

Social Issues: The Ethics and Economics of Taxes and Public Programs

John C. Winfrey

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Given the recent cuts in government budgets, issues such as taxation, welfare, education, health care, Social Security, and environmental protection are drawing increased public awareness. The government programs directed at these issues are the subject of intense debate, with one underlying question: how to divide resources equitably among all members of society. In order for these moral conflicts to be resolved, however, a much better understanding of the moral as well as the economic dimensions of the issues and proposed reforms is needed.

Social Issues provides the necessary framework for discussing and resolving today's most pressing social issues. This approach to ethics, termed social ethics, presumes that moral principles should be evaluated in terms of their relevance to a specific situation or social issue. The social ethics approach allows for moral principles to be weighed in the context of social programs such as welfare reform, taxes, health care, education, Social Security, and the environment. The basic perspectives of economic, political, and social theory can greatly enhance understanding of the issues, the programs, and the possible reforms.

Many recent reform proposals seek to enhance the efficiency of social programs by deregulation and privatization. It is important to examine why the market originally failed to address and resolve these issues. Here the role of economic analysis becomes crucial: the success of reforms depends on an appreciation of the special characteristics of related goods and activities.

Social Issues provides a forum for open discussion in which the moral values and political and economic viewpoints of differing perspectives are entertained, discussed, and evaluated.



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