
1 Justice as a Value in Social Work

Social workers once aided striking workers and helped bring about social change. What are we doing now? We are often caught up in political campaigning for a bill, proposition, candidates, etc. rather than focusing on the macro change.

—Natalia Ventura, Southern Chair of
the Social Action Council of California, 2005

Since the 1960s and 1970s, justice issues have received considerable attention in writings on social work. The spotlight has intensified even though radical critics consider the shift more rhetorical window-dressing than a program implemented in practice or supported through professional training (Reisch & Andrews, 2001; Wagner, 2000). Social justice and related themes stand out in the documents of major organizations—the National Association of Social Workers (NASW) and the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE)—that represent the profession and that shape the training of social workers.

The codes and standards of the NASW (2003) address professional ethics. Professional commitment centers on issues that stress human rights and interpersonal resources. The core values guiding the enterprise are service, social justice, personal dignity and worth, the importance of human relationships, and integrity.

The guiding notion is that “social workers challenge social injustice.” Professionals are supposed to “pursue social change, particularly with and on behalf of vulnerable and oppressed individuals and groups.” Social workers’ reform efforts are to concentrate on issues of “poverty, unemployment, discrimination and other forms of social injustice.” These activities seek to promote sensitivity to and knowledge about oppression. “Social workers strive to ensure access to needed services and resources, equality of opportunity, and meaningful participation for all people” (NASW, 2003, pp. 381–395).

Under the heading of “Social Workers’ Ethical Responsibilities to the Broader Society,” justice comes in for further operationalization. “Social workers should,” the codes and standards document (NASW, 2003) states,

- promote the general welfare of society, from local to global levels, and the development of people, their communities, and environments. Social workers should advocate for living conditions conducive to the fulfillment of basic human needs and should promote social, economic, political and cultural values and institutions that are compatible with the realization of social justice.
- facilitate informed participation by the public in shaping social policies and institutions.
- engage in social and political action that seeks to ensure that all people have equal access to resources, employment, services and opportunities they require to meet their basic human needs and to develop fully. Social workers should be aware of the impact of the political arena on practice and should advocate for changes in policy and legislation to improve social conditions in order to meet basic human needs and promote social justice. (pp. 394–395)

A similar insistence on justice crops up repeatedly in other NASW declarations about economic programs, electoral politics, environmental policy, health care, housing, immigrants and refugees, international relations, and human rights.

The first formal statement of the Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) about curricula dates from 1962. In this, and in a number of subsequent documents, attention is given to social policy. However, it was not until 1992 that economic justice and populations at risk received explicit notice. By 1994, the need to promote social and economic justice in professional curricula was pressed still more clearly:

Programs of social work education must provide an understanding of the dynamics and consequences of social economic injustice, including all forms of human oppression and discrimination. They must provide students with the skills to promote social change and to implement a wide range of interventions that further the achievement of individual and collective social and economic justice. Theoretical and practice content must be provided about strategies of intervention for achieving social and economic justice and for combating the causes and effects of institutionalized forms of oppression. (CSWE, 1994)

Since then, curricular statements stressing issues of multiculturalism have become more common. Some commentators (e.g., Gilbert, 1995; Piven & Cloward, 1997) view the rise of identity politics as a distraction that undermines the struggle for human rights.

In sum, both the professional association and the accrediting body of the professional schools exhort social workers, in their role as change agents, to correct and undo injustice. The NASW uses the tentative “should.” The CSWE prefers the imperative “must.” The difference probably reflects the different scope of the organizations more than any practical variance in their commitment to justice. The NASW is much larger but more heterogeneous. The CSWE has a narrower, somewhat more focused mission, with sharper teeth through its powers of accreditation.

These documents leave no doubt about the overarching importance of social justice for the profession. But “overarching” can easily be translated into “generic bromides” and posturing. The task is to see how social work authors have emphasized one or another specific facet of these guidelines.

The approaches we will look at are representative of a range of formulations rather than exhaustive. I have selected a variety of works that stand along a continuum. Some positions claim that only certain interventions are consistent with the justice mandate. Alternative views adopt radical, reformist, and distributive ideas about justice in social work.

A Schizophrenic Profession?

The statements about justice issued by the NASW and the CSWE came late to a profession whose core method has been casework and, more recently, clinical practice. There seems to be a discrepancy between officially sanctioned principles and the courses offered in most schools. A similar gap appears between the justice ethic as a principle on the one hand and, on the other, values in tune with the jobs that social workers actually perform.

In a typical introductory class, students learn about the history of the profession. Mary Richmond and Jane Addams are identified as the founding mothers. While Richmond was the decisive figure in professionalizing social work, Addams and the settlement movement associated with her have remained at the roots of the justice thrust in the profession (Franklin, 1986).

Mary Richmond played a crucial role in bringing social work to professional standing. Together with the backing of the Russell Sage Foundation, her influence on the fledgling profession was decisive. Richmond’s views took shape during her years of work with the Charity Organizations and at the John Hopkins Hospital in Baltimore. This experience helps explain her liking for both the practice of casework and the medical model of intervention. Her book on social diagnosis (Richmond, 1917) merged these two preferences and was instrumental in giving professional status and scientific credibility to the activities of social workers (Lubove, 1965; Reamer, 1994; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Wenocur & Reisch, 1983). This was the ground in which the therapeutic direction, with a few collectively oriented excursions, germinated, grew, and came to dominate the field (Wenocur & Reisch, 1983).

Jane Addams had more formal schooling than Mary Richmond, and she had close ties with the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago. But she was suspicious of the move to professionalize social work. An activist reformer, Addams saw it as a threat to the progressive mission of the field. She feared that the search for professional respectability made social work vulnerable to cooptation (Franklin, 1986). Addams preferred community practice. Her vision of social problems was sociological rather than psychological. She aimed at changing policies on women's work, child care, health, housing, immigrant education, and integration. She pushed for the creation of juvenile courts.

Addams became involved in the politics of the Progressive movement. This was a commitment that "pro-profession" social workers made no secret of disliking. In addition, most social workers saw her tireless opposition to the entrance of the United States in World War I as unpatriotic. Addams eventually became a Nobel Peace Prize laureate, but her direct influence on social work's rise to professionalism was marginal (Franklin, 1986). Nevertheless, her ideas were absorbed into and have remained part of the identity of social work, even if they have taken the rather disembodied form of "values" that are rarely integrated in practice (Reisch & Andrews, 2001; Specht & Courtney, 1994; Wagner, 2000). Hers was a moral victory, not one that set an institutional course. So, a split developed between the individual-therapeutic slant of the profession and the justice and social change goals expressed in NASW and CSWE policy statements. The history of the profession shows a relentless, if not entirely linear, ascent of the therapeutic approach in training as well as practice.

How did the individual perspective gain so much ground? It is not as if, during the early days, there was a lack of practitioners to push a vision of clients within a larger community—the person-in-environment perspective. The preeminence of Mary Richmond notwithstanding, there were a number of reformers among pioneering professionals (e.g., Follett, 1909; Lindeman, 1921), and the staying power of the justice norm as a minority current is evident. Still, the puzzle remains. Why has the impulse toward justice lost out, in relative terms, compared to the therapeutic turn?

Although they differ in details, accounts of the origins and development of the profession are fairly consistent. Several factors combined to support "the triumph of the therapeutic." Besides the search for professional credibility, these include social demands for specific services, the priorities of funding sources, political pressure, and the dominance of a distinctive social ideology.

In a market economy like that of the United States, professional status matters. It is essential for gaining political, legal, and economic control of an occupation. Certification requires evidence of delivering a unique service, demonstration of its utility, and a rationale that justifies the necessity of that service. Furthermore, professional recognition has to be based on a body of knowledge. This entails elaborating a set of codified interventions that can be imparted to future professionals. Accreditation and licensing regulate the

process. In short, in order to legitimize its claim of exclusivity in an occupational sphere, a new profession has to justify a unique approach and impart skills that address social needs.

The medical profession provided the outstanding template for social work in its embryonic days. Social work's typical method of intervention was casework with psychiatric overtones. In its desire to stand on its own—to distance itself from volunteer charitable work and from an auxiliary role within the medical orbit—social work was drawn to Freudian theories and, somewhat later, to what Specht (1990) terms popular therapies. The profession drifted toward clinical social work. This attraction did not take hold in a historical vacuum. These trends gained momentum in response to a real demand for such services—notably, the need to treat the traumas of wartime combatants.

But this is not the whole story. In the 1930s, during the New Deal, the demand for social workers grew with the expansion of public programs. Schools of social work responded by training students in the administration of services. In the 1960s, the War on Poverty provided an enormous stimulus to community organizers, and enrollments in community organization courses reached a peak (Reisch & Wenocur, 1986). Later, with the fading of the conditions that gave them birth, both types of incentives for the development of macro-practice fizzled. The slide continued even as advocates kept promoting macro-strategies of intervention (Dunham, 1940; Gurin, 1971; Lane, 1939; 1930; Ross, 1955; Rothman, 1968; Steiner, 1925; Woods & Kennedy, 1922).

Changes in the political climate, fashions in funding for different programs, bureaucratic hierarchies within service agencies, and the persistence of an ethos of individualism all converged to favor the therapeutic style. The 1950s, and particularly the McCarthyism that reigned at the time, had a chilling effect on reform movements and demands for fairness. Dissidents were viewed with suspicion and labeled as anti-American.

The 1960s represented a sharp break with the repression of the 1950s. But that notorious decade also generated a backlash. The cultural revolution amplified and united a conservative constituency. The counter-mobilization of the right could measure its success by how terms like “liberal,” “civil liberties,” and “left” became codes for symptoms of decadent, pathological, and self-indulgent inclinations and behavior (Schram, 1995).

In addition, programs of service delivery became more dispersed with the growth of private and for-profit agencies working under hard-to-supervise government contracts. The sponsorship of social programs through private foundations and the United Fund cemented a business/corporate alliance that limited the options of social workers and fragmented the claims of clients.

Finally, the therapeutic style jibes with the national culture of individualism (Ellwood, 1988). Americans are not inclined to search for social remedies in collective, communal approaches. Even when systemic failures such as economic recessions occur, the tendency is to neglect structural causes and to concentrate on promoting individual responses, “pluck” and personal initiative, against all odds.

The individualist norm evokes two long-standing beliefs that mesh with and encourage a therapeutic approach. People have the capacity to shape their lives under a variety of circumstances. Since people have this capacity, they are responsible for what happens to them. The role of therapy is to help individuals discover and strengthen their capacities, and to motivate them to use these endowments to solve their problems.

Given this force field of cultural prescriptions and organizational conditions, it is easy to see why the appeal of the justice ethic paled in social work practice. But we still have to answer the question as to why the casework/clinical practice perspective is considered to be *antithetical* to the justice principle. It is one thing to account for the popularity of one approach over the other. It is another to understand the invidious nature of the comparison and the enmity between the approaches.

The professional consensus is that the goal of social work is to better the life of the oppressed and the exploited, those facing barriers to self-fulfillment. The mission of social work is to turn the skills of the disadvantaged to their own advantage and, in so doing, to solve or ameliorate social problems.

Justice practitioners criticize social workers who approach such problems as clinicians, and they castigate them for assuming that clients themselves are the cause of the problems they experience. Clinicians, they argue, choose interventions to improve behavior by correcting individual shortcomings. A selective repertoire of interventions is designed to foster functional, healthy adaptation. The description is simplified, of course. Experienced caseworkers are aware of barriers over which clients have little control, and they try to lower them, even if on a case-by-case basis.

Yet even the characteristic social work approach of dealing with the “person in the situation” centers rather myopically on the individual, and his or her immediate environment—the family, the work setting, and so on. Another example illustrates the same point. “Human Behavior and Social Environment (HBSE),” a course required in all accredited schools of social work, emphasizes the first part of the title, with a subordinate role for the second (Carter et al., 1994; Figueira-McDonough, 1998b). Along similar lines, a recent book proposal on mental health, prepared by a number of distinguished social work scholars, was touted as the ideal text for HBSE.

The fundamental argument of justice practitioners is that systemic forces drive social problems. The justice mission of social work requires nothing less than that an unjust system be the target of change. The individual approach boils down to a version of blaming the victim that reinforces the status quo. It is as if, through a kind of collective hallucination, social workers have dismissed the “social” from their professional nomenclature. For justice practitioners, the honest and sensible methods of intervention, consistent with the principle of justice, include community organization, and policy practice and skills such as advocacy, grassroots organization, collective protests, and the like.

Rescuing a Profession That Betrayed Its Mission

How valid is the idea that social work has fallen short of its mission? Specht and Courtney mount what is probably the most dramatic attack on the therapeutic strategy. Along with their criticism, they develop an ambitious program for implementing social justice that hinges on community organization (Specht, 1990; Specht & Courtney, 1994).

Specht and Courtney on the Shortcomings of Therapy as a Social Work Method

Specht and Courtney acknowledge that the therapeutic turn in education and practice goes back a long way, having evolved over the course of the last century. Their principal concern is the ongoing love affair of social work with popular therapies, together with the growth of clinical work and its transfer to private practice. The gist of their criticism is that these techniques fail to address the structural context within which social problems emerge. The massive investment of human resources in individual treatment is misplaced and ineffective.

A corollary distortion stems from the population that therapeutic social work is likely to reach. The types of therapy that are deployed fit the anxieties of the urban middle class rather than the stresses of the poor. The standard menu of concerns includes identity crisis, the pursuit of self-advancement, and the like. Therapeutic services are often delivered privately, in a closed-door setting, where interaction depends on the skill of the therapist. Evidence for the effectiveness of these interventions has proven to be pretty thin (Saxton, 1991; Stiles, Shapiro, & Elliott, 1986).

Specht and Courtney direct their bitterest attacks at what they call “popular therapies” adopted by practitioners and taught in many schools of social work. Most of these are psychodynamic approaches associated with figures like Rogers, Maslow, Perls, and Pollack. Specht and Courtney deny that these treatments have theoretical coherence or research validity. The therapies, such as they are, grew out of utopian religious movements in vogue during the nineteenth century, and they came back in fashion under the guise of motivational/self-realization techniques during the pop culture years of the 1960s and 1970s.

As Specht and Courtney see it, the trend in favor of therapeutic intervention and clinical practice goes squarely in the wrong direction, turning social workers away from the poor, whom they were originally supposed to serve. By the 1990s, about one-third of the students entering schools of social work said they planned to go into private practice. The flight from welfare and public services continued unabated (Abel & McDonnell, 1990).

Redeeming Social Work

Critics like Specht and Courtney are aware that social workers distinguish between casework and psychotherapy. For caseworkers, personality change is not the goal, nor is the middle class their target clientele. The priority is to understand the client's problems from a social interaction perspective, to match needs with resources. Still, even if the approach worked for those in poverty, it would require an unrealistically optimal—that is, low—ratio of therapists to clients to deal with the problems of the poor on a one-to-one basis. Logistically and financially, the strategy would be infeasible. In short, it looks like a prescription for burnout.

The bottom line for Specht and Courtney is that traditional casework scores low on efficiency and social utility. Social problems have social causes; hence, a collective response seems intuitively to be the way to go. At the end of the day, the focus should not be on the individual but rather on the process by which individuals participate in and utilize collective life.

Child abuse and neglect are cases in point. The availability of child care services in poor neighborhoods, accessible to all residents and with extensive and flexible schedules, together with self-help clusters of parents, would reduce the incidence of abuse and neglect. Parents would be able to put children in a safe place during periods of stress. At the same time, the self-help group would help them tune in to signs that lead to a loss of self-control. During periods of tension or depression, access to services would protect children and allow parents to recover. While admitting that certain cases might require individually targeted interventions, Specht and Courtney expect that their collective approach would drive down abuse and neglect in poor neighborhoods.

Loosely inspired by the settlement house movement, the community proposal differs from it in two ways. The community center would deliver locally coordinated *public* services, and the purpose would be to foster the active *participation* of residents. Social workers would be central to this project in delivering and coordinating services. Even more importantly, they would be crucial in facilitating the organization of grassroots groups and enabling their participation in the planning and policies of the community center. All this would bring social work back to its true mission of addressing social problems and empowering clients.

Critical Commentary

It is easy to see that the spirit of the Specht and Courtney proposal goes well with notions of social capital, grounded civic society, participatory democracy, inter-organizational synchronization, and collective effectiveness (Figueira-McDonough, 2001; Halpern, 1995; Putnam, 1993a, 1993b). But it has operational problems. As is often the case with such proposals, details about the structure of the community center, inter-service coordination, assumptions about community solidarity, and evidence of effectiveness of collective intervention are sketchy. On all these fronts, a variety of concrete

precedents could be explored to move Specht and Courtney's ideal model closer to one that is open to experimentation.

Gil on Social Determinism and Constructing a Just Society

In the eyes of many, David Gil is the father of radical social work theory. In *Confronting Injustice and Oppression: Concepts and Strategies for Social Workers* (1998), Gil brings together his ideas and proposals for practice.

His point of departure is the observation that social workers have always been involved with victims of injustice and oppression, and they seem to grasp intuitively and emotionally the meaning of dehumanizing conditions. Yet there is also evidence of a lack of theoretical insight into the causes of suffering and into the strategies necessary to transform oppressive socioeconomic and political institutions. It is Gil's ambition to construct a theory of injustice, lay out strategies of social change for overcoming oppression, and highlight the implications of both for social work practice.

Assumptions and Evidence

Gil starts with a pair of assumptions. First, relations of dominance are not inevitable expressions of the nature of groups but the result of choices and actions. Because they are constructed, hierarchies can be changed through movements for justice. Second, relations of dominance permeate all spheres of life—the social, economic, political, and cultural. These hierarchies condition, as well, the consciousness and behavior of winners and losers. The net result favors the maintenance of the status quo. In sum, unjust societies can be changed. It is acceptance of the unjust system that is the major obstacle to change.

Gil puts together a historical analysis to support his first point, that relations of dominance reflect choice rather than the weight of inevitability. He contrasts societies, and periods of history, that rank high in egalitarianism, solidarity, and a fair distribution of resources with others that have been wracked by the opposite. While some of Gil's grand comparisons are oversimplified, a few corroborate the first assumption. Societies with excessive demographic growth, for example, may encourage emigration, or develop new public enterprises, or shorten the workweek in order to encourage a more equitable distribution of income. In short, what is built into history is not determinism but the lesson that social challenges can be handled in a variety of ways, some more conducive than others to social justice.

Gil adopts an organic view of society to buttress his second assumption about the pervasiveness of dominance. Not unlike that of Talcott Parsons's (1951) vision of systemic functions, Gil's perspective stresses the functional complementarity and interdependence of institutions.

Table 1.1 Key Institutions of Social Life

Stewardship (development, management, control, use, and ownership) of natural and human-created resources

Organization of work and production

Exchange of products of human work

Distribution of concrete and symbolic goods and services, and of social, civil, and political rights and responsibilities

Governance and legitimation

Reproduction, biological and social

Take as an example the restrictions imposed by patriarchal traditions on property ownership by women. This particular injustice spills over into limited access to employment, education and divorce, controlled authority over offspring, and barriers against the right to vote. Exploitation is typically not confined to a single area; it crosses over into multiple institutions and domains.

Types of Change

Long-range change consists of undoing instances of systemic injustice and putting just structures in their place. Since key institutions reinforce one another across the board, only a complete overhaul can reverse this vicious circle. The goal seems extravagant, but Gil musters historical evidence for such seismic change through collective resistance to the established order.

Controlled by elites, agencies of educational and media socialization give rise to and reinforce a phenomenon variously described as hegemony (by Gramsci) or false consciousness (by Marx). The process means acceptance by the oppressed of the ideology that advances their oppression. This belief is accompanied by the fear that any systemic change would make matters worse. In Gil's view, a good deal of missionary work is required to counteract ideological submission of this magnitude. Conversion necessitates a lengthy mobilization of critical consciousness, initiated and maintained by social movements in search of just alternatives.

However it comes about, the success of total system change would be measured by the elimination of multiple inequalities. So, for example,

- Natural and manufactured products are treated as a public trust available on equal terms to everyone
- Work and social protection are organized to meet individual and social needs
- Products are to be exchanged and distributed fairly according to needs
- Truly participatory democracy exists
- Socialization is shaped by egalitarian values

Short of systemwide reconstruction, certain transition policies may be viable. As intervening steps, their aim is to alleviate as much suffering as possible. The basic rule is to fight social oppression within prevailing cultural and legal conditions. Supposedly, this will allow for curbing deprivation, while the struggle for fundamental transformation proceeds. Gil treats bringing down unemployment as a prime example of transitional policy.

At the heart of structural inequalities is exploitation that occurs through the division of labor. There are huge inequalities in the prestige and rewards attributed to different types of work. For those at the bottom, doing the most undesirable work, “incentives” range from wages that keep them in poverty to threats of starvation from unemployment.

The appropriate transitional policy is the elimination of unemployment, together with fair compensation for work. This entails participation in the production of needed goods and services by all members of society, depending on their abilities. The legislature would periodically adjust the length of work depending on the ratio of workers to what has to be done. Productive workfare, when necessary, would be an option. The most undesirable work would be rotated among all.

Employment is a badge of social membership. Its role in determining self-identity, shaping the creation of social wealth, and influencing compensation is undeniable. In recognition of their contribution to production and reproduction, workers should receive adequate wages, health protection, and child care. Progressive taxation would be a key mechanism moving toward such reforms.

The Role of Social Workers

Gil insists that the mandate of social workers is to promote welfare—that is, conditions under which people fare well. So, social workers must understand and strive to overcome the sociostructural causes of “ill-fare” by examining the institutions that uphold them.

Gil knows full well that there are contradictory tendencies in social work. On the one hand, there are the tenets of human solidarity and mutual help, empathy for suffering, and the ethical values of justice. On the other, there is the need to ensure the strength of the profession and its organizational viability, even when this means concessions to an unjust status quo. Navigating these currents impels social workers toward dissonant roles:

Control—that is, enforcing dominant norms on the “undeserving poor”

Adaptation—treating the poor so that they adjust to their conditions

Reform—carrying out incremental policies from the top down in the name of reducing oppression and injustice

Structural transformation—spreading critical consciousness by forming collective movements to root out injustice

A justice perspective, according to Gil, would be consistent with the two latter imperatives. *Reform* coincides with Gil's notion of transitional, short-term policies, while *structural transformation* is indispensable for long-term change.

Critical Commentary

Injustice is socially determined. There is little room, in Gil's world, for individual causes. Yet systemwide change depends on individual conversion, and this conversion in turn depends on the dedication and zeal of those who possess critical conscience. Therein lies the catch. Gil's vision of an enlightened few implies a cadre-led hierarchy otherwise rejected by his theory.

Paulo Freire's (1990) method of encouraging oppressed people to reflect on their experience, exchange insights and feelings with one another, and imagine their way toward fresh perspectives on social claims is more consistent with a horizontal democracy than the "enlightened know best" command structure that Gil flirts with. In fairness, when he discusses the choice of means for change, Gil (1998) sounds a return to a relatively egalitarian standard of leadership:

If this change of consciousness will lead to a non-violent or violent system change, only people affected by the particular unjust and oppressive realities, rather than distant supporters and observers, have a moral right to decide, for they alone may live or die with the consequences of their strategic choice. (p. 62)

The call for systemwide overhaul and long-range change is grandiose and sketchily operationalized. Weighed down by its own ambition and complexity, the scheme collapses in abstraction. Nevertheless, despite these shortcomings, Gil's presentation of transitional, short-term tactics remains an important contribution to policy practice.

Piven and Cloward on Welfare, Control, and Disruption

A political scientist, Frances Piven, and Richard Cloward, a professor of social work, are widely known in radical social work circles both as activists and authors. Mobilization for Youth, a landmark program of the War on Poverty, was their brainchild. Together with several Columbia University colleagues, Piven and Cloward spearheaded the program's implementation in New York City. In the 1980s, they initiated a movement that promoted voting in poor communities. The history of organized labor in the United States, the functions of welfare, the unfolding of poor people's movements, and critiques of welfare reforms are recurrent themes in their work.

The Failure of the Labor Movement

For Piven and Cloward, the route toward a fair and more equal society goes through the power of a labor party, supported by an active labor movement. They link persistently high and growing inequality in the United States to the absence of the first and the weakness of the second.

Early efforts to unionize were squashed by powerful industrialists during the second half of the nineteenth century. Under Franklin Roosevelt, the union movement gained some legitimacy, but the strategies promoted by government and adopted by labor leaders to win health and related benefits through contracts with employers weakened the movement and set workers against the expansion of benefits outside the unions. This accommodation defused the development of a militant labor movement in the European sense.

The political wheeling and dealing of conservative administrations—in particular, the Reagan administration—further sapped the unions, and globalization quickened the downward course. Public opinion turned against unions for putting American businesses at a disadvantage in the world market. Production costs inflated by union demands were blamed for the migration of industries abroad. Over the past decades, union membership has fallen from its high point in the 1950s to below 20 percent of the workforce. Against this trajectory, the dream of a working class democracy in the United States, Piven and Cloward (1997) conclude, was unachievable.

Welfare as a Control Mechanism

Among social workers, *Regulating the Poor* (1971) is probably the best known of Piven and Cloward's books. The focus is on welfare in general and public assistance in particular. The thesis is that the purpose of welfare is to control the working poor, not necessarily to help them or improve their social position. Piven and Cloward marshal historical evidence ranging from the Elizabethan poor laws to the development of comparable legislation in the United States. Welfare policy does not follow a progressive path, responding in linear fashion to the needs of the poor. On the contrary, it expands and shrinks depending on perceived threats to the status quo. Figure 1.1 gives a schematic depiction of their model.

The cycle starts with an unequal society, typical of capitalist systems in which competition is never fair. Early victories create differences in resources between winners and losers. The winners enter subsequent competitions with accumulated resources that guarantee future victories or at least bias outcomes in their favor. With economic power comes political power, and so we have a society bifurcated between the powerful and the powerless.

There is a catch, however. Those in power need the poor to do the work that creates wealth. They need docile workers to maximize production and decrease the costs of coercion. How can systemic problems be transformed

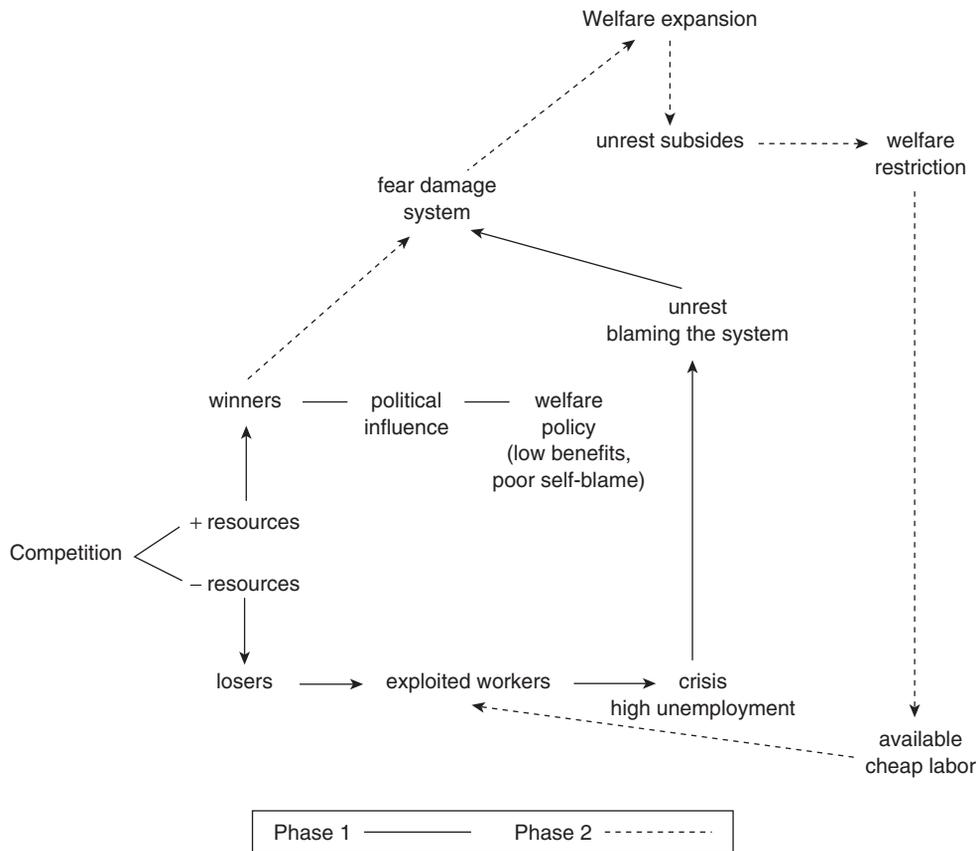


Figure 1.1 Welfare Cycle

into (the illusion of) self-generated pathologies? The answer is public assistance. These are programs designed to alleviate the misery and despair of the marginalized, by giving them a measure of insufficient help. Treatment concentrates on individual dysfunctions that reflect essentially self-inflicted problems. Tacitly, blame is shifted from the system to the person.

Sometimes, when economic crisis occurs and the number of the marginalized grows, as does their despair, this comfortable arrangement breaks down. The self-blame ploy loses plausibility. Outsiders start to attribute their predicament to the system's shortcomings. Protests, civil disruptions, and even mass violence follow. To protect their advantages and the system that provides them, elites are quick to make concessions to appease widening discontent.

As the situation returns to what passes for normal, and the need for cheap labor continues, rules specifying requirements for applications for social assistance are subtly and not so subtly adjusted upwards, and many who were receiving assistance find themselves expelled from the welfare rolls. Left

without protection, the impoverished cannot bargain for better wages, and they accept the pittance offered them. This equilibrium settles in until the next crisis.

The Depression era in the United States is a showcase, Piven and Cloward argue, that confirms their hypothesis. Social assistance provided by the states before the 1930s was meager, a fact that became painfully obvious as soon as the Depression hit. By the beginning of the 1930s, the Hoover administration and Congress were well aware of the misery spreading across industrial centers like Detroit and agricultural states like Arkansas. But neither branch of government moved to respond to the emergency. It was the aggressive demands of various groups, disorders in a few cities, increased agitation by communist sympathizers, and a march on Washington by disgruntled World War II veterans that raised the awareness of the nation and led to the landslide electoral victory of Franklin Roosevelt. Fearing mounting disorder, some farsighted businessmen backed Roosevelt's election and his early social reforms (Gates, 1983).

As the economy slowly recovered, however, this support withered. Some workfare programs—the Works Progress Administration (WPA) was perhaps the most conspicuous—came in for attack on the grounds that they constituted government competition with private business. So, though high unemployment persisted for another year, the program was dismantled.

Social Workers and Strategies of Disruption

From the perspective of Piven and Cloward, social workers, as deliverers of remedial services, are handmaidens of the status quo. The professional neutrality professed by social workers is a fake. As an attempt to reconcile differences between parties with huge power discrepancies, neutrality becomes in effect a political act that favors the mighty. Social workers should be unequivocally on the side of the powerless—that is, the poor.

Their research on *Poor People's Movements* (1974) led Piven and Cloward to conclude that, within the political system of the United States, disruptive collective action—riots, protests, civil disobedience, and the like—constituted the only chance for the poor to turn social policy in their favor. These strategies have a chance when social dislocations make political realignments likely.

Since the poor are powerless, the only change strategies available to them are those of conflict. Powerlessness does not simply result from a lack of economic resources. It is also transmitted through the treatment the poor receive from various institutions, including those that are supposed to help them. Long delays in receiving service, continuous checks, and vigilance and suspicion are the norm. These experiences convey to recipients that they are worthless, and the feeling often gets internalized. The extremely low electoral participation of the poor reflects an awareness of their lack of power. Seeing themselves as outsiders, without access to formal channels, the marginalized are left only with “deviant” forms of asserting their claims.

So, according to Piven and Cloward, only spontaneous acts of collective protest that grab the attention of political parties when they are going through constituency realignments can be successful. The 1960s provide an exemplary, best-case illustration of this scenario. Southern whites began to abandon the Democratic Party, and blacks were courted to join up.

Critical Commentary

Piven and Cloward's stand on welfare has come in for numerous criticisms. The core of the programs instituted by Roosevelt has survived and grown over time. While ours remains a very unequal society, the United States is not simply a land of the very rich and the very poor. Piven and Cloward dismiss the role of the middle class and the power of the unions. Criticisms such as these are reasonable correctives to a simplistic model. This said, the theory still alerts us to certain dynamics and biases that have driven recent changes in welfare policy in the United States (Figueira-McDonough & Sarri, 2002).

The disruption thesis has been the target of particularly stringent criticism. Many observers of social movements reject exclusive reliance on disruption as a strategy for success. One representative of this position, the sociologist William Gamson (Gamson & Schmeidler, 1984) cites evidence from histories of the labor and the civil rights movements that contradicts Piven and Cloward's ideas. These movements cannot be reduced to spontaneous, violent expressions of despair. They gained real benefits for the poor through a repertoire of tactics. They managed to mobilize resources, develop effective long-term inter-organizational alliances, and introduce important changes in social policy.

David Wagner (2000), a radical social worker, acknowledges some of the dangers of cooptation that representatives of welfare clients face. But his research has also demonstrated that consumers of assistance have been effective if they belong to social movements that give them clout.

In *The Other America: Poverty in the United States*, Michael Harrington (1962) stripped Americans of the fiction of shared national affluence. His vivid depiction of poverty, in some places paralleling Third World conditions, fed into a strategy of reform that did not rely on disruption. Harrington, a democratic socialist, saw the poor he had encountered face-to-face as society's outsiders. Serious redistribution was needed to bring them into the American way of life. He did not believe that conventional, mostly voluntary channels of redistribution would work. In a society prizing individual competition, insiders would not willingly back redistribution on such a scale. Harrington held to the view that only the federal government had the power to promote the inclusion of the marginalized. His strategy was translated into the War on Poverty, launched during the Kennedy years. Bypassing state, county, and municipal authorities, federal grants were channeled directly to poor communities.

Gilbert on Balanced Reform From Within

The reformism of Neil Gilbert (1995) contrasts dramatically with the radicalism of Gil, and Cloward and Piven. The inexorable expansion of welfare alarms him. The solution, he thinks, lies in transforming the welfare state into an “enabling” state. In view of an exponential growth in entitlements, the aging of the population, and resulting fiscal pressure, Gilbert looks on some such “Third Way” reform as unavoidable.

Structuralists like Gil define problems as socially determined, whereas Gilbert is inclined to attribute them to individual causes and only tangentially to the vagaries of the market. By and large, the thesis developed by Gilbert could stand as a blueprint for Clinton’s 1996 welfare reform.

Excesses of Welfare Expansion

Three factors are behind the growth in welfare: the aging of the population, the breakdown of the family, and the sheer increase in claims on the state. The first cause is a demographic fact, widely discussed whenever Social Security reform is considered. Gilbert’s recommendations are akin to some of the solutions common in these debates. Raising the retirement age is one; reducing tax deductions for retirees whose assets reach a comfortable level is another.

Gilbert’s views on the second factor—family collapse—overlap with a proposition advanced by Charles Murray (1984). Single motherhood is an indicator of family breakdown, and welfare encourages this breakdown. The rapid growth of AFDC (Aid to Families with Dependent Children) caseloads in the 1960s, Gilbert admits, resulted in part from policies that set fairer admissions criteria. His critique focuses on how the originally temporary features of the program took on the characteristics of a permanent entitlement. Social Security Survivor’s Insurance was supposed, in time, to protect widows with children. In Gilbert’s view, had the government kept on that road, the outcomes for families and society would have been much better.

Gilbert gives extensive coverage to his third factor—the increase in claims on the government. He decries the proliferation of social rights as a contagion promoted by activists enamored of identity politics. Trendy zealots fabricate novel categories of social victims to whom protection is due. The call for policies to protect the homeless is one such fashion. Others include demands to protect abused children and women who are sexually assaulted. Gilbert claims that evidence of these problems is vastly, and deliberately, inflated to boost the emotional appeal of calls for reform.

Inefficiencies of Welfare

The decentralization of services, delivered in a maze of agencies through which benefits, in cash and in kind, wend their way, has a negative impact

on the uniformity of criteria and evaluation of outcomes. Contracting out might lead to cuts in costs, but the lack of adequate supervision jeopardizes evaluation, especially with for-profit organization dealing in human services.

Gilbert cites benefits given to teenage single mothers as a typical inefficiency. Teenage girls are in a troubled period of their lives, and he sees becoming pregnant as one more sign of immaturity. "Kids with kids" have deficient parenting skills. Child abuse and crib deaths are the predictable results (Kleinman, 1993). Since teenage mothers are unusually inept caretakers of their children, they need to be under the watch of competent guardians. Teen mothers should be required to take parenting classes. Furthermore, they should go to school or they should work. If their performance does not improve, sending incompetent teen mothers to a halfway house should be considered.

The Costs and Unfairness of Wealthfare

Indirect and often invisible transfers along the lines of tax deductions and credit subsidies—such as tax credits, tax deductions on retirement, deductions and exclusions for housing, credit subsidies and tax expenditures for education, training, and employment and social services—disproportionately benefit the middle and upper-middle classes. These benefits cost a lot to the Treasury and mount up to a serious fiscal burden. Such expenses—*wealthfare*—are equivalent to welfare. They are social goods, not earned in market exchange, distributed by the government.

Mortgage interest deductions and rental exclusions cost more than twice as much as direct federal grants for housing and community development. The value of child care tax credits is twice as high for upper than for lower income brackets. The same happens with job benefits. High-paying jobs are more likely to include pension benefits than low-paying jobs. Taxpayers from the first group gain more than they should from pension-related tax deductions. Most transfer payments to the poor go to immediate consumption, while benefits for the better off tend to contribute to the accumulation of assets (Sherraden, 1991). In short, indirect and invisible gifts to the non-poor exacerbate inequalities created by the market.

The Enabling State and the Role of Social Workers

As far as Gilbert is concerned, the welfare state has no choice but to move away from entitlements toward the promotion of private responsibility, in the direction of what he calls the enabling state. Citizens are to be treated not as passive recipients of public benefits but as individuals capable of looking after themselves, with occasional assistance from the government.

Citizens who embrace American values, including stable and responsible family life and hard work, will eventually succeed. They will manage to

become productive and independent. Some, because of personal incapacity as well as (ill-defined) social forces, may be temporarily or permanently unable to fulfill the ordinary responsibilities of citizenship. Training and temporary support, with incentives and punishments, will push the more capable toward independence. Longer periods of service provision, under strict controls, will achieve the same result for the less capable.

The objective of welfare is not redistributive. It is not a means to reduce social inequalities. Rather, the goal is to integrate everyone into the market. The distinctive function of the market is to foment economic development and social integration. This is the true road to social equity.

The importance of programs like WIN and other workfare programs for clients on assistance is that they link recipients' rights and social responsibility in order to achieve self-sufficiency. The assumption of civic responsibilities has to accompany any expansion of claims to benefits. These duties include taking available jobs, contributing to the support of one's family, learning enough in school to be employable, and respecting the law.

Behavioral Strategies

How do you get collaboration from people who, for a variety of reasons, cannot make ends meet and who see no opportunities to better their lives? The answer is carrot-and-stick behavior modification through incentives and punishment.

Take as a success story of work incentives the experience of some AFDC mothers. They left the program by getting a job, while retaining their access to Medicaid, food stamps, and child care benefits for one year, even if their job income would have disqualified them from those programs. By the same token, punishment, either by withdrawing benefits or increasing controls, would be meted out for nonconformity at any level—in family, in work effort, in training, or in moral behavior.

On the issue of unemployment, Gilbert's position is very close to Mead's (1986). Simply put, the unemployed must accept any job available. The ideal is to integrate people into the market economy and to ensure that the unemployed assume their responsibility as productive citizens.

Table 1.2 lays out the contrast between the traditional welfare state and the enabling state. Gilbert (1995) adds an important qualifier to the imperative of self-sufficiency:

The new policies aim for a fairer balance between the right to welfare and the responsibility for self-sufficiency. The danger is that they will rely too heavily on the presumption of competence. Owing to personal incompetence, as well as to social forces beyond personal control, some people are temporarily or permanently unable to support themselves and meet the responsibilities of citizenship. (p. 83)

Table 1.2 Comparing the Welfare and the Enabling State

<i>Welfare State</i>	<i>Enabling State</i>
Expanding social rights	Linking rights to obligations
Relying on direct expenditures	Increasing indirect expenditures
Transfers in the form of service	Transfers in cash and vouchers
Delivery by public agencies	Delivery by private agencies
Policy focused on individuals	Policy focused on the family
Welfare benefits for consumption	Welfare benefits for investment
Reducing economic inequality	Restoring social equality

Gilbert separates welfare recipients into two groups. There are those who come to welfare due to some crisis in their lives, stay for a short time, have reasonable skills, and enjoy a certain family stability. For this sector, standard incentives and punishments will work in a relatively short time. However, the other group might have a more disorganized past because of drug addiction, brushes with the law, unstable or nonexistent family life, or spotty employment. For these individuals, strategies need to be tailored to their specific problems, over longer periods. Rehabilitation will depend on greater control, supervision, and intensive special services.

The enabling state would leave social workers with two roles. Some—case managers delivering routine behavior controls—would be suited to work with the first category of clients. A significantly greater variety of interventions, some demanding therapeutic expertise, would be needed for the second group. The mix of control and therapeutic interventions has proven to be hard to reconcile, as demonstrated by social work interventions in the criminal justice system. The scarcity of trained direct-service social workers in welfare agencies would make assigning different workers to different roles a nightmare.

Critical Commentary

Gilbert's concerns about the expansion of welfare are well taken, and his observations about the inefficiencies of welfare are justifiable. But his arguments against new claims are flimsy, and his views regarding cures for poverty seem forced into a preconceived framework.

Recall that, in his remarks on the expansion of claims, Gilbert charges activists with massaging data in order to elicit support for programs that they have already decided are desirable. He is very hard on reported evidence about the sexual abuse of children and rape. But the counter-evidence he introduces is just as weak.

This same problem of facile generalization taints his report on the dangers that teen mothers pose to the welfare of their children. Gilbert cites just one study to validate his conclusions. He suggests a further link between

assumed abuse by mothers and the incidence of crib death. Several national and regional studies have found that children born to teenage mothers, in part because of their lack of access to prenatal care, are often underweight and frail (Ketterlinus, Henderson, & Lamb, 1990; Ventura & Martin, 1998). Besides this, we know that child abuse statistics are regularly biased, reflecting cultural construction and class vulnerability. The personal volatility imputed to teen mothers has not been found to be widespread (Horowitz, 1995; Walruff, 2002). The expectation that young mothers on their own will have a hard time handling the responsibilities of motherhood is plausible. But tarring these girls with unsubstantiated failings leads to punitive recommendations rather than the support they may need.

Gilbert sings the praises of self-responsibility and economic integration through work, but he neglects to mention how the market itself and the skewed distribution of economic rewards contribute to forms of institutionalized inequity that cause poverty. Individual causation—ineptitude, the wrong values, and the like—take the front seat. Strategies of intervention are cast around an image of the poor as people who do not quite abide by American standards of sturdy independence, work ethic, and family ethos. Behavior modification is needed to straighten them out. Once rehabilitated, the poor will be integrated into the market and become true—that is, productive—citizens. Some proposals along these lines, such as employment without choice, are hard to distinguish from those adopted by authoritarian governments.

Jordan on Struggling for Justice

The title of Bill Jordan's (1990) book—*Social Work in an Unjust Society*—captures the tension between the roles ascribed to social workers and their ethical commitment to justice. Jordan's approach differs from that of radicals like Piven and Cloward who stress the necessity of working outside and against the system. But neither does he subscribe to a belief that the profession's role is to prop up the status quo.

The Ethic of Social Justice and the Roles Assigned to Social Workers

Implicitly or otherwise, most jobs in social work come with a mission of control. Social workers are usually given coercive leverage over their clients. They can decide that certain requirements for a benefit have not been met. They can decide to remove children from their families. They can decide if a juvenile who has broken his or her parole should be sent to an institution. They can send a runaway child back to the family. In short, the positions held by social workers carry the authority to evaluate the behavior of clients and to enforce rules.

Rules supposedly represent a public morality; they are in place to enforce and maintain norms. A corollary assumption is that these goals or values represent the preferences of a majority. Social workers, then, find themselves in the position of enforcers. They can curtail the autonomy of clients.

The ethical dilemma disappears once clients are viewed as deviants, unable to fend for themselves in a rule-bound manner. But three considerations quickly make this solution much too simplistic. First, not all rules have moral content. Second, rules are standardized and abstract, while the situations that social workers confront are complex and idiosyncratic. Last, those involved in formulating rules are generally not representatives of a majority.

Moral reasoning is no substitute for knowledge of the law and social policy. Yet social workers handle tasks, day to day, in the field, precisely in situations where applying laws and policies is often ambiguous. Specific cases are open to a number of interpretations. Improvisation goes on all the time. The judgment, discretion, and skill of professionals all come into play to protect the public interest.

The interests of clients are at stake as well. Clients may be victims of injustices perpetrated by powerful groups who dominate decision making and influence the life chances and opportunities of clients. These “players” also condition the power and resources of social workers. Social worker–client transactions have to be understood within the ampler context in which policies originate. Only the guileless and utterly naïve would suppose that there is no real clash of interests between dominant groups, on the one hand, and the excluded on the other. A realistic expectation is that social workers are to act in conformity with rules formulated by those in charge, and only secondarily on behalf of the downtrodden.

Contradictions of the Liberal-Democratic System

The freedom and participation of individuals are ingredients essential to liberal democracies. This is the norm of high school civics textbooks. Be this as it may, Jordan concurs with the argument of some social justice theorists that there is a contradiction between property and personal rights (Bowles & Gintis, 1986). The accumulation of assets leads to the control of resources that others might need. The process gathers momentum. It allows the few to impose conditions for access to resources on the many.

Wealthy people, Jordan observes, are able to shape rules of distribution in their favor. They have a powerful say in setting wage and welfare benefit levels. As employers and landlords of the poor, they have enormous influence on remuneration and rents. They can become architects of economic marginality.

Some variations on the liberal theme (Bowring, 1843; Mill, 1912) express this link more clearly. Utilitarians, for example, assign to government the responsibility for structuring society so as to maximize production and optimize the distribution of welfare. The free market remains the best way to generate the largest possible income—with the added prescription that the resulting wealth be channeled to the whole population in fair proportions.

According to Jordan, the democratic side of liberal polities has serious fissures, too. Economic disparities impede access to political power. In reality, the majority principle excludes sizeable portions of the population. Political decision making may gain in efficiency, but at the cost of reducing outcomes to sheer competition, rather than consultation, cooperation, and compromise that are more in tune with genuine participatory democracy. These problems are endemic not only in the selection of representatives and decision making ostensibly by majority vote. They also characterize “expert” policies formulated without the participation of those affected by them. When applied to the poor, these arrangements tend to be paternalistic, shaped “for their own good.”

Challenging the System From Within

Social workers face the dual challenge of responding to the here-and-now issues of clients and of evaluating options and strategies for dealing with the structural origins of those problems. Rules are not particularly case-sensitive. Besides, the connection between professional rules and social goals is often murky and even contradictory. Given these parameters, thought experiments require a good deal of ingenuity and imagination.

Compelled to apply the rules, social workers nevertheless have some freedom to interpret them. They can challenge their suitability for achieving one goal or another. They don’t have to go by the book. They offer immediate counsel for the urgent needs of clients, and they open up access to resources designed to help them out. At the same time, their professional code specifies that social workers discern and respect the goals of clients themselves. They must also attend to the variable meanings of the problem, and their possible solution, that may arise out of the concrete social network in which clients find themselves.

Building mutual trust and identifying structural causes that may contribute to the client’s problem are also part of the social worker’s mission. Consciousness-raising of the latter sort resembles the strategy recommended by radical social workers. These efforts cannot be reduced to after-hours activism. They are to be carried on within the service agencies where most social workers do their work.

The justice-oriented social worker has two other commitments: to challenge the rules that hinder his or her clients’ welfare, and to enhance the active participation of clients in decisions that affect them. This entails confronting the rules that infringe on or otherwise undermine publicly stated moral goals, such as those guaranteeing civil and human rights.

Similarly, social workers should build on the solidarity generated by common experiences and residential sharing in order to establish community centers where locals can gain an active voice in decisions affecting them (Figueira-McDonough, 2001). Reclaiming a degree of civic engagement that is a core expression of democratic values legitimizes such activities.

Critical Commentary

Jordan's proposals are more modest than those of radical theorists. The objective is not to dismantle the system but to draw on taken-for-granted principles—democracy, equal opportunity, civil rights and human rights—to correct the way the poor have been exploited, dominated, and rendered powerless. The approach sympathizes with the constraints imposed by social work practice in the trenches, and it sets forth strategies coherent with professional ethics. But detailed suggestions about how to implement such strategies remain to be specified. Jordan's preliminary map, enticing as it is, would benefit from the incorporation of experiential results.

Wakefield on Justice as the Organizing Principle of Social Work

In an important series of articles, Jerome Wakefield (1988a, 1988b) makes a useful distinction between disciplines and professions. Disciplines develop knowledge through theory and research; professions are supposed to change situations through interventions. The goal is to solve or prevent problematic situations. Disciplines are concerned with intellectual puzzles, professions with problems and solutions.

Plainly, professions base their intervention on knowledge derived from the theories and research of relevant disciplines. This borrowing forms a large part of their intake. But their practical activities follow from the values and goals that define their commitment to change. These are the norms, the desired outcomes, around which professions are organized.

Methods Versus Goals

Amid the reams of pages written about the organizing values of social work, the most direct statement comes from the professional codes of the National Association of Social Workers, cited at the beginning of this chapter. Two of these principles are central: (a) respect for the autonomy of the clients, and (b) contribution to social justice. Wakefield reiterates that these values are crucial to the professional identity of social workers.

Methods of intervention, he argues, have less importance. To prove the point, he assembles examples of methods that cut across human service professions. A typical arsenal of techniques includes those deployed in family therapy by social workers, counselors, family therapists, and clinical psychologists. The same "portability" holds at the macro level. Methods of community organization used by social workers and community developers are pretty much the same. All these professionals base their interventions on research conducted by social scientists. This is the provenance of constructs

like psychological maturation, system and network linkages, inter-organizational connections, social capital, power structure, and so on. As knowledge expands and social contexts change, so will skills and methods of intervention. Dynamic adaptation of all human service professions is the only way to go. Fixing a profession around a supposed monopoly of intervention techniques is impossible and undesirable.

What distinguishes professions from one another, what gives them a unique identity, are their values or codes. Adherence to and promotion of these values are part and parcel of professional life. Success has to be judged in light of the commitment to the goals that the methods, whatever they may be, must advance. The rule applies to all professions. The goal of mental health professionals is to promote adjustment between the internal and external realities of clients. The methods and skills thought to be appropriate and productive have changed greatly—from scalding baths, to talk therapy, to behavior modification, to drug therapy. What is considered canonical one day may be quackery the next. Through all this, the remedial goal has not changed.

The Utility of the Concept of Distributive Justice

How do we put flesh on the abstract bones of self-determination and justice? Wakefield builds on Rawls's theory of distributive justice. True to its Kantian roots, the theory presupposes that we are all rational, and that we should be able to make decisions toward our own goals. Rousseau's notion of groups grounded on a social contract is also germane. This compact embodies an elemental trade-off. Individuals join social units and go along with their regulations in the belief that the group will be more efficient than scattered individuals in providing for their needs. This voluntary submission has a specific counterpart. It is the expectation that, downstream, social goods produced by the group will be distributed among all members.

Three principles determine distributive justice: (a) freedom—in other words, the right of all to the most extensive freedom compatible with comparable freedom for others; (b) equal opportunity, since economic and social inequalities can only be tolerated if positions that create them are open to all on equal terms; and (c) the difference principle—that is, social and economic inequalities are justified if and only if they function to benefit the least privileged. The principle of freedom accords well with the social work value of self-determination. The other two principles lie directly in the ambit of social work's justice ethic.

Legitimizing Psychotherapy as a Contribution to Justice

Principles of social justice are conventionally framed in terms of the distribution of economic goods. At first glance, the principles of equal opportunity and difference just mentioned appear to give credence to observers

who assign priority to community organization and policy practice, stressing that these are the strategies that deal with access to rights and goods. Wakefield takes issue with this exclusivity of means. He reasserts the value of psychotherapy as a method at the service of justice.

Wakefield develops this idea from Rawls's insight that the psychological property of self-respect may be the most primary social good with which justice is concerned, independent of its economic implications. We gain self-respect by seeing ourselves as valued members of society and by being seen by our peers as such. Individuals with low economic and political status are likely to place themselves and to be positioned by others at the bottom of the pecking order. Low self-respect is thus a social construction. Lack of self-respect constitutes a barrier to freedom and equal opportunity insofar as it discourages individuals from pursuing these goals. Passivity can set in, letting others override legitimate desires and goals, and distancing those who are discouraged from the collectivity.

Wakefield extends this understanding of self-respect as a basic good to other psychological deficiencies that, he argues, are also socially created. His long list takes in a series of negative traits that result from bad experiences: low self-esteem, low self-confidence, low self-awareness, low problem-solving skills, low assertiveness, low self-organization, low social skills, and low emotional intelligence.

If social workers help individuals overcome problems in these areas and enable clients to pursue their goals by directing them toward opportunities, they are contributing to distributive justice. This is because justice so defined is nothing more than the distribution of socially created goods. Injustice, then, consists of social impediments in the way of reaching these goods. Justice-oriented therapists, in striving to remove or circumvent socially created psychological impediments, make a valuable contribution. By way of example, consider restrictions on the developmental needs of children. These may be biological, nutritional, or psychological, and they may be traced to the family situation, the surrounding environment, or some combination of both. Handicaps like these are attributable to failures of the social structure. The role of the psychotherapist is to foster viable personal development.

Obviously, policy advocacy and community practice are needed to redress some environmental and systemic conditions. Equal access to quality education is one such structural issue. If we are to live up to the equal opportunity principle, it is the institutional distortions of the education system that need fixing.

Critical Commentary

Wakefield's distinction between goals and methods is a helpful insight for social workers. So is his treatment of self-respect as a socially created phenomenon. The same goes for his depiction of psychotherapy as a justice-enhancing intervention.

Although Rawls's theory sets aside defects of nature because they do not meet his criteria of being socially created, we are becoming increasingly aware that many health problems are not matters of fate or bad luck. They are socially constructed. Polluted environments foster diseases. Insufficient food stunts growth and learning. Differential access to health services shortens the life of the least privileged. Lack of prenatal care affects what might otherwise be thought of as natural differences—for example, in intelligence. The market structure of health services in the United States leaves about 40 to 70 million citizens without health insurance. This constitutes a glaring failure of distributive justice, but it is one that Wakefield's model fails to address.

As a kind of afterthought, Wakefield makes allowances for clinical social workers who use their skills for other than justice objectives. The popularity of such specializations and the appeal of private practice are such that their place in the profession becomes justified. It is a mystery how this conclusion can be squared with the argument that values and goals, rather than methods and skills, organize and define a profession.

Comparing Concepts of Justice in Social Work

The approaches we have examined treat social justice in markedly different ways, ranging from an ideal of equalization, to a social democratic order dominated by labor, to a liberal economic integration of responsible citizens under a free market. We have also looked at a couple of models that are less concerned with visionary goals, focusing instead on how to improve existing systems by challenging unfair policies or ensuring access to basic goods.

The more ambitious the justice model, the more sweeping the change goals and the more demanding the strategies recommended. The roles laid out for social workers in the creation of an egalitarian society are very far-reaching indeed. In contrast, by the standards of the labor socialism advocated by Cloward and Piven, social workers are dismissed as pernicious agents of the powerful.

Jordan's proposals require a complex response from practitioners. Social workers must assess the legitimacy of policies they implement, and they must empower their clients and protect their rights. Wakefield takes still another tack. By promoting goals over methods, he unifies the roles of social workers around the promotion of any activities that reduce injustice in the distribution of socially created resources.

Table 1.3 summarizes these diverse perspectives. It sorts out the authors' conceptualizations of what makes for a just and unjust society, outlines the changes and strategies proposed, and highlights the tasks assigned to social workers.

Table 1.3 Conceptualizations of Justice in Social Work

	<i>Features of a just society</i>	<i>Features of an unjust society</i>	<i>Objectives for change</i>	<i>Strategies</i>	<i>Roles of social workers</i>
Gil	Production of public goods for distribution based on needs Participatory democracy	Systemwide inequality Status quo ideology	<i>Long-range:</i> elimination of inequality <i>Short-term:</i> universal access to employment	Fight mass "false consciousness" Build just society through consensus or revolution	<i>Positive:</i> responsive to victims of injustice <i>Negative:</i> lack analytical and strategic knowledge of roots of social problems
Piven & Cloward	Labor socialism: a society shaped by labor to represent interests of labor	Any capitalist system serving interests of capital and exploiting workers	Promote democracy with labor participation Abolish welfare system that controls poor	<i>Desirable:</i> sustain the labor movement <i>Realistic:</i> use disruption during political realignment	Handmaidens of the status quo Controllers of the poor
Gilbert	Integrates citizens in the economy, requires social participation	Weakens citizens' responsibility by unfair, inefficient handouts	Move toward enabling state that promotes individual economic development and responsibility	Short-term help Accountability of outcomes through positive and negative reinforcement	Manage behavior conditioning Tailor interventions in cases of social handicaps
Jordan	Social policies reflect interests of the powerless	Policies made by and favoring the powerful	Participation of the powerless in decisions that affect them	Reform from within: challenge morality of rules and policies Uphold civil and human rights	Interpret adjustment of rules to cases Challenge rules that harm clients Organize clients for civic action
Wakefield	Based on distributive justice All have access to socially produced basic goods	Fails to provide access to basic goods consistent with level of development	Promote access to basic goods (e.g., food, shelter, education, health)	Professional methods that use any effective technique to promote justice	Increase distributive justice through interventions Promote self-respect as socially constructed basic good