Millions of people worldwide live in poverty. Why is that? What has been done about it in the past? And what is being done about it now? Poverty: A Very Short Introduction explores how the answers to these questions lie in the social, political, economic, educational, and technological processes that impact all of us throughout our lives—from the circumstances of birth and gender to access to clean water and whether it is wartime or peacetime. The degree of vulnerability is all that differentiates us. This VSI looks at the history of poverty, the practical and analytical efforts made to eradicate it, and the prospects for further poverty alleviation in the future.

The programmes that make up the welfare state vary from nation to nation and from time to time, and the balance between markets and government, and free enterprise and social protection, is perennially in question. In contemporary political debate the welfare state seems mostly to be viewed as a problem rather than a solution, and welfare programmes appear constantly on the defensive. The Welfare State: A Very Short Introduction describes the modern welfare state, explaining its historical and contemporary significance and arguing that far from being ‘a failure’ or ‘a problem’, welfare states are an essential element of contemporary capitalism, and a vital concomitant of democratic government.