what we allocate is money."[5] That we have no right to "allocate" to Smith the money that was earned by Jones, any more than we have the right to give Smith's television set to Jones if we have reason to believe that Jones (who doesn't own it) will enjoy it more than Smith (who does), is a point that is never brought up. The obedient note-taking student is expected not to bring it up either.

Professor Nicholas Rescher, in his books *Welfare* and *Distributive Justice,* is somewhat more flexible about the government distribution of money. First, he suggests, a "utility floor" is needed, a level of income below which no person or family should be permitted to go regardless of the type of work the breadwinner does, or indeed whether he chooses to do any work at all.

Having said that, however, he adds that income should have something to do with desert—that a person who works hard or does a kind of job not duplicated by anyone else should be provided (by the government) some more income than the average, so as to keep his enterprise going. Thus, a convicted murderer who has served his sentence should still receive the minimum stipend (the "floor"), but no more than that because his actions have shown that he does not deserve more. The government thus becomes the arbiter and determiner of what each person deserves—an awesome responsibility indeed when added to the enormous enforcement duties that government already has, and already does at minimum efficiency and maximum cost.

In the end, according to Rescher, the following factors merit consideration: people should be treated "(1) as equals (except possibly in the case of certain 'negative' distributions such as punishments); (b) according to their needs; (c) according to their ability or merit or achievements; (d) according to their efforts and sacrifices; (e) according to their actual productive contribution; (f) according to the requirements of the common good, or the public interest, or the welfare of mankind, or the greater good of a greater number; (g) according to a valuation of their socially useful services in terms of their scarcity in the essentially economic terms of supply and demand."[6]

A Tremendous Calculation

How even an army of bureaucrats armed with computers could determine each person's deserved income by such a formula (and how much weight each of these factors should receive in the final determination of one's income) is a matter so complex as to boggle the mind.

Production *is* important, says Rescher. In order for goods to be distributed, they first must be produced. This was once a problem, he says, because (for example) few persons who wanted cars could have them. But today, owing to mass production, almost every family has one. "The problem of just distribution is less urgent," he says, "for an abundant good, and simply *does not arise* with a genuinely superabundant good."[7]

But *how does it happen* that consumer goods are superabundant in the United States and still so scarce in totalitarian countries that one has to stand in line for hours to get them, and so scarce as to be virtually nonexistent in some Third World countries? What is it that has brought about this superabundance? The vital importance of the operation of the free market in the countries with superabundance is never so much as hinted at.

Much more vague is the formula "Everyone (every person? every family?) should receive an equal income *unless* there is some special reason to make it unequal." This is a widely accepted maxim in Academia. As it stands, it seems innocent enough: one special reason (or the only one) might be, that one person has earned more than another on the free market. But this is not in general an academically accepted reason. No, the acceptable reasons would be, for example, that one person or family is in greater *need* (for whatever reason—whether through misfortune or from spendthrift habits apparently makes no difference); or that one person had worked more hours per day than another; or that one couple decided to have more children than another couple did. Market considerations have little place in such theories of academicians. Yet it is only the operation of the market that can create the wealth that they want government to distribute.

A Consumer's Point of View

The point of view is uniformly that of those who are to *receive,* not those who have to *produce* what others will receive. It is tacitly assumed that production will go on, no matter what the conditions; that producers will continue to produce, no matter how much is taken away from them, no matter how they are regulated; as willing pawns they will continue to produce without a murmur and that it will be left to the "humanitarian" distributors to determine who shall receive what.

Nor is there any conception in all this of the enormity of the coercive government machinery that would be required to sustain such equality of income: the waste, the graft, the corruption (getting your friends on the payroll, staying on welfare or disability long after you don't need it any longer, etc.). All this is ignored or accepted without question. It's just one of those "practical problems" for omnipotent bureaucrats to solve that should never be permitted