

but the crunch of sidewalks disintegrating. An explosive growth in the number of children born out of wedlock—in 1995, one of every three of our fellow citizens is beginning life hindered by the absence of a father—is one indication of rapid decline.

Why is welfare replacement politically possible? Because there is broad understanding that the system hurts the very people it was designed to help, and that the trillions of dollars spent in the name of compassion over the past three decades have largely been wasted. Conservatives who want an opportunity to recover past wisdom and apply it to future practice should thank liberals for providing a wrecked ship. And liberals should support welfare replacement because, given the mood of the country, the alternative to replacement is not an expanded welfare state, but an extinct one.

Why is welfare replacement morally right? Because, when we look at the present system, we are dealing with not just the dispersal of dollars but with the destruction of lives. When William Tecumseh Sherman's army marched through Georgia in 1864, about 25,000 blacks followed his infantry columns, until Sherman and his soldiers decided to rid themselves of the followers by hurrying across an unfordable stream and then taking up the pontoon bridge, leaving the ex-slaves stranded on the opposite bank. Many tried to swim across but died in the icy water. Similarly today, many of the stranded poor will soon be abandoned by a country that has seen welfare failure and is lapsing into a skeptical and even cynical "compassion syndrome"—unless we find a way to renew the American dream of compassion.

The destruction of life through the current welfare system is not often so dramatic, but the death of dreams is evident every day. During the past three decades, we have seen lives destroyed and dreams die among poor individuals who have gradually become used to dependency. Those who stressed independence used to be called the "worthy poor"; now, a person who will not work is also worthy, and mass pauperism is accepted. Now,

those who are willing to put off immediate gratification and to sacrifice leisure time in order to remain independent are called chumps rather than champs.

We have also seen dreams die among some social workers who had been in the forefront of change. Their common lament is, "All we have time to do is move paper." Those who really care do not last long, and one who resigned cried out, "I had a calling; it was that simple. I wanted to help." Some social workers take satisfaction in meeting demands, but others who want to change lives become despondent in their role of enabling destructive behavior.

We have seen dreams die as "compassion fatigue" deepens. Personal involvement is down, cynicism is up. Many of us would like to be generous at the subway entrance or the street corner, but we know that most homeless recipients will use any available funds for drugs or alcohol. We end up walking by, avoiding eye contact—and a subtle hardening occurs once more. Many of us would like to contribute more of our money and time to the poor, but we are weighed down by heavy tax burdens. We end up just saying "no" to personal involvement, and a sapping of citizenship occurs once more.

We have seen dreams die among children who will never know their fathers. Government welfare programs have contributed to the removal of fathers, and nothing can replace them.

Some would say that for the poor and the fatherless the death of dreams is inevitable, but that is not so. England in

the nineteenth century recovered from its downward spiral that began in the eighteenth century. And we in the United States in the twenty-first century can recover from our recent problems, since we know a great deal from our own experience about how to fight poverty. We had successful anti-poverty programs a century ago—successful because they embodied personal, material, and spiritual involvement and challenge.

This vital story has generally been ignored by liberal historians, but the documented history goes like this: During the nineteenth century, a suc-

**"...many of the stranded poor will soon be abandoned by a country that has seen welfare failure and is lapsing into a skeptical and even cynical 'compassion syndrome' – unless we find a way to renew the American dream of compassion."**

money and face criminal prosecution.

- New York City's school policies require distribution of condoms to children, even if their parents have objected in writing.
- The Ninth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals ruled that passing over higher scoring police promotion applicants in favor of lower scoring members of preferred gender or racial groups was permitted under the 1991 Civil Rights Act.
- A Wisconsin man convicted more than thirty times for indecent exposure was turned down for a job as a park attendant. He sued on the grounds that he had never exposed himself in a park, only in libraries and laundromats. Wisconsin employment officials agreed there was "probable cause" that the flasher was the victim of illegal job discrimination.

These examples underscore the failure of the intellectual and moral foundations of the welfare state. The first intellectual leg of the four-legged stool supporting the welfare state is the idea that politicians in Washington can redistribute the wealth of the nation. The second leg is the idea that the important decisions in your life are better left to trained professionals—the "experts"—than to you and your family. The third leg is the idea that the work ethic is obsolete and old-fashioned. (If you don't believe this is true, just look at the wel-

fare system itself. There are only two rules for getting welfare in America: First, you may not work, and, second, you may not be married to anyone who does.) The fourth intellectual leg of the welfare state is moral relativism—the idea that there are no rights or wrongs, just different choices among alternative lifestyles.

## An Alternative to the Welfare State

**C**onservatives must offer a vision of an alternative to the welfare state that is not just the opposite of the liberals' vision—advocating small government where the liberals favor big government, individualism where they favor group entitlements, free markets where they favor regulation. They must engage in a profound and fundamental "reversioning" of the entire philosophy of American government. ▲

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# "The Conservative Vision and the Demise of the Welfare State"

*Pete du Pont*  
Former Governor of Delaware

**W**ith a law degree from Harvard University, Pete du Pont has served as a state legislator, a U.S. congressman, a two-term governor of Delaware, and in 1988 as a Republican presidential candidate for the presidency of the United States.



During his tenure as Delaware's governor, he signed into law two major income tax reduction measures and a constitutional amendment limiting taxing and spending. He balanced his state budget every year for eight years, and he founded an innovative unemployment prevention program for youths

that has since been duplicated in sixteen states and foreign nations. He has also established GOPAC, which has helped more than a thousand individuals run for state office and has educated thousands more on how to conduct grassroots political efforts.

Presently, Governor du Pont is a director in a Delaware law firm, policy chairman of the National Center for Policy Analysis, and chairman of the National Review Institute. ▲

*As the keynote speaker for Hillsdale College's March 1995 program, "American Perestroika," Pete du Pont argued that the welfare state "is much more than a set of entitlements and subsidies." It is an assault on the freedom of every citizen to make his own decisions and determine his own future. The Governor's remarks are excerpted here.*

**A**ny discussion of the demise of the welfare state must begin with some familiar words: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain Unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness."

So wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1776. But liberty throughout history has been hard-won. The blood of millions has been shed in defense of a simple idea: man's superiority to the state. Sometimes it doesn't come to bloodshed or revolution. The threat posed by the state to man's freedom is not always so clear. Sometimes it comes gradually, offered in tempting packages put forward by well-meaning people who believe with all their hearts that they know better how to improve the lot of all. All that is necessary is that we provide them with certain powers and that we sacrifice a few of our freedoms in order to provide a better and more equal world for all. A better world, of course, as viewed by *them*.

That world is called the welfare state.

The welfare state is much more than a set of entitlements and subsidies—and its impact reaches much further than the disadvantaged underclass it is designed to help. For, at its core, the welfare state emphasizes group responsibility over individual responsibility. After all, the purpose of bureaucracy is to make group instead of individual decisions. It also emphasizes decisions by elites, and it derides the importance of personal effort.

## Collective Morality

**T**he pre-eminence of a collective morality is evident in all of the welfare state's manifestations, from its welfare programs' bias against the family, to affirmative action's group preferences, to the lax enforcement of punishment in the criminal justice system. This collective morality levies what I call "spiritual taxes" across the breadth of our society. Here are just a few examples:

- A welfare mother who clipped food coupons and saved from her benefits accumulated \$3,000 in savings toward sending her child to college. Welfare officials demanded that she return the

cessful war on poverty was waged by tens of thousands of local, private charitable agencies and religious groups around the country. The platoons of the greatest charity army in American history often were small. They were made up of volunteers led by poorly paid but deeply dedicated professional managers. And they were highly effective.

Thousands of eyewitness accounts and journalistic assessments show that poverty fighters of the nineteenth century did not abolish poverty, but they enabled millions of people to escape it. They saw springs of fresh water flowing among the poor, not just blocks of ice sitting in a perpetual winter of multi-generational welfare dependency. And the optimism prevalent then contrasts sharply with the demoralization among the poor and the cynicism among the better-off that is so common now.

What was their secret? It was not neglect. It was their understanding of the literal and biblical meaning of compassion, which comes from two Latin words—*com*, which means “with,” and *pati*, which means “to suffer.” The word points to personal involvement with the needy, suffering with them, not just giving to them. “Suffering with” means adopting hard-to-place babies, providing shelter to women undergoing crisis pregnancies, becoming a big brother to a fatherless child, working one-on-one with a young single mother. It is not easy—but it works.

Our predecessors did not have it easy—but they persevered. Theirs were not “the good old days.” Work days were long and affluence was rare, and homes on the average were much smaller than ours. There were severe drug and alcohol problems and many more early deaths from disease. We are more spread out now, but our travel time is not any greater. Overall, most of the problems paralleled our own; the big difference lies in the rates of increase in illegitimacy and divorce. Most of the opportunities and reasons to help also were similar; a big difference in this regard is, as I have already pointed out, that our tax burden is much larger, and many Americans justifiably feel that they are already paying for others to take care of the needy.

In the nineteenth century, volunteers opened their own homes to deserted women and orphaned children. They offered employment to nomadic men who had abandoned hope and most human contact. Most significantly, our predecessors made moral demands on recipients of aid. They saw family, work, freedom, and faith as central to our being, not as “lifestyle options.” The volunteers gave of their own lives not just so that others might survive, but that they might thrive.

## Seven Basic Principles of Effective Compassion

### *Affiliation*

A century ago, when individuals applied for material assistance, charity volunteers tried first to “restore family ties that have been sundered” and “reabsorb in social life those who for some reason have snapped the threads that bound them to other members of the community.” Instead of immediately offering help, charities asked, “Who is bound to help in this case?” In 1897, Mary Richmond of the Baltimore Charity Organizing Society summed up the wisdom of a century: “Relief given without reference to friends and neighbors is accompanied by moral loss. Poor neighborhoods are doomed to grow poorer whenever the natural ties of neighborliness are weakened by well-meant but unintelligent interference.”

Today, before developing a foundation project or contributing to a private charity, we should ask, “Does it work through families, neighbors, and religious or community organizations, or does it supersede them?” For example, studies show that many homeless alcoholics have families, but they do not want to be with them. When homeless shelters provide food, clothing, and housing without asking hard questions, aren’t they subsidizing disaffiliation and enabling addiction? Instead of giving aid directly to homeless men, why not work on reuniting them with brothers, sisters, parents, wives, or children?

We should ask as well whether other programs help or hurt. It is good to help an unmarried teenage mother, but much of such aid now offers a mirage of independence. A better plan is to reunite her whenever possible with those on whom she actually depends, whether she admits it or not: her parents and the child’s father. It is good to give Christmas presents to poor children, but when the sweet-minded “helper” shows up with a shiny new fire truck that outshines the second-hand items a poor single mom put together, the damage is done. A better plan is to bulwark the beleaguered mom by enabling her to provide for her children.

### *Bonding*

A century ago, when applicants for help were truly alone, volunteers worked one-to-one to become, in essence, new family members. Charity volunteers a century ago usually were not assigned to massive food-dispensing tasks. They were given the narrow but deep responsibility of making a difference in one life over several years.

Kindness and firmness were both essential. In 1898, the magazine *American Hebrew* told of how one man was sunk into dependency but a volunteer "with great patience convinced him that he must earn his living." Soon he did, and he regained the respect of his family and community. Similarly, a woman had become demoralized, but "for months she was worked with, now through kindness, again through discipline, until finally she began to show a desire to help herself."

Today, when an unmarried pregnant teenager is dumped by her boyfriend and abandoned by angry parents who refuse to be reconciled, she needs a haven, a room in a home with a volunteer family. When a single mom at the end of her rope cannot take care of a toddler, he should be placed quickly for adoption where a new and permanent bonding can take place, rather than rotated through a succession of foster homes.

### ***Categorization***

A century ago, charities realized that two persons in exactly the same material circumstances but with different values need different treatment: One might benefit most from some material help and a pat on the back; the other might need spiritual challenge and a push. Those who were orphaned, elderly, or disabled received aid. Jobless adults who were "able and willing to work" received help in job-finding. Those who preferred "to live on alms" and those of "confirmed intemperance" were not entitled to material assistance.

"Work tests" helped both in sorting and in providing relief with dignity. When an able-bodied man came to a homeless shelter, he often was asked to chop wood for two hours or whitewash a building; in that way he could provide part of his own support and also help those unable to perform these chores. A needy woman generally was given a seat in the "sewing room" (often near a child care room) and asked to work on garments that would be donated to the helpless poor or sent through the Red Cross to families suffering from the effects of hurricanes, floods, or other natural disasters. The work test, along with teaching good habits and keeping away those who did not really need help, also enabled charities to teach the lesson that those who were being helped could help others.

Today, we need to stop talking about "the poor" in abstraction and start distinguishing once again between those who truly yearn for help and those who just want an enabler. Programs have the chance to succeed only when categories are established and firmly maintained. Work tests can help: Why shouldn't some homeless men clean up streets and parks and remove graffiti? Now, as thousands of crack babies (born addicted to cocaine and often deserted by mothers who care

only for the next high) languish in hospitals and shelters under bright lights with almost no human contact. Shouldn't homeless women (those who are healthy and gentle) be assigned to hold a baby for an hour in exchange for food and shelter?

### ***Discernment***

"Intelligent giving and intelligent withholding are alike true charity," the New Orleans Charity Organization Society declared in 1899. It added, "If drink has made a man poor, money will feed not him, but his drunkenness." Poverty-fighters a century ago trained volunteers to leave behind "a conventional attitude toward the poor, seeing them through the comfortable haze of our own intentions." Barriers against fraud were important not only to prevent waste but to preserve morale among those who *were* working hard to remain independent: "Nothing," declared the Society, "is more demoralizing to the struggling poor than successes of the indolent."

Bad charity also created uncertainty among givers as to how their contributions would be used and thus led to less giving over the long term. It was important to "reform those mild, well-meaning, tender-hearted, sweet-voiced criminals who insist upon indulging in indiscriminate charity." Compassion was greatest when givers could "work with safety, confidence, and liberty." Today, lack of discernment in helping poor individuals is rapidly producing an anti-compassion backlash, as the better-off, unable to distinguish between the truly needy and the "grubby-grabby," give to neither.

### ***Employment***

Nineteenth-century New York charity leader Josephine Lowell wrote that "the problem before those who would be charitable is not how to deal with a given number of the poor; it is how to help those who are poor without adding to their numbers and constantly increasing the evils they seek to cure." If people were paid for not working, the number of non-workers would increase, and children would grow up without seeing work as a natural and essential part of life. Individuals had to accept responsibility: Governmental programs operating without the discipline of the marketplace were inherently flawed, because their payout came "from what is regarded as a practically inexhaustible source, and people who once receive it are likely to regard it as a right, as a permanent pension, implying no obligation on their part."

In the twentieth century and beyond, programs that stress employment, sometimes in creative ways, need new emphasis. For example, instead of temporary housing, more of the able-bodied might receive the opportunity to work for a permanent home through "sweat equity" arrangements in which labor constitutes most of the down



payment. Some who start in rigorous programs of this sort drop out with complaints that too much sweat is required, but one person who stayed in such a program said at the end, "We are poor, but we have something that is ours. When you use your own blood, sweat, and tears, it's part of your soul. You stand and say, 'I did it.' "

### **Freedom**

Charity workers a century ago did not press for governmental programs, but instead showed poor people how to move up while resisting enslavement to governmental masters. Job freedom was the opportunity to drive a wagon without paying bribes, to cut hair without having to go to barber college, and to get a foot on the lowest rung of the ladder, even if wages there were low. Freedom was the opportunity for a family to escape dire poverty by having a father work long hours and a mother sew garments at home. Life was hard, but static, multi-generational poverty of the kind we now have was rare; those who persevered could star in a motion picture of upward mobility.

Today, in our desire to make the bottom rung of the economic ladder higher, we have cut off the lowest rungs and left many on the ground. Those who are pounding the pavements looking for work, and those who have fallen between the cracks, are hindered by what is supposed to help them. Mother Teresa's plan to open a homeless shelter in New York was stopped by a building code that required an elevator; nuns in her order said that they would carry upstairs anyone who could not walk, but the city stuck to its guns and the shelter never opened. In Texas and New Mexico, a Bible-based anti-drug program run by Victory Fellowship has a 60 percent success rate in beating addiction, yet the Commission on Drug and Alcohol Abuse has instructed the program to stop calling itself one of "drug rehabilitation" because it does not conform to bureaucratic standards.

### **God**

"True philanthropy must take into account spiritual as well as physical needs," poverty-fighters a century ago noted, and both Christians and Jews did. Bible-believing Christians worshiped a God who came to earth and showed in life and death the literal meaning of compassion—*suffering with*. Jewish teaching stressed the pursuit of righteousness through the doing of good deeds. Groups such as the Industrial Christian Alliance noted that they used "religious methods"—reminding the poor that God made them and had high expectations for them—to "restore the fallen and helpless to self-respect and self-support."

Today, the challenge that goes beyond the material is still essential to poverty-fighting. In Washington, D.C., multimillion-dollar programs

have failed, but, a mile from the U.S. Capitol, success stories are developing: spiritually-based programs such as Clean and Sober Streets, where ex-alcoholics and ex-addicts help those still in captivity; the Gospel Mission, which fights homelessness by offering true hope; and the Capitol Hill Crisis Pregnancy Center, where teenage moms and their born and unborn children are cared for. They are all saving lives. In Dallas, Texas, a half-mile from the Dallas Housing Authority's failed projects, a neighborhood group called Voice of Hope invites teenagers to learn about God through Bible studies and to work at remodeling deteriorated homes in their neighborhood. During the past decade, crime rates among the boys involved with Voice of Hope and pregnancy rates among the girls have been dramatically lower than those in the surrounding community.

## **Changing Our Methods of Fighting Poverty**

**W**e need to change our methods of fighting poverty, but we need to be clear about the reasons for change. Government welfare programs should be replaced not because they are too expensive—although, clearly, much money is wasted—but because they are inevitably too stingy in providing what is truly important: the treatment of people as human beings made in God's image, not as animals to be fed and caged.

Private charities can do a better job than government, but only if they practice the principles of effective compassion. *Giving*, by itself, we need to remember, is morally neutral. We need to give *rightly*, so as not to impede the development of values that enable people to get out of poverty and stay out. Only when the seven principles of effective compassion noted above are widely understood and practiced can anti-poverty work succeed. In 1995, as in 1895, the best programs offer challenge, not just enabling, and they deal with spiritual questions as well as material needs. In 1995, as in 1895, there is no effective substitute for the hard process of one person helping another. And the century-old question—Does any given "scheme of help...make great demands on men to give themselves to their brethren?"—is still the right one to ask. ♣

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## "The New Welfare Debate: How to Practice Effective Compassion"

Marvin Olasky, Senior Fellow  
Progress and Freedom Foundation

**M**arvin Olasky is a senior fellow at the Progress and Freedom Foundation and its new Center for Effective Compassion in Washington, D.C. He is also a professor of journalism at the University of Texas at Austin and editor of *World*, a weekly news magazine written from a Christian perspective.



He has written thirteen books, including *The Tragedy of American Compassion*, *Prodigal Press* and *Patterns of Corporate Philanthropy*, and as well as more than fifty articles in such journals as *National Review*, *Christianity Today*, and *Policy Review*. Dr. Olasky received his B.A. from Yale University and his Ph.D. from the University of Michigan. ▲

*The American welfare state has created a \$50-billion-a-year "poverty industry" that hurts rather than helps the poor. Marvin Olasky, the author of one of the most-talked-about books in recent years, The Tragedy of American Compassion, outlines a powerful case for returning to an older, more effective tradition of voluntarism and charity.*

*His remarks were presented during the Center for Constructive Alternatives and Ludwig von Mises Lecture Series seminar, "American Perestroika: The Demise of the Welfare State," in March 1995.*

**F**or too long the welfare debate has been the "same old same old." Liberals have emphasized distribution of bread and assumed the poor could live on that alone. Conservatives have complained about the mold on the bread and pointed out the waylaying of funds by "welfare queens" and the empire-building of "poverty pimps."

It is time now, however, to talk not about reforming the welfare system—which often means scraping off a bit of mold—but about replacing it with a revolutionary, centrist system based on private and religious charity. Such a system was effective in the nineteenth century and will be even more effective in the twenty-first century, with the decentralization that new technology makes possible. But we must also make the right changes in personal goals and public policy.

Why is welfare replacement necessary? Because in America we now face not just concern about poor individuals falling between the cracks,