a new era for welfare economics."

--Antoinette Baujard, *Oeconomia*

"[Adler's] book invites a focus for moral criticism of legal and regulatory decision making that is appropriate

to the target of that type of decision making - human wellbeing - and commensurate with its scope and reach. It is a marked improvement over our current limited reliance on the criticism of law by prior law, criticism of law by reference to deontological premises in a few fields, and critique of the rest of it by reference to preference-maximization techniques familiar from economic analysis."

--Robin West, *The Journal of Things We Like (Lots)*

"Adler sets out a path-breaking discussion of whether it is appropriate to go beyond cost-benefit analysis (required by President Barack Obama) to consider the effects of regulations on social well-being and equality. Adler's discussion has implications for regulatory policy. But because his conclusions come at a high level of abstraction, he is cautious, and properly so, about making concrete recommendations." -Cass R. Sunstein, Bloomberg View, former administrator of the White House Office of Information and Regulatory Affairs, Robert Walmsley university professor, Harvard Law School

About the Author

Matthew D. Adler is the Leon Meltzer Professor of Law at the University of Pennsylvania. He has also taught at Columbia University, the University of Chicago, and the University of Virginia, and is currently a visiting professor at Duke University. In 2007 he received the University of Pennsylvania Lindback Foundation Award for distinguished teaching. Adler is the author of many articles and several books on cost-benefit analysis, risk regulation, and equity. His work is interdisciplinary, integrating law, welfare economics, and moral philosophy. He is an editor of *Legal Theory*, a leading journal in the area of law and philosophy.

Users Review

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Warren Damron:

In this 21st century, people become competitive in each and every way. By being competitive right now, people have to do something to make these individuals survive, being in the middle of often the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that oftentimes many people have underestimated it for a while is reading. Sure, by reading a guide your ability to survive enhance then having chance to stay than other is high. For you who want to start reading some sort of book, we give you this kind of *Well-Being and Fair Distribution: Beyond Cost-Benefit Analysis* book as beginner and daily reading book. Why, because this book is greater than just a book.

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The book *Well-Being and Fair Distribution: Beyond Cost-Benefit Analysis* has a lot of information on it. So when you make sure to read this book you can get a lot of advantage. The book was published by the very famous author. The writer makes some research previous to write this book. This book very easy to read you can get the point easily after perusing this book.

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