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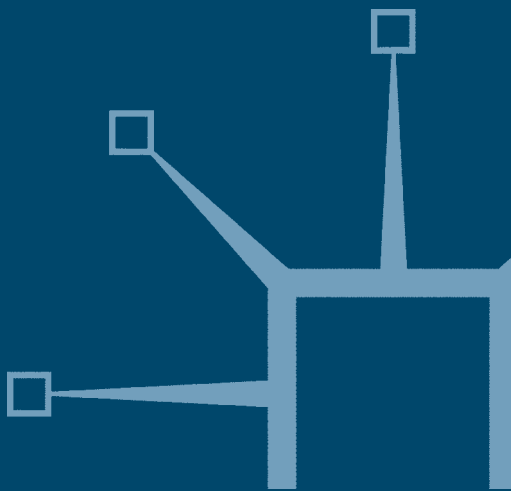
Challenging Social Work

The institutional context of practice

Catherine McDonald



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First published 2006 by
PALGRAVE MACMILLAN
Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire RG21 6XS and
175 Fifth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10010
Companies and representatives throughout the world

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ISBN-13: 978–1–4039–3545–8 paperback
ISBN-10: 1–4039–3545–9 paperback

This book is printed on paper suitable for recycling and made from fully managed and sustained forest sources.

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data
McDonald, Catherine, 1955–
Challenging social work:the institutional context of practice/Catherine McDonald.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.
ISBN-10: 1–4039–3545–9 (paper)
ISBN-13: 978–1–4039–3545–8 (paper)
1. Social service. 2. Social workers. I. Title.
HV40.M447 2006
361—dc22 2006043166

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1
15 14 13 12 11 10 09 08 07 06

Printed in China

To my mother Patricia.
The most influential social worker in my life.

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Acknowledgements

In the first instance, I thank my very good friend and fellow social worker Luisa Snell for her patient reading and helpful comments. I also thank Rayleigh Joy and Julie Clark for the robust and hugely enjoyable discussions about the content matter and the conclusions I reach. I also express my gratitude to my friends Greg Marston (for the time we spend thinking about developments in critical social theory, neo-liberalism and its implications) and Lesley Chenoweth (for practically carrying me to America, and for helping me think about welfare reform and social work). I thank successive classes of final year social work students at the University of Queensland for putting up with my undoubtedly maddening habit of thinking out loud and going off on tangents. Finally, I thank my husband, Norrie, who in his own words (and with a Glaswegian accent) 'kept ma feet on the groond'.

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List of Abbreviations

AASW	Australian Association of Social Workers
BASW	British Association of Social Workers
IFSW	International Federation of Social Workers
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IMF	International Monetary Fund
ISO	Industry Standards Organization
MSW	Master of Social Work
NASW	National Association of Social Workers
NPM	New Public Management
OECD	Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
QA	Quality Assurance
QC	Quality Control
SSD	Single System Design
TANF	Temporary Assistance for Needy Families
TNC	Transnational Corporation
TQM	Total Quality Management
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
US	United States

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Part 1
The Context of Change

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Preface to Part 1

Social workers have always been interested in change. Specifically, they are interested in promoting positive change for service users and their families, in local communities, in service delivery systems, and in organizational and government policies. This book continues this important tradition in that it is also centrally interested in change – *but from a different perspective.* Here, promoting or managing change in client or other systems for example, is not the key objective addressed. Rather, my interest is in assisting social work students and social workers now and in the future to think about how they are going to respond to change *writ large*, originating beyond the everyday contexts of practice, but being carried nevertheless into those contexts by a raft of policies and programs. Developments over the last three decades of the 20th century have spurred significant transformation in the many and varied circumstances where social workers practice all over the advanced industrialized world.

Social work is an activity shaped by its institutional context. What social workers do – the practices they adopt, the values they act upon, the outcomes they pursue – are very much the result of the gradual accumulation of past practices and understandings within the profession which have gradually taken on a (more or less) 'accepted' status, particularly in the corpus of professional practice theory. These agreements about social work have served the profession well because there was a match between social work and the institutional order of welfare promoted in advanced industrialized countries. Further, despite the disparate impact of local conditions, social work as a global or international activity had meaning for people beyond the confines of their own country, their own employing organization, and their own specific field of practice.

Unfortunately, and as I argue extensively in Part 1 of this book, the institutional conditions of social work practice – however conceived and wherever practiced – have undergone significant

transformation. I characterize these developments as *institutional change* in that they re-write the foundational conditions upon which social work as a set of practices developed over the 20th century. Currently, a new *institutional order* is in place, which re-inscribes the conditions of practice. As I discuss more fully in Chapter 2, welfare systems (wherever they are) function as institutions in that they promote a set of expectations about how societies will respond to individual and collective unhappiness, poverty, disadvantage or pain (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). Major developments (discussed subsequently) have led to the introduction of new *ideas* into the domain of social welfare which, in turn, has spurred the implementation of new accompanying *practices*. This affects the way social workers view the nature of client problems, what we think social work is, and how we do what we do (Greenwood, Suddaby, and Hinings, 2002). New *rules of the game* of social work are promoted, shaping the range of possible responses considered appropriate for the changed conditions. Without doubt, institutional change of this magnitude clearly influences professions (see Scott, Reuf, Mendel, and Caronna, 2000) who show how managed care – the reorganization of the funding arrangements of private health insurance in US health care – profoundly impacted on the medical profession). This book is predicated on the notion that social workers are in no way immune from the impact of institutional change.

Further, because the changes occur at the level of institutions, they are not able to be deflected or dismissed at the level of practice however much we might like to. Institutions *become* institutions very slowly, so much so that the processes involved can slip below the radar of everyday observation. Once a set of beliefs and practices becomes institutionalized, they resist rapid and purposeful change. Institutions, which we take very much for granted, are everywhere in social life. It is from their complex inscriptions of how things are done that we drawn the rules of everyday life in virtually every domain of experience. An example of one omnipresent institution is the heterosexual family which provides 'rules' for the management of adult sexuality and the procreation and development of children. Despite their seemingly steadfast nature, institutions do not last for ever, and there are a number of scenarios developed by social theorists which outline when and how institutional de-stabilization and frag-

mentation is likely to occur (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002; Scott, 2000; Jepperson, 1991; Oliver, 1992). One of these, Christine Oliver (1992) for example, talks about what she thinks are the antecedents to institutional change in organizational fields; antecedents which clearly apply in the field of social welfare organizations. These include such processes as a mounting performance crisis, growth in internal and external criticism, increased pressure to innovate, changes to external expectations of what constitutes procedural conformity, shifting external dependencies, withdrawal of rewards for institutionalized practices, increases in technical specificity or goal clarity, changes in the statutory environment, growth in intra-field criticism, and conflicting internal interests. As I show in subsequent chapters, these conditions *are* present in the broad field of social welfare-as-institution, and have already penetrated social welfare organisations in both the state and the non-profit sectors.

By taking this particular stance (that is, by focusing on institutional change), I talk in this book about change at a level at which it is rarely discussed in social work. Rather, social workers (even those engaged in macro practice) tend to focus on the incremental decisions made by policy makers and by organizational managers, seeing these as incidences of (perhaps) poor policy or misguided management which can, with effort, be remedied or countered. While such debates are always useful in sensitizing social workers to the nuances of the contexts in which they practice (and to the specific day-to-day responses they might make), they can also fail to appreciate that, as part of wider-reaching processes, the context itself is transforming into something completely different.

My primary objective in the first part of the book is to sensitize social workers to such change as institutional change, and in doing so, help readers appreciate just how wide-spread and invasive the resultant institutional transformation is likely to be. Further, by characterizing it this way, I help social workers appreciate that those macro-level developments usually discussed in social policy texts and debates (but without much reference to actual welfare practices) have resonating and concrete implications in the daily lives of social workers and their clients. This appreciation, I suggest, is a necessary precondition for professional evaluation of or suggestions for contemporary social work. Fortunately, institutional change of the type suggested here is still very

much a work-in-progress in that the transformations are far from complete and the new institutional order is nowhere near stable.

This points me to the second reason for writing this book (and forms the underlying rationale for Part 2 discussed in more detail later): institutional instability of the sort I describe here means that many voices and a range of positions are being articulated in the general jockeying for a place in the new order. Social work has to engage in the fray. My preference is that we do it knowingly, and with an eye to shaping the eventuating institutional outcomes.

And so to Part 1. As indicated, my objective is to foster informed and critical understanding of the contemporary institutional context in which social work finds itself. Throughout this part, I aim to help social workers engage with sets of ideas and bodies of literature which, in their diversity and complexity, contribute to an understanding of contemporary contexts of practice. In Chapter 1 I introduce readers to the broad parameters of change and to the strategic objectives of social work as a professional project. In doing so, I indicate my own position. Chapter 2 sets the foundations for subsequent in-depth discussions of three specific dimensions of change. In that chapter I explore at some length the manner in which 20th century professional social work, operating within the 20th century welfare state, represented a model of modernity and an archetypal example of the optimism of the notion of progress. This chapter develops readers' appreciation of the intricate ways social work is embedded in and dependent on the institutional arrangements of the welfare state, and how those arrangements have been reconfigured. Here, I also draw out in more depth what I have flagged in this preface; that is, social work is an expression of a particular institutional rationality operating in a context of institutional change. In this way readers are able to appreciate why, institutionally, social work has to (and can) think about the present and the future in new ways.

In Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I examine why this institutional reconfiguration has happened. To do so, I traverse three domains of thought and action which have had considerable impact on social work, albeit at different levels of analysis and in different ways. The first of these is what I have called *the economics of change*; the pressures for change emerging at the level of national and global economies which produced the overall conditions by which insti-

tutional change within nation states came about. Here, I also draw the links between developments at the macro and micro levels of the economy, the institutional arrangements of the modernist welfare state, and the practice of social work. By doing so, readers can more readily appreciate that social work is not a creature of its own making, and that processes outside of its terms of reference and its daily practices fashion the conditions in which we now exist. In Chapter 4, this process of unpicking the primary elements of change continues. In that chapter I focus on *the politics of change* exploring the reconstruction of the state and the emergence of new modes of governance in the late 20th century. The focus shifts to the implications of these developments for the relationship between the state and the people it governs. I argue that this relationship and its refashioning are central to social work because social work and the welfare state was one of the means by which the old relationship was enacted. What then are the consequences of the emergent relationship between the citizen and the state fashioned by the politics of advanced or neoliberalism?

The final plank in this analysis is the subject of Chapter 5, *the ideas of change*, the challenges to social work which have arisen within the scholarly (and for many, arcane) domain of intellectual thought. Specifically I examine the challenges to social work thinking and social work practice posed by developments in a diverse body of literature loosely grouped under the nomenclature of 'postmodernism'. My purpose here is not so much to 'explain' postmodernism in its entirety to social workers (an impossible task), but to show how particular ways of thinking which arise from employing its analytical techniques have the capacity to consider social work in very different, very challenging but nevertheless valuable ways.

Having marked out these three main drivers of institutional change, we turn in Chapters 6 and 7 to the *specific* consequences for social workers and for the people who use social work services. In Chapter 6, I focus on the widespread *managerial challenge to social work practice*. The chapter examines how the sorts of political shifts described in Chapter 5 have resulted in detailed orientations, programs and practices of government which reconstruct the manner in which welfare services and social work practice is produced. It discusses for example, the rise of markets and quasi-markets, the resurgence of case and care management, and

the deployment of risk and risk management as a principle and a technology of service delivery. Following that, Chapter 7 turns to a discussion of the implications of change *for people who use our services*, the emerging models of service use embedded in and promoted by the conceptual and political processes discussed in Chapters 4 and 5. I identify, for example, three different constructions of service users. The first two of these, the service user as customer and the service user as the object of discipline are linked to the neoliberal project. The third, the service user as citizen arises from the various service user movements in such areas as disability and mental health. Again, the implications for social work are identified.

In summary, this is a book about change – in this case change of significant dimensions in the institution of welfare. The various developments discussed in Part 1 are presented not to frighten readers into abandoning social work as a constructive and desirable occupation, but to underscore the notion that social workers collectively and individually should not be passive and uncritical recipients of policy and management prescriptions developed by others. Rather, social workers should enter the field in all of its varied locations as *knowing actors*, well aware of what is occurring and why. Such social workers will also, I hope, be sufficiently critical of our own project to move it forward in positive ways. This, I suggest, is the fundamental challenge posed by the new institutional order of welfare.

1 The Professional Project in the Context of Change

It is almost *passé* these days to note that the circumstances in which social work is practiced have changed considerably and that the seeming certainties of the past have largely vanished. Nevertheless change is the reality, particularly in the cases of what were once thought of as the advanced welfare states of Australia, Britain, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. A brief tour through the professional social work journals produced in those countries readily illustrates that this notion of change, in particular destabilizing and perhaps transforming change is widespread. Some American commentators adopt an apocalyptic tone (see Meinert, Pardeck, and Kreuger, 2000; Kreuger, 1997; Stoesz, 2002), suggesting that forces of discontinuity arising from institutional transformation are so great that they fatally undermine the very future of the profession. Others are less pessimistic, but still propose that social work in the United States and in other countries such as Australia, Canada and Britain is at a critical juncture (Finn and Jacobson, 2003; Hil, 2001; Leonard, 2001; Lymbery, 2001; Sowers and Ellis, 2001; McDonald and Jones, 2000). Irrespective of the specific position adopted, the core message promoted is that social work as a collective enterprise (and individual social work practitioners and people thinking about becoming social workers) should, at a minimum, take stock of what has been occurring. Social workers need to evaluate the impact of developments in the environment, to think about the realities of the present and the implications for the future, and to fashion individual and collective directions forward.

In the three decades following World War Two, most western industrialized democracies developed a version of what many contemporary social workers take for granted – a system of welfare known as the *welfare state*. For a long time there was widespread consensus about welfare; about the desirability of collective responsibility for the wellbeing of all citizens and

the associated development of a range of welfare services. This consensus led Daniel Bell (1960), an influential commentator of the time, to declare that such societies had arrived at the 'end of ideology'. Unfortunately, those seemingly halcyon days have faded into memory. Instead, the welfare state as an idea, as a set of institutional arrangements and social practices has became increasingly contested, and ultimately, largely discredited in the dominant political debates. As Gilbert (2002) suggests, there has been from Stockholm to Sydney, in Britain, Western Europe, in North America, and in the 'Anglo' countries of the southern hemisphere, a silent surrender of public responsibility.

Currently, we live in a world characterized by a retreat from collective responsibility (Rose, 1999), a world in which the state and its various instrumentalities re-configures its relationship with the people it governs in ways that minimize state responsibility for citizen and community well-being. Now, a different version of economics, *neoclassical economics* (which abhors budget deficits and believes strongly in minimizing state expenditure), dominates government thinking. Further, a new approach to public sector management (known as *New Public Management* (NPM)) has become entrenched, a development associated with what is known as the 'hollowing out of the state' and with the introduction of market mechanisms in the delivery of welfare. Finally and crucially, the welfare state has been transformed into the *workfare state* (where access to welfare is predicated on engagement in employment services). All of these developments are examples of processes which have fundamentally re-shaped the institutional arrangements of modern welfare states.

Many other influential factors are nominated; for example economic globalization, the erosion of the authority and autonomy of nation states, the rise and entrenchment of neoliberal or conservative politics, associated programs of welfare reform and shifts in the manner in which social services are produced and managed. All of these factors operate to a greater or lesser degree in the industrialized democracies. No country is immune, though the nature of their response does vary. Using a particularly evocative metaphor, Gilbert (2002, p. 22) also suggests that the advanced welfare states are like ships 'afloat on a large bay at ebb tide', drawn back away from social democratic notions of progress, care and responsiveness as a 'flood tide of new structural

pressures and socio-political forces' transforms the conventional arrangements for welfare. In his analysis (ibid, p. 61), such developments are neatly represented in three tightly connected themes in the public debates about change: a shift from passive to active policies towards people receiving public welfare payments, an emphasis on the responsibilities of these people rather than their rights, and a re-definition of the objectives of welfare from social support to social inclusion. All, he suggests, indicate that collective responsibility has already given way (or is in the process of giving way) to increased private responsibility for most, if not all of life's ubiquitous contingencies. Adopted across the political spectrum and across the globe by leaders and parties of seemingly very different political orientations, it is entirely possible that these themes represent not the end of ideology as Bell (1960) once asserted, but its re-assertion. Now, many of us live in what have been characterized as *neoliberal* or advanced liberal *workfare states* (Rose, 1999; Jessop, 1993).

As we will see in Chapter 3, a new mode of capitalism has developed in recent times; different from the type which underpinned the modern welfare states of the 20th century. As a consequence all modes of social organization, including social work, are subject to processes of reconstruction. In regard to social work in particular, such processes translate into a range of disturbing developments experienced on a daily basis by workers delivering services, such as the whittling away of professional autonomy, the tightening of professional accountability to managers, and the relaxation of professional boundaries and increased competition for jobs with non-social work trained personnel. Linking such developments explicitly with the prevailing political ideology of neoliberalism and to the associated sets of management practices developed under the mantle of NPM, authors such as Lymbery (2001; 2000) suggest that the benign conditions of the high point of social work are gone. Instead, the regime surrounding the welfare state, service delivery and professional practice has experienced such a degree of change and restructuring that the future of social work itself appears threatened. As a direct result of the re-fabrication of the institutional framework of social welfare, the organizational contexts in which social workers ply their craft have been re-shaped, dismantled and re-located.

A stark example of the changes is found in the circumstances facing British social workers, particularly in the re-fashioning of the social service departments and the partial dismantling of the once-famous (in comparative welfare terms) British welfare state. Jones (2001) reports that state social work in Britain (that is, that practiced in state-sponsored social service departments), is traumatized and defeated. Orme (2001) describes how social work in that country has been subsumed within the recently articulated category of 'social care', in which social work roles and practices are reconfigured into unskilled tasks requiring the application of simple 'common sense' instead of the knowledge, skills and attributes of professionally educated social workers. Skerret (2000) suggests that this new mode of 'care' in Britain represents a completely distinct paradigm. Readers should not, however, suppose that such developments are confined to Britain. Giarchi and Lankshear (1998, p. 25 cited in Powell, 2001), for example, argue that this 'social care complex' undermines the identity and status of social work in Europe as well as in Britain, while Holosko and Leslie (2001) suggest that the credibility of Canadian social work has been dealt a significant blow by similar developments.

In many ways, the scale and rapidity of change has taken social workers by surprise, reflected in the almost panicky tone of some discussions of the implications of these events for the profession. Fears are expressed about the future: about the implications for people who exhibit all the various forms of need and dependence to which social workers attend; about the future of formal service delivery structures developed in the second half of the 20th century, and about individual and collective professional futures. I use two analytical devices to 'frame' the varied discussions being had about the institutional transformation of welfare, about the impact on social work, and about the various responses members of the profession are promoting. The first, the notion of social work as a *professional project* is introduced below, a construct drawn from the sociology of professions. The second (introduced briefly in the preface and discussed in more depth in Chapter 2) is taken from a body of sociological theory called neoinstitutional theory (Powell, 1991). Taken together, and brought together in Part 2, these formulations provide a means of thinking about the future of social work.

The professional project of social work

A useful way to begin to think about what are undoubtedly a very confusing and complex set of processes impacting on social work is to step back from the perspective of social work itself. In other words, it is very difficult to think about something when the mind set is that most commonly adopted by representatives of the phenomenon or context under investigation. To facilitate the capacity of readers to think critically about social work, it is helpful to adopt a position which understands it as a set of *strategic activities* of a group of people located within and responding to a particular set of (historical) circumstances. Here, we can reflect on all of the varied activities and practices which make up what we understand as social work as a *professional project*. Drawn from a number of sources (see Macdonald, 1995 for a more thorough discussion), this notion of the professional project builds on the Weberian conception of society as an arena in which social entities compete for economic, social and political rewards. In particular, it develops Weber's nomination of the occupational group, in some cases holding specific educational qualifications from which a living is derived, as one category of competitor. Such entities (in this case the professions) work to bring themselves into existence and to maintain or improve their relative standing. In this way, professions as occupational groups pursue a *project*. Taken up and extended by Friedson (1970) and in particular, by Larson (1977), the idea of *the professional project as strategy* developed. Applied to social work, the professional project refers to the various activities undertaken and characteristics projected by those wishing to propel the idea that a collective entity called 'social work' existed (and still exists).

While the claims asserted throughout the exercise of the professional project rarely explicitly acknowledge it, the professional project is *political* in the sense that it is fundamentally concerned with erecting boundaries which exert a degree of distinction and create a border between those on the inside and those on the outside (Fournier, 2000). Those on the inside are accorded a (variable) degree of regard, some status and some reward by the state in particular and society more broadly. Those on the outside are not accorded such privileges (or are in receipt of lesser or different levels of regard, status and reward). In respect of social

work, the various professional associations such as the Australian Association of Social Work (AASW), the British Association of Social Work (BASW) or the National Association of Social Work (NASW), in conjunction with the state but to different degrees, propel the professional project of social work within each national context. This can be overt and deliberate, as in the case of state licensure for social work in the United States of America, or more low-key, through the provision of places for practice, as is the case of Australia. Internationally, the same process is undertaken by such bodies as the International Federation of Social Work (IFSW), which promotes the idea of social work as a set of processes (doing social work), an identity (a social worker) and a coherent entity (the profession of social work) which transcends national borders.

Within most nations with advanced welfare regimes, the state, at a minimum, nominated and created jobs for social workers accredited by the professional associations within the particular institutional arrangements of its specific welfare regime; for example, in human service agencies, in hospitals and other health programs, in adult and juvenile corrections, in child welfare and child protection agencies. The state, its welfare regime and social work are (or were) inter-related, and social work itself was dependent upon the development and maintenance of policies and associated programs which provided an occupational role for social workers within human service organizations. As we will see in Chapter 2, social work and the post-World War II welfare state both display and reflect the high point of what is known as *modernity*, and as such, are congruent with or aligned with each other. In other words, social work can be thought of as an operational expression of the institution of modern welfare.

The political nature of the professional project is also reflected in attempts (irrespective of success or failure, or right or wrong) to exert authority over other people: that is, those who use social work services, either voluntarily or involuntarily, due to some sort of (usually serious) problem. This very real authority which social workers possess is legitimized by reference to a body of professional knowledge (practice theory and skills). In fact, the development and deployment of social work knowledge is a key feature of the social work professional project. All professions are supposed to demonstrate ownership of and mastery

over a defined body of knowledge valued by the society in which they are located. As Fournier (2000) explains, successful professions forge a field of professional expertise not only by creating boundaries around an area of activity, but also by turning this field into a legitimate area of knowledge *and* of specialist intervention.

The quest for articulation and codification of a specific body of social work knowledge has been a key feature of the social work professional project since the early decades of the 20th century (Flexner, 1915). As well as marking out a way of thinking about the social world, social issues and social problems, the articulation of social work practice theory also served another key function. Social work practice theory and its deployment by social workers in practice contexts serve a *discursive function*. But what do I mean by this? The answer is both simple and complex. The development and use of practice theory gives social workers a way of thinking, a specific form of consciousness, a set of cognitive repertoires within the overarching institutional apparatus of the welfare state and within the specific practice contexts where social workers are found. Think, for example, about social work practice in an acute health care setting. The holistic approach of social workers to the service user, usually including a focus on his or her family, perhaps focusing on their strengths, often contrasts markedly with the perspective brought by other professions, most notably the medical profession. Unlike social workers, medical practitioners are more likely to focus on the presenting problem or deficit, often in a way that is disconnected or minimally connected to the person's environment. In this way, the social work orientation or cognitive repertoire is very different from the medical profession.

When used, such specific forms of social work consciousness construct both patterns of social relations (between workers and clients, between workers and their employing organizations, between workers and the state) and social identities (social workers, clients). Social workers will usually, for example, try and think about service users as citizens with rights to services and the right to be involved in decisions made about them. In doing so, they construct both the relationship between themselves and the service user *and* the identity of the service user. This key dynamic as it relates to the construction of the professional project of social

work is captured by Canadian author DeMontigney (1996, p. 71) when he states:

> It is in the living, material practice of discourse that social workers construct a distinct identity as professionals and as authoritative and powerful. It is within the matrices of discursive power that social workers and other professionals differentiate insiders from outsiders.

As well as discursively constituting social work and guiding intervention, professional knowledge also gives the profession's accounts of the nature of the service user experience a degree of legitimacy superior to that of the layperson, largely because the layperson is an 'outsider' without access to social work ways of knowing. It is important to remark however, that the promotion of this type of professional, specialized, knowledge-based legitimacy was equally necessary to the overall welfare state project of social progress (discussed in depth in Chapter 2), and to support the complex edifice of state intervention in the lives of its citizens. In other words, social work and the welfare state were engaged in the compatible, mutually supportive meta-project of *social progress*. In this way, the alignment between the social work professional project and the modern welfare state is further revealed. (The progressive nature of both social work and the welfare state, was, of course, highly contested in the past and continues to be so today.)

Irrespective of that ongoing debate, Lymbery (2001) also makes the point about the linkages between the welfare state and social work by citing Johnson's notion of *state-mediated profession* (1972), and Parry and Parry's idea of social work as the *bureau-profession* (1979). Both of these are notions designed to highlight that social workers, unlike other professions such as lawyers and medical practitioners, are more likely to practice within state-based organizations (or at a minimum, in an organizational context funded by the state). Lymbery's intent, like mine, is to underscore the symbiotic relationship between the welfare state and the profession.

The social work professional project is also reflected in attempts (depending on the country and with varying degrees of success) to hitch itself to the power of the state as that inheres through various institutions and institutional arrangements. In other words, social workers are often granted legal powers to intervene into private domains. While these powers are not as far reaching as, say,

police officers, they are nevertheless greater than the average layperson. The profession is also linked to the state in that it is the *state* which allows or affords social work the space to practice. Accordingly, the professional project is the more or less conscious strategic efforts of a group of people (social workers) to be known, accepted and often promoted, for example by the state and other state-authorized employers, as a distinct occupational group entitled to sole or at least privileged occupation of a niche in the steadily expanding post-World War II human services labor market. The professional project also entails efforts by the collective niche occupants to be accorded *regard*, *status* and *reward* by significant others; for example other professions, the state, people who use social work services, and the general community at large.

The social work professional project has largely consisted of efforts to adopt the strategies of the established professions, and articulate the possession of various *traits* or *attributes* said to characterize such professions (Greenwood, 1957). Jones (2000) has called it the *aspirant model* of professionalism, in that it is aspiring to the status of the more established professions such as medicine and law. Taking this view, it could be argued that the social work professional project has been quite successful in that it has gained the conventional trappings of a profession. Over time, its place within universities as a legitimate area of tertiary education and scholarly endeavor was consolidated. The professional associations developed and maintained membership and control over entry, often through control exerted over university curricula. The professional associations also successfully developed many of the other characteristics of professional bodies: for example national structures, codes of ethics, academic journals, professional indemnity insurance, systems of continuing professional education and regular national and international conferences (McDonald and Jones, 2000).

Nevertheless, significant differences in the success or otherwise of national versions of the social work professional project to position themselves as central to particular welfare regimes were evident. The Australian experience, for example, stands in marked contrast to that of social work in Britain. In the British context, via a significant strategic development known as the Seebohm Report (Department of Health and Social Security,

1968), professional social work successfully located itself centrally in the then new arrangements for the delivery of social welfare and social care. In other words it positioned itself as the key bureau-profession of Britain's welfare state. In that case, professional social work located itself as the core labor force in the social service departments, established with universalistic orientations to broad ranging services delivered within a framework of social democracy and social rights. Ironically, what was considered to be a successful strategy at that time is now considered a weakness, as the British welfare regime is reconstructed in ways which are grounded in government criticisms of social work and of the social service departments which employed them (Jordan, 2001).

In Australia, on the other hand, social work never managed to achieve such centrality, and the Australian welfare service delivery system was not integral to the establishment of the local form of social citizenship rights (Wearing, 1994). Overall, the Australian evidence suggests that social work failed to fully capitalize on the rapid growth of social welfare services, growth which continued from the 1970s through the 1980s (Martin, 1996). Being only one of a number of occupational groups implementing the health and social welfare dimension of the Australian welfare state, social work did not and has not achieved a pivotal, influential, or even particularly large role. This marginal status is further reflected in the fact that, despite repeated attempts, Australian social work, unlike some of its counterparts, has been singularly unsuccessful in gaining state recognition through formal registration (McDonald and Jones, 2000).

Irrespective of such local differences, social work as an occupation overall managed to promote the appearance of success within the modern welfare states in that social workers were employed by human service agencies to operationalize 20th century welfare. Unfortunately for the profession those circumstances have largely disappeared, and as I indicated in my introductory comments to this chapter, led some commentators to predict the end of social work. Prior to turning that important issue (which after all, is the theme of Part 1), it is important to re-state the perspective towards social work which I adopt.

Social work, as well as being an entity which works towards the promotion of individual and collective wellbeing, is also a *professional project*. As such, it entails a collective strategy organized

largely in relation to the state, and as we discuss in detail in Chapter 2, the modern *welfare state* in particular. As the institutional complex which constitutes the welfare state dissolves, then the strategic orientation embodied by the social work professional project becomes increasingly precarious. And if this is the case, continued promotion of the professional project as the primary strategy for promoting social work may not be the most appropriate or most productive strategy in the new institutional arrangements. I do not mean to suggest, however, that the professional project *per se* is conceptually or morally inappropriate. Rather, and as will become clear, my position is that the *strategic utility* of the professional project alone is increasingly uncertain in the contemporary environment. This scepticism towards the professional project as strategy is the first of two evaluative themes brought to bear on the four major options for social work discussed in Part 2. The second, institutional change and its implications for the nature of social work is developed in Chapter 2. Prior to that however, I outline what I consider to be the ongoing moral legitimacy of social work in the contemporary environment.

Where to for social work?

Does social work have a role in the current and emerging institutional and moral landscape of welfare? I suggest that it most certainly does! The highly influential sociologist Zygmund Bauman (cited in Powell, 2001, p. 23) remarked that social work in the contemporary era is haunted by uncertainty. If we reflect upon it, it is in many ways a welcome uncertainty. Even if the collective sense of moral responsibility for each other is publicly repudiated by successive governments (as increasingly seems to be the case in the neoliberal workfare states), the *need* for social work has not gone away. Nor, I argue, has the moral legitimacy of social work vanished. Rather, the contemporary circumstances make the idea or moral intent of social work, of a profession responsive to social and individual pain and disadvantage, as relevant as ever. In such circumstances, Bauman's uncertainty can be reconceived as fertile ground for the development of ideas and suggestions of ways forward for those with the courage to engage. In view of that, it is incumbent upon us to find ways

of not only surviving the frosty conditions, but of working out how to foster the moral agendas to which social work hopefully remains committed.

Indeed, we can think about the rise and entrenchment of social work as the archetypal example of the optimism of the 20th century – the embodiment of the belief that we, as a society, could improve the conditions in which people live their lives, and in which we could maximize people's capacities to live those lives to their fullest potential. Ultimately, this optimism is what social work offered and potentially continues to offer to the societies in which it was and is practiced. Consequently it is at this juncture, or rather within these objectives that interest in the future of social work, transcending that of members of the profession (or in other words, transcending the objectives of the professional project), potentially resides. It is here where the future of social work (or something like it) becomes relevant for us all, not just members of the profession. What arrangements, for example, should we make and what developments should we attend to if we wish to continue to propel 20th century optimism into the 21st century? Is social work the most appropriate vehicle for this? Is it capable of fulfilling such a role, and if so, in what form? If not, what should replace it? Ultimately, questions such as these form the underlying ethical justification for adopting what is undoubtedly a critical orientation to the contemporary status of and future options for social work.

While the specific sets of circumstances which sustained the professional project of social work, and which allowed social work as a discursive practice to shape itself and its clients has dissipated, the future is not necessarily devoid of optimism. Interestingly, the very same destabilizing processes which seemingly undermine the traditional professional project we have grown accustomed to, also produce moments of disruption which actually encourage re-examination of the ideas, goals, and purposes of social work in fruitful ways. In other words, the contemporary circumstances in which social work finds itself allow us to appreciate (or re-appreciate) and engage with its discursive nature. In doing so, alternate ways of 'doing' social work perhaps more suited to the present are able to be imagined, which, in turn, opens up future possibilities for exploration. More importantly, some of these possibilities re-open up ways of engaging globally,

propelling social workers beyond the confines of the advanced liberal democracies and into new spaces of practice.

Moreover, there is a paradox in operation. I have indicated previously that the centrality of 20th century social work to various welfare state projects varied from country to country. The destabilization and fragmentation of those welfare states and the associated shift away from collective responsibility for social responsiveness to human suffering and disadvantage has heralded a new set of circumstances. These circumstances often position social work in an ambiguous position. Despite the contemporary ambiguities and dilemmas they raise, social work nevertheless remains centrally involved in some of the key developments in contemporary welfare. Here I refer specifically to the various manifestations of welfare reform in operation or being introduced in countries like the United States, Canada, Australia and Britain. As social institutions such as welfare states change so to do the relationships and identities constitutive of social work and welfare clients.

The liberal welfare states of the second half of the twentieth century formed people who used social work and welfare services more broadly than their contemporary counterparts, within and through normative notions of citizenship, needs and rights. That is, most categories of clients were constituted as the legitimate responsibility *of* the state acting on behalf of society. The neoliberal welfare-as-workfare regimes characteristic of the 21st century (Jessop, 1993), situate people who use services quite differently – as claimants with obligations *to* the state. In these countries, the escalation of (bi-partisan) political desires to manage 'risky' populations has focused on the implementation of various, highly controlling and often disciplinary forms of case management. In the USA, it is welfare-dependent mothers who are the key target, in Australia and Britain it is the long term unemployed. Irrespective of who actually implements case management in the core sites of claimant control (that is, which category of human service worker), more and more areas of service delivery and modes of intervention operationally on the fringes of welfare reform are being drawn into the overall political agenda. Key examples are the practice domains of mental health, especially community-based mental health services, and child protection. Social workers practice in all of these locations, and increasingly find themselves

drawn into implementing the new modes of welfare just as they put into operation those of the past.

While there appears to be a degree of continuity operating here (and in many ways there is, because social work has always demonstrated an ambiguous relationship with its social control functions), there is a fundamental divergence at play in the new institution of welfare. One of the most crucial relationships in the new advanced liberal welfare-cum-workfare states in which contemporary 'welfare' is created is that between workers and clients (Brodkin, 1997). Now, newly-forged street-level bureaucrats operating in multiple often non-state locations take on a new and highly charged significance in determining client experience (Smith and Lipsky, 1993). A new and individualized approach to welfare policy and service delivery has emerged where the *primary* responsibility for managing social and economic risks facing individuals and families is devolved from the bureaucratic-professional state to the individual and his or her social work or welfare worker, often working in non-state organizational locations. As a consequence of this devolution, the outcome of policies are now dependent, more than ever before, on how they are implemented by those responsible for working with service users. Herein lies the paradox: as welfare reform sweeps the globe, systematically dismantling proactive state engagement in people's lives, occupational groups such as social workers are increasingly positioned as the new face of a mode of government radically different from what preceded it. Furthermore, social workers' relationship with their clients increasingly becomes the new space in which the new *active citizen* is forged.

In other words social workers, despite claims of marginality and irrelevance, are still important both practically and morally. In regard to the practicalities of the future of social work, it is noteworthy to remark in passing that as an occupation, it continues to grow in, for example, the United States (Morales and Sheafor, 2001), Australia (Healy and Meagher, 2004), and Canada (Stephenson, 2001). Furthermore, social work is growing in China, in South East Asia, and in Africa (Garber, 1997). The spread of so-called Third Way ideas across Europe have, according to Lorenz (2001) opened up new possibilities for social work in the European countries. Similarly, Jordan (2001) argues that social work in Britain needs to create a new identity and to

forge new strategic alliances to favourably position itself in the contemporary regime of welfare. McDonald and Jones (2000) argue the same case for Australian social work. It is observations such as these that make appreciation of the challenges facing social and its future directions worthy of consideration. To fully appreciate the significance of the changes occurring in the institutional environment of welfare, readers need to develop an awareness of the symbiotic linkages between social work and the modern welfare state. This forms the substance of the next chapter.

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2 Modernity, Social Work and the Welfare State

Most social work practitioners and scholars hold an enduring but often unrecognized attachment to the welfare state; the institutional arrangements of welfare developed over the 20th century to manage the problems modern society created. As indicated in Chapter 1, some authors accuse social work of failing to adjust to the inevitability of economic, political and social change; all of which are promoting institutional instability and change. These criticisms join a chorus of claims from across the political spectrum that post-World War II welfare statism has come to the end of its natural (and in the eyes of many, unnatural) life, that the various welfare reform processes of the advanced welfare states are essential, and that further 'reform' may well prove necessary. This theme is not new as the welfare state has been considered to be in 'crisis' for some time (OECD, 1981; Mishra, 1984; Offe, 1984).

The notions of institutional destabilization, reform and reconstruction are of course the central analytical axes of this book, setting the tone, pace and subject matter of successive debates conducted within the field of welfare. Normally social workers think about these sorts of processes as the province of macro analyses undertaken by social policy scholars and practitioners operating at a level far beyond the realm of everyday social work practice – which in many ways they are. As such, social workers are often unsure of or are ambivalent about why they should engage in any sustained analytical endeavour to understand complex processes operating at such a distant, even alien stratum. I attempt to invert this mode of thinking; to develop awareness that these processes and the debates being had about them are actually foundational to *all* forms of social work. Other discussions and developments, such as specific policies about certain categories of service users or about developments in service funding and service delivery mechanisms,

are both more familiar and more obviously relevant to daily experience. Nevertheless, they rest on the institutional foundations of macro processes and policies, and it is from these, ultimately, that the contemporary conditions of practice are drawn.

In this chapter, I suggest that social work represents a way of thinking often characterized as 'modern'. As we will see, modernity is/was an emancipatory project of progress, and its assumptions constitute the foundations for the welfare state, for much social policy and for social work. As Parton and O'Byrne (2000, p. 39) say: 'the birth and development of social work was very much aligned with modern ways of thinking and dealing with social problems'. In this chapter I focus specifically on the 20th century welfare state as a model of modernity, as the crucible in which contemporary social work was formed, and on its destabilization. In doing so, the chapter establishes the central condition of institutional transformation.

Modernity, welfare and social work

Modernity, a summary term for a cluster of social, economic and political arrangements, is generally held to be the legacy of the *Enlightenment* – a shorthand term for a complex constellation of cultural, intellectual and political forces which emerged in 18th century Western Europe (O'Brien and Penna, 1998). It is both an actual period in time, and a signal of a new way of thinking. Its novelty is best appreciated in terms of what it supplanted. In the preceding era, the world (read pre-modern Europe) was understood very differently. It was God-given, the product of God's word, an expression of God's essence, always and forever of God and under God's control. At that time, everything and everyone occupied a particular status or pre-ordained position in the social, political and economic order, an inevitable hierarchy of ranks which was considered completely natural. The divisions between lord and peasant, between master and servant, between the rich and the poor, between men and women, and between father and child were all considered part of a divine order, and hence, unquestionable (Wallerstein, 1996).

The Enlightenment heralded a major development (modernity), in which explanations for the natural and social world

shifted from the divine to the secular. In other words, God was increasingly removed from the picture as the causal agent of all social phenomena. The philosophical and scientific revolution of the 18th century encouraged educated and literate people to be curious about the world and the way it worked. The use of reason and systematic inquiry by intellectuals and scientists supplanted ecclesiastical interpretation of God's will (Howe, 1994). Rejecting superstition, rationality of thought became the new virtue and scientific thinking emerged as the dominant creed. The Enlightenment and the period of modernity which followed was essentially *optimistic* in that it was believed that reason could triumph over ignorance, and order would prevail over disorder.

Science, and more central to the interests of social workers, social science became the dominant rationality by which the world is both understood, and through its application, could be transformed. In contrast to the pre-Enlightenment period, modernist optimism increasingly asserted that the future could be made through purposeful human action underpinned by reason. Science became the founding complex of beliefs of capitalism, and the power of reason and rationality gradually developed a stranglehold on the human imagination, extending from the natural world to the social world (Irving, 1994). Slowly, we became convinced that better and more advanced expressions of human life could be promoted in a social world shaped by human intervention through the application of social technologies. The emerging social sciences gave expression to the faith in the possibility of social betterment, the bedrock of modernity. Social science would, over time, produce a truer understanding of the real world; contribute to better governance of society and to greater fulfilment of human potential.

Modernity was as much a political project as an intellectual and philosophical one (Wallerstein, 1996, p. 15). This was a period in which the idea of the *dangerous classes* emerged, a concept which described persons without power or prestige, but who were, nevertheless, making political claims. Accompanying the supremacy of 19th century liberalism over conservatism and radicalism, variations of the liberal state developed in the USA, Western Europe and in the colonies of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. Within these states, a threefold strategy of universal suffrage, the welfare state, and a national identity project became important pillars of the political

program designed to manage the dangerous classes. The welfare state as a strategy arose in response to the historical transformation of European societies from agrarian, localized and traditional, to industrialized, national and modern (Pierson, 1998). Holding out the promise of social engineering as a key process in the betterment of human kind, the social sciences became part of a political strategy to manage this change.

Accordingly, the emergent welfare state was very much an expression of modernity. Within that, social policy was (and largely still is) an expression of the ideal of rationality drawn into the realm of the social. Through its manifestation in research and in the development of the social sciences, solutions to a wide range of social problems could be developed to improve the welfare of the population. The progressive orientation embedded within the welfare state and social policy represented a founding proposition of Enlightenment thought. The welfare state would, step-by-step, lead us towards better social outcomes, and to a more just, fair and well-ordered society.

The welfare state strove to regulate social life, particularly in its attempts to smooth the bumps of capitalism and buffer the citizens. At the same time (and as discussed in more depth in Chapter 3) it facilitated the functioning of a particular *regime of capitalism*. The welfare state also developed a specific liberal approach to government, through which the interests of a variety of social groups were attended to through social policy interventions. Protecting disadvantaged people and promoting their interests, for example, became a legitimate target of government intervention. The institutional framework of the welfare state was considered the natural way of maximizing welfare in modern society. It was assumed that the state worked for the whole society, and that social policies (and the social services which put policies into practice) were the most appropriate means to meet social needs and to compensate for the down-side of modern capitalism. The welfare state was designed to ameliorate the worst effects of capitalism, to integrate various interests within the body politic, and to (modestly) redistribute wealth (Jamrozik, 2001). Social progress would be achieved through the agency of the state; through public expenditure, through statutory provision, through government intervention and regulation, and through the activities of social workers.

The welfare or social state of the 20th century was paradigmatic in that it was an *institutional expression* of a number of modernist ideas (Ferge, 1997). It represented the essence of the modern liberal belief in the perfectibility of society, in the existence of rational means to reduce injustices without seriously damaging freedoms, and in the notion that the state had a major role to play in the modernist welfare project. It also represented, for example, a particular collective approach to the processes of social reproduction of society in which, to a greater or lesser extent, government took significant responsibility upon itself over and above that of individuals, families and the market. For influential analyst Esping-Anderson (1999) the welfare state is more than the sum total of protective social policies. It also structured personal lives (such as when to work and when to retire) and shaped social structures (such as social class). In all of these ways, the welfare state was the institutional expression of modernity.

In doing so, the welfare state institutionally established a particular way of thinking about the social world (Irving, 1994); of which social work knowledge and practices represent a superlative example. 20th century social work grew out of the same modernist set of transformations that lead to the welfare state; in particular, transformations in the political process and in the orientations of governments to the *scope* of government, the *role* of government, and the *relationship* between government and their subject-citizens. As the welfare state developed, more and more domains of social life were opened up to activity by government. Looking back at the historical development of social work, particularly in Britain and America, its links with the project of modernity as represented by the welfare state are easily seen. This point, for example, is made by Huff (2002), who portrays social work as being forged in a 'cauldron of change', a piece of the 'larger story' of modernity.

After making a scientific study of poverty in 1890s London, Charles Booth for example, a forebear to modern social work, made public his 'solution'. The state must 'nurse the helpless and incompetent as we would in our own families nurse the old, the young and the sick' (cited in Woodroofe, 1962, p. 11). In doing so, he demonstrated a thoroughly modernist notion that the society should actively intervene in the situation of the poor. Similarly, the foundational work of the Charitable Organisation

Societies in Britain and the United States attempted to impose notions of administrative rationality on philanthropy to counter the biases of individual philanthropists and promote practice based on reason. The work of the Settlement Houses, with their traditions of research and reform, represented the operations of the ideas of modernity in the precursors to professional social work. For Woodroofe (ibid), the Charitable Organisation Societies stands as the forerunner of clinical social work, while the Settlements were the forebear of group work and community development. Both areas of endeavour emphasized the scientific nature of their work. The Hull House Social Science Club in Chicago, for example, actively promoted the study of social problems in a scientific manner in the interests of contributing to social reform. These new modes of thinking about poverty, pain and disadvantage ultimately developed into the social diagnosis or casework of key social work theorist, Mary Richmond (1917). These ideas of emergent social work eventually organized into formal training programs such as that offered by the New York School of Philanthropy in 1898, and the School of Sociology with the London Charitable Organisation Society in 1903, subsequently to become the Department of Social Science and Administration at the London School of Economics in 1912.

Gradually, social work as an identifiable activity committed to notions of reform within a scientific modernist framework developed around the world. Professional education was introduced in the Netherlands, for example, in 1899, in France in 1907, in Chile in 1920, in Sweden in 1921, and in South Africa in 1924 (Morales and Sheafor, 2001; Adams, Erath and Shardlow, 2000). Over the first two-thirds of the 20th century, social work developed to occupy a pivotal space created by the modernist orientation of the welfare state – between the individual and the family and the state and society. This space was, and to a large extent remains, an intermediary zone produced and subsequently reproduced by developments in law, in public administration, in medicine and psychiatry, and in the social science disciplines and practices of psychology and education. The development of the space occurred because the modern liberal states were increasingly confronted with what was progressively articulated as a 'new' problem. It was in fact a 'problem' created by the analytical frameworks promoted and developed within the overriding project of modernity – that

is, how can the state establish the well-being of weak, dependent or poorly functioning people while at the same time preserving the functioning of the key institutions of the liberal state?

Enter social work. That is, social work was seen as a positive response to this 'problem', and social workers were gradually positioned as key technologists of the state-sanctioned intermediary zones; the 'petty engineers' of the 20th century social state as Nikolas Rose (1999) (somewhat acerbically) comments. In this way, the welfare state provided the primary vehicle for social work, and the primary supporting institution for sustaining its professional project. It is from these institutional arrangements that social work drew its legal and moral authority, along with the organizational auspices for practice. To varying degrees and depending upon the national choices made in respect of modernist welfare, social work was the operational embodiment of modern welfare regimes.

Also illustrative of social work as a child of modernity is the way problem-solving is (optimistically) represented and promoted in social work practice theory – a mode which rejects superstition and intuition in favour of rational logical thought. Hollis (1966, p. 27), for example, describes case work as *rational*, and as *directive techniques*. Written at the high point of social work in the 20th century, an influential text by Pincus and Minahan (1973) draws heavily on the positivist rationality of systems theory – a type of rationality or way of conceiving the social world which assumes that it is like, for example, the more ordered worlds of the physical sciences. It develops the notion of systems of practice – the change agent system, the client system, the target system and the action system – in which the social worker proactively intervenes. A modernist orientation continues to underpin contemporary discussions about the practice of social work in the current era. The Social Work Dictionary (Barker, 1999 s.v. 'social work'), for example, defines social work as 'the *applied science* of helping people achieve an effective level of psychosocial functioning and *effecting social changes* to enhance the well-being of all people' (emphasis added). A more recent example of the projection of such modernist logic in the 21st century is provided by Sheafor and Horejsi (2003). These authors devote a chapter of their prominent text to *planned change*, and go so far as to provide a formula representing the relationship between a social

worker's professional resources, knowledge, the practice context and planned change (ibid, p. 121). These examples illustrate how practice theory itself constructs the professional project of social work in a particular way, in this case in a manner complementary to the conditions and rationalities of 20th century modernity.

On the face of it, the diverse corpus of social work practice theory illustrates considerable scope, with superficially very different orientations – for example, between clinical interpersonal or therapeutic work and radical community development practice. Despite these overt differences, the range of practice theories is nevertheless predominantly conceptualized within the same meta-framework of modernity. At the foundational level of ideas about the nature of human beings and the nature of human society, social work practice theories have much in common in that they pick up and interpret the ideas about people and about society produced by the grand intellectual projects of modernity – for example, of psychology and sociology. Sheafor and Horejsi's formula (2003, p. 121), for instance, represents an attempt to characterize social work in an abstract and highly idealized manner, in this case by borrowing the imagery of the discipline of algebra. Irrespective of whether the formula accurately represents social work practice and irrespective of its utility as an educational device, its deployment is illustrative. Whether it is notions of practice as processes of planned change (ibid), or as in the radical social work tradition, practice as processes of emancipation and liberation that are proposed (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Mullaly, 1997; Reisch and Andrews, 2001), such descriptions of social work demonstrate how it draws from, is representative of and complementary to the rationalities of modernity. Sitting within the supportive institutional scaffold of the welfare state, social work in the 20th century was very much a child of modernity. Along with the welfare state, it captured the 'zeitgeist' of an era (Esping-Anderson, 1999). That era has now gone, and the institutional scaffold has been severely disturbed. It is to this twist of events that we now turn.

Institutional destabilization

The great hope that was embodied in the welfare state has become increasingly unstable, discredited and undermined – by critics and

by events. Indeed, a key question being asked by analysts of the welfare state is 'can it survive?' Some argue that it cannot in the forms that it adopted in the 20th century. Such commentators would argue that the transformations we have already witnessed in the liberal regimes of the OECD countries, particularly those of Britain, the United States, Canada, Australian and New Zealand, have amounted to an emergent paradigm shift (Glennerster, 1999; Harris, 1999; Ferge, 1997). Others are more sanguine, suggesting instead that the changing conditions represent forms of adjustment to new conditions (Esping-Anderson, 1999). Whether we are witnessing revolution or reform is debatable. There is, nevertheless, significant agreement about the precipitating factors promoting institutional change.

First, there has been a series of developments in key social institutions central to the edifice of the welfare state. The assumptions embedded in the 20th century welfare state about family structure and functioning, for example, are no longer tenable (Goodin, 2000). Family breakdown has escalated, particularly in the second half of the 20th century, resulting in an increased incapacity for that institution to provide the type and degree of financial and personal support traditionally assumed by welfare states. Similarly, fertility rates are declining, resulting in a projected imbalance in the dependency ratio between those in the workforce supporting, through their taxation, those not in the workforce. There have also been significant changes to the structure of labor markets, resulting in the emergence of trends running counter to welfare state assumptions which, in turn, serve to undermine the overall model. One of these is the movement of women out of the home into the labor market. In doing so, their capacity to care for dependent people such as the aged and the disabled is significantly reduced (Gilbert, 2002; Goodin, 2000). Furthermore, the traditional welfare state model made significant assumptions about the nature of employment itself; that it is full-time, full-year, life-long employment. Those conditions have changed considerably across the advanced industrial nations or, more accurately, the post-industrial nations. Those welfare states which embedded forms of occupationally-based income transfers have become increasingly unable to meet the needs of their populations. The most glaring example of this is the increasing failure of occupationally-based social insurance systems to meet the long-term needs of casualized

labor forces with intermittent labor force attachment (Goodin, 2000; Glennerster, 1999).

Demographic developments such as the aging of the population and the declining fertility rates in western countries are often nominated as factors precipitating what is known as the fiscal crisis in the welfare state (Gilbert, 2002; OECD, 1995; World Bank, 1994). In essence, it is argued that increased and unsustainable fiscal pressure will be placed on welfare states because of increasing income security expenditure, and rising expenditure on health care and other forms of nursing and domiciliary care. The OECD for example, argued that welfare states have, in effect, raised expectations among their populations about what they can actually expect from the state in retirement, arguing instead for a shift in responsibility away from states and towards individuals (Hoo Park and Gilbert, 1999). Such suggestions find expression in the shift observable in several countries towards mandatory systems of self-financing for post-retirement income support. Similarly, there is a persistent theme in the social policy literature about the fiscal constraints faced by states. Such views are often couched in terms of expenditure blowouts caused by the increased expectations of the aging baby boomers in contexts of resource constraints and a shrinking of the taxation base. However, similar arguments are made, primarily by neoclassical macroeconomists, about the deleterious effects of excessive government expenditure on inflation, and the associated desire to promote continued fiscal constraint as a permanent feature of government macroeconomic policy.

This type of argument is often associated with discussions about the impact of globalization of the economy; the accelerated mobility of capital, the growth of transnational corporations, and the impact of information technology particularly on financial and other trading markets (all of which are discussed in Chapter 3). In this case, it is argued that economic globalization has intensified pressures on national governments to both retrench labor rights and to limit social welfare expenditure, as both function to constrain the capacity of an economy to compete in the global market (Taylor-Gooby, 2001; Gilbert, 2002; Standing, 1999). Furthermore, political globalization represented by such developments as the European Union have created sets of institutional conditions and a favorable atmosphere for the spread of an orientation to social policy which downplays state solutions to social dependency

(Taylor-Gooby, 2001). Finally, another source of pressure on the traditional model of the welfare state arises from shifts in ideas about the moral validity of welfare (Gilbert, 2002; Taylor-Gooby, 2001; Goodin, 2000; Glennerster, 1999). This, coupled with popular resistance to increased taxation (Taylor-Gooby, Hastie and Bromley, 2003) has exerted considerable pressure on the welfare state. One highly influential variant of this latter process is the idea of welfare as a 'moral hazard', in which the welfare state is held to promote at best, free riding (wherein some people consume welfare which they do not pay for or appropriately contribute to) and at worst, outright cheating (Lindbeck, 1995). The other major position destabilizing the welfare state across the world is the widespread notion that welfare creates dangerous dependency and disincentives to actively engage in the labor market (Mead, 1986; Murray, 1994). Such positions have found their most potent expression in the United States, institutionalized within the Personal Responsibility and Work Opportunity Reconciliation Act (1966), which, through the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, has radically reformed the American welfare state (Martinson and Holcomb, 2002).

Even if institutional change is not as advanced in other countries as it is in the United States, there is still a general drift in the national policy imagination in the post-industrial states away from poverty and disadvantage as an important social problem requiring significant and sustained government attention and intervention. As suggested in the previous paragraph there are a number of influential thinkers and a collection of think tanks around the world questioning the capacity and correctness of governments to take leadership roles and indeed, make a difference in debates about and responses to poverty. While commenting upon the Australian context Adams (2000), for example, ponders why poverty has become a precarious idea with increasingly limited legitimacy in public debate, and concomitantly why the welfare state has been allowed to become destabilized politically. His comments resonate more widely. He suggests that there has been an erosion of the group of public intellectuals which provided the leadership for such welfare programs as the War on Poverty in the United States, the Community Development Projects in Britain or the Australian Assistance Plan in Australia in the 1960s and 1970s. In other words those voices

which championed the welfare state, particularly in public debates, have fallen silent. As we will discuss in detail in Chapter 5, developments in public policy and public administration have led to a situation in which economic efficiency has been substituted for social justice as a key principle and objective of government. As a result, faith has shifted away from the welfare state towards the market as the appropriate vehicle for progress. Accompanying this is the growing belief that poverty is intractable, and that our confidence in the capacity of the welfare state to eradicate it has been lost (Fincher and Saunders, 2001).

As Adams (2000) suggests, the stakes are high for the citizens of the advanced welfare states, and furthermore, they are high for social workers. What sort of welfare regime is likely to emerge or has already emerged? What are the implications of the new institutional conditions? Depending on which author to which one gives chief credence, the future is at worst, very bleak or at least, very different. Ferge (1997) for example, is one author who suggests that the emerging welfare regime represents not only a paradigm change, but one significantly inferior to that which went before. In the new post-industrial welfare regime, he suggests, there will be an explicit retreat from collective responsibility, an increasing acceptance of unemployment, poverty, social segmentation and marginalization. Economic growth will become the primary objective of policy, accompanied by a decreasing interest in and commitment to social integration. In this new regime, state delivery will be replaced by markets, and social justice and equality will be replaced by commitments to individual freedom of choice, autonomy and responsibility. State sponsored and managed income security will be replaced by private insurance, and charity will return as a core mode of social support.

Gilbert (2002) largely agrees. Whether considering regimes as disparate as Britain, Sweden or the United States, the *degree* of change is such that an entirely new design for welfare has emerged, one which has thoroughly re-constructed the essential framework of the progressive welfare state. This restructure incorporates a shift from commitments to universal and publicly delivered benefits designed to protect labor against the market within a framework of social rights, to a selective approach to private delivery of support and services designed to promote labor force participation within a framework of individual responsibility

and individual management of risk. For Goodin (2000, p. 146), the future is also very bleak as the pillars of social support are 'collapsing at once for all too many people'.

In his review of European welfare states, Taylor-Gooby (2001) however suggests that the theme of radical destabilization is significantly overstated, a conclusion supported by Kuhnle (2000). Alternatively, Taylor-Gooby suggests that welfare policy in Europe has, in the recent past, largely resisted pressures for retrenchment, is not contracting, and is not obsolete. Nevertheless, he does suggest that the European welfare states are on a new trajectory, or rather trajectories, as different welfare states respond idiosyncratically to the pressure for change. Both Kuhnle and Taylor-Gooby argue that the primary tenor of change has been one of adaptation as opposed to destabilization. Yet certain common themes are apparent: a shift to labor market activation policies in income support (in which benefits are conditional on some sort of 'activity'), to greater competition in the production and delivery of personal social services, cost containment and greater efficiencies. Taylor-Gooby also suggests however that those factors in the European welfare states which resisted the pressure for welfare state reform and reconstruction have weakened, and that as a result 'the past does not offer a helpful guide to the future' (2001, p. 188).

What does appear to be the case is that, to different degrees and following locally contingent trajectories, the 20th Century institutional arrangements for welfare are being re-shaped. In some cases the reforms are radical, and in others, more reformist in intent. In all instances, the primary commonalities revolve around the linkage between employment policy and engagement with associated labor market programs, the promotion of individual responsibility and increasingly conditional access to social support. Importantly for social workers, and as Gilbert (2002, p. 189) concludes, policies devoted to 'cultivating independence and private responsibility leave little ground for a life of honorable dependence for those who may be unable to work'. This is the group for whom the stakes of welfare state destabilization are highest, the prospects for whom I discuss at some length in Chapter 7. While the impact of welfare state reconstruction on dependent populations is clearly of central concern to social workers, the various projects of welfare reform associated with the

destabilization of the welfare state also have implications for social workers – both practical and moral. In the next and concluding section of this chapter I outline a way we can think about these sorts of developments theoretically. I do so to facilitate understanding of welfare reform as institutional change and its implications for the present, but also to provide a framework for how we might think about social work in the future. Along with the notion of the professional project introduced in Chapter 1, this discussion outlines the second analytical device I use to think about the four options for progress suggested in the social work literature, a discussion which forms the substance of Part 2 of this book.

Social work and the rationalities of welfare

In the concluding section of this Chapter the phrase 'welfare reform' as used as a convenient short-hand term for the reconstruction of the modernist welfare state. Welfare reform provides the pre-eminent example of an *alternative* (and increasingly dominant) rationality or set of ideas about welfare (or *workfare*). Previously in this chapter, I illustrated how the ideas of modernity, particularly those of progress, underpinned the institutional complex of the modern welfare state. Welfare reform represents a shift at this level of foundational ideas. Analytically, I draw selectively on a set of concepts drawn from a particular sociological theory called *neoinstitutional theory* (Powell and DiMaggio, 1991). My first proposition, clearly demonstrated throughout this chapter as well as in the preface to this section, is that welfare regimes, both past and present, function as *institutions*. An institution is a set of norms and expectations regulating the interaction of social actors – groups, agencies and individuals – in this case, in the promotion of 'welfare' (Bouma, 1998). Under the conditions of the modernist welfare state, the state articulated a particular relationship with its citizens, one in which it cared for and took some responsibility for citizens' life outcomes. As I suggested earlier, under the emerging conditions of welfare reform, the position increasingly taken by the state is that citizens are responsible *to* it as an expression of society more broadly. This, I argue, is suggestive of significant institutional change.

Institutions are constituted by and reflected in fields. The field of social welfare, for example, is made up of human service organizations and their employees (government, market and the non-profit sectors), those agencies of the state which develop the specific policies and frameworks for welfare service delivery, and other interested groups (such as social work and social policy researchers and scholars). Welfare reform as *institutional change* disrupts any pre-existing field-level consensus by introducing new ideas and practices (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002; McDonald, 2000). In other words, the actors within a field more or less agree about how the primary activities of the field should be undertaken. Within institutional fields there are different groups of people (Hoffman, 1999; Bouma, 1998) – such as social workers, but also policy makers and managers of human service organizations – which influence field-level debates to differing degrees.

Of late, attention has been directed towards to institutional change processes that emphasize shifts in dominant logics, rationalities or sets of ideas (in particular, what participants say about the field and how it should be structured and managed) (Aldrich, 1999; Scott, Reuf, Mendel and Caronna, 2000). Scott et al (ibid) for example, examined the impact of managed care (a very influential shift in the way health care is funded and delivered in the USA) as a form of institutional change on health care organizations and health professionals. In doing so, they showed how that field, once dominated by the professional rationality of the medical profession, is increasingly dominated by the rationality of the market as expressed by profit-making managed care health insurance companies. Similarly, the rationality of welfare reform is an institutional logic; that is, it is a common meaning system which represents an array of actual practices as well as symbolic constructs, which taken together, constitute organizing principles guiding activity within the field of welfare (Galvin, 2002). Institutional logics provide the rules of the game, and shape what answers and solutions are both available and considered appropriate by actors (policy makers, managers and social workers) (Thornton and Ocasio, 1999). Changes in the institutional logic of a field over time lead to changes in the functioning and behaviour of constituents (Galvin, 2002). In other words, human service managers would increasingly conform to the new

institutional logic and would attempt to transform their organizations accordingly. As we will see in Chapter 4 and in more depth in Chapter 6, this is indeed happening. As a consequence, this perspective would suggest that social workers, as actors in a changing institutional field, would likewise change.

Friedland and Alford (1991) use the notion of 'value spheres' developed by Weber – clusters of values nested within the overarching institutional logic of a field. They do this to expose differences between rationalities – for example between welfare and workfare. Importantly for this discussion, they note that in institutional fields multiple sub-rationalities can operate at the same time. Within the welfare field, social work is a value sphere in its own right; with its particular theoretical, substantive, and formal rationalities (Townley, 2002; Kalberg, 1980). These provide the foundations of both professional identity and patterns of action. They can be contrasted with the rationalities of the new institutional logic imported into the field by welfare reform.

A theoretical rationality, for example, refers to how a group thinks about and understands 'reality' through the applications of particular ideas. Social workers, for example, use the concepts of social work practice theory to develop their 'take' on the field in which they practice and on the problems they confront. A social worker using the strengths perspective, for example, will focus on identifying, working with and maximizing a service user's personal capacities. Conversely, the theoretical rationality of welfare reform in relation to unemployed people focuses on presumed personal deficits of those same people. Further, and as we will see in Chapter 4, the institutional logic of welfare reform promotes an alternate set of ideas drawn from bodies of microeconomic theory known as public choice and agency theory. As I demonstrate in that chapter, the assumptions these make about human nature stand in stark contrast to those of social work theories.

A substantive rationality is one which shapes action into specific patterns by reference to an identifiable cluster of values. For social work, the professional substantive rationality is found in the profession's formal values and normative commitments (which also happen to be congruent with the values of a liberal-democratic welfare state). Under conditions of welfare reform, an alternative substantive rationality is promoted which is informed

by neoliberal notions of obligation, mutual responsibility, and heroic individualism.

Finally, a formal rationality is one in which action is shaped by reference to rules, laws or regulations relating to the economy and society. For social work (the bureau-profession) this promoted practice informed by the policies and organizational logics of the modernist post-war welfare state – largely played out in state bureaucracies or agencies funded by the state. These bureaucracies, for example, were (usually) committed to notions of administrative equity (that is, treating all people equitably). Under welfare reform, welfare practices are informed by new configuration of states and markets and new forms of service delivery. In the new arrangements, the primary formal rationality of choice and flexibility informs the devolvement of service provision away from the state and into new sites of practice organized into a market or quasi-market.

In these ways, the dimensions of theoretical, substantive and formal rationality provide a dynamic analytical tool for evaluating the potential responses by social work to change in the institutional logic wrought by welfare reform. As indicated, these issues will be taken up in more depth in later chapters as we explore the extent and dimensions of institutional change. In this chapter, the trajectory of social work as an exemplar modernist profession within a key project of modernity in the 20th century has been charted. By illustrating the linkages between social work and the welfare state, the scene is set to appreciate how the institutional scaffold surrounding the profession is being dismantled and reconstructed. To augment this analysis, I explore in some depth in Chapter 5 how the challenges to social work as an expression of modernity arise not only from institutional destabilization, but also from the realm of ideas. In this chapter, the notion of modernity as particular sets of ways of thinking about the world has been canvassed. Chapter 5 illustrates how the model of rationality informing the social work project (represented our reliance on the social sciences) is also destabilized, not only by the logic of welfare reform, but also by alternative groups of ideas falling within the intellectual movement known as postmodernism. Prior to that however, I examine the economic and political developments prompting the wholesale shift away from the dominant 20th century mode

of managing industrial capitalism, and the linkages between that and the institutional reconfiguration of the welfare state. In this way, readers can begin to appreciate just how profound and far reaching the conditions of transformation are. I begin with economics.

3 Challenging Social Work: The Economics of Change

Everyone knows that the economy is important, but few of us understand why. In the main, social workers (like most people) are not necessarily as informed as perhaps they should be about the economic context in which they practice, a deficit which this chapter attempts to remedy if only to a very limited extent. It does so within a framework drawn from the discipline of political economy. I have located the discussion within this body of analysis so as to make clear the institutional linkages between economics and politics, a theme which constitutes the substance of this and the next chapter. Much of what I consider here is related to the ubiquitous processes of economic globalization, which in recent times have taken on heightened significance and are of great consequence because of the institutional effects within state systems around the world. Reverberating out to the subject populations of virtually all states, economic globalization brings diverse populations in equally diverse regions of the world into the realm of a common global dynamic. The consequences for different nations, however, vary drastically.

There is as yet certainly no closure in academic debates about the likely end point of economic globalization. Some even doubt that it has occurred! A number of authors contend that the contemporary era is qualitatively different from that which it succeeds, while others suggest that the claims made about the convergent and apocryphal tendencies of economic globalization seriously misunderstand the past and overstate both its extent and impact (Rieger and Leibfried, 2003; Held and McGrew, 2000). The notion of economic globalization and its consequences remains hotly contested (also see for example, Wade, 1996; Zysman, 1996). Nevertheless, many argue that a new mode of *social* organisation is developing because of developments in the realm of the economic, indicating an historic transition in

the capitalist world order. This is why it is important for social workers to consider. This new mode of social organization has significant implications for the arrangements which provided the institutional locale for social work. If social workers develop some appreciation of the various arguments posed about why this is occurring, they are more likely to acknowledge that strategic thinking about the future is timely; specifically, thinking about the likely consequences for people who use social work services, as well as about the profession's response. In other words, when reflecting on the impact of economic globalization, our imagining of alternatives takes on a new urgency.

In this chapter, I give a brief overview of the processes said to have prompted the current era of economic globalization. Following this, I introduce three 'takes' on economic globalization and its impact on national economies developed within the field of political economy. I do this to help readers consider the potential linkages between what happens in the economy and the broader social and political infrastructure of any given society. One of these frameworks, post-Fordism, is discussed in slightly more depth because it is from this analytic genre that one of the clearest explanations of the rise of the workfare state replacing the welfare state has been developed.

What happened? Bretton Woods to the global economy

Towards the end of World War II, concerns were raised, particularly in America and Britain, that the post-war period might bring on a repeat of the damaging economic crisis which followed World War I (Panic, 1995). At that time, it was generally considered that the greatest problem facing nations in the years between World War I and World War II was the breakdown of the international political economy. It was also argued that the inter-war economic collapse contributed to the rise of Fascism, a significant if not the prime factor precipitating World War II. A debate arose at the time about how to protect nations' sovereignty over the functioning of their domestic economies. Accompanying this were clearly articulated desires by governments to protect their economies from the unfettered functioning of the international market (Panic, 1995; Bessel, 1992).

In response, 'Pax Americana' or the international post-war world economic order came into being, arising from the Bretton Woods agreement of 1944. This was an agreement, basically between the USA and Britain, to create a mechanism to manage the international flow of money (international liquidity), to protect national economies from internationally-produced debt, and to reinstate international equilibrium. This was achieved largely through a system of fixed exchange rates, where countries pegged their currencies against the American dollar. This led to the establishment of such coordinating and regulatory institutions as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank, and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade. For some time, this system provided both stability and economic growth. The latter, however, was not distributed equally across the globe, manifesting in sustained inequalities between industrialized and less industrialized countries (Mitchell, 1992).

The United States emerged as the dominant economy with its enormous financial power, a dominance augmented by the fact that the US dollar was the currency used for international transactions. Because of the latter, the USA acted as system manager in control of international liquidity. At first US policy makers were more or less committed to this role but as the decades progressed, these commitments to maintaining the international financial order became weaker (Strange, 1994). The wavering of US commitment was one of the factors that led to the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system.

Another factor arises from the operations of the system itself. The fixed exchange rate regime theoretically forced a degree of discipline on participating nations who pegged their currency against the US dollar. When serious national payment imbalances arose, countries with payment deficits were supposed to devalue their currency while countries in surplus were meant to appreciate theirs. Unfortunately, countries with a surplus (such as Germany) did not always appreciate their currency, thereby transferring the international adjustment problem to the deficit countries. To manage adjustment, this latter group of countries were forced to use restrictive monetary policies which, in turn, slowed growth and weakened domestic employment rates. To manage the internal politics of these unwelcome consequences, such nations implemented protectionist policies which,

in turn, distorted international trade and damaged other national economies.

Another factor weakening the Bretton Woods system was the emergence of the 'Eurodollar' markets, in part a function of the rapidly increasing profits of the oil exporting countries (creating a seemingly unlimited flow of Petrodollars), and in part from successful American multinationals attempting to elude US banking legislation. The Eurodollar market, for example, was an off-shore dollar market beyond the reach of national currency and banking controls. This market encouraged the rise of transnational corporate activity, and especially, the development of global banks (McMichael, 1996). It represented the beginning of an era of financialization, where money and its flows became a key economic dynamic, largely divorced from the production and productive capacities of national economies.

As a result, the off-shore capital market outside US control expanded from US$3 billion in 1960, to $75 billion in 1970, to $1 trillion in 1984 (Strange, 1994, p. 107). This put downward pressure on the ratio of US reserves (gold) to liquid liabilities (paper money in circulation), and eventually led to speculation on the dollar. Eventually American policy makers were forced to end the gold-dollar standard, a development which initiated a destabilizing shift from fixed to floating exchange rates (McMichael, 1996). Fostered by these currency crises, the international financial relations of the Bretton Woods system unravelled and a new era of contemporary economic globalization took off. The new financial markets had the effect of detaching finance from its original purpose of financing trade, and money itself became a commodity to be traded like any other commodity. Currency speculation, plus the increased mobility of capital beyond the control of governments and central banks, resulted in a situation where the value of a currency depended more on the flows of the market than on the underlying balance of trade in an economy. Susan Strange (1994, p. 59) described this turn of economic events as 'casino capitalism'.

The demise of the Bretton Woods system and the rise of the new economic order can be observed operating along three clear trajectories – in finance, trade and production (Held and McGrew, 1998). The first are the sorts of developments in finance discussed above. Since then global financial activity has grown

exponentially, resulting in the development of extremely complex global financial markets. These have transformed the management of national economies. As indicated, the international finance markets are highly volatile and responsive to shifts in such things as interest rates, and as such, they render national macroeconomic policy vulnerable to changes in global financial conditions. As illustrated by the catastrophic Thai currency collapse in 1997, speculative currency trading can have immediate and drastic national economic consequences. Now, there are clear consequences in the form of different costs and benefits associated with various national macroeconomic policy options. Certain choices, for example pursuing expansionary policies (with associated sustained government expenditures), can prove very expensive in the sense that it may lead to a flight from a national currency by financial markets, with associated serious exchange rate consequences. The shifting costs and benefits of various policy options are, however, unpredictable, a factor which further destabilizes the management of national economies.

Furthermore, the capacity of the international financial markets to facilitate short-term capital flows out of particular economies can have knock-on consequences for other economies in a region, and in the global financial sector as a whole. As Held and McGrew (1998, p. 229) note, in a 'wired world' linked by information technology, national markets are intimately enmeshed with each other, so that disturbances in one spill over very rapidly into others. In such a context no government can successfully insulate its economy. This itself has led to a significant shift in the balance of power between governments and markets, in that it is market-based decisions by market participants, be they individual or institutional, who have become the authoritative actors in the global financial system. While nation states clearly retain significant capacity to act, their actions, particularly in times of crisis, are increasingly driven by decisions made by these non-state and market-based actors. This qualitatively different financial market, characterized by increasing complexity, scope, volume, speed and diversity, operates in a manner utterly unlike that of any previous period. It is a 'distinctive new stage in the organization and management of credit and money in the world economy', which is 'transforming the conditions under which the immediate and long-term prosperity of states and peoples across the globe is

determined' (Held and McGrew, 1998, p. 230). This vast global pool of money has contributed to the crippling debt crises in a large number of so-called Third World countries (Hoogvelt, 1997), as well as significantly influenced macroeconomic policy in the OECD nations.

Trade, as opposed to finance, has always had international dimensions, but it is the contribution of international trade to national income, and the extent of the world output that is traded which has reached new significance (Perraton, Goldblatt, Held and McGrew, 1997). Currently, international trade is integral to the well-being of national economies. Virtually all economies are incorporated into global trading networks and are attempting to position their products and services in global markets. The world trade system is now institutionalized through such increasingly important mechanisms as the World Trade Organization, which actively promotes global trade liberalization and discourages domestic policies of protection. The resultant global competition, often within national borders between domestic and foreign firms, occurs simultaneously with the opening up of the global marketplace. Global trade is also re-shaping pre-existing hierarchies of trade (Hoogvelt, 1997; McMichael, 1996). Whereas once trade was concentrated within and between OECD economies, new trading patterns re-inscribe and re-construct the industrialized-industrializing divide into more complex and fractured patterns.

The new era of the global economy was and is also promoted and characterized by globalization of production as well as finance and trade. The rise and rise of transnational corporations (TNCs) – the corporate empires which straddle the globe – are centrally implicated. In 2002, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, 2002) noted that there are about 65, 000 TNCs today, with about 850, 000 foreign affiliates. In 1996, there were 44, 000, with 280, 000 foreign affiliates. Twenty nine of the world's 100 largest economic entities were TNCs. Further, the value-added activities of the largest 100 TNCs have grown faster than those of national economies, accounting for over 4.5 percent of world gross domestic product in 2000, as opposed to 3.5 percent in 1990. In 2001, their sales of almost US$19 trillion were more than twice as high as world exports. In 1996, their total sales were US$7 trillion. In the new

global economy, production processes themselves are internationalized by the TNCs. This expansion of international production is driven by a number of factors that play out differently for different industries in different countries: the opening up of national markets through policy liberalization, rapid technological change, and heightened competition. These factors result in international production taking new forms, with new ownership and contractual arrangements, increasingly institutionalized through a range of processes such as out-sourcing, sub-contracting and joint ventures.

In these ways – through developments in the areas of finance, trade and production – economic globalization was and is advanced. Not surprisingly, there have also been concomitant institutional consequences for nation states. To appreciate the recursive nature of the linkages between economies and societies (and between economic developments and the welfare state in particular), we now turn explicitly to the discipline of political economy.

Post-industrialism, disorganized capitalism and post-Fordism

In the 1970s political economists such as Bell (1973) and Torraine (1974) began to ask whether the extensive developments evident in industrialized economies represented a fundamental transformation of the capitalist economy, or whether they were better understood as a minor aberration. While there are different emphases in accounts attempting to understand what was subsequently labeled as the post-industrial economy, there were some common empirically observable processes evident that seemed to indicate that a radical departure from the industrial economic form in OECD countries had occurred.

These processes, indicative of changes propelling these economies towards a post-industrial form, included shifts in the balance of the economy and in employment from manufacturing to service industries; the emergence of a core workforce in relatively secure employment and a growing peripheral work force of low paid casualized labor; and a transformation of the organization of work and occupations, generating new forms of social divisions and life chances. In 1990, an influential social policy author,

Esping-Anderson, applied the post-industrial thesis to the welfare state explicitly linking the economy to the institutional arrangements of welfare. While there has been much subsequent critical discussion about his typology (see for example, Gilbert, 2002), the point of interest for us is not whether he got it right or not, but rather that he was perhaps the most prominent social policy analyst to highlight the interdependent relationship between the welfare state and the economy.

Also attempting to explain apparent shifts in the organization of capitalism, a related theoretical perspective represented most prominently by Lash and Urry (1987), focuses on what they argue is the disorganization and reorganization of capitalism. They identify three core periods of capitalism, the first of which is *laissez-faire* capitalism, characterized by a lack of central political co-ordination (the 19th century). The second is industrial capitalism (the 20th century), characterized by the concentration and centralization of capital, the regulation of markets, a mass production economy organized within national boundaries, and, with welfare states. The third period is that of disorganized capitalism, characterized by de-industrialization of economies, the decline of national markets and nationally based corporations, a decline in the absolute and relative size of the industrial working class, a decline in collective bargaining and the growth of company and plant level bargaining, flexible forms of production and work practices, a weakening of the national state capacity to manage the economy, a decline in industrial cities, an expansion of the service class, a decline in mass politics, the growth of new social movements, and an increase in cultural diversity and fragmentation.

All of this, they argue, leads to a polarization of income and wealth, and a massive growth of poverty, often racialized, in the de-industrialized cities. Lash and Urry (1987) demonstrate how, in the United States in particular, these 'rust-belt' cities are also systematically emptied of important social and political institutions, labor markets, commodity markets, trade unions, and people with sufficient resources to relocate. These cities increasingly suffer from *regulation deficit*, as the institutions of social and economic regulation move out, leaving behind ungovernable spaces which welfare state agents (such as social workers) utterly fail to manage, resulting in an escalation of crime, violence, drug addiction and so forth.

Increasingly, the old political allegiances and coalitions supporting the beleaguered welfare state start to break apart as new social divisions and cleavages emerge. Traditional class politics declines as does support for the mass political parties, and new modes of political and social organization emerge. At the same time as the economic conditions and political and institutional supports underpinning the welfare state collapse; its weakened agents are increasingly asked to mediate new conflicts, divisions and social problems. Ultimately, the welfare state (as an institutional form and associated with the period of organized capitalism) cannot manage, and is not functionally, economically or politically viable in the emerging conditions.

A closely related body of theory attempting to explain the contemporary experiences of nations within a global economy and a global society is that of post-Fordism. Most commonly associated with the work of Bob Jessop (2002a, b; 1999; 1994; 1993), post-Fordist inspired political economy presents the most detailed accounts of linkages between the economic, the social and the political. In its early stages, post-Fordism was largely focused on what had passed and on the nature of the transition. More current work tends to shift its attention to what is coming into being – the new world of the so-called workfare state. These still developing analyses stress both the material reality of social relations (such as the widening gaps between rich and poor) and the social and cultural processes that constitute them (for example, welfare services). It shows that the operations of the economy are co-constituted by other systems and evolve along with them, for example, in and through the technologies, politics, law, education, science, and even art of a society.

From Atlantic Fordism to the knowledge-based economy

Post-Fordist political economy takes its analytical orientation from the Marxist notion of the recurrent crises of capitalism. It develops the work of what is known as the Parisian 'regulationist' school of economics, and as the name indicates, is interested in the regulation of the economy. This sounds like a truism, but within economics the regulationists were unusual in that they assume

that the frequent disruptions and recurrent crises in the economy owe little to the 'hidden hand' of the market for their resolution. They also consider the role played by political and cultural institutions and relations in attempts to regulate the instability of advanced economies. They stress the role of such institutions as the state in attempts to balance patterns of production and social demand. They recognize that the pattern of accumulation and growth in advanced economies is secured as much by *social regulation* as it is by *economic regulation*.

Theorists of the post-Fordist school concern themselves with the structure of *regimes of accumulation* and *modes of regulation*. Regimes of accumulation are periods of growth characterized by whatever it is that ensures a compatibility between what is produced and what is consumed in an economy. Under a Fordist regime of accumulation, for example, production and consumption are both characterized by mass standards (exemplified by the ubiquitous model T Ford). A mode of regulation is however of a different order. It functions more or less as a support framework for the growth regime. It pulls together and directs the wide variety of actions taken by a range of actors (firms, banks, retailers, workers, the state, employees, and labor unions) into a kind of regulatory network. Accordingly, a capitalist mode of production and reproduction is manifested in a regime of capitalist accumulation. Distinctive historical periods in the development of capitalism can be discerned. Each successive wave of capitalist development has its own regime of accumulation and associated mode of economic, political and social regulation. In other words, each regime has regime-specific modes, methods or processes of socialization, and regime-specific methods or processes of promoting social cohesion and integration. Both of the latter are necessary strategies to ensure economic growth (or capital accumulation).

Post-Fordism takes its starting point at the period of capital accumulation between the late 1930s to the mid 1970s, known as the golden age of *Atlantic Fordism*. This was a period of unprecedented and sustained economic growth in western industrialized nations, predicated on the development and maintenance of mass production and mass consumption. It was also a period noted for its political and social stability. There are a number of central features which account for that. First was the establishment of a social pact between capital and labor after the class

war of the 1929–1933 Depression, reflecting agreement about basic social institutions (the welfare state and a managed market economy). Second, the 'new' social institution of the *welfare state* developed, designed to deal with the dysfunctions of the market economy, to establish a minimum wage and thus place a floor underneath consumption, and promote 'norms' of mass consumption. Third, there was a general acceptance of the need for state regulation and intervention in the economic sphere. In other words, there was a commitment to a set of economic policies designed to sustain demand, to secure full employment and promote economic growth. Fourth, as discussed in the first part of this chapter, mechanisms to control the increasingly international economic order were developed, beginning with the Bretton Woods agreement.

The success of mass production (Fordism) required simultaneous transformation and regulation of consumption to ensure mass markets. It is here that post-Fordist political economy would stress that post-World War II Fordism should be seen less as a mere system of mass production, and more as a total way of life. While transformations in the methods of production were at the heart of the regime of accumulation, to be sustained it also needed transformations in all social institutions. Therefore, social institutions such as the state and the family were reconfigured to facilitate particular modes of social conduct conducive to mass consumption.

Post-Fordist-inspired authors, for example, link a particular family form and a particular order of gender relations with the Fordist regime of accumulation (Jessop, 2002a). This family form (the nuclear family) serves as a powerful mode of social regulation enhancing and embedding the capital accumulation regime. The nuclear family, it is argued, played a key role, both as a locus for privatized consumption and as a site for social and emotional integration. In its simplest terms, women were largely excluded from the labor market remaining within the private sphere of the family. In doing so, one of their primary roles was to act upon and transfer the norms of mass consumption. Around this family form, a whole series of other social institutions both supported and extended this order of gender relations. The welfare state, for example, clearly supported this pattern of relations by overtly constructing women as dependent upon men (O'Connor, Orloff and Shaver, 1999).

As a regime of accumulation and as a particular social order, all went well for a significant period of time. As described in the early section of this chapter, the inevitable seeds of crisis embedded in the regime eventually grew into full blown contradictions – resulting in a crisis of accumulation. The indicators were such phenomena as stagflation (sustained high levels of inflation), an increased share of capital going to labor through high wages and a large welfare state which shifted the underlying balance of class forces in favor of organized labor in the economic sphere, the rise of the new social movements increasingly critical of capitalism, and perhaps most importantly, the combination of the financial crises, the oil shocks and declining profits.

The last of these was catastrophic for Fordism as it became progressively exhausted. The declining rate of profit was both the vital indicator of decline and the straw that broke the camel's back. Critical voices began to be raised, disparaging of the dominant economic policy prescriptions of the time. Wages were said to be too high, wage fixing processes were considered too rigid, and the rights of labor were considered to have gone too far. As a consequence, it was claimed, workers were pricing themselves out of jobs and labor mobility was seriously impeded.

Consequently, from the 1970s onwards, it became increasingly 'evident' to policy makers that minor reforms to the system would not solve the crisis, and a new model of socio-economic organization needed to be established, which would support continued profit growth. This new 'model' of global capitalism (with national variations and diverse fortunes) has now emerged, and in the process, has altered the three key elements of the Atlantic Fordism. The first is accelerated economic globalization. Second, capital has succeeded in appropriating significantly higher shares of profits by using a number of strategies, all of which have reduced the power of labor (i.e. confrontations with the trade union movement; deregulation of the labor market; deregulation of the wage fixing system; workplace restructuring; employment of less well organized labor such as women and migrants). Third, state intervention has shifted away from political legitimation and social redistribution towards political domination.

The post-Fordist accumulation regime has several key features. As a labor process, post-Fordism can be defined as a flexible production process based on *flexible technology* and on a *flexible*

workforce. As a mode of macro-economic growth, post-Fordism is based on the dominance of permanent innovation – new practices, new products, new organizational forms, and new markets. As a social mode of economic regulation, it is characterized by the polarization of skilled and unskilled workers, greater flexibility in *internal* and *external* labor markets, and shifts to local levels of wage fixing. Also, it is typified by a new mode of socialization or social regulation – the contours of which are becoming clear and which I discuss shortly. The post-Fordist economy is a *knowledge-based economy*, in which knowledge is *applied* to production, and in which knowledge moves from the public domain to the private in an escalating process of commodification (Jessop, 2002a).

The resulting restructuring of social and economic life results in a number of discernible outcomes (Sassen, 1991): the rise of global cities divorced from their local and national economies; an accumulation of government and corporate debts to recondition and re-service these global cities resulting in a decline in infrastructure in other areas within the same country; a loss of manufacturing jobs and a steady increase in service sector employment; an extremely polarized wage structure; deterioration in economic and social conditions for low wage workers; the demise of the compact between labor and capital; the rise of a post-Fordist consumerist middle class with a large disposable income consuming 'new' goods and services (personal services, life style goods), creating demand for another type of low-wage worker to service them; and greater demand for the products of sweated industries and outwork.

The post-Fordist accumulation regime is *spacialized* (Brenner and Theodore, 2001; Rodger, 2000; Cox, 1997); that is, it restructures space – for example, in the large urban conurbations. It generates new forms of urban poverty that have come to be called *social exclusion*. The effects of post-Fordist change leave some areas of the city suffering from decline (old manufacturing areas) as others develop (service and high technology areas) (Mellor, 1997). As cities globally compete with each other for investment, for the rights to hold prestigious events and conferences, for the location of businesses and so forth, investment is reallocated towards that development which presents the best face to the world (up-market inner city development). Uneven

development contributes to urban decline in some areas and major disparities in income, wealth and future prospects.

The post-Fordist city is marked by spacial polarization, illustrated by the notion of the dual or quartered city, a metaphor which aptly characterizes the emerging urban forms. The evolving city centers, for example, with their considerable up-market investment, are not places for the poor. Marcuse (1989) has developed a representation of the idea of the 'many cities within a city' thesis. He identifies the economic city, the prestigious office blocks where the 'big decisions' are made; luxury housing spots, enclaves of isolated buildings and blocks occupied by the rich; the city of advanced services, characterized by downtown clusters or professional offices enmeshed in a complex communicative network; the gentrified city, for those professional and managerial groups that are 'making it'; the suburban city, for single family housing, the middle professional and managerial groups and the skilled artisans which can be found both at the outer reaches of the city or near the center; the tenement city constituting cheaper single family areas and including areas of social/public housing occupied by lower paid workers; the city of unskilled work, located in relatively cheap industrial units, warehouses and sweat shops providing goods and consumer services in the city; and the abandoned city where the 'victims', the poor, the unemployed, the homeless and the excluded congregate, a city colored by a sub-culture of drugs, alcohol and street crime. The notion of the restructuring of space can also be applied beyond urban areas. In the Australian and Canadian context for example, it illustrates the effects of economic decline in rural and regional areas, culminating in the emptying out of once-vibrant towns and an escalation of rural-urban drift.

This shift to the new mode of production with its far reaching spatial, political and social implications is encapsulated by the notion of a shift from a welfare state to a workfare state. Clearly, social welfare is centrally implicated, as are social workers. It is to this that I now turn.

From welfare to workfare

The welfare state has, as has been suggested, been supplanted by the workfare state, as a result of which the definitions of

welfare have changed, the institutions and institutional arrangements responsible for its delivery have changed, and the practices in and through which welfare is delivered have changed (Jessop, 1999). Social policy is now focused on transforming the 'identities, interests, capacities, rights and responsibilities' of its citizens so that they may become active agents in the pursuit of a competitive edge in a global economy (Jessop, ibid, p. 353). The coalition of interests that underpinned the welfare state has fragmented, and this fragmentation has led to demands for a more differentiated form of economic and social policy – that is, approaches to policy that treat different groups of people in different ways.

The workfare state is geared to promote permanent innovation and flexibility in an open economy. It has abandoned full employment for full employability (in which a government seeks to engage the unemployed in job preparation and job seeking instead of providing actual employment) as it seeks to promote structural and systemic competitiveness. Welfare services, once delivered as part of a parcel of citizenship rights, are now pulled apart and bundled together in new ways as additional means to benefit business, demoting the individual citizen to second place in the dynamic. Finally, there has been (to shifting degrees) devolution of policy and its operations to sub-national levels along with a transfer of delivery of services away from the state to non-state sectors.

While experienced differently in different countries, it should be quite clear by now that social workers wherever they are need to think about what can be learned from post-Fordist political economy in regard to welfare generally and for social work in particular. In the first place, it is a framework which encourages appreciation that much of what is occurring in the broader economy and society, in the human services and to the welfare state in particular, is a result of the *role* of the welfare state and the human services within the economy. In other words, a political economic analysis moves beyond the value-laden rhetoric normally employed to justify the welfare state (represented, for example, by claims about the social rights of citizens), but which cannot account for the recent developments except by bluster, or conversely, by silence. It also assists social workers to fully appreciate that welfare is not immune from the economy, and that indeed it never was. Welfare, in whatever specific regime-inspired

guise, is very much implicated in the emerging mode of regulation in the post-Fordist society.

Similarly, post-Fordism would suggest to social workers that the various contexts of practice have all the characteristics of an industry undergoing significant restructuring. In other words, the traditional ways the profession has of understanding its context may not be particularly useful in this new era. While social work has the capacity to acknowledge and locate itself within an environment, the assumed characteristics of that environment have altered (if they were ever present). The notion, for example, of a logical, more or less integrated and stable service delivery system, overseen, managed and negotiated by autonomous professional workers, is patently inadequate in the context forecast for us by a post-Fordist framework. Rather, service delivery systems have become more complex, particularly since the introduction of quasi-markets in contexts once characterized by state bureaucracies.

This and related themes will be developed in Chapters 6 and 7 where I examine the implications of a post-Fordist political economy for the production and management of welfare in the new mode of regulation. Traditional work practices associated with professional and autonomous practice in welfare states have and will continue to change. Wages and conditions will increasingly be exposed to market forces. Significant inequalities will probably develop in the welfare work force as a whole. State services will probably reduce their commitment to training and development, particularly if they are no longer the chief provider. Those employees whose skills are in demand will in all likelihood exert or reassert professional power. Issues of training, licensing, and credentialing in these groups will arise. The non-profit and for-profit sectors will be drawn more tightly into the service delivery system or structure. What they do will be set by policy developed at the centre, their ongoing behavior controlled and monitored by contract provisions. The likely service-delivery outcomes for people who use our services is unclear, though many fear that there will be even greater inequality of provision than existed under the welfare state as the market processes differentiate between types of providers.

Overall, post-Fordism provides an explanation for many of the processes and outcomes currently being experienced by social

workers. These developments are shaking the context, or more accurately, contexts in which social work is practiced to the very core. It should, however, be acknowledged that post-Fordism is an analytical framework which has been accused of being overly deterministic (in that is positions the economy as the key dynamic), and overly silent about the role of human agency (in that people are represented as relatively powerless pawns). (See Williams, 1994 for a good account of the limits of post-Fordism, and Carter and Raynor, 1996, for a well-argued account of why a post-Fordist analysis may over-emphasize transformist tendencies in welfare states.) Nevertheless, post-Fordism, at a minimum, warns us not to think of welfare or social workers as creatures entirely of our own making. As it relentlessly draws our attention towards the role of the welfare state cum workfare in the mode of governance and regulation associated with economic functioning, it positions social workers and other human service professionals as players in a much larger game.

In conclusion, whatever else it did, the welfare state forged a social bond between citizens, and between citizens and the state. It rested on a sovereign state, the political entity which institutionalized the welfare state to stabilize that social bond. As we have seen, that sovereignty is compromised by economic globalization, albeit to differing degrees depending on the orientation of particular governments. As Devetak and Higgott (1999, p. 487) argue 'the urge for free markets and small government has created asymmetries in the relationship between the global economy and the national state'. Economic globalization does make it harder for governments to compensate for market mechanisms and market failure; it makes it harder to tax capital and thereby to underwrite social cohesion. Finally, it makes it more difficult to run welfare states. In such circumstances, how does the state respond? This question forms the substance of the next chapter.

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4 Challenging Social Work: The Politics of Change

Economic globalization has political dimensions as well as political implications. It is both reality *and* rhetoric. As has been suggested in Chapter 3, associated with economic globalization are very real sets of developments which have placed considerable pressure on sovereign states. But it has a rhetorical dimension as well in that some states and some governments couch their responses in terms of urgency and inevitability, and in doing so, position those responses as the *sole* policy option available to them. The form of politics that has emerged and become dominant in some (but by no means all) countries has been dubbed 'conviction politics' of the 'no alternative' school (Peck, 2001, p. 445), drawing on a highly contested analysis promoted by the 'business school globalization thesis' (Watson and Hay, 2003, p. 291). As an upshot of this, we can see quite different policy trajectories developed to manage states and their economies in the current era, evident in the varying responses of the European countries to those of the Anglo countries of Britain, the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand. In this chapter, I focus specifically on the political responses and policy orientations commonly found in the latter group; on the overall dominant political assemblage of neoliberalism, on associated developments in how the state is both managed and transformed, and on the consequences of those processes.

Attending to this level of response (that is to the politics of change) is important for social workers because, as will become clear, all of the nation states identified above are well advanced in the process of reconstruction. When viewed together and within the broader political logic of neoliberalism, the constellation of processes identified and discussed in this chapter result in a comprehensive re-scaling of governance, social policy and citizenship. In doing so, the assumptions which underpinned the operations of states, and which breathed life into various

concrete modes of social citizenship via access to, for example, social welfare services have been unraveled. Instead, a new set of assumptions is in place which has significant implications for social workers collectively as a group of people committed to the promotion of social citizenship, and individually at the level of day-to-day practice.

The rise of the neoliberal state

Esping-Anderson (1999; 1990) characterized the group of countries identified above as the liberal welfare states, with the emphasis on *liberal*. As liberal states each was, to a greater or lesser degree, committed to the freedom of its citizens who as rational actors sought to advance their own well-being within an institutional framework that both supports and promotes those aspirations. The liberal states were committed economically to the extension and promotion of market forces in society as widely as possible. Politically they were committed to a constitutional state with limited powers of intervention in the economy and society, and an associated commitment to maximizing the formal freedom of legally recognized actors both in the economy and in the public sphere. The latter freedom involved freedom of association of individuals to pursue any activities not forbidden by constitutionally valid law (O'Brien and Penna, 1998).

The *neoliberal* state is both a continuance and more importantly, an intensification of liberalism. What is most interesting about this new mode of liberalism is that it is a form of what Beck (2000) calls 'high politics', in that it presents itself and is represented in the media, for example, as entirely non-political. In other words, it has developed a truth-like stature in public debates which weakens awareness of it as a set of political ideas for which there are credible alternatives. For social theorists Bourdieu and Wacquant (2001), for example, neoliberalism is the new 'planetary vulgate' or biblical text for the contemporary era, its ideas crisscrossing the globe like transcontinental traffic (Wacquant, 1999). For Beck (2000) it is a thought virus, virulently contagious in the liberal welfare states, but nevertheless quite infectious in the others. The prevailing dominance of neoliberalism in the intellectual and practical dimensions of politics serves to limit the

range of politically legitimate options open to governments and to oppositions. This, inevitably, increasingly constrains political debate (Peck, 2001).

While neoliberalism, like liberalism varies according to different national conditions, cultures and histories, it nevertheless has some generic features (Peck and Tickell, 2002). Increasingly, the term 'neoliberalism' has usurped other older and perhaps more familiar labels such as Thatcherism, Regeanomics and Rogernomics which referred to specific political projects in Britain, the USA and New Zealand respectively. Similarly, it is more widely used than its counterparts (for example economic rationalism, monetarism, neoconservatism, managerialism and contractualism).

Larner (2000) suggests that neoliberalism can be interpreted three ways, all of which contribute to an understanding of what it is. It can, for example, be interpreted as a *particular policy framework* emphasizing a shift from the traditional welfare state to a policy framework that focuses on creating the conditions of international competitiveness. The (familiar) policy prescriptions involve the rolling back of welfare state activities and a new emphasis on market provision of public services. Neoliberalism rests on five values: the primacy of the individual, freedom of choice, market security, *laissez faire* and minimal government. These values underpin a body of influential middle-range microeconomic theories which 'carry' the neoliberal reform agenda into the apparatus and functioning of the state and, importantly, its agents. These are transaction costs economics, public choice and agency theory, all of which I discuss in due course, and which taken together provide a relatively coherent theoretical and ideological rationale.

Another interpretation of neoliberalism which deepens our appreciation of it is provided by the types of political economists discussed in the previous chapter (Jessop, 2002b; Peck, 2001; Peck and Tickell, 2002, 1994, 1992). In these interpretations neoliberalism was, in its first manifestation, a set of ideas with intellectual roots traceable back to founding economists Adam Smith and David Ricardo, revived in 1944 by Hayek in his polemic tome, *The Road to Serfdom*. The contemporary intellectual agenda of neoliberalism, called *proto-liberalism* by Peck and Tickell (2002) was forged in conservative think tanks such as the London-based Institute of Economic Affairs and the

Washington-based Heritage Foundation, and in the Economics Department of the University of Chicago (the home of Milton Friedman) from the end of the war to the 1980s. In the 1980s and early 1990s, it developed into what we now know was an extremely significant political strategy, exemplified by Margaret Thatcher in Britain and Ronald Reagan in the USA. Peck and Tickell (2002) call this *roll-back neoliberalism*, in that it was a state program which did just that. As is comprehensively documented, its dominant discourses were those of small government, privatization and de-regulation, its economics were supply-side and monetarist, its spaces and actors of resistance were organized industrial and labor conflict, its casualties were the northern industrial cities of England and Scotland, the rust-belt cities of the USA and the global army of the mass unemployed.

Many predicted that it would fall apart at the seams as the casualties mounted (particularly in the public eye). Instead neoliberalism has transformed itself, become normalized on both sides of contemporary politics, and is increasingly taken for granted. Exemplified by the governments of Bill Clinton in the USA and Tony Blair in the UK (and in an earlier version, in the Australian Hawke-Keating government), the latest mode of neoliberalism has emerged. It is a more technocratic and managerial form of neoliberalism operationalized by cadres of political advisers and public servants within government and supported by new sets of ideas about how to achieve the good society drawn not only from economics, but also from sociology (for example, Giddens, 1998). Peck and Tickell (2002) call this, the latest and contemporary phase, *roll-out neoliberalism*. Here, they argue, it has acquired a diffuse but consolidated form, and its central tenants are now firmly entrenched within mainstream political thought. It is characterized by marketized service delivery systems, low levels of inflation, full employability instead of full employment, government debt retirement and moral authoritarianism towards segments of the population (for example, the unemployed and welfare-dependent single parents). Internal resistance within left-leaning political parties has collapsed and/or has re-located out into the social movements and the anti-globalization confrontations. One of the most important implications of this deepening of neoliberalism has been the (often successful) attempts to sequester economic policy issues beyond the formal institutions

of politics and place them beyond the arenas of contestation behind the (closed) doors of central banks. Again, it is important to remember that such trajectories depend on the contexts in which they are enacted. As indicated previously, while Britain has the Blair Government, Australia had an earlier version of neoliberal rule in the Labor Hawke-Keating government, whose policy trajectory has subsequently intensified under an incoming conservative government. The central point to appreciate is that roll-back and roll-out neoliberalism represent *ideas* or a *model* about how neoliberalism developed, the actual manifestation of which varies according to local contingencies.

A third way of interpreting neoliberalism is found in what is known as the *governmentality* literature (Larner, 2000; Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999; Dean and Hindess, 1998). Drawing on the work of Michel Foucault, this is a literature which I discuss in more depth in the next chapter. For the purposes of this discussion, neoliberalism is understood by governmentality scholars less as a policy framework or set of ideas and practices of government, and more as a wide-ranging and all-encompassing mode of *governance* involving a complex and inter-connected array of state and non-state processes and sites. This new mode of governance re-draws the relationship between social and economic thought, and all aspects of social behavior are reconfigured along economic lines. Rose (1999) for example, illustrates how neoliberalism encourages governments to reject the ideal of a welfare state which takes direct responsibility for arranging the affairs of a nation. Re-vamped liberal states become *enabling states* that govern indirectly, by activating and promoting a range of non-state processes. Neoliberal states, for example, govern by acting on an individual's choices to promote such desirable economic ends as a flexible workforce engaged in life-long learning and responsive to the needs of a globalized economy. It is a way of thinking about neoliberal governance which draws together a range of developments: for example the re-shaping of the relationship between professionals and the state, the rise of risk technologies, the explosion of audit as a mechanism for government regulation, and the reconstitution of citizens as consumers. It helps explain why it is that the neoliberal state is often *more* not *less* interventionist in the lives of its citizens in that it reveals how the state reaches inside communities and families to activate their capacity for

self-governance. It also helps explain why, for example, the neoliberal state can (and often does) involve *more* expenditure that traditional liberal governments as it organizes and rationalizes its interventions in diverse, fragmented and spatially dispersed ways.

Each of these three ways of thinking about neoliberalism allow us to appreciate its dimensions and its subtlety as a political strategy, and one which represents not a break with the past but an intensification and magnification of trends and impulses embedded within liberalism. As indicated earlier, neoliberalism is the dominant political rationality in the Anglo nations, but also in other parts of the world. Many of its prescriptions, for example about how states should organize themselves, have been transported into the so-called developing nations by the World Bank and the IMF, via the 'first' and 'second' generations of reforms nominated by their Structural Adjustment Programs (Common, 1998; World Bank, 1997). In these instances, and in the case of the Anglo nations, one of the primary agendas and consequential effects has been a re-configuration of the state. Given the importance of the state to the bureau-profession of social work, these developments are of considerable concern. It is to this that we now turn.

From governing to governance

For some time now, the public administration literature has discussed the phenomenon known as the 'hollowing out' of the state, referring to neoliberal-inspired developments in public sector management. To illustrate the extent of change, I first establish a base-line of what went before, particularly in the Anglo nations. Clearly, each of these nation states organized the process of governance differently, and no single 'pure' model existed. Nevertheless, some core principles guided the development of the public administrative apparatus and its role in governance. These are, for example, an apolitical civil service in which public servants have no discernible political allegiances and which can serve any master but within a clear framework of serving the public, a hierarchical organizational design in which the processes of work are constrained by explicit and formal rules, life-long employment tenure, and a focus on administrative equity. Under the old model, when a public sector body was responsible for

a function, it carried out that function itself with its own staff. Finally, public servants were held accountable to the public via elected representatives.

For a variety of (again) contested reasons, the traditional model was at a minimum undermined, and in some cases (such as in Britain and New Zealand) thoroughly disgraced. Pressure for change came most directly from the political right, expressed in their desire to replace the traditional model with a marketized and minimalist state. These turn of events resulted in the coining of a new term to capture the parlous state of the traditional model – the *overloaded state* (Skelcher, 2000). Responding to increasing perceptions of the un-governability of complex industrialized democracies, the overloaded state adherents pointed to such developments in the 1970s in particular of rampant industrial unrest, industrial decline and increasing public cynicism about the welfare state and the associated economic management model. The overall conclusion was that government was in crisis, that the institutions of government had seriously over-reached themselves and that reform was both inevitable and highly desirable.

Accordingly, the overloaded state was replaced by the *hollow state*. Two influential students of public administration have been largely responsible for the growing popularity of the hollow state or hollow crown thesis. One is American (Peters, 1996) and the other British (Rhodes, 1994). Drawing on their analyses, four inter-related trends can be observed which stem from the loss of legitimacy of the overloaded state: the privatization and limitation of the scope and forms of public intervention; loss of functions by government departments to alternative service delivery systems; the loss of functions by government to transnational institutions (such as the European Union); and the curtailment of public service discretion. Such processes, it is said, have rendered the state a shadow of its former self.

But has the state hollowed out? According to some commentators (for example Sbragia, 2000), the hollow state thesis has been overstated and relies too much on an eccentric period of specifically British history (the Thatcher years). While evidence can be mounted that the state is fragmented, it should be noted that it was ever thus. Because of its powerful and undiminished resource-allocation functions the state retains considerable control, albeit within a fragmented and often loosely coordinated

system. The belief that the state is shrinking has been influenced by the fate that had befallen the welfare part of it. In public perceptions the 'big state' was inevitably hitched to the expansive and expensive publicly provided social programs, income security payments and other programs which mediated the relationship between capitol and labor. As the welfare state has been cut back, the traditional role of government *appears* to be under assault. This view relies on a quite narrow perception of the entirety of the state, and in doing so, fails to account for the *actual* range of state activity, unaffected or minimally affected by cut backs. Indeed, in some areas (such as law and order and security) state activity has actually expanded.

What the hollow state thesis really implies is a shift in the form of government to one of governance. Governance is a much over-used word in contemporary policy and political discourse, ranging from a blanket term re-defining the extent and form of public intervention coupled with the use of markets and quasi-markets to deliver public services, all the way to prescriptions of how to manage corporations. It can also refer to such principles and practices as: an efficient public service, an independent judicial system and legal framework to enforce contracts, the accountable administration of public funds, an independent public auditor responsible to a representative legislature, respect for law and human rights at all levels of government, a pluralistic institutional structure and a free press. Championed by the World Bank in the 'developing' nations, this mode of governance essentially involves a form of neocolonialist advocacy of liberal democracy as 'best practice' in government.

More recently governance is understood as an integrated, inter-dependent, mutually co-operative system of social sectors (government, market, voluntary, informal) in which central government is no longer necessarily supreme. Here, governance becomes a broader term and a broader process no longer purely confined to the activities of a government, with services provided by any permutation of the state in conjunction or *partnership* with the private and voluntary sectors. In this sense, governance means managing networks and centrally involves social coordination. In the social welfare field, this is reflected in the development and management of a mixed economy of welfare in which the state works with families, local communities, business and the voluntary

sector in the provision of a range of supports and services. In most of the Anglo countries, this form of governance, sometimes known as the *networked state*, is dominant. To understand both *why* and *how* the traditional model of government was reworked, we need to turn to a body of intermediate mid-range microeconomic theorizing which carried the intent of the neoliberal political project into the operations of the state and into the field of welfare. Again, this is a set of hugely influential ideas which have transformed the organizational contexts of professional social work practice. Strangely, they are ideas which are barely acknowledged, must least discussed in the social work literature.

The microeconomics of new public management

The constellation of management prescriptions for re-engineering the state are known as New Public Management (NPM). Under NPM a new set of management doctrines take precedence, to greater or lesser degrees, depending on the jurisdiction. Some countries (such as New Zealand and Britain) went further along the NPM path than, for example, Australia. In all the Anglo countries the field of welfare has been decisively incorporated into the management reform programs informed by NPM. The sorts of policy prescriptions are: a shift of focus by public sector leaders from policy to management, an emphasis on quantifiable performance measurements and appraisal, the break-up of traditional bureaucratic structures into quasi-autonomous units, dealing with one another on a user-pays basis, market-testing and competitive tendering instead of in-house provision, a strong emphasis on cost-cutting, output targets rather than input controls, limited-term contracts for state employees instead of career tenure, monetized incentives instead of fixed salaries, 'freedom to manage' instead of central personnel control, more use of public relations and advertising and encouragement of self-regulation instead of legislation (Hood, 1991).

Notably, management authorities Osborne and Gaebler (1992, p. 20) argued that NPM is *entrepreneurial*:

> Most entrepreneurial governments promote competition between service providers. They empower citizens by pushing control out of the bureaucracy, into the community. They measure the performance

> of their agencies, focusing not on inputs but on outcomes. They are driven by their goals – their missions – not by their rules and regulations. They redefine their clients as customers and offer choices. They prevent problems before they emerge, rather than simply offering services afterwards. They put their energies into earning money rather then simply spending it. They decentralize authority, embracing participatory management. They prefer market mechanisms to bureaucratic mechanisms. And they focus not simply on providing public services, but on catalyzing all sectors – public private and voluntary – into action to solve their community's problems.

The concepts of NPM are drawn largely from an interconnected group of theories applied to the business of government – transaction costs theory (Williamson, 1975), public choice theory (Buchanan and Tullock, 1980) and principal-agent theory (Grossman and Hart, 1983). It is the latter two of these that are of singular interest to social workers because far-reaching decisions have been and continue to be informed by them, but as indicated above, do not reside in our field of knowledge and more worryingly, are rarely acknowledged by it. Just as neoclassical economics (the economic version of neoliberalism) is centrally implicated in the reconfiguration of national economies, public choice and principal-agent theories re-configure the state.

Public choice theory is the study of politics based on economic principles, with a key assumption that politicians and public servants (in fact everyone including social workers) are motivated by self-interest. They are self-interested utility maximizers. Reasoning deductively, economists consider what a rational actor (a consumer, an entrepreneur, a trade unionist, a politician, a public servant, a social worker) would do to maximize his or her chances of getting what he or she wants or to gain some advantage. In the language of public choice, rational actors *maximize their own return*. Those involved in government, however, have the job of providing public goods and services. But they are rational actors and as such, will use their position for material self-advancement and enrichment. A consequence of this from the public choice perspective is that policy is distorted away from the preferences and interests of the majority of citizens towards those of the elite and those who put policy into practice. The entrepreneurial and rational actor characteristics of public servants cause them to run public sector agencies in their own

interests rather than in the interests of economic and social efficiency. In public choice theory terminology, this is known as *rent seeking*.

From a public choice perspective, the role of values or ideology is irrelevant. If anything, values and ideologies serve to mask rational action. Values such as altruism, commitment to social justice, commitment to the notion of professionalism and sets of professional ethics, or commitment to the ideals of an impartial public service – all of these have little place in public choice theory. Public choice prescriptions for the business of politics and government seek to *constrain* the power of politicians. Similarly, public choice prescriptions for government seek to constrain the power and discretion of public servants (for example, social workers) by, for example, exposing public functions to competitive tendering. Another tactic is the relocation of government functions outside of government (contracting out). By such processes, public choice-inspired reforms have influenced the redesign of state organizations (for example, corporatization, the establishment of separate business units within organizations, and introduction of internal markets). It has also inspired the search for more efficient use of money and people. Furthermore, whereas once such functions were substantially supported by consolidated revenue, they are now funded increasingly from user charges and co-payments.

Agency theory is a particularly influential strand of public choice theory. It introduced many of the principles that now characterize public service delivery including social welfare, for example, the concepts of *principals* and *agents*. Agency theory examines the relationship between principals and agents. A principal is she who sets the task; an agent is he who implements it. The central problem for principals is how to control agents, particularly opportunistic rent seeking agents. Popularized by Osborne and Gaebler (1992) in one of that decade's most influential books, *Reinventing Government*, the metaphors *steering* and *rowing* introduced the model to the public sector.

According to principal-agent theory, principals have two broad strategies for keeping agents in line. First, there are structural solutions (that is, increasing the information available to principals through performance indicators and increased financial accountability). Second, there are contractual solutions (that is,

opening up internal operations of state agencies to various forms of tender, thereby creating competition or increasing contestability through the use of contracts). Contracts are the key medium negotiating the relationship between principals and agents. Relationships constructed within a contract are subject to contract law, and can be enforced though legal action. In a good contract, the tasks are clearly defined, the responsibilities of the agent delineated, performance indicators set. Contracting, by its specified and regulated nature, is thought to overcome the risks of rent seeking inherent in principal-agent relationships. In this way, accountability is maximized and effects of rent seeking behavior are minimized.

The use of these microeconomic concepts in NPM is more than a decade old and shows little sign of fading away, underscoring the imperatives for social workers to understand both the theories and their effects. Not only do they re-configure the state as a site for social workers to engage in practice, they also create new sites run on different and unfamiliar principles. These issues, particularly as they relate to the actual practice of social work, will be explored in some depth in Chapter 6. Here, we turn to a discussion of some other developments in the new politics of welfare. The first of these is the spectacular rise of a new mode of risk and risk management as a core task of government.

The Renaissance of risk

Welfare states have always managed risk and for social workers, risk is not an unfamiliar construct. In the new circumstances confronting us however, the traditional orientation of welfare states to risk management through income security policies and programs and other social services has waned. Clearly, many life risks faced by citizens are still mostly managed by the provision and use of welfare, but public welfare consumption in whatever form is an increasingly residual activity confined to fewer and fewer people. In contrast to the past, contemporary policy debates deploy risk in two main ways – first, as seemingly technical fix to an (overloaded) system, and second, as a moral discourse inscribing new identities. In the first, developments associated with late modernity are held to pose new sets of risks that the existing

institutional arrangements of the welfare state cannot manage. In the second the notion of risk is employed through neoliberal discourse to reject and invalidate the welfare state, to problematize welfare dependency, and individualize responsibility for managing life course risks.

In the first usage, social policy theorists and practitioners are returning to the concept of risk, but do so to provide an analytical framework to think about change, rather than justify the post-war Keynesian welfare state (see Goodin, 2000; Taylor-Gooby, 2000; Esping-Anderson, 1999). The core thesis of such arguments is that the institutional arrangements of the post-war welfare state were designed to manage certain types of risks and to respond to the risk structure of its times; predicated on the prevailing family type and prevailing labor market conditions. As these conditions have disappeared and as the family disintegrates, the role of policy is to promote alternative institutional arrangements to manage the emergent categories of risk. An example, drawn from Australia (and watched carefully by other countries) was the development of compulsory occupational superannuation to privately fund the retirements of future generations of aging people.

In the second category, the concept of risk is employed largely as a political strategy (see Culpitt, 1999; Rose, 1999). Specifically, these authors develop an analysis that shows how the dominant political discourses of neoliberalism have problematized welfare dependency, and privatized the management of all forms of care and responsibility. In other words, they show how it is that risk is employed as a device to legitimize the winding back of collective responsibility for managing social dependencies, social problems, and even the small problems of everyday life. Furthermore, they show us how it is that the new strategies of managing social dependencies as 'risk' involves the ascription of particular categories of people to new, highly disciplined and socially excluded social identities. This way of thinking about risk provides us with a means to 'read' such influential authors as Lawrence Mead (1986), whose ideas underpin a whole raft of policy initiatives introduced in western liberal democracies. What Mead does in his work is to position the dependent as a 'risky' group of people, requiring a whole new strategic response (welfare reform) which is, at the same time, an entirely new political strategy (workfare).

Taking citizenship to the market

A second and perhaps more important implication of the new politics of welfare is the re-shaping of citizenship. Again, this is a development which is of central interest to social workers because it re-shapes how the state views the people who use social work services. One of the features of modern western democracies is that they have governed individuals as *citizens*. In the neoliberal regimes, they continue to govern citizens, but the question turns to the type of citizens being created. Traditionally, the citizen was understood as a rights-bearing individual who, depending on the type of welfare regime in place, made claims on the state. Under the liberal democratic model the citizen was constructed as a member of a political community whose interests were collectively expressed by the system of governance. The citizen contracted into the social and political community of the nation, and in so doing, both created and contracted with the body politic. The citizen, by becoming a member of the body politic, created along with other citizens a collective or public will. In other words there was a collective, an *all-of-us* that the state embodied, which has responsibility for us and duty to govern us. In this context, social rights translated into social welfare services and other forms of support provided by the state (Bulmer and Rees, 1996).

Accompanying the neoliberal project has been a steady weakening of the welfare citizenship model, and as we have seen in this and the previous chapter, a concomitant deterioration of the institutions of citizenship. Instead, the application of the neoliberal political strategy to the apparatus of the state through NPM has lead to the marketization and individualization of citizenship. The shrinking of the state through privatization partially devolves the institutional site for 20th century citizenship into the private sphere. While there are clear variances between nation states in the extent to which this has occurred, the starkest example of this is the rise of the 'corporate social worker' in the United States where, routinely, welfare services such as child care and disability support services are provided by large corporations such as Maximus Inc and Lockheed-Martin (Frumkin and Andre-Clark, 1999). Indeed, under conditions of welfare reform in that country (and increasingly in others such as Australia), social citizenship has practically no place. Further, as nations

follow the prescriptions of the OECD and de-regulate their labor markets, employment and decent working conditions cease being citizenship rights, but become something differentially extended by employers to their workers dependent on market considerations alone (Crouch, Eder and Tambini, 2001). In this way, the rights of citizenship are further devolved to and dependent on the capacities and characteristics of individuals.

Currently, the developments in the public sector resulting from the application of NPM are fundamentally reconstructing the relationship between the citizen, the public and the state. In the emerging set of arrangements, the contractual relationship between the collective or the body politic and the state is replaced by a new contractual relationship, a 'radically disaggregated and individualized relationship to governance' (Yeatman, 1996, p. 285). In other words, a type of *radical individualism* is emerging; a heroic '*I*', replacing the *'we'* embodied in the liberal democratic model. One of the most cogent expressions of this was made by Margaret Thatcher who once famously asserted that there is no such thing as society; rather, there are only individuals. In effect, she was referring to a retreat from acknowledging any collective, and an accompanying assertion of the heroic individual as the unit of reference for government.

Rediscovering community

The third implication of the politics of neoliberalism as expressed in NPM is the reassertion of *community* – a development which has the potential to disguise many of its implications, particularly to social workers who, for quite some time, saw community as an arena of constructive practice. The 'community' of NPM however is one which has become a central location for the operations of neoliberal politics. At the same time and very confusingly, community is taken up and promoted by many on the political left as an alternative space for re-invigorating forms of citizenship and reconstructing of social bonds. In this murky and contradictory conceptual space, a complex matrix of ideas incorporating and promoting such idealized phenomena as social capital and civil society are attempting to articulate the new and alternative political strategy to neoliberalism, while at the same time, being taken up by it (McDonald and Marston, 2002).

Political manifestations of community, such as that promoted by Blair's Third Way in Britain, draw heavily on the morality of communitarianism. This approach is expressed in a number of key concepts articulated within a framework of valorized community; rights and responsibilities, stake holding, inclusion, and partnership. As a political strategy, it promotes a central role for non-state community-level structures, and non-state collectivities as active welfare agents in the lives of British citizens. Communities are promoted as an essential part of the new 'good society'.

These new politics of community have been reconstituted as a central terrain of political debate and contention (Everingham, 2001, p. 105). Community is asserted as both the site of and solution to the social problems associated with the new economic conditions of a globally competitive economy. With its multiple meanings and undefined ideas, the matrix of ideas surrounding the promotion of community as a political strategy provides a binding rhetoric. In these circumstances, community becomes a very powerful discourse, legitimizing and inscribing various forms of strategy, often mobilized via the operations of national welfare reform projects. Depending on the particular strategic intent, community is invoked as a locality, as an undifferentiated network of tax-payers to whom obligation is owed, as arenas for consultation and participation, as enabling and facilitative place of welfare service provision, as localities in need of public and private investment, as participants in and spaces of partnerships, and as sites for surveillance and enforcement (Cass and Brennan, 2002). This vision of welfare and society presupposes that all citizens, but particularly those who use welfare, belong to a close enduring community of citizens who have interests in common. Unfortunately this assumption, while convenient to the politics of the moment, is flawed. As social workers know only too well, many people who use welfare are isolated and marginalized, or in the parlance of the times, excluded.

Why does all this matter? Why is it important for social workers to understand the politics of neoliberalism, and the ideas, operations and implications of NPM? Why is the rise of risk, the marketization of citizenship and the valorization of community important? These developments matter because they fundamentally and comprehensively reconfigure the role, responsibility and responses of government to the collective citizenry that constitute

nations, and to individual citizens. It is here that this development intersects with core business of social work; that is addressing and advocating for the interests of particular, mostly marginalized and disadvantaged individuals and groups. Modern social work draws its primary auspice and moral authority from expressions of the public good, collective responsibility and social justice, notions currently disappearing from the domain of the state as it reshapes itself. On another more profound level, these developments at the level of politics have significant implications for a profession whose prefix is 'social'. Social work draws much of its meaning, its sense of identity and its legitimacy from ideas that have currency in social and to lesser extent liberal democratic models of governance. In other words, it draws its legitimacy from models of governance which *recognize* the social dimension. Currently, social work and social workers are increasingly located in states that are no longer welfare states, but are becoming or have already become, workfare states. What then, are the implications for social work and for the people who use social work services? How these processes drill down to the coal face of social work practice and welfare service use forms the substance of Chapters 6 and 7. But before turning to that, there is one other set of developments challenging social work – developments in the realm of ideas. Explaining these and identifying the implications for social work forms the theme of Chapter 5.

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5 Challenging Social Work: The Ideas of Change

As if the economic and political developments discussed in the previous chapters were not enough to contend with, a further challenge faces the profession; in this instance one which operates at a quite different level. Indeed, a very important question confronts social work. Does the emergence of a body of thought, loosely known as postmodernism (which claims to be a radical shift in the foundation of knowledge) have any relevance for the profession? It constitutes an *epistemological* challenge, in that it calls into question the profession's knowledge base. It is also an *ontological* challenge if such a thing can be said to exist in relation to a profession. By this I mean that the notions that social workers might have about themselves as, for example, advocates and change agents for human betterment, are destabilized. At a minimum, developments in theory are critical of assumptions social workers might make about the progressive purposes and positive identities of social work, both collectively and individually. Originating largely with a group of French intellectuals in the 1970s, the challenges arising from this complex body of thought have, since then, spread into many disciplines and practices. It has spawned an intellectual project (or more accurately projects) of such breadth, depth and complexity that a single chapter cannot possibly hope to capture its dimensions, much less its import. It is even difficult to know what to call it. Is it, for example, most accurately represented as postmodernism or post-structuralism? Or has the *oeuvre* moved sufficiently to warrant an entirely new name? Given the lack of coherence within the total body of work, it is easier said than done to make clear distinctions, and for my purposes here, such distinctions are largely unnecessary. Rather, because of the pervasiveness of the genre and its rapid penetration into so many disciplines related to social work I shall, throughout this chapter, refer to it as *contemporary theory.*

I wish to do several things here, the first of which is to develop an appreciation of the nature of the challenge posed to social work. This, I suggest, is very important. While there are several very good discussions of contemporary theory and its relations to social work in the professional literature (see, for example, Powell, 2001; Healy, 2000; Leonard, 1997), few of these clearly spell out *why* contemporary theory is so destabilizing. I attempt to do this in the first part of this chapter, hopefully in a manner which is accessible to readers, for unfortunately, much of this body of work is not! My second purpose is to briefly canvass how the profession is responding, partially pre-figuring a more detailed discussion of options for the future in Part 2. Following this, I illustrate how concepts and analyses drawn from contemporary theory can be useful to social work. This latter discussion, by virtue of my personal orientation and limitations (as well as those posed by the relative brevity of the chapter), is partial and idiosyncratic at best. I include it to provide one, no doubt limited example of *how* an individual social worker might usefully think about contemporary theory. Those readers who wish to pursue it further should consult an introductory work such as Rosenau (1992) who provides a reasonably accessible yet scholarly initiation.

Before beginning, it must be acknowledged that the relevance and utility of contemporary theory to social work is a highly contested issue. Parts of the social work academy consider its application to the professional project to be more characteristic of intellectual fashion, frivolous at best and nihilistic and destructive at worst; a way of thinking that the profession should not become obsessed with (see Noble, 2004; Powell, 2001; Ife, 1999; Midgley, 1999a; Wakefield, 1998). Others are embracing it and are attempting to incorporate (certain) theoretical insights into how social work might regard itself, and how social workers might go about their practice (Fawcett, Featherstone, Fook and Rossiter, 2000; Healy, 2000; Parton and O'Byrne, 2000). The position I take is that, tempting as it might be, social work cannot ignore or dismiss contemporary theory because, as an intellectual genre, it is just too big, too pervasive, and too influential in shaping thought in our foundation disciplines. Furthermore, it is not going to go away in the foreseeable future. The critical task for social work in relation to contemporary theory is, I suggest,

reaching some appreciation of what is useful and what is less so. To do that however, social workers need to grasp the nature of the challenge.

Unsettling social work knowledge and practice

At its most basic, contemporary theory is a reaction to modernity (which was discussed in Chapter 2). Briefly recapping, modernity is a set of philosophical principles held to be the foundation of modern knowledge. These principles incorporate and promote the tradition of rationality initiated in the Enlightenment, a largely European philosophical movement characterized by rationalism, by an impetus towards learning, by a spirit of skepticism and by empiricism in social and political thought. Human progress (as opposed to the maintenance of traditions) was held to be desirable, and the development of industrialized society informed by scientific knowledge was positioned as the key means of achieving it. The Enlightenment project is also known as the 'project of modernity' (Habermas, 1987), and was based on two related sets of assumptions: humanism and objective reality.

Humanism is an extremely complex body of thought with several main variants (Davies, 1997). Secular humanism, the variant of most interest to modern social work, holds the individual to be the ultimate source of value and is dedicated to fostering the individual's creative and moral development in meaningful and rational ways, and without reference to the supernatural. Human beings are not merely reflections of God. Rather, each person possesses a unique essence or human nature along with the capacity for rational consciousness. This essence is, nevertheless, transcendental because it rises above and beyond individual circumstances. An individual self is not wholly socially determined, but exists *a priori* to engagement in society. In this way, the individual or the *subject* of modernity is born. The humanistic conception of a coherent subject stands separate from objective reality. This subject is capable of knowing the other; is capable of knowing the world external to self, and to which our language and perceptions refer. This *subject-object dualism* leads to the notion of *representational knowledge*.

From an Enlightenment-informed humanistic standpoint, the mind is conceived as a mirror that reflects an objective and

external reality. Knowledge and its development concerns itself with assessing and refining the accuracy of the mirror's reflections. Knowledge generation becomes the means by which 'true' or 'truer' reflections of the outside world or objective reality is developed. Truth is seen as the correspondence between thought and language. The human subject can (theoretically) become the coherent, authentic source of interpretation of the meaning of reality. The project of modernity is the pursuit of truth that has the character of certainty. Knowledge is truth. Science, including the social sciences objectively developed and correctly interpreted, is true. Social science *represents* the world.

It is this fundamental premise that contemporary theory unsettles (Rosenau, 1992), and in doing so, undermines the knowledge base of modernist enterprises such as social work (Parton, 1994). Knowledge (or truth) from this perspective is not detached from the subject, but is inevitably a human artifact or creation (Murphy, 1988). The reasons why contemporary theory is so destabilizing to modernist knowledge are quite complex, but it is worth engaging to begin to appreciate the nature of the challenge. Much of the contemporary critique of representational knowledge starts with linguistics, and with an early 20th century structural linguist called de Saussure (Rossiter, 2000). His basic premises were that language, far from reflecting an objective reality, constitutes reality for us and that neither social reality nor the 'natural' world has fixed intrinsic meanings which language reflects or expresses. Saussure assumed that meaning is made possible by the existence of an underlying system of linguistic and social conventions, in contrast to the notion that language reflects reality. Meaning is constituted within language, and is not guaranteed by the subject that speaks it. In other words, the origin of meaning is not in the individual speaker (the rational humanistic subject), but lies in the language itself.

Key contemporary theorist, Jacques Derrida (1976), developed this further by questioning the notion that signs (words) have a fixed meaning, recognized by the self-conscious awareness of the rational subject. For Derrida, specific meanings are always located in *discursive contexts* and in *discourses*. But what is a discursive context? What is a discourse? A discourse is a structure of knowledge, claims and practices through which we understand things and through which we decide to do things. Discourses

define all sorts of phenomena: obligations and the distribution of responsibilities for example, or the authority of different categories of people such as social workers and clients (Parton and O'Byrne, 2000). A discourse is a framework or grid of social organization that makes some forms of social action possible while excluding others. A discursive context is the context or arena in which particular discourses are enacted. A social work assessment interview is a discursive context – as is this book. Every discursive context is different from every other and every discursive moment is unlike every other. Meaning constantly shifts; it is open to definition and redefinition in different contexts and in different moments. Meaning depends on the discursive relations in which it is located, and is open to reinterpretation again and again.

Derrida developed an analytic process known as *deconstruction*, a method of grasping the 'unwritten' in texts, for example the unacknowledged biases of accepted representational knowledge. In doing so, he was critical of the notion that there is a 'truth', or an unequivocal 'best' way of knowing. This type of theoretical perspective poses a significant challenge to all modernist modes of thinking which rely on representational knowledge, and in its wake, to social work theory and practice. The explanatory models and theories commonly employed in the field of social work – at the macro-level of policy analysis and the micro-level of the worker-client encounter – become unstuck. An 'emotionally disturbed client', for example, is not recognized/constituted by the rational mind of the social worker assessing an objective reality inherent in the service user. Rather, both the client and the therapist are understood to be 'resident in' (or created by) the 'talk' or discursive formation of the 'pathological model'. Contemporary theory suggests that we can no longer trustingly accept the assertions and analyses of social theories as being unequivocally true. The modes of analysis and guiding assumptions of both neo-marxist theories of society and psychological theories of personality, for example, unravel. Furthermore, as they are deconstructed, the unsaid orientations and hidden biases are brought to the surface and the theories themselves are revealed as discourses which create one truth by denying others. The gender biases of some Marxist accounts and the cultural biases of some western psychology are, for example, revealed. For contemporary theory, the notion that there are fundamental principles of social

organization or that there is a elemental human psyche is questioned. Social organization is better thought of as multiple discursive contexts in which social relations between the social worker and the service user are constituted. Notions of the human psyche deployed by social workers in practice encounters with clients are, from this point of view, texts awaiting deconstruction. In this way, readers can begin to see how the knowledge platforms and assumptions underpinning social work appear to fold under the weight of theoretical developments. But it doesn't end there!

Other foundational theorists in the *oeuvre* such as Lyotard (1984) and Foucault (1976, 1980) are similarly anti-'truth'. They point out that despite its hopes, the project of modernity has not produced much emancipation. The promise of continuous enlightenment is confuted by calamities such as senseless wars, genocide and urban decay (Leonard, 1997). It was Lyotard, for example, who famously employed the notion of *incredulity towards grand narratives*; those influential perspectives on history and society developed, for example, by Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud. Lyotard maintained that it is not possible tell large stories about the world, only small local stories from multiple, heterogeneous subject positions of individuals and social groups. Foucault, on the other hand, insisted that what is understood as 'knowledge' can (and must) be traced to the different discursive practices in which it is generated. In other words, there are a range of discourses and practices that make up various localized *knowledges*. Social scientific knowledge constitutes what are called *regimes of truth* which can (at worst) silence or (at best) discount other knowledges and ways of knowing. Contemporary theory is profoundly mistrustful of this aspect of the social sciences, particularly when they conceal their own investment in a particular view of the world and their privileged position in the modernist regime of truth.

In so far as it relies on social science, social work knowledge is equally suspect. I present two key examples. First, contemporary theory disrupts the idea of the subject as an *a priori* self-contained being who is the holder of sense and meaning. This mode of subjectivity infuses all social work knowledge, and it is the mode upon which we assume we act when we practice. From the perspective of contemporary theory, this mode of self has largely disappeared, leaving in its wake a jumbled surfeit of potential

identities. The social work assumption that there is a self who can be known or brought to know itself (through social work interventions), is reduced to acknowledgement that social workers, as practitioners, both engage with and promote one (or more) possible identity (ies) among many. Foucault, for example, would be curious about the implications of the client-self we create in our practice. He would suggest, (and this constitutes the second example), that social work practice theories propel a particular complex of 'truths' which serve instead to fabricate the individual or constitute the subject on which it acts. We 'create' social work clients with particular attributes and dispositions (for example, as co-dependent, anxious, disempowered) which at the same time, shuts down possibilities and disallows the expression of alternatives. In this way, contemporary theory would argue that social work practice theory (and social work practice) produces the very bodies and minds (and their 'problems') that we seek to ameliorate (Jeffreys, 2003).

Clearly contemporary theory challenges social work practice in many ways, not all of which we can canvas here. Some examples are, nevertheless, instructive. According to some writers contemporary theory challenges the profession's idea of its humanist mission (Margolin, 1997). Prior to the rise of social work, political surveillance by government of certain (marginalized) populations was largely restricted to the public domain of the school or the street. With the advent and development of social work, governments were able to keep track of people in their homes and within their personal relationships. Social work, Margolin claims, mystifies and normalizes these intrusive aspects of itself into the lives of its clients. In like vein (and for Rossiter, 2000), contemporary theory creates a 'crisis of identity' about who social workers really are and what social workers actually do.

Contemporary theory challenges social work in what it positions as the profession's extremely naïve, but for the profession, fortuitous understanding of power. Foucault, for example, would suggest that modern forms of power (such as those in which social work is enmeshed) are, paradoxically, most potent when they are concealed, as they tend to be in social work relations (Foucault, 1982). What Foucault means is that social workers are so industrious in working to weaken or overcome unequal power relations between themselves and their clients that their efforts

conceal the fact that such power relations cannot be broken down, and that social workers' activities contribute to their maintenance. For authors such as Margolin (1997) and Leonard (1997), social work adopts a particularly insidious form of denial about power. Social work denies the productive capacities of power, for example to make identities. It also denies the ubiquitous deployment of power, especially its repressive capacities in all aspects of human experience, including every act of social work. More importantly, what contemporary social theory does is open up a new and finely grained sociology of social control, both for the management of deviance as well as the administration of normalcy (Agger, 1991). As I demonstrate in the next section of the chapter, it is a sociology which centrally implicates the profession.

Social work, society and social control

It is here that the work of Foucault (1977; 1965) offers insights which have the capacity to reinvigorate existing if somewhat stagnant debates about the relationship between social work and social control (see for example, Day, 1981), particularly in his analysis of crime, punishment and madness. He showed, for example, how criminology creates the category of criminality, subsequently punitively imposed on behaviors that were formerly disregarded or ignored. Foucault's approach would suggest that social work creates the subject of welfare (the client or service user) in everyday practice encounters in a similar fashion. The social work subject has (or should have) a rational ego, and is (or should be) self-determining. Foucault reveals that such a subject is created by discourses that divide people into groups: in his case the division of reason and unreason, sanity and madness. Such a *binary divide* was necessary for the establishment of psychiatry, an edifice of ideas that constitute a *discursive formation*. By creating the discourse of reason versus unreason, the mad are effectively separated from the sane, and psychiatry becomes the bearer of reason into the world of unreason.

Both the welfare state and social work developed upon such binary divides, some of which became the ground on which professional social work practice formed: good from bad, law-abiding from criminal, healthy from sick, good mothers from bad mothers, and poverty from pauperism. Social work practice theory

is the discursive formation for our engagement and social work subjects (clients) are located within discursive constructs drawn from practice theory such as those listed above. They constitute subject positions which carry with them both a moral judgment and permission for moral instruction by state-authorized actors. Drawing on the insights of Leonard (1997) and Dean (1999), we can both illustrate and appreciate the mode of analysis by examining the most pressing and contemporary divide central to the global project of welfare reform: that between dependence and independence. As is well known, those pressing for welfare reform argue that the welfare state creates pathological and debilitating dependence; presented as an economic, social and/or individual malaise. The subject position of 'welfare dependent' is one in which the individual is likely to experience (alongside income support payments) subjection, which positions that person as an object of both ethical judgment and/or moral reform. Such ethical judgment legitimates increased state surveillance. Moral reform of the welfare dependent subject only occurs when that person shifts their dependency from the state to the labor market or from the state to the family.

The welfare dependent is a discursive construct, explicitly contrasted to another, the independent worker; a subject position which signifies autonomy, industriousness and self-reliance. Further, categories such as the welfare mother constitute conceptual repositories for social minorities, for example African-American single parents in the United States. This classification of troublesome populations parallels Foucault's account of the separation of madness from sanity as a necessary precondition for the establishment of the mental health profession. The same process gave rise to the establishment of welfare professions such as social work, discourses rooted in the claim that scientific judgments can be made on the basis of such classifications. Such processes are nevertheless always contested, and are always a site of struggle and resistance. The social worker as case manager and her client meet, for example, and in that meeting the exercise of power and the production of resistance results in continuous contestation.

The entire complex of the formal and informal procedures of surveillance and intervention, of acting on ourselves, by the state, by the community, by families and by our very selves are processes of *governmentality*, the regime of discipline, or the

conduct of conduct wherein we both govern and are governed simultaneously. The social worker is one of the modern professions charged with the conduct of conduct, most specifically the conduct of *risky* populations. Our clients, the subjects of modernity, 'know' things about themselves. Such indigenous knowledge is, when brought alongside and compared with professional knowledge, given lesser status or even discounted, except where self-disclosure is used to confirm professional judgment. The social worker refers to the disciplinary knowledge of the social sciences to legitimate her intervention. The social worker is not alone in this – she works alongside of the other human service professions – medicine, psychiatry, nursing, teachers, lawyers, psychologists.

Let us take the example of a social worker as case manager in a labor market program such as those inspired across the USA by TANF and in Australia's Job Network. In the initial phase, the welfare dependent subject undergoes processes of scrutiny and questioning in order to discover what is wrong. The aim is *assessment*. During assessment a classification is made to the satisfaction of the case manager and the subject position is further refined to a more specific identity, from for example, *unemployed* to *learning disordered*. What follows is the *case plan*, mapping the process of intervention. The welfare dependent subject has to attend training/classes/therapy. The person is relegated to a particular population of, for example, the 'learning disordered', itself further deeply inscribed into the subject identity. The person also engages in *self-surveillance* and *self-disclosure*, a necessary part of the professional assessment. Throughout the professional relationship, the subject is expected to self-disclose as a demonstration of commitment to changing herself; confessing, for example, her poor literacy to her case manager. Self-disclosure usually takes place within a binary discourse wherein the person is required to be: more assertive – less passive; more reflective – less introspective; more nurturing – less self-destructive; more straightforward – less demanding; more self-directing – less dependent. The changes expected to emerge from engagement involve the self-constitution of a new subjectivity, and at the same time submission to the discourse embodied by the case manager.

Where there is welfare, in other words, there is expertise directed to the organization and control of those who are

subject to its gaze. Under contemporary conditions and in respect of those not specifically identified as welfare subjects, a different mode of governing occurs. Here, deference to state-based authority weakens along with faith in state-based expertise and social institutions. This apparent erosion of state authority is accompanied by the proliferation of new kinds of experts (counselors and therapists), providing private contractual advice on how to live one's life. These private carriers of expertise encourage self-surveillance, self-intervention and self-monitoring in the life-long business of constructing and reconstructing identities. Increasingly, in the conduct of conduct, coercion and overt control give way to a more profound internalization of expertise.

Applying the Foucaultian-inspired analysis to social work, Epstein (1994) and Chambon, Irving and Epstein (1999) develop the notion of the *therapeutic idea*, the predominant influence on the composition of normative standards for how we conduct ourselves in the contemporary era. The therapeutic idea is, says Epstein, one of the four great governing faiths (grand narratives) of modernism: psychoanalysis, capitalism, Marxism and democracy. Therapeutic ideas have come to be considered 'trans-historical, scientifically objective, apolitical and good for you' (Epstein, 1994, p. 6). At its core and foundation, it is a set of interlocking beliefs, values, commitments and commandments based on original Freudianism. As Cruikshank (1999) notes about the self-help industry in the United States, the therapeutic idea is seriously big business. And as Epstein (1994, p. 7) argues, it is perhaps the foremost non-religious doctrine about how to live in the 20th and emerging 21st centuries. It analyses the modern experience of self, suggests the sources of our ill-being, and tells us how to pursue personal growth and self-actualization.

The therapeutic idea is organised into *technologies of the self*, techniques and interventions designed to manage behaviors and minds, and which constitute the moral technologies of discipline (Rose, 1999; Dean, 1999). Therapeutic practitioners are those who apply these techniques to others. Therapists of many disciplines combine to form the discourse of the therapeutic idea. Epstein (1994, p. 8) suggests that the leaders are the psychiatrists. Psychologists do the important research, thereby providing the scientific cachet so necessary to any project of modernity.

Social workers provide the labor power and do the housekeeping. Together with an array of other therapeutic practitioners, these three professions 'co-ordinate the control, surveillance, tutelage, care, protection, treatment of deviants, disturbers of the peace or the quietly desperate' (ibid, p. 8). Likewise, 'pastoral counselors, nurses, occupational therapists, family therapists, relationship counselors, marriage counselors, addiction counselors, rehabilitation counselors, street workers, community workers and other technicians all occupy various roles in the therapeutic panorama' (ibid, p. 13).

The therapeutic enterprise enjoys public and political sanction. It is, in the terminology of Rose (1999), an 'ethico-politics' in which a particular mode of being is rendered desirable or 'ethical'. Therapeutics as the mode by which this ethicality is achieved is part of the basic polity of the state. The liberal (and advanced liberal) state and the therapeutic enterprise co-evolved and continue to evolve in partnership. The desirable or ethical citizen is the free citizen, one who by engaging therapeutically and deploying technologies of agency creates his or her own 'freedom'. This freedom is freedom to engage in market society. As Dean says (1999, p. 149), the objectives of policy (that is, governed citizens) also becomes their means (that is, through governing themselves). In this way, the therapeutic enterprise and its technologies allows government to govern indirectly. And in this governing complex, it is social work which most immediately conducts the conduct of the risky populations.

Responding to contemporary theory

It is easy to see then, why many social work authors are skeptical about the contribution that contemporary theory makes to the profession. The critique of social work that can be drawn from contemporary theory is, as I have suggested, both relentless and uncompromising. Before identifying some ways in which contemporary theory can be applied in potentially useful ways to social work, particularly to its future, it is equally important to canvass the types of objections many in the profession have raised.

Evaluating contemporary theory

For the most part, doubts about the application of contemporary theory arise out of concern for the status of the emancipatory potential of the professional project. Contemporary theory would, for example, suggest that the profession's emancipatory potential was always more imagined than real. Because of this negativity, many are skeptical about whether contemporary theory can make any useful contribution to practice, arguing, for example, that it leads to the promotion of uncertainty, diversity and complexity (see for example, Meinert, 1998). Furthermore, and as illustrated above, it undermines the entire intellectual heritage of the profession (Noble, 2004). Even more worrying, the simultaneous impact of contemporary theory and neoliberalism has silenced those public intellectuals (often social workers) who once fervently championed the interests of the poor and promoted the advancement of welfare (Adams, 2000). Social work scholars such as Midgley (1999a), Ife (1999) and Powell (2001) argue convincingly that uncritical acceptance of contemporary theory serves the interests of neoliberal politics by its persistent undermining of analytical genres which focus attention on capitalism's worst effects, for example, the 'grand narrative' of left political thought. Similarly, activist and feminist social workers argue that contemporary theory is counter-revolutionary and inherently conservative in that it does not acknowledge the patterns of oppression that transcend locations and historical epochs. Contemporary theory abandons the subject just when, for example, different groups of women begin to assert their right to define what the subject is (Fawcett and Featherstone, 2000). The diverse and fragmented identities of contemporary theory deny categories of class, race and gender that continue to represent virulent social divisions. Importantly for social work, can collective and progressive political practices be founded on the types of slippery notions of diversity promoted by contemporary theory? Finally, contemporary theory not only destabilizes the emancipatory and progressive intent of social work, it also undermines specific sets of practices – particularly those social workers use when engaging in social and community development (Midgley, 1999a).

In the main, the core of this body of critical commentary on contemporary theory is that theoretical developments which

undermine progressive grand narratives (such as neo-Marxist understandings about the operations of class and social stratification) and undermine representational knowledge (for example, about poverty) inevitably retreat to a position where we cannot 'know' about the enduring phenomena the profession has traditionally been concerned about. Furthermore, its rejection of the optimism of the Enlightenment also means a rejection of related principles of great significance to social work arising from the same tradition, for example, social justice (Atherton and Bollard, 2002). How, it is asked, can social work exist if it denies its emancipatory purposes?

Echoing such influential critics as Jerome Wakefield (1998), the case against the application of contemporary theory is succinctly made by Australian Brian Trainor (2003), who provides a detailed account of why contemporary theory in certain manifestations is dangerous. Arguing that social work needs a unitary epistemology (or knowledge base), the fragmentary tendencies of contemporary theory are, he claims, inherently damaging. Professional practice, he says, would be 'frankly worthless' if, as contemporary theory suggests, we abandon representational knowledge and the notion of a unified, coherent subject (ibid, p. 29). Reverting to a moral reassertion of a humanist imperative, Trainor argues that social workers and their (knowing) clients are 'co-travelers on a truth journey', one which seeks to 'genuinely address the true or authentic needs of clients'. For Trainor, contemporary theory is intensely, indeed immorally pessimistic, and that this 'hyper-pessimism is a form of hyper-irresponsibility' (ibid, p. 33). In many ways, the position taken by Trainor (and the other authors noted above) is correct in that if we were to accept the analyses of the professional project promoted by contemporary theory, the optimism of social work as an emancipatory practice would be severely dented, and perhaps terminally discredited as hopelessly naïve and misguided.

However Trainor, along with other social work authors (also Australians) such as Pease and Fook (1999) do allow that there are versions of contemporary theory which are less destructive of the professional project, a position also advanced by social scientists such as Rosenau (1992) and Agger (1991). For Rosenau contemporary theory can be split into the skeptical and affirmative camps; for Agger, these are critical and apologetic. Trainor and Jeffreys

(2003) call them the 'going somewhere' and 'going nowhere' versions of contemporary theory. Essentially, these authors are distinguishing between those contemporary theorists who insist upon a strict engagement with the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the genre, and those who adopt a more flexible approach which interprets and uses the insights more liberally. The second approach is one which, more usually, takes up a body of ideas developed by what is known as the 'latter Foucault'. It is a body of work which suggests that an ethical impulse or moral purpose can be held and promoted, while at the same time attending to the critical impulse of contemporary theory. This, in my opinion, is a reasonable position to adopt. But as we will see in the next, concluding section of this chapter, adopting this position does not let social work off the hook but keeps it, squirming and wriggling, on a very uncomfortable (metaphorical) pointy bit.

Taking the good

Obviously social workers will react differently and will take from contemporary theory different suggestions for how it might usefully inform practice. Here I present some (but by no means all) of the insights that, for example, confront me. I present these not as 'truths', but as illustrative examples of how one person engages with the genre. Accordingly, this concluding discussion is purposefully conducted in the first person, and it should be noted, prefigures in a small way further discussion in Part 2. In the first instance, the gift of this body of work to social work *is* its destabilization of the professional project. This has many dimensions. The method of inquiry developed by Foucault, for example, seeks to understand the conditions that make certain social practices (such as social work) or regimes of practices (such as welfare states) seem inevitable at certain times. Such an analytical method can be reconceived as a liberating device in that it reminds me that writing a history of the present renders the regime of truth visible for what it is; that is, not a 'truth' at all but a series of *decisions*. This, in turn, allows me to fully accept that the social practices of social work and the regime of practices of the welfare state (past and present) are social artifacts with a specific historical trajectory and to which there were and are alternatives. Through this acknowledgement of the historical, the imagining of present

and future alternatives becomes possible. Accordingly, as much as it destabilizes the past, it also destabilizes the present – the policy decisions, for example, creating the workfare regimes of the present day.

Further, by asking me to attend to social work practice theory as discourse, contemporary theory asks me to think about the sorts of identities I am offering my clients. It allows me to recognize that there may be others, perhaps authorized by my clients, and perhaps more appropriate for the moment. This point was recently brought to life for me in the reading of a recent doctoral thesis (Joy, 2004), which drew very clear links between social work practices with child victims of sexual assault and the subsequent promotion of the dominant 'correct' identity of the 'victim' by social workers, even though alternatives (in some instances, more appropriate alternatives for these 'victims') were present. In this case, some of the 'victims' did not engage with that identity at all and were puzzled, even repelled, by the repeated suggestions about how they should be feeling.

Contemporary theory allows me to appreciate that the welfare state and social work are not simply systems of state control. Rather, they are systems and sets of practices that *produce* the poor, the damaged, the excluded. In any productive process, all sorts of unexpected and local contingencies can intervene, making the processes unstable and indeterminant. This volatility provides opportunities or 'spaces' for creative practice. Focusing on this level, on the real complexities of social work productive practices also gives me permission to take small steps forward, and relieves me of the (probably unattainable) imperatives to create the type of all encompassing 'fix' implied by the grand narratives. This does not mean an abandonment of the ethical objectives of the grand narratives; it merely renders those ethics more specific. It is enough, for example, to help some one feel a little happier with their circumstances, which hopefully, have been slightly improved or modified. The focus on the small spaces and small things of practice reinvigorates the traditional social work practice nexus of person-in-environment. Furthermore, the re-conception of the subject by contemporary theory, as an identity or series of identities constituted within multiple intersecting discourses, is important. Acknowledging that such identity formation occurs within

ubiquitous power relations, the insight nevertheless re-authorizes (at the same time as it re-conceptualizes) the traditional social work concern with the impact of the social on the individual.

Importantly, the destabilization by contemporary theory of social work knowledge allows me to attend to other, perhaps situated and often subjugated, knowledges. This development authorizes me as a white Australian to properly and indeed respectfully attend to the knowledges of this country's indigenous peoples (see Pease, 2002 for a perceptive discussion of this possibility). Furthermore, it suggests that knowledges are produced in human praxis, an insight which, paradoxically, supports such relationship-based practices as social work. Finally, and in my opinion most significantly, contemporary theory poses an irreducible imperative for continuous critical reflexivity. The analytical genre suggests that any and all practices of social work inevitably engage in the constitution of particular identities, my own and others. It suggests that my practice is therefore inevitably and continuously enmeshed in and engaged with both productive and repressive operations of power. It suggests that I need to develop a capacity for unrelenting reflexivity.

This is the 'pointy bit' referred to earlier. Contemporary theory refuses to allow me the ontological comfort of being a nice person with good intentions. Neither does it imply that I am a bad person. Rather it suggests that in my being a social worker, I am inevitably engaged in the production of others' identities (as well as my own). I cannot avoid this. I can only be aware of it. More importantly, it directs me to develop the will, capacity and strategies for destabilizing myself.

In conclusion, it is clear that contemporary theory challenges social work at least as much if not more than the economic and political developments discussed in earlier chapters. These challenges strike at the identity of the profession, both in what it knows and what it does. Contemporary theory does comprehensively undermine the professional project, perhaps most importantly in that it exposes it for something other than what it presents itself to be. Critics not withstanding, it should also be clear that, in my opinion, it would be unproductive to ignore it, as in addition to the critique, it has much to offer to an alternative project (or ongoing series of projects) re-fashioning the actual doing of social work.

Having sketched to this point the reconfiguration of the institutions of welfare – the economics, politics and ideas re-shaping the contexts in which social work now exists – it is time to turn to some of the effects, particularly at the level of practice. In the next chapter, we turn to the impact on the profession, and in the following chapter, to the impact on the people who use our services.

6 Re-constructing Practitioners

During the high point of modernity the professions were the equivalent of the mandarins of the Chinese middle kingdom; the cadres that serviced the various formal institutions constituting and regulating modern societies. Social work aspired to be one of these, albeit in a fairly humble way and with less power and prestige than, say, the lawyers and medical practitioners. The contemporary position of the professions is somewhat different, particularly in the Anglo countries. With the exception perhaps of accountants, the relative power of most of the other professional groups has waned, but it must be said, to different degrees.

Discussing professions generically Evetts (2003) proposes that they are under threat from economic, political and organizational change. The professions are, it is claimed, experiencing a reduction in autonomy and dominance, a decline in their ability to exercise occupational control of their work, and a weakening capacity to act as self-regulating groups. As Hanlon (1999, p. 191) suggests, 'the state is engaged in trying to redefine professionalism so that it becomes more commercially aware, budget focused, managerial, entrepreneurial and so forth'. The linkages between the emerging marketized culture and the professions challenges occupational, functional and professional segmentation. The new culture celebrates integration and flexibility, along with the deregulation of professions and their monopolies on competencies (Malin, 2000). Social work is very much if not more enmeshed in these processes than most professions, processes which are deliberately designed to reconfigure the way in which we practice. Social work as a 'bureau-profession' (Parry and Parry, 1979) has been largely located within the hierarchies of state bureaucracies and has never been able to exercise the degree of autonomy and discretion afforded the other professions. Nevertheless, the discretion and occupational control it was able to deploy has eroded significantly in recent years (Lymbery, 2000),

albeit to differing degrees both within and across the Anglo nations.

I begin this chapter by briefly canvassing the social work literature which describes the types of processes said to be reconstructing the profession away from its traditional modes of operations. In the second part of the chapter, I discuss two of the most overt examples; managed care in the United States and care management in the Great Britain. To a lesser extent, the same processes can be observed in other contexts, for example in particular forms of case management in Australia. As will become clear, each of these represents variations of an underlying and for the most part common theme; the reorganization of service delivery for economic ends. In the third part of the chapter, I discuss some of the increasingly ubiquitous processes challenging the professional project: the 'quality' agenda, the rise of 'risk' and 'audit' – in particular how they, as tools of management, undermine professional autonomy. Finally, I briefly examine the impact of information and communication technology. For the most part, what we consider here are functions of and attributable to the applications to the field of social welfare of New Public Management (NPM) discussed in Chapter 4 (itself arising from the economic pressures and imperatives described in Chapter 3). However, we will also use some of the insights provided by contemporary theory in Chapter 5, particularly in developing appreciation of the role of such seemingly benign and useful notions as quality, risk and audit.

A professional revolution?

The social work professional project and its modes of practice are being seriously challenged, so much so that some consider it to represent a crisis, albeit one which has been underway for some time (see, for example, Clarke, 1996). Furthermore, it is a crisis of *de-professionalization* experienced across the English-speaking world (Healy and Meagher, 2004; Hugman, 1998). A number of trends are identified in the professional literature, of which I discuss four. First, the domain in which social workers practice is being continuously re-drawn, and parts of what were once considered to be core practice arenas have been hived off.

A good example of this comes from Britain where probation and parole services (once a core area of employment) has been designated as inappropriate for social workers; a practice domain which, it is said, requires a different body of knowledge and set of skills (McLaughlin, 1998). Previously, probation and parole work in that country was founded on social work orientations of care, assistance, facilitation and responsiveness to client needs. In the contemporary era of corrections, a new model is in place which emphasizes control, supervision, punishment and discipline. Because of its compassionate and developmental orientation, social work it is argued, is not the right profession for the new era of criminal justice, and social work courses have been displaced as the primary source of pre-service education.

Second, the boundaries around designated social work positions are eroding. In this instance, people with different professional (and in many instances, non-professional backgrounds) are moving into what were once conceived as social work positions, for example lawyers, psychologists, nurses, occupational therapists, even volunteers (Dominelli and Hoogveldt, 1996; Healy and Meagher, 2004). In several of the Australian states, for example, child protection positions in state child welfare agencies were, at one time, limited to social workers. Over the past decade, the entry-level qualifications have broadened with social workers constituting one source of workers among several. Third, social workers are increasingly required to work in contexts and with people who have little understanding of or sympathy for the social work perspective or for the social work professional project. Key examples here are corporations such as Maximus Inc and Lockheed Martin providing wide-ranging welfare-related services across the United States (Frumpkin and Andre-Clarke, 1999). In such instances, the processes of service delivery inevitably prioritize different rationalities (the need to generate profit), not necessarily informed by professional notions, and perhaps not even particularly sympathetic to professional sensibilities. Fourth, there is a seemingly endless crescendo of loss of faith in the profession to manage certain functions, particularly child protection, but also youth homelessness (Kemshall, 2002).

Different authors emphasize different aspects of this overall trend. Arguing from the British perspective and focusing on causal factors, Foster and Wilding (2000) claim that the neoconservative

governments of Margaret Thatcher and John Major, invoking public choice theory (discussed here in Chapter 4), positioned the professions as rent seeking vested interests effectively accountable to no-one. Furthermore, they (the professions) were (and continue to be from the perspective of Blair's New Labor) inefficient, ineffective, and prone to making spurious claims to expertise unsupported by evidence. Focusing on social work in particular, Foster and Wilding argue that two primary processes, bureaucratization and the move towards competency-based training, have undermined the profession's status, both issues which I discuss in due course.

In concert with an escalating critique of social work, a range of outcomes are discernable. Social workers are increasingly marginalized from the policy making process, and as a consequence, are even less able to influence the conditions of their practice. (This point has been cogently made about American social work in relation to welfare reform and the impacts that it is having on social work in that country. See Reisch, 2000.) A range of external forms of scrutiny and appraisal have been imposed, for example in the form of benchmarks and performance indicators, with the result that social workers are held accountable for the outcomes of their services, not just their processes (Gibelman, 1999). In addition, the escalation of generic management, for example, the use of performance appraisals, drawing on business management principles as opposed to professional supervision in service delivery agencies has largely displaced social work leadership and further weakened the autonomy of social workers.

A major factor destabilizing social work has been the loss of auspice, which we discussed at some length in Chapter 2. There, we noted that the welfare state is beleaguered and is undergoing significant reconstruction. I made the point in that chapter that professional social work practice can be thought of as a key operational expression of the modern welfare state and is, not surprisingly, in the front line of many of the attacks brought against it. As practitioners in child protection know only too well, social workers have been doubly dammed as both too intrusive and controlling, and at the same time, charged with being ineffective (Howe, 1994). In other words, social work has not only been made out to have failed, but is positioned as having actively contributed to social harm.

Another factor (discussed in more detail in the next section) is the contraction of models and methods of intervention. Here, particularly in the British context but also to a lesser extent in Australia, I refer to the ubiquitous adoption of care or case management and brokerage as the dominant model of intervention. In Australia, for example, case management has been largely appropriated out of the practice domain of professional social work and extended as a technique to other groups of 'practitioners', for example variously qualified and unqualified people working in labor market programs (Marston and McDonald, 2003). At the same time, other professional roles (such as advocacy, community work, developmental roles) have been constrained, if not actively proscribed (Sunley, 1997).

Another development frequently cited as influential in the re-configuration of social work has been the rise of competencies, an occurrence which is said to be leading to a trivialization of social work knowledge, and the deskilling and proletarianization of practice (Kreuger, 1997; Dominelli, 1996). In service contexts where competencies prevail, those in control display little interest in developing knowledge and skills designed to diagnose problems, carry out treatment plans, cure individuals and change social systems. Rather, in the name of accountability, more interest is shown in ensuring that practice instances follow particular models and are undertaken in prescribed ways.

As Chapters 3 and 4 suggested, the (un)making of the profession has occurred largely due to the ascendance of the logic of the market and its expansion into other domains, particularly that of the state and its agents. As well as efficiency, flexibility and accountability, this now dominant logic asserts a new type of service user, the 'sovereign consumer'. Although this is a largely mythical identity (particularly in relation to social welfare) it nevertheless serves the purpose of displacing other older identities such as the dependent client or patient. These latter identities are, of course, those created by and invoked by professionals, and when vanquished by the sovereign consumer, position professional modes of service delivery as obsolete, or at a minimum, open to challenge. The logic of the market also serves to dismantle (or at least undermine) the notion that there is utility in fragmented fields of professional knowledge. The very turbulence and complexity of globalized markets and the societies

they create is alleged to outstrip the capacity of single professions to administer complex problem domains. Instead, such domains become the object of a valorized discipline of *management*, in which the integration and flexible deployment of the various tools within its ambit becomes the key. In this way the professions are transformed from being autonomous, self-regulating entities, and become answerable to management *as tools of* management.

Further the political discourses of advanced liberalism accompanying the logic of the market articulate problems and their solutions in new ways. This, as Fournier (2000) indicates, is particularly pertinent to professions such as social work, as increasingly, social problems become problems for 'communities' to fix, and thereby open to rectification by lay persons as opposed to professional social workers. It is in all of these ways and in all of these sorts of statements and claims that the professional project of social work is destabilized on a day-to-day basis and at the concrete level of service delivery. While Chapters 3 and 4 outlined the foundational processes creating the conditions for the unmaking of the professional project, in this chapter we address how those processes play out. While for the most part, the effects of the sorts of phenomena identified in the earlier chapters are often the most visible, particularly in the professional literature and in the daily experiences of practitioners, it is important to underscore that they are *effects*. In other words, if social work wants to have some impact on how these play out, then social workers need, at a minimum, to understand their genesis.

Managing social work

I suggested earlier that managed care in the USA, care management in Britain and to a lesser extent, a model of case management currently deployed in Australia represent variations of a common theme. That theme is the desire to re-organize service delivery in certain domains in which social work is practiced for the purposes of promoting the twinned goals of efficiency and effectiveness. While there are significant differences across (and within) jurisdictions, these examples are instructive beyond the specific context in which they are manifest in that each illustrates trends which, while articulated differently, have similar

effects. And as we will see, each example represents a version of NPM in health and social welfare domains, driven by a dominant rationality of (economic) efficiency fundamentally at odds with the rationality of professionalism.

Managed care is largely a response to escalating health care costs in the USA driven by such factors as an aging population, changing disease patterns and expensive technological advances in a context of reduced government support for public health care (Scheid, 2003). In 1995, Shapiro described managed care as 'any kind of health care services which are paid for, all or in part, by a third party, including any government entity, and for which the locus of any part of the clinical decision-making is other than between the practitioner and the client or patient' (p. 441). In the USA managed care is *fiscal management*, driven by over two hundred profit-driven companies serving around half of the American population (Cohen, 2003). Under managed care the financing and delivery of services are integrated in ways quite unlike preceding models of service organization and delivery where, for example, professional clinical judgment was organizationally and conceptually independent of payment. That is, in the old model providers billed patients or insurance companies retrospectively. Insurance companies (or in the case of certain populations – governments through Medicare) played a peripheral role (Gorin, 2003) and decision-making was driven by clinical concerns.

During the 1980s and the 1990s, managed care dominated health care provision in the USA. Managed care systems operate by contracting with 'preferred' service providers to provide a set of services to enrolled members (usually enrolled through employer-provided health care benefits) for a pre-determined monthly premium. Managed care uses compulsory quality assurance systems to control service provision and create financial incentives for people to use preferred providers and facilities. Importantly, managed care companies assume some of the financial risk for practitioners, and in doing so, encourage practitioners to balance patient need against the need for cost control. Managed care companies take on control for service delivery decisions through, for example, implementing gatekeeping devices to determine when a person has a 'real' need for treatment. They limit expenditure to those services the gatekeepers deem

necessary and appropriate, to be delivered in the least intrusive (and least expensive) treatment setting, and only by designated practitioners. Managed care employs a strategy known as *utilization management*, in which a managed care company (or its agent) assesses each case *before* service provision. Service providers must have services authorized before delivery in order for payment to be made. As Cohen (2003, p. 35) indicates 'once treatment is authorized, individuals in the managed care organization determine which professionals the patient may see, what type of treatment he or she may receive, how frequently the patient may be seen, and for how long'. In this way, company officials make decisions once made by health practitioners and patients. In other words, professional autonomy is significantly reduced.

Clearly, there are a range of issues associated with the growth of managed care, most of which revolve around quality and access to care, particularly by certain populations (Gorin, 2003). Nevertheless, managed care has had major (and paradoxical) constitutive effects on social work. In mental health (which is the major site of interest for social workers where ever they are located), managed care organizations are increasingly turning to clinical social workers as preferred providers of non-medical treatment, largely because they are cheaper than psychologists and psychiatrists (Cohen, 2003). In response, social workers are moving into private, often group practices with other mental health professions. Further, the managed care environment has significantly influenced modes of intervention, with brief therapies and group therapies based on behavioral and cognitive theories now the preferred modes. Cohen (ibid) also indicates that managed care has created imperatives for providers, including social workers, to incorporate outcome measurement and ongoing assessment so as to produce performance-related data. Practitioners who fail to do so are greatly disadvantaged. The role of clinical case manager (often a social worker) has escalated in importance. The case manager oversees benefits, coordinates the various service providers involved in a patient's care, stands at the interface between the service delivery system and the managed care company (albeit often as employee of the company). Finally, social work educators are urged to incorporate knowledge and skills for working in managed care environments in MSW programs – for example, knowledge and skills in

management, appeals, clinical diagnosis, brief problem-focused interventions, performance assessment and case management. Not surprisingly, these bodies of knowledge increasingly compete with and supplant others, such as advocacy and community development, in crowded curricula.

Social work and social workers are, not surprisingly, ambivalent about managed care. Some see it as an opportunity to expand the profession's role in the American mental health system and recommend active engagement (Dziegielewski and Holliman, 2001). Similarly, others claim that managed care provides opportunities for new forms of community-based practice in networked and multi-disciplinary teams (Berger and Ai, 2000). Other commentators raise concerns. Neuman and Ptak (2003) for example, argue that the philosophy and practices of managed care challenge fundamental social work values; for example the client's right to self-determination and confidentiality, and most centrally, the social work duty to put the client's interests first. Social workers themselves seem disheartened by managed care. Surveying attitudes towards it, Scheid (2003) and Kane, Hamlin and Hawkins (2003), for example, found largely negative attitudes. As Kane et al (ibid, p. 115) state: 'Consistent with social work and other professional literature, most of this sample . . . . believed that managed care was more concerned with cost and finances than clients, restricts client access to services, is an enduring form of service delivery, and has lowered the quality of health and mental health services'. While legal challenges to the operations of managed care companies begin to temper their practices (Gorin, 2003) the model of service delivery that managed care represents has not been significantly de-stabilized. Within that, the imperatives shaping social work practice in the fields where it dominates bear down unabated, and while there is resistance, there is also acceptance and accommodation. Of interest, of course, are the consequences for the profession of such adaptation. Here, it is instructive for a reader to think back to Chapter 2 where I outlined the idea that such developments in the various contexts where social workers' work can be conceived as institutional change. I also cited an important study on the impact of managed care *as institutional change* on the medical profession (Scott et al, 2000). Here, I suggest that no lesser changes confront American social work as a consequence of its engagement with managed care.

It is important for our purposes to grasp that managed care in the United States is an example of the introduction of market principles to health care. It is *not* about developing effective responses to need. As such, its underlying rationality stands very much at odds with those traditionally associated with social work. In Britain the same imperatives have created a seemingly different but eerily similar series of developments. Instead of health and mental health being the primary field, in Britain it is the personal social services (services to children, people with disabilities and older people). While the search for efficiency in the USA has produced managed care, in Britain these same processes have created another phenomenon highly influential in shaping social work; *care management*.

Care management is an integral part of a wide-ranging strategy in Britain to implement a mixed economy in social care. Since the re-organization of the social services in the 1960s, care of various dependent populations was provided by local social service departments. Part of the Thatcher revolution was a form of devolution, or more accurately outsourcing, wherein local authorities were required to commission the purchase of most of their services, particularly their supportive or personal social services from a variety of non-profit and for-profit organizations. The role of local authority social service personnel became one of assessment, purchasing and budget-holding of a range of services from different providers (Pinkney, 1998).

Care management in Britain has transformed prior understandings of the role and purpose of social work (Carey, 2003; Harris, 2003, 1998). In an ethnography of care managers' practice in local authorities, Carey (ibid) identifies four primary dimensions of interest. First, the majority of practice involved responding to formal paperwork and other bureaucratic processes within a rigid and highly formalized information technology-driven system. Second, the style of management provided by social work middle managers has shifted away from the developmental and supportive focus of professional supervision towards a more traditional business style emphasizing authoritarianism, compliance and discipline. Third, the actual practices of care managers were 'budget led', as every intervention is defined by the (un)availability of finances. Finally, the adoption of care management in a context of constrained resources produces

an increasingly de-professionalized and impoverished service to vulnerable groups.

British social workers are now 'running the business' (Harris, 2003, p. 66) within a 'quasi-capitalist rationality' (ibid), in which social workers are 'care *managers*, putting together *packages* of care from the quasi-*market* for individual *customers*' (p. 67, italics in original). Here, the language of 'business' used by Harris illustrates my point about how the rationalities of such developments contrast with those usually associated with the traditional professional project of social work. In this case, two processes stand out: first, the intensification of work as middle managers exert pressure to extract the maximum amount of effort; and second, a narrowing and standardization of the work processes along with increased scrutiny and control of performance, particularly through the use of standardized software packages and information technology. So great has been the transformation of social work under care management that many regard the profession to be in a condition of almost terminal crisis (Lymbery, 2001, 2000; May and Buck, 2000). Professional judgment has given way to the following of rules, and social workers currently function more as technical operators 'without any pretence of autonomous professionalism' (Lymbery, 2000, p. 131).

The outcomes of the application of the logic of the market in Britain are superficially quite different from the situation in the United States. In the US, for example, social workers are constituted both as case managers in managed care companies and as therapists in the mental health service provider organizations. In the British context, social workers in local social service departments purchase personal social services from non-state providers, most of who have different or fewer qualifications. There are, however, clear similarities in that in both systems the organization of service delivery and the service delivery system constrains the roles social workers may take up, limits their professional discretion and autonomy, constrains the types of knowledge they use in practice and renders their work accountable as specific outcomes. In other words, they destabilize the professional project.

Similar processes, albeit to a lesser extent and in a more fragmented manner, can be observed in the other Anglo countries. The most commodified and marketized service delivery system in Australia, for example, is employment services provided to

the unemployed and to disabled people. Here, and in related systems which interact with it, a version of care management as case management exists which is virtually analogous to the British experience in intent and in terms of its impact on the case managers. This is a system wherein case managers (located in non-state agencies but acting as contracted agents of the state) purchase services from other sources within a strict budget, and tied to pre-specified performance goals. Like the British and American examples, information technology plays a significant role, not only in determining costs of services, but also in tracking and monitoring the case managers and their clients. In the case of the Australian Job Network for unemployed people, single parents and the disabled, the primary rationale is twofold: the management of 'risky' populations and (like managed care and care management) the containment of the financial costs of delivering social welfare services.

Despite these developments and their undoubted impact, it should be remembered that not all jurisdictions are the same (McDonald, Harris and Winterstein, 2003), and that there are variations within nations between diverse service delivery systems. While care management in Britain is hugely influential in re-shaping social work, this is largely a result of the profession's dominance of social service delivery in the extensive British post-war welfare state. In Australia on the other hand, social work roles are considerably more diverse and social workers are located in a much wider spread of organizational contexts and service delivery systems. As a consequence the impact of the market logics of efficiency and effectiveness, while nevertheless felt, are somewhat muted. With that caveat in mind, I now turn to a set of seemingly ubiquitous processes and notions which are also increasingly influential in shaping the organizational contexts in which we practice and, in certain domains or fields, the manner in which we practice.

Audit, risk and quality

These three themes – audit, risk and quality - constitute elements of a *discursive formation*. In Chapter 5, I suggested that contemporary theory would propose, that at any given time, certain

discourses (as ideas and as social practices) would take on a truth-like and taken-for-granted status. As such, they appear reasonable, logical and inevitable. This is how audit, risk and quality are currently employed, as a discursive formation nested within the broader assemblage of NPM in advanced liberalism. My goal in this section of the chapter is to de-stabilize their taken-for-granted nature, and to identify the implications of their deployment for social work.

In the introduction to this chapter, I suggested that one profession is doing rather better than the others in terms of its influence and status. That profession is accountancy. Accountants undertake *audits*, and audit has become the key technology of New Public Management (Power, 1997). Accountants developed audit for a purpose; that is, to promote accountability, particularly in situations of mistrust and imperfect knowledge. Here we see a continuation of the theme which underpinned the development and promotion of managed care and care management – but with a slightly different spin. The rise of audit as a mode of promoting accountability represents the 'financialization' of relationships which were once bureaucratic or professional. By this I mean the financial logic of audit; the calculation of costs, ratios, surpluses, deficits, appreciation, depreciation, profits and losses in pursuit of financial accountability and efficiencies, has become the core rationality of 'public' service delivery, irrespective of the site of production. The rise of audit has thrown an all-encompassing cloak of financial rationality over the range of institutions and their organizational representations. Through its inexorable insistence on inspection and evaluation and its demands for procedural conformity audit is, as Rose (1999, p. 152) suggests, a powerful technology for 'acting at a distance on the actions of others'.

Power (1997) proposes that contemporary society is an *audit society*, in which programs of control and the mechanisms of audit are one and the same. Audit as a process is ubiquitous, spreading to domains beyond the financial and rendering them calculable within the logic of finance. In social work we hear, for example, of ethics audits and skills audits in which the competence of social workers and the ethicality of their practice is calculated by the 'presence' or 'absence' of a particular observable 'skill' or a specific administrative procedure. Qualities or capacities which

fall outside of the observational range of the audit recede in significance, and desirable attributes such as critical reflexivity or internalized commitment to professional values and ethics are dismissed. The spread of audit as the defining rationality has widespread effects, especially in terms of what actions are undertaken, by whom and when. Professionals, academics, managers – any one operating in a site governed by NPM – all are drawn into its calculations. In the process, the technical requirements and the logic of audit replaces professional expertise and other specialist activities. As Power (1997) suggests, the rise of audit represents the triumph of distrust, and in our case, escalation of suspicion of professional social workers and organizations providing welfare services – actors and settings once representative of hope and optimism.

Walking hand-in-hand with audit is its discursive cousin – *risk*. Where audit reigns as the primary logic of governance, society increasingly understands itself in terms of risk. This takes several forms, all of which are relevant to social work. On one hand, the welfare state (which once collectivised risk) has given way to the new state in which risk is increasingly privatized, and in which the *responsibility* for managing risk is re-located away from the state and into communities, families and individuals. Good citizens, good families and good communities are those that exercise responsibility for their own security. At the same time, those that do not or cannot manage themselves are separated out, dispersed into fragmented and hierarchically-ordered zones of 'riskiness'. In the process, the older approaches to risk which emphasized social solidarity and collective responsibility for all citizens within a society recede, and different classes of citizens, determined according to their adjudged degree of 'riskiness', are created exhibiting qualitatively different relations with the state.

As perceptions of riskiness increase, for example, so too does the authority of the state through its agents to intervene. Social workers, along with other actors such as psychiatrists, psychologists and the police connect up with one another in 'circuits of surveillance' (Rose, 1999, p. 260) designed to 'minimise the riskiness of the most risky'. Social workers as case managers in Australia's Job Network, for example, are authorized to transform unemployed and disabled Australians into good citizens who manage themselves or show themselves willing to *try* and manage

themselves through engagement in the labor market (Marston and McDonald, 2003; Dean, 1999).

Risk management – the identification, assessment and management of risk – has become a key professional task in certain domains or fields of practice, albeit with different orientations. In aged care and in the disability field, for example, 'risk' becomes a technology which is primarily deployed in the rationing of scarce resources such as respite care and home help. In other words, the task of determining who receives home help or meals on wheels is managed by social workers determining who is at most 'risk' of admission to a nursing home or other form of accommodation should the service not be provided. In child protection, on the other hand, the goal is risk containment and reduction. It is also a 'forensic tool' (Kemshall, 2002, p. 81–2) for investigating allegations, formalizing and proceduralizing those investigations, and in the process, rendering workers accountable to their managers. Increasingly, social workers in settings dominated by risk as the key rationality find their practice hedged by highly prescriptive guidelines and formalized assessment tools.

In these domains of social work practice, risk has replaced need as the primary discursive formation – with all of its attendant effects. It represents a new form of orthodoxy which both constitutes and frames professional practice (Kemshall, 2002). 'Their professional world' Kemshall says (ibid, p. 128) 'is characterized by key themes: fiscal prudence, rationing, risk assessment, targeting and reponsibilization of service users'. Risk creates a new morality, and constitutes social work as a new form of moral enterprise. The new morality distinguishes between good citizens who manage their own risk, and risky citizens requiring moral tutelage (Dean, 1999; Rose, 1999). Social workers, along with the enactment of other 'psy-based' professions (Rose, 1999) become key actors in the new moral enterprise.

The final branch of the troika constituting the new discursive formation in which social work is currently constituted is *quality*. In recent times, quality has been lifted out of its conceptual birth place in engineering and transformed into what may well be one of the most influential management discourses of the late 20th century and early 21st century (Power, 1997). Carried in such programs as Total Quality Management (TQM), Quality Control (QC) and Quality Assurance (QA), quality has become a central

issue for social welfare services over the past decade (Watson, 2002). In Britain, for example, quality has been used as a key tool of management control over social work and social service organizations, borne by such standard bearers as the Audit Commission and the Social Services Inspectorate in the 1980s (Adams, 1998). It has continued to shape the 'business' of social service delivery and social work practice under New Labor (Harris, 2003), particularly in the development of performance standards and measures. In Australia, the key Federal government authority charged with reforming both government *and* industry, advocated the use of generic ISO 9000 quality standards to regulate service delivery in the Australian mixed economy of welfare (Productivity Commission, 1996). In doing so, the Productivity Commission argued that the delivery of social welfare services are conceptually no different from other productive processes, an assumption which is held more widely (see Donimelli and Hoogvelt, 1996).

In a review of the literature about the quality agenda in respect of the British social services, Watson (2002) argues that, despite the promise of quality, it has been a top-down, managerialist process, intimately linked with benchmarking, performance measurement and assessment. As such, he argues, the quality agenda has not lead to an improvement in services to users, but has instead lead to a more constrained, inflexible, proceduralized and commodified service. This is particularly the case for social work services which are, it is claimed, so caught up in the quality-related performance measurement processes, that what is measured (and hence what is done) bears little resemblance to the social work task itself. Nevertheless, quality combined with risk and audit, have become a key discursive complex constituting the parameters of practice, largely through holding social welfare service delivery processes (and social workers) to account.

Finally, any discussion about factors and processes shaping practice in the contemporary era is not complete if it does not acknowledge the impact of information and communication technologies (ICTs). All of the processes I have discussed in this chapter are made possible and intensified by the proliferation of ICTs, revealing the productive capacities of practical objects (Henman and Adler, 2003). The calculation of risk, the proceduralization of service delivery, the development of performance measurement, all of the processes of the 'conduct of the conduct'

of service delivery are immeasurably assisted by the use of technologies that can work their way into that space of practice – the space of the street-level bureaucrat – hitherto concealed from managerial oversight. Management information systems and decision making systems operated via electronic platforms can be thought of as new purpose-built domains of practice in which user (social worker) discretion is purposefully designed away, and in which critical or moral reflection on (and choice of) system options is simply not possible (van den Hoven, 1998). Further, as Bovens and Zourdis (2002) suggest, the new street-level bureaucrats in social welfare service delivery agencies may no longer be the social workers; they may well be the ICT software designers.

With the development and use of ICTs in the managing of service delivery, we see the integration of soft and hard technology which, taken together, have already and will continue to shape the conditions of possibility for practice. ICTs reshape the nature of the relationships between social welfare organizations and their users, and between social workers and their clients. The escalating use of call centres, for example, bringing together telephonic and computer technologies, utterly changes the nature of the user-organization interaction (Henman and Adler, 2003), a development which also creates possibilities for new forms of social work practice (see, for example, Humphries and Camilleri, 2002).

The vulnerability of social work to technology-driven change largely stems from its nature as a bureau-profession. Further, as ICT continues to propel new forms of 'networked governance' (Skelcher, 2000), the 'bureau' need no longer be a bureaucracy. It can, as is the case in Australia, the USA and Britain, be any service delivery agency operating under any auspice in a contractual relationship with the state. Earlier in the chapter, I suggested that the (un)making of the profession (Fournier, 2000) is contextually contingent (McDonald, Harris and Winterstein, 2003). While this is certainly the case, it is also true that the processes described in this chapter re-constitute what social work is and what it does. The task for readers is to recognize examples of what I have identified here and consider the implications for their practice in their own locale. But our analysis of the contemporary environment and its effects is not yet complete. In the next chapter we consider the impact of the same deep and intermediate processes of change on the people who use our services.

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7 Re-constructing Service Users

Along with social work practitioners, service users have also been significantly affected by the developments charted in Chapters 2 to 5. The processes by which change has been wrought and the impact on service users can be captured through an analysis of their *status*. The various descriptive labels that have attached to people who use welfare services are particularly illustrative in that these labels conjure up specific identities, each of which have consequences. At one time (albeit quite a long time ago), a social worker, even one who was not necessarily working in a health-related setting, might have unselfconsciously referred to service users as 'patients'. More latterly, the words 'client' or 'service user' predominate. Most recently and in many domains (but by no means all) another pair of labels or identities has been brought into play – that of consumer and customer. These developments signify an interesting and disturbing outcome, particularly of the political developments we discussed in Chapter 4. They suggest that the 20th century relations of citizenship – that is, relationships between individuals/groups and the state – are undergoing a transformation in ways that intimately involve people who use welfare services.

There is considerable disquiet being expressed, particularly in the academic literature, that shifts in the way we conceptualize and deliver services is having an insidious and destructive impact on the *standing* of these people as citizens of liberal democracies. As an issue, however, it is not altogether new. The words we use to describe those who use our services are, at one level, metaphors that indicate how we conceive them. At another level such labels operate discursively, constructing both the relationships and the attendant identities of people participating in the relationships, inducing very practical and material outcomes. The word 'client' for example, was and may well still be the most common in the broad field of social welfare internationally. As part of its

modernist professional project, social workers adopted the term 'client' from psychoanalysts (Healy, 1998), but 'client' is also used by other professional groups such as engineers and lawyers. Unlike the clients of engineers and lawyers (who can leave the relationship if they wish, or in the language of NPM, exercise 'exit'), many, if not nearly all of the clients of social workers are more or less captive. They have little choice in the act of consumption. While *client* may nevertheless be the term most frequently employed, increasingly *consumer* and *customer* are creeping into the discourses of service delivery.

The usual reasons are nominated as causal factors in the adoption of new metaphors for naming and positioning people who use welfare services, all of which we have discussed in previous chapters. Re-stated in summary form, these are: the hegemonic position of neoliberalism in shaping policy, the re-construction of the state and models of governance, the introduction of contestability and competition in service delivery, and increasingly, developments in the policy regime associated with welfare reform. Service user identities are actually inscribed and embedded within specific policy regimes, which in turn are brought to life in everyday encounters, for example between users and social workers (Wearing, 1998). In essence processes such as these, ones associated with the neoliberal-policy regime, are re-constructing people who use welfare services from rights-bearing citizens to consumers or customers of a market-produced product or service (Barnes, 1999).

The 'consumer' rhetoric has a sub-text in that it creates a division between an ideal active consumer-citizen, and that object of institutionalized disapproval, the welfare dependent. Before we discuss that issue, there are other matters which logically precede it and which further inform our developing analysis. In the first instance, I take us back briefly to the realm of social theory (informed by contemporary theory discussed in Chapter 5). I discuss how *theories of discourse* help us to appreciate just how powerful and important the constitutive effects of language are, in this case labels or descriptive categories applied to human beings using social work services. Having established the significance of these terms to describe service users, we turn to another related level of explanation and effect; that is, the re-working of the nature of citizenship in the emerging workfare states. We very briefly

examine the actual *operations* where these processes are acted out (largely because they have been comprehensively described elsewhere), and their *consequences* in terms of the identities created. The discussion concludes by identifying some of the problems with and limits to the new mode of consumer-citizenship, and with counter-developments arising in the service user movements.

Discourse and identity

By turning to the notion of discourse, I am signaling that the type of shift we are witnessing to the *status* of service users operates ontologically. Put simply, the new modes of social welfare arising out of workfare states shape people in fundamentally different ways than the preceding welfare states. The invocation of new identities in the form of consumer or customer, for example, changes how we actually *think* about service users, which in turn shapes their *material experiences*. In Australia, for example, workfare programs encourage social workers in those organizational contexts involved to think about service users not as rights-bearing citizens hit upon hard times, but as unmotivated and possibly lazy people who should be forced to engage in whatever program deemed appropriate (McDonald and Marston, 2005). While I cannot here do justice to the complexity of discourse theory and associated analytic methods, we can nevertheless take some of the ideas generated within that body of work to assist appreciation of the constitutive effects of language.

Discourse is language-in-use, in either spoken or written forms. It is talking and writing which, in both instances, acts upon the world and both constructs and is constructed by it (Candlin, 1997). For our purposes, the words used to describe people who use social work and welfare services act as *signs*. Signs stand between the object (in this case the service user) and the interpreter (for example, a social worker). When a sign is affixed to a service user, the user is known 'through the sign *and not by any other means*' (Boden, 1994, p. 55, italics in original). The signing process, in this case the affixing of labels or terms such as 'patient', 'client', 'consumer' or 'customer', is achieved *through* language. It is a process which is, paradoxically, so transparent that it is invisible, and hence taken for granted. In a social

work intervention process, the sign 'social worker' and 'client' are brought to life, with actual, material consequences for both. The social worker, for example, is the one who is the bearer of knowledge and has access to resources. The client, by definition, has neither or at least, is deficient in some way so much so as to warrant 'assistance'.

The labels affixed to service users are categorization devices – that is, they are means of determining who is who, and what characteristics adhere to the various categories. Discourses which employ such signs reproduce and reinforce ideologies (Van Dijk, 1998). Ideology operates at conceptually distinct levels (although in practice, the levels are interwoven) – for example at an intellectual level (an overall, coherent system of thought), and at a lived level of presentation of self and 'other' (Jaworski and Coupland, 1999)). When service users are categorized as consumers and customers, a specific ideology is promoted at the various levels. The notion of customer, for example, promotes the overarching ideological formation of neoliberalism, but when invoked in social practices (such as in instances of social work practice, or in almost any encounter in a social welfare organization), creates a particular identity (or formation of identities).

As we will see later in the chapter, in the contemporary era the actual identity formation discursively offered and accepted depends on the type of customer or consumer one actually is. 'Consumer' and 'customer' is a mode of representation which can be (and is) politically contested, because it is an attempt (usually but not always successful) to position some people or groups with less than desirable identities. The classic examples are the welfare dependent mother or the long-term unemployed person. When applied, each mode of representation defines both the person making the representation and the individual or group so constituted. In addition, it conditions interaction. The label 'illegal alien', for example, operates in much the same way as 'welfare consumer'. In both instances, the identity authorizes specific types of intervention. In Australia, for instance, 'illegal aliens' are forcibly detained for long periods of time in maximum-security detention centers in remote, inaccessible and climactically unforgiving places. The identity of 'welfare consumer' similarly authorizes a range of actions, depending on the service field and type. As Hugman (1998) notes, the consumer identities of contemporary

welfare regimes range along a continuum from active (doing) to passive (being done to). In summary, what we call people who use our services clearly has greater significance than is immediately apparent. Further, the re-construction of service users over time reflects shifts in the overarching ideological formation at play with quite specific consequences.

Discourses of welfare

Ife (1997, p. 56) identifies four discourses of welfare. He places these on two axes, horizontal and vertical, for the purpose of analyzing each in terms of power and values. Here, I take the four he identifies and add another. I examine them along one chronological dimension to illustrate developments over time (albeit in an oversimplified way) and to position them in relation to service delivery modalities. Clearly such a process understates complex social, historical and political contingencies in different contexts, but it is nevertheless useful analytically. Further, by separating and positioning them in this way, I do not mean to imply that they operate distinctly. They do not as indeed all may exist contemporaneously within any one welfare regime and in any one period of time. The first of these is the *charitable discourse*, in which welfare or service delivery is a *gift* or *donation* directed towards a *needy supplicant* (usually a member of the deserving poor). The worker in this case is a *philanthropist* accountable to *charitable donor*. The welfare as charity discourse dominated in the 19th century, but clearly still remains in many parts of the non-profit welfare sector, particularly in those areas where state provision is limited. The second is the *professional discourse*, clearly associated with the social work professional project. As suggested earlier, welfare is a *service* for the *client*. The worker is a *professional* accountable to the *client*, to the *profession*, and finally to the *organization*. Its period of dominance was clearly the post-World War II welfare states, deployed in the many state agencies providing services. The third and more contemporary discourse is that of NPM in which welfare is a *product* for the *consumer – citizen*. Here, the worker is a *case* or *care manager*, primarily accountable to the *state*, and to *management* as opposed to the profession or the service user. The fourth (also contemporary) discourse is that of the *market* which

promotes welfare as a *commodity* for the *customer*, wherein the worker is a *broker* or *entrepreneur* again accountable to *management*, and as in the case of large US firms involved in welfare service delivery such as Maximus Inc and Lockheed Martin, to *shareholders*. The final discursive formation of welfare I identify is that of *community*, a contradictory and confusing set of discourses in which welfare promotes *participation* for the *citizen-user*, and the worker as *community enabler*. Depending on the version, the worker is accountable to different stakeholders. Variants of this latter discourse are promoted by Third Way adherents, communitarians and in other social movements.

No one discursive formation dominates completely, but it is clear that the *market* and *managerial discourses* are increasingly influential, and are displacing other discourses, particularly that of the *professional*. The *charitable* discourse has a much more variable fate. If operating in organizations funded by the state, then it is to a greater or lesser degree supplanted by the managerial and market discourse or a hybrid of the two. All of these discourses have an underlying feature in common; that is each positions people who use services within a relationship with those who produce services.

Within each, people who use services are constructed a little differently. Within the *charitable discourse*, the user was/is predominantly someone who is dependent (physically and/or economically). Good dependency (the deserving poor) is supported; bad dependency (undeserving poor) is punished. All those who are dependent are subjected to strict surveillance by those with the moral legitimacy to do so. Within the *professional discourse* the person is constructed as someone in need of assistance or intervention, someone who does not have the necessary knowledge/ability/capacity to help him or herself, and who is relatively passive. The profession itself makes claims to special knowledge or ways of knowing. The disciplines, or ways of knowing, position the subject/client in different ways. At the core of each, however, is a variation of dependency, knowledge deficit or inadequacy. The *managerial discourse* positions people who use services as types of consumer-citizen. The consumer-citizen has rights (to a certain extent and fairly constrained), such as the right to access service and the right to minimum standards in service delivery. The consumer-citizen is constructed largely

within his or her relationship with the state as opposed to a professional. The state 'manages' service delivery on behalf of the consumer-citizen, controlling the activities of professionals and circumscribing their professional autonomy. Professionals have a largely instrumental value to managers acting as key agents of the state. The *market discourse* constructs the service user as a customer. Welfare services are a commodity to be purchased in some form of market-place. The user as customer is constructed as a more active and powerful participant than the consumer. In this conception, it is the customer who determines what will be provided and how. The customer's power of choice renders services and professionals more accountable and more responsive. This powerful customer stands in contrast to others, for example the unemployed, who because they are not customers purchasing services, cannot choose and can then be directed into specified modes of intervention. Finally, the various *community* discourses create a range of welfare identities – for example, the engaged citizen constituting herself by participating in mutually constitutive and supportive relations, enacted within organic communities. This latter discourse or more accurately group of discourses, while very fractured and diverse, also accounts for a range of alternate and resistant identities, for example, those promoted by the various service user movements.

While each of these discourses operates in an assortment of permutations in most welfare regimes, it is the rise of the neoliberal 'market' and 'managerial' discourse and the associated consumer-customer identity currently constituting service users which is of most interest when thinking about the future. The emergent identity of the consumer-customer signals an entirely new relation of welfare markedly different from what went before. As I suggested at the beginning of this chapter (and discussed at some length in Chapter 4), this development is deeply disturbing because it signals a fundamental reconstruction of the relationship between the state and its citizens. It is, in effect, a cultural shift (Taylor-Gooby, 1998).

The types of developments identified in earlier chapters and here reflected in the rise of the consumer-customer identity, have had profound implications for the models of governance and politics of welfare embedded in the liberal democracies. During the rise of the 20th century welfare states, the approach to

citizenship incorporated some commitment to social citizenship rights (Delanty, 2000). Under the post-World War II settlements, the citizen was constructed as a member of a unified, national and coherent political community, whose interests were collectively expressed through institutionalized means, within an apparently stable system of governance. It was a model in which the deployment of professional and public service ethics plus a willingness to finance services to needy members of the polity were seen as contributing to and guaranteeing the common interest. As we now know, the expansion of social citizenship rights led to the creation of a form of welfare in which states, to differing degrees, assumed responsibility for the well-being of the citizens. Now, a new form of welfare (workfare) has emerged, representing an abrupt break with the past both in terms of the political settlement and in terms of the model of citizenship. Citizens are now active, not passive – they are customer-consumers of marketized services, not clients of a bureau-professional based in a state agency. Currently, welfare is a matter of individual needs and wants, and commitment to any public or collective dimension to welfare is dwindling (Harris, 2003; Clarke, 1998). But as we will see, in this brave new world there are hierarchies of consumer-customer identities in terms of desirability, and in terms of the mode of interaction with the state and with state-sponsored welfare services.

The retreat from the post-war welfare states and the re-working of citizenship is, of course, the focus of welfare reform. Developments in policy have, for example and most centrally, disarticulated access to income support from any notion of social rights, and re-articulated it within a new form of contractualism emphasizing claimant obligation. This obligation is one to participate, principally in the labor market, but if that is not available or possible, in various modes of state-sponsored and state-generated 'activity'. While welfare reform remains the dominant site in which contemporary envisioning of citizenship through the customer-consumer identity is occurring, other modes of welfare service delivery are also involved. This is particularly so when we acknowledge that operationally, reforms in income support and other forms of welfare services are each implicated in the other. Models of welfare reform promoted in the various new regimes largely depend upon deployment of a range of welfare services; from

child and family welfare services to substance abuse programs. It is in many of these various locations that the new identities of service users as consumer-customers are discursively constituted and social workers, by virtue of practicing in these locations, are clearly involved (Frame and Duerr Berrick, 2003).

Constituting the consumer-customer

The carriers of this new identity are a range of 'reforms' designed to re-fashion service delivery within the rationality of the market. A new model of service delivery has emerged which assumes that market forms of delivery informed by management models and principles drawn from business can deliver services more efficiently and effectively. The model asserts advantages to the people who use services: for example less cost, greater diversity, increased choice. The marketization of welfare has essentially meant the implementation of purchaser/provider splits (government as purchaser, non-state bodies as providers); the creation of quasi-markets and the introduction of the principle of contestability in service delivery; the expansion of service delivery by the for-profit sector, the re-orientation of service delivery and the introduction of increased scope for user-pays arrangements.

One of the driving forces articulated as a reason for these developments in service delivery reform is to maximize responsiveness to the interests and needs of people who use services, and to develop a 'customer-oriented' approach to service delivery (Vardon, 2000). Previous models of delivery were positioned as limited in their capacity to respond to service user interests (Harris, 2003). In Chapter 6, I briefly discussed the introduction of the Quality agenda in the production of welfare services, a development which is an important plank in the new model of service delivery. Comprehensively discussed elsewhere, it is developments like this within an overall framework of customer-oriented management derived from the private sector which form the contexts in which the consumer-customer is constituted (see for example, Harris, 2003; Clarke, 1998; Healy, 1998; Hugman, 1998; Butcher, 1995 for in-depth discussions of these processes).

Conceptually, consuming welfare services is treated as much the same as consuming any other commodity. Even though the differences between goods and services are acknowledged, the

perspective assumes that the exercise of choice grants power to the chooser, and it is this exercise of choice that is crucial. Consumer choice is not only a desirable design principle, it is also thought to discipline service providers through the exercise of 'voice' (consumers' influencing service delivery, usually by collective action) and 'exit' (consumers exercising their choice to take their business elsewhere) (Hirschman, 1970). There are, however, a few problems with this position when applied to welfare services (Hudson, 1998). First, the capacity for *'exit'* (that is, the capacity to leave a service and go to another) is clearly limited in welfare service delivery, particularly in service delivery systems increasingly stretched by ongoing resource constraints. Further, 'exit' is not an option available to involuntary service users, and is rarely an option for service users who experience significant *information asymmetry* (that is, who do not know what is available) and who do not know of or cannot access alternatives. Second, the capacity for *'voice'* (in which customers argue for what they want and, importantly, are listened to) barely exists in most domains of social welfare practice. If it does, it is usually limited to the development of various forms of customer or citizenship charters. These, while setting standards of service delivery and by providing various modes of customer complaint and redress, do not serve to promote service users as bearers of social rights. Crane (2004) for example, clearly demonstrates how such consumer-customer oriented developments promoted by the NPM reform agenda in Australia had limited impact, foundering on the front-line of service delivery in non-profit youth agencies, where they were taken up in name only but with little real impact on how services were delivered. Taking another Australian example, consumer activist groups which once vigorously exercised 'voice' have been systematically stripped of their state funding or have been otherwise muzzled. Instead, 'voice' is increasingly reconfigured as the conduct of consumer focus groups by service delivery organizations (Vardon, 2000).

While these limitations expose the limited capacity to exercise voice and exit, and in doing so, illustrate the weakness of choice as a mechanism for the promotion of 'good' consumer-customer outcomes, it allows us to further appreciate the limits to the new mode of citizenship inherent in contemporary modes of service delivery. In the new regime, citizenship rights are replaced

by a series of assertions about what constitutes *best practice* in consumer relations in a market. Instead of customer pledges from the company, we see the emergence of charters, statements of what a consumer-customer can expect in terms of best practice service delivery. Any legally enforceable guarantee that the criteria will be met is missing, and in effect, citizenship rights accruing to the new identity of customer-consumer are actually reduced. Furthermore, as previously indicated, the consumer-customer identity is actually plural, and is, in the new conditions of welfare, hierarchically ordered. In other words, some consumer-customers are held in higher regard by the state than others. To a certain extent this was always the case in that all societies are stratified and the various forms of welfare have contributed to that. Nevertheless, the post-war welfare states attempted to undercut such stratification processes by constituting the social rights-bearing citizen and holding that identity out to all political citizens of the various liberal democracies. In the new conditions, the consumer-customer 'citizen' is a differentiated category.

The good citizen

The most desirable status is that of the *responsible consumer-customer*. This status is that of the sovereign consumer – one with sufficient resources to purchase goods and services, with the ability and knowledge to choose between the various options provided by the market, the capacity to evaluate the product, and to seek redress (Harris, 2003). The good citizen is the active citizen – active in the labor force and active in the market. The good citizen manages her own life risks by taking out insurance, and by adopting life-long habits to (theoretically) reduce health risks. The good citizen actively engages in the consumption of welfare; chosen by herself and tailored to her preferences. The good citizen purchases what were once collectively-provided goods from the new 'markets'. She finances her own retirement, buys health insurance and attends a private hospital; she places her children in a for-profit child care center and her mother in a for-profit nursing home.

In terms of contemporary theory discussed in Chapter 5, the responsible consumer is one that engages in the activity of *self-surveillance*. As such, the person is engaging in the most

cost-effective (for the state) mechanism of achieving social control in that the consumer-customer attends to the managing her own life and its risks, coincidentally congruent with the objectives of the market. How does she achieve it and what does she achieve? Leonard (1997) identifies several key processes. There is, for example, a type of self-surveillance operative within the regimen of treatment offered by expert professionals:

> Medicines must be consumed, exercise engaged in, dreams noted down, anger monitored, written work undertaken, roles practiced, all of these activities undertaken outside of the direct gaze of the expert, but nevertheless guided by the expert's discipline (in both senses) (Leonard, 1997, p. 56).

In other words, the good consumer-customer citizen engages in a form of self-generated self-regulation in which she reflects upon and regulates her conduct as an ethical subject, improving her 'self' by using 'technologies of the self' (Rose, 1998). This form of surveillance is constructed as a form of moral virtue, often exhibited by forms of self-denial and self-discipline: our consumer diets, exercises, abstains from smoking, drinks alcohol in small quantities (with at least two abstemious nights a week), and engages in safe sex. Those who engage in such self-surveillance are deemed 'good', while those who do not are morally questionable. In this way, our 'new' citizen manages her own risks, and does so as part of the moral project of attaining independence, a status that carries with it ascriptions of maturity. Her social worth and the desirability of the identity she projects is constantly reinforced by the constant invocation of its opposite; the immature, dependent, incompetent, ignorant, and ill-disciplined. In this way, hierarchies of identities are established. For example:

> . . . it is wrong – morally mischievous as well as silly – to be satisfied with what one has already got and so to settle for less rather than more; that it is unworthy and unreasonable to stop stretching and straining oneself once what one has seems to be satisfying; that it is undignified to rest, unless one rests in order to gather force for more work. In other words working is a value in its own right, a noble and ennobling act. The commandment follows: you should go on working even if you do not see what that could bring you which you do not have already or don't think you need. To work is good, not to work is evil (Bauman 1998: 5).

Bauman further notes that we have moved beyond the work ethic, or more accurately, have linked the work ethic with what

he calls the *aesthetic of consumption*, in which the puritanism of earlier moralities of work have been replaced by the excesses of a consumer society. In this new society, a new form of morality emerges based on continuous consumption, in which people endlessly engage, and in doing so, continuously create or strive to create desirable identities. The irony of this, of course, is that those very identities are constructions of a market, and that which is desired, is almost certainly manufactured and promoted by others. It is also ironic that the identity is always in the process of becoming; as it is constituted by the consumption of 'products' continuously superceded in a relentless, restless and constantly 'innovative' consumer society characterized by built-in obsolescence. Again, from Bauman (1998: 28):

> Cultural fashions dynamite their entry into the public vanity fair, but they also grow obsolete and ludicrously old-fashioned even faster than it takes to grasp public attention. It is therefore better to keep each current identity temporary, to embrace it lightly, to make sure it will fall away once the arms are open to embrace its new, brighter, or just untested replacement.

The good citizen is one who wholeheartedly engages in an ongoing project of the personality defined by continuous consumption. 'Personality' is assembled and re-assembled; a quixotic quest which becomes the primary ethics and duty of citizenship (Ellison, 2000; White and Hunt, 2000). 'Freedom' is freedom to create personality and identity through the act of consumption. Nevertheless, both the manufacture of desire, its consumption and the construction of identity creates binding dependencies on work, and the responsible consumer is one who funds their (highly constructed and regulated) consumption by work, while at the same time, managing risks associated with living by the exercise of both prudence and self-discipline. But what of her alter-ego? What are the characteristics of the other consumer-customer, the customer of welfare?

The disciplined welfare consumer-customer

The 'consumer' subject identity promoted by contemporary developments in social policy has, as indicated, two elements. Both involve a re-positioning of human agency, from passive to

active, while invoking a particular morality. As described above, the first of these is the *responsible consumer*. The second identity is a residual category, a not-so-new social space which acts as the repository for the new poor, the socially excluded, the stigmatized – in other words that ubiquitous group, the 'underclass'. This identity I dub the *moral defective*. This alternative identity being constructed within contemporary social policy is one that positions certain groups of people as manifestations of negative attributes, dispositions and moralities. It is, as indicated above, *oppositional* in that it is constructed in opposition to or in contrast to the responsible consumer. As the responsible consumer is positioned as the new moral actor, her alternatives are positioned as moral defectives, incapable of or unwilling to take up the challenges embedded in the new world.

Invoking the notion of *social exclusion*, critical commentators such as Nikolas Rose (1999) and Zygmunt Bauman (1998) illustrate how various groups of people (the poor, the disabled) are not only excluded from the labor market, but also from all aspects of social life. Because they are unable to adopt/employ the responsible consumer identity, they are further excluded from what is increasingly defined as the universe of moral obligation. The exercise of morality is possible in one domain, but not in the other. The alternative domain – that of the socially excluded – becomes the object of the new moralizing discourses but as counter-constructions to the desired and virtuous identity. This new morality is asserted over the welfare dependent. It acts on them but does not include them. The inability of identities constructed and located within alternative domains to assert themselves as active agents in the new morality authorizes and legitimizes the correctness of acting on them in much the same way as the immaturity of children legitimizes the adult parent's right to 'act' upon them. And in the new regime of workfare, social workers are increasingly asked to do the 'acting'. The moral rectitude of this entire orientation to dependent people is clear. Read, for example, these extracts from Lawrence Mead (1986):

> The issue hinges on whether the needy can be responsible for themselves and, above all, on whether they have the competence to manage their lives. . . . (p. x)

> Whatever outward causes one cites, a mystery in the heart of nowork [neologism in the original] remains – the *passivity* of the seriously poor in seizing the opportunities that apparently exist for them... To explain nowork, I see no avoiding some appeal to psychology or culture. Mostly, seriously poor adults appear to avoid work, not because of their economic situation, but because of what they believe (p. 12).
>
> In the absence of prohibitive barriers to employment, the question of the personality of the poor emerges as the key to understanding and overcoming poverty. Psychology is the last frontier in the search for the causes of low work effort... Why do the poor not seize [the opportunities] as assiduously as the culture assumes they will? Who exactly are they? (p. 133)
>
> The core of the culture of poverty seems to be inability to control one's life – what psychologists call inefficacy (p. 144).

In Bauman's terms (1998, p. 72), such identities serve the purpose of positioning the poor as 'the enemy inside the walls, destined to replace the external enemy as a drug crucial to collective sanity; a safety valve for collective tensions born of individual insecurity'. Thus marginalized, excluded and often criminalized, the capacity of people burdened with these identities to act as moral agents in the new moral order is increasingly circumscribed. Positioned as the carriers of destructive morality, the legitimacy for exclusion and objectification of the moral defective becomes (tautologically) logical. In this way, the alternative identity of the disciplined welfare subject is created and maintained. Subsequent to and as a consequence of the attainment of such an identity, the disciplined welfare subject is subject to, among other things, a shaming culture in welfare service delivery contexts. As Wearing (1998, p. 104) demonstrates empirically in his qualitative research in non-profit social welfare organisations, this shaming culture acts as 'punishments imposed on the mind and body [which] operate, often beneath consciousness, in routine and ritualized forms. This is corporeal punishment, the subjugation of and exploitation of bodies under the monitoring of the [welfare agency's] administration'. Such outcomes or consequences for welfare service users are, of course, not new. But the very fact that they are not new indicates that there are plenty of reasons to remain skeptical about the neoliberal-inspired reformist agenda which has re-configured welfare states and re-constructed welfare service delivery.

On a different note, while discussing the implications of the customer-consumer identity for public administration, Ryan (2001) nominates a number of other problems – two of which have significant bearing for us and our service users, particularly the disciplined welfare consumer-customer. First, reducing the interaction between the state and the public to passive commercial transactions reduces active political participation of citizens in governance. Consumer complaint mechanisms and the (limited) consumer rights embedded in customer charters, for example, are substituted for notions of public duty and citizen responsibility. Further, separating policy making from service delivery (as has happened in both Britain and Australia) promotes circumstances in which government is insulated and protected from the day-to-day political demands of society, often expressed as demands for welfare. As a consequence of this, government need listen only to those it desires; and those who are so desired are rarely the same people who are users of welfare services.

Second, the whole (albeit for the disciplined welfare consumer-customer – fictional) notion of *consumer sovereignty* constrains the capacity of government to act in the public interest. Collective interests that might (and often do) cut across individual interests are increasingly unlikely to be upheld in contexts where the facilitation of individual interests becomes a core principle of government. Rather than subsidize public goods that meet the needs of everyone (especially the poor), the new mode of governing which prioritizes the consumer-customer mode of citizenship facilitates the capacity for individual customer citizens to buy what they need and want in individualized transactions.

Finally, we should not forget that throughout the 1990s there has been another development of some consequence; the emergence of service user movements. At its most basic, this development represents a strong collective reaction from people trapped in unwelcome user identities to their damaging experiences of welfare and professional services. It is also related to a number of other broader social and political changes which have their roots in the emancipatory political movements of the 1960s and 1970s (Longmore and Umansky, 2001). The disabled people's movement is perhaps the most strongly established of these, with an intellectually sophisticated, highly plausible and coherent social critique (Oliver and Barnes, 1998; Barnes, Mercer and

Shakespeare, 1999). But this should not divert attention from other movements, for example, of psychiatric system survivors, or of people living with HIV/AIDS (Beresford, 1999). What distinguishes these movements is that they are based on self-identification, for example, as movements of disabled people, mental health service users/psychiatric system survivors or older people. They are self-organized and self-run; organized into local, national and international groups based on their own identities which they themselves control and in which they develop their own ways of working, philosophies and objectives. Finally, they are committed to both parliamentary and direct action. The service user consumer movement, through its existence, offers a counter-discourse to that of the market (and it should be noted, to the professional project). It is a series of movements which provide alternate identities with quite different material consequences. It is a discourse to which, I suggest, social work should attend, but to do so, it would need to listen through ears critically attuned to the elitist elements of the traditional professional project – elements which service user movements have little time for.

We have now completed the analysis of the complex processes driving change and have drawn out the implications and consequences for social workers and service users. We have attended to the unraveling of the 20th century welfare state and its reconstruction into something entirely new. We have explored the economic, political and theoretical processes and challenges that have contributed to the contemporary circumstances of the 21st century. Throughout Part 1 I have suggested that the utility of the modernist social work professional project is also significantly destabilized, and that social work *of necessity* needs to envisage ways forward if it is to survive as a collective enterprise with any sense of its original purpose intact. I have also, at several points, shown how the new rationalities of the market and the state, carried by NPM, by audit, risk and quality directly confront the traditional rationalities of welfare and social work. These propel the analysis presented in Part 2. For that reason, I turn to the four principal strategic options for the future articulated by the profession. Before launching into this next state of the journey and at the beginning of Part 2, I draw out *how* I engage with the various options, and the reason *why* I have

chosen this approach. As will become clear, those reasons are as much drawn from developments in knowledge about how the world of organizations and institutions work, as they are from any personal orientation of my own.

Part 2
Options for Social Work

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Preface to Part 2

The various processes and developments described in Part 1 appear quite overwhelming and readers can be forgiven for feeling rather depressed! Not only are the pressures coming from all around, the driving processes are, as I have pointed out on several occasions, resulting in and from *institutional-level change*. Adjustments at this level can make social workers, who for the most part don't have (or don't think they have) the capacities to practice at this stratum feel as if they are feeble creatures tossing in a very turbulent ocean. There are three responses I make to this.

First, I indicated in the preface to Part 1 that in contexts of institutional instability (which is certainly the conditions of contemporary workfare) the likely outcomes are highly indeterminate. As a consequence and as I have also suggested previously, many voices and positions are jockeying for dominance. Second and as I show subsequently again drawing on neoinstitutional theory, there are sound reasons *theoretically* why social workers should add their opinions and positions, however expressed, to the general clamour. Human agency actively contributes to and is important in institutional-level processes which after all are, for the most part, *human* processes, and the agency of social workers is no exception. Third, social workers are *already* contributing with proposals being made, suggestions put forward, and arguments developed about how social work should be undertaken in the contemporary environment. My purpose in this part is to review four general clusters of these. I wish to think about each option in terms of the two analytical devices introduced in Part 1 – first, the notion of the profession as a professional project and its continued strategic utility in conditions of institutional instability. Second, I return to this idea of institutional change and the extent to which workfare produces and promotes alternative rationalities which have the capacity to threaten the identity of social work. Here, I ask the extent to which the options identified can acknowledge, accommodate and/or resist such rationalities. While no means

a certainty (because, after all, it is a work-in-progress), this analysis gives us an *inkling* of the potential consequences.

Prior to outlining the way forward, I return to the second point made in the previous paragraph. I suggested that human agency, in this instance the agency of social workers, is salient in institutional processes – be they creating institutions or changing institutions. The literature on agency in organizations and in institutions is, not surprisingly, extremely complex and highly contested. It also contains real differences of opinions about the *nature* of human agency – that is, whether rational change agents operating strategically can possibly influence change, or whether human agents are more or less determined by (constructed by) the contexts where they act, plus all points of theoretical possibility in between (Caldwell, 2005).

Here I take up suggestions about the role of agency suggested in recent developments in neoinstitutional theory, acknowledging that it is one literature among many. My justification for using it here is that I focus on *institutional* change as the primary meta-process influencing social work and welfare. I suggest that there *are* significant possibilities for social workers' agency within social welfare organizations and in the social welfare field, even under the emerging conditions of workfare. Early neoinstitutional accounts nominated a core role for human agency (see for example Zucker, 1977, 1986; DiMaggio and Powell, 1983; Tolbert, 1985). More recently reconceptualizing agency in institutional processes, particularly institutional change, has re-emerged as key goal of contemporary work. As a result calls have been made for neoinstitutionally informed studies to specify the various processes by which different aspects of human agency enact or change institutional orders, and the various conditions under which different forms of agency operate (Barley and Tolbert, 1997; Hirsch and Lounsbury, 1997).

In these instances agency is re-instated in institutional processes but in a form somewhere in the mid-point between two distinct modes identified above. The first positions individuals as 'sovereign agents' (Willmott, 1987) or 'rational actors' (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996), engaged in constant calculation of costs and benefits (for example, how individual social workers or a group of social workers in a social welfare organization will survive the chilly conditions). Standing in contrast is what has been described

as an over-socialized conception of agency in which individuals routinely and unquestioningly accept, follow and reproduce social norms (for example, social workers uncritically accepting workfare rationalities, processes and practices). Within the genre, both the rational actor and its alternative are rejected in favor of a conception of agency operating within a model of *bounded rationality* (Perrow, 2000), in which agents deliberately work out how to 'go on' on a moment-by-moment, day-by-day basis. In other words, social workers are *knowing actors* – but their awareness and the span of action is bounded, limited, and circumscribed to the context and time-frame in which they are located.

Positioning social workers this way, as institutional agents operating in a bounded way, constructing (perhaps de-constructing) the institutional order of the field of welfare cum workfare, we can take the suggestions made in the next four chapters seriously. Coupled with emerging appreciation of the role of leaders in institutional change (Beckert, 1999; Fligstein, 1997), it is entirely possible that professional leaders, perhaps championing the various options canvassed subsequently, have the capacity to really influence social work – albeit in bounded, localized ways.

In Part 2 I focus particularly on four major orientations canvassed in the social work and related literature. I do not mean to suggest that these are the only ways forward being promoted. Rather I wish to emphasize that options *do* exist and futures are actively being imagined and practiced by both academics and practitioners. Chapter 8 identifies and discusses the *entrepreneurial profession* (after Jones, 2000). Here, the different often adaptive and strategic responses by social workers to the realities of their experience in the contemporary environment take centre stage. In Chapter 9, I discuss *evidence-based or scientific practice*; its background and what it has to offer social work at this juncture, especially in the managerial conditions of advanced liberalism. In Chapter 10, we examine the emergent possibilities of *critical social work*, especially at its capacity to speak to and work constructively within the advanced liberal welfare states. We focus here on the ability of this mode of social work to re-invigorate the radical and progressive historical heritage of social work. Finally, in Chapter 11, another quite different direction is identified and discussed; in this case, *global social work*. This chapter explores developments in international social

work and various forms of social development practice. Here, we begin to appreciate how aspects of social work continue to demonstrate the possibilities of transcending the boundaries of nation states, engaging with the realities of globalization, and bridging the North-South/developed-developing country binary divide. In other words, these developments illustrate a global future for social work, and one which is, more importantly, not wholly dependent on the institutions of advanced welfare states.

In the final chapter (Chapter 12) I briefly re-state the major themes of change which were the subject of Part 1, and equally briefly re-iterate the strategic strengths and weaknesses of the options canvassed by the profession in Part 2. To ground the discussion into empirical reality, I draw on several studies of institutional change relevant to social work and draw out their implications, particularly the consequences of conflicting institutional rationalities. Finally, I return to the issue of leadership, again drawing out notions and examples from neoinstitutionally-informed theoretical and empirical accounts. I do this to sketch what model or models of leadership may be appropriate in conditions of institutional instability, and what social workers can potentially learn. I do this to underscore that we *can* act, and what we do can usefully be informed by knowledge developed *outside* of our own professional corpus.

8 Entrepreneurial Social Work

Fortunately, social workers are not passive victims waiting to be swamped by the successive waves of change identified and elaborated in Part 1. Rather, in different arenas and in quite diverse ways social workers are articulating, developing and promoting modes of practice which represent possible futures. Jones (2000) advances a specific program for the future of social work (which we will examine later), and his intent, as is mine, is to focus on all of the many developments in the profession which are attempting to adapt (either wittingly or unwittingly) to the developments in the contemporary environment. These attempts are, for the most part, a re-tooled version of the professional project attempting to create a better 'fit' between what social workers do and the emerging conditions of practice. The drive behind the various strands within this overall category of the entrepreneurial profession is essentially one of hard-nosed pragmatism and all variants hold out the message of 'adapt or die' – albeit with differing degrees of emphasis. In this chapter I focus on four main emphases, all of which to a greater or lesser degree are implicated in each other. The first of these is that which promotes the currently popular notions of social entrepreneurialism and social capital. The second version endorses a vigorous and opportunistic embracing of the new conditions of practice, while the third is inventing and engaging in new spaces and new modes of practice. Finally, the fourth version of entrepreneurial social work positions politically-inspired strategic engagement as the key mode of responding to change in the external environment.

Riding the new rhetoric

In the contemporary environment a phenomenon which a colleague and I have dubbed *the matrix of ideas* has emerged;

a dense, interwoven set of notions, concepts and arguments which serves the purpose of providing legitimacy for the new modes of welfare developing under conditions of neoliberalism (McDonald and Marston, 2002). Taken up and used by a variety of actors from seemingly different political persuasions (for example, by both Britain's New Labour and Australia's neoliberal Coalition government), the matrix of ideas consists of evocative yet slippery notions such as community, participation, partnership, engagement, social inclusion, social exclusion, social capital and social entrepreneurialism – notions increasingly applied in the domains of welfare. Social workers, it should be noted, are one group among a much broader movement which has adopted this new rhetoric, often with remarkable enthusiasm. While social work has, for example, a history of engagement with social enterprise (particularly in community development in impoverished non-western contexts, see Gray, 1997 and Midgely, 1996), this current deployment draws on and promotes an entirely different politics. Whether acknowledged or not by its champions, this iteration of social enterprise draws its institutional legitimacy largely from the neoliberal workfare state. This is especially the case when we understand that it is the neoliberal state which has, through minimizing its own role, opened up the space for the contemporary versions of social enterprise or social entrepreneurialism to emerge and engage with the business of welfare.

In its current form, social entrepreneurialism in particular proposes that the dispositions of people (both workers and clients) who engage in the new spaces of welfare can be remade and new cadres of actors (again, both workers and clients) can emerge. It is suggested that the characteristics of, for example, successful business people can be grafted onto actors in welfare contexts to promote the social and economic wellbeing of disadvantaged groups. Energy, initiative, enthusiasm, openness to challenges, willingness to engage, to take risks, and to forge new partnerships are held up as not only advantageous, but also necessary for success (Bent-Goodley, 2002). A new approach to social work practice emerges, one which holds out the promise of a complete re-invention of the way social workers go about their business and in which their legitimacy to engage in the contemporary and emerging sites of practice is enhanced (Gray, Healy and Crofts, 2003).

The matrix of ideas is, in many instances, clearly influenced by forms of Communitarianism, which is itself a body of thought shot through with political differences; with conservative, neoliberal, feminist and radical variants. The contemporary forms of Communitarianism influencing the business of welfare and social work (which at times, seems a confusing mix of all of the variants identified above) represents attempts to re-locate the articulation of citizenship away from the domain of the state and into non-state locations. In doing so it decisively rejects inertia and passivity on the part of the service users held to be produced by Marshall's version of welfare as social rights, institutionalized in what is (pejoratively) characterized as 'old welfare' provided by the state. Equating civil society with 'community', accounts drawn from this tradition argue that citizenship is attained not through the exercise of rights and responsibilities, but through active participation in contexts, settings and activities created by social workers as social entrepreneurs.

A highly influential form of Communitarianism has recently emerged in the political rhetoric surrounding welfare reform in, for example, Britain and Australia (Everingham, 2001; Lund, 1999). It asserts a strongly moral version of citizenship as responsibility and participation in a web of mutual expectations. Reform of income security in both countries reflects aspects of this, in which the notion of enforced obligation by income security recipients to participate in various social programs is promoted. There are also significant efforts to articulate and embed social entrepreneurs in welfare service delivery, operating for the most part in the 'third' or non-profit sector, creating 'social capital' alongside and sometimes through delivering services (Kendall, 2000; Lyons, 2000).

This group of developments illustrate attempts by various players (for example social workers as social entrepreneurs) to position themselves as important in the emerging politics of welfare in the (as yet) fluid institutional arrangements of the new regime of welfare. In such visions, conventional poverty relief programs are replaced by wide-ranging and often innovative community-focused approaches, emphasizing the development of 'support networks, self-help and the cultivation of social capital as a means to generate economic renewal in low-income neighborhoods' (Giddens, 1998: 10). While Giddens

refers to developments in Britain, the same processes are evident elsewhere, and have until very recently not only been largely uncontested, but actively celebrated (Botsman and Latham, 2001).

This forms the substance of the first version of entrepreneurialism as a strategy for the re-making of social work. By engaging with the matrix of ideas and by engaging in activities and developmental projects designed to promote the objectives embedded within it, social work in effect inserts itself within one of the most widespread attempts to proactively engage with the neoliberal regime of welfare. Social entrepreneurialism, as its name flags, is a quite bold strategy. It is an approach which promotes a clear values position – certainly one that is attractive to many. Importantly, it appears to circumvent what many social workers and others have felt to be an insuperable barrier to engagement with contemporary welfare. It does this by giving participants what *appears* to be an alternative moral vision to that of neoliberalism. In its strategy of forming partnerships it dissolves pre-existing institutional barriers between business and welfare (in this case, between the business and nonprofit sectors) within a values framework which appears similar to (but is not the same) as traditional social work values. Further, it provides an active program (for example, working developmentally with disadvantaged communities) in a re-worked institutional site, both practically and politically, which people can pursue.

In a context where the capacities for social workers to practice as autonomous professionals within the traditional confines of state agencies are rapidly diminishing, the route offered by social entrepreneurialism is promising and is attractive to social work. For that reason, in the concluding chapter on his valuable book on the future of the profession, Powell (2001, p. 159) argues that social workers should take up 'opportunities in the not-for-profit voluntary sector to provide social services within a market context. Social workers can harness the innovative potential arising from such private-public partnerships in a manner that seeks to blend market realities with humanistic values'. Social workers should embrace the strategic option embedded in and carried by the matrix of ideas. Social workers should, in other words, become social entrepreneurs.

Grasping the opportunities

The second variant of this strategic option is widespread as well as diverse. Here, the key suggestion is that, rather than retiring in horror, social workers should enthusiastically embrace the new conditions created by developments in the neoliberal workfare state. It is a position which finds its clearest expression in the American professional literature, identifying actual and potential roles for social work within the various welfare reform-related platforms of practice and also in managed care. While the suggestions may seem odd to British or Australian readers, they do nevertheless provide examples of where, strategically, social work could attempt to expand.

Addressing a long-term aversion on the part of American social work to public welfare, Banerjee (2002, p. 326), for example, claims that social workers should be hired for frontline work in state-sponsored employment services. Subsequent to the demise of traditional public welfare and its substitution with TANF (welfare reform), the framework of public welfare has become much more holistic and active in its span of intervention with welfare recipients. As a result, the skills required for success are closer to mainstream social work. Martinson and Holcomb (2002) suggest that social workers are ideally suited to provide services to 'hard-to-employ' individuals facing multiple barriers. Social work, Green and Edwards (1998) argue is well placed to work in and with state-based public welfare agencies to undertake significant cultural change, re-orienting non-social work front-line staff to the challenges involved in shifting from a passive benefits system to active welfare-to-work programs. Hasenfeld (2000) claims that social work values and practice principles make it the most appropriate approach to achieving success in employment services in public welfare departments. Anderson (2001) proposes that social work insights, particularly those employing the strengths perspective, can enhance TANF-related casework. Hagan and Owens-Manley (2002) declare that social work needs to become involved in managing such programs as the TANF Family Violence Option, as existing public welfare front-line workers are failing to correctly identify (and hence work with) victims of domestic violence. Finally, Anderson and Gryzlack (2002) and Lens and Gibelman (2000) emphasize an active

individual-level and system-level advocacy role for social workers in welfare reform programs.

Green and Edwards (1998) suggest that there is a special 'fit' between social work and contemporary workfare. Social workers work primarily with client attitudes and perceptions, and are thereby well-suited to a domain in which client motivation is a key disposition for success. Here, they also specifically position the strengths perspective as a potentially useful and hence strategic approach in the workfare milieu. Further, the capacities of social workers to build trusting relations in difficult circumstances, their commitments to helping families bring about change, and their capacity to link families to community resources, are ideally suited to work in workfare programs.

Hagan (1992) identifies six distinct roles for social workers within workfare: case managers, agency managers, policy analysts, policy advocates, staff development and training, and research. In a different vein, Iverson (2000, 1998) suggests that welfare reform provides opportunities for the re-invigoration of what is known as occupational social work as a distinct field of practice. Occupational social work in America (and to a small extent in Australia) is a specialized field which provides a social work service to employed people in various corporate settings. Welfare reform however, opens up the possibility for occupational social workers to have a significant impact on the occupational needs of welfare-dependent populations. She identifies four broad roles for occupational social workers in welfare reform programs – assessment, advocacy, program development and social activism. Like Hagan, Iverson also argues that occupational social workers can provide an advocacy role, but with a bit of a twist on the standard advocacy role adopted by social workers. They can, for example, collaborate with corporate occupational social workers to open up pathways into employment; they can evaluate corporate recruitment and hiring procedures and advocate for family-friendly policies designed for single parents as potential employees. They can also educate businesses about the business potential attendant to engagement with workfare.

In like vein, opportunities are seen in the spread of managed care in the American health, particularly mental health system. As far back as 1993, Strom and Gingerich argued that clinical social workers operating within a psycho-social framework

need to engage with those forms of practice (assessment, diagnosis, brief therapies, group work) favored by a managed care environment. Ten years later Cohen (2003) claims that clinical social workers have performed the largest portion of psychotherapeutic intervention in the United States, and that this, in turn, is providing opportunities for solo and group private practice. Using a metaphor drawn from the physical environment, Dziegielewski and Holliman (2001) argue that all allied health professionals, including social workers, will be forced to continue to compete and forge a niche in the managed care market. To survive and thrive in this new ecology of welfare social workers need to work towards behaviorally-based client outcomes, present themselves as integral to the functioning of interdisciplinary health care teams, and promote social work as a key to the achievement of quality care within a cost-effective framework.

In both cases, that is, in relation to welfare reform and to managed care, much of the commentary is enthusiastic about the roles social workers can play, and about the capacity for welfare reform in particular to re-invigorate the profession in the 21st century. It is a literature which, in large part, is quite unabashed in its calls for engagement and is, accordingly, quite clear in its strategic orientation. Furthermore, on the face of it, it appears to be a productive strategy in that in regards to managed care in particular, social work has been quite successful in carving out a role.

In fairness, this enthusiasm is hotly contested and many argue for a more critical engagement to (at a minimum) moderate the negative context-derived implications of both workfare and managed care for social workers and their clients (Anderson and Gryzlak, 2002; Gorin, 2003). Nevertheless, social work participation in both program areas is treated as an uncontrovertible 'fact' and an environmental reality which cannot be wished away. Indeed, to the extent to which the many processes described in Part 1 have contributed to the development of welfare reform and managed care in the USA, then both programs and similar developments in other national jurisdictions *are* real and *do* constitute the context of practice. At issue are the costs (or in less emotive language, the implications) of engagement. At its heart, welfare reform in particular is a moral project with a very specific rationality which is quite different to the humanist rationality

promoted by social work. As such, involvement in welfare reform and managed care has the capacity and authority to displace traditional professional social work rationalities.

New spaces of practice

The third variant of social work as an entrepreneurial profession is intimately linked with the developments described in the preceding section. Again, it represents engagement with the new conditions of practice but instead of promoting the fitness of specific approaches to social work (such as the strengths perspective), this variant is represented by those instances where social work is carving out a new practice niche in the evolving 'ecology' of welfare. There are many examples of this strategic option. Here I examine four, sufficient to represent the case. The first two come from the American experience, again clearly driven by welfare reform and managed care. The third case, while specifically taken from Australia, is increasingly representative of the conditions experienced in most advanced welfare states. The fourth and final case is global in application.

In response to managed care new roles and spaces for social workers are being promoted, for example as organizational consultants and organizational change agents, and as partners or company owners of firms providing third party-funded clinical and other services to purchasers such as insurance companies (and also increasingly, by governments) (Dziegielewski and Holliman, 2001). Clearly, this development falls within the fairly long-standing (largely American) tradition of private practice, but managed care has provided an institutional impetus which is qualitatively different from the conditions adhering to the 'old' welfare state. Strom (1996) and Berger and Ai (2000) claim that the new conditions are also re-shaping the manner in which private practice is undertaken; from an old 'dinosaur-like' model of the solo practitioner hanging out her solitary shingle, to a new 'adaptive' practitioner working in multi-speciality group models of practice aggressively bidding for service contracts. This is in addition to the rise of large commercial firms such as Lockhead Martin, Electronic Data Systems, Maximus Inc, America Works, Curtis and Associates and Anderson Consulting in the business of welfare.

These firms, according to Frumkin and Andre-Clarke (1999) have shown a marked tendency to employ social workers with high-profile welfare expertise, and in doing so, open up entirely new career paths for social workers. While these examples are drawn from America, it should be noted that the same institutional impetus exists wherever a welfare market or quasi-market exists.

Second (and similarly), American welfare reform has directly led to the development of a new 'space' of practice in faith-based welfare (Cnaan and Boddie, 2002). While social workers have always practiced in religious non-profit organizations, a specific provision of the act which authorized TANF (called Charitable Choice) significantly widened the scope of that sector. Whereas previously, most non-profit church-based provision was undertaken by large, old, formal and for the most part bureaucratically organized organizations which, over the 20th century, increasingly drew their organizing frameworks and rationalities from the welfare state, Charitable Choice allows for services to be provided by local congregations. Under previous conditions, the service delivery or pastoral arms of the churches were, in the main, functionally separate from the devotional arms of the congregations and parishes. The principles of service delivery were increasingly dominated by the rationalities of bureaucracy which shaped service delivery in human service organizations, irrespective of auspice. What is so interesting about this development is that the statutory provision encouraging charitable choice specifically protects the religious freedom of participating entities. *How* services are conceived and delivered is relocated more within the private domain of the religious entity as an expression of faith, and less from an ethics of pastoral care contained within the domain of the state. In this context, what social workers do will be shaped more by religious beliefs and devotional activities of congregations than by professional and administrative rationalities of the modern welfare state.

Third, developments in information technology accompanied by the application of New Public Management and the subsequent corporatization of significant welfare functions have opened new 'spaces' which social workers have been able to exploit. In the case of Australia, for example, the re-engineering of the main Commonwealth government service provider (Centrelink) coupled with the development of call-centre technology has

opened up a new and quite innovative niche for social work in the provision of telephone counselling (Humphries and Camilleri, 2002). In a call-centre culture of answering calls quickly and maximizing 'customer throughput', the social workers have had significant success in demonstrating the utility and contribution to both the clients *and* the organization of in depth, on average, 45 minute calls (plus follow-up), as opposed to the average call centre-operative 4 minute call. Developments such as this and also in the various modes of on-line counselling (Hunt, 2002) or information and communication technology-mediated counselling such as telehealth (McCarty and Clancy, 2002) indicate that the significant opportunities exist.

There are both potential opportunities and costs in these strategic developments. The emerging roles and spaces provided by the rise of the corporate social worker in medium sized and large firms, while clearly opening up a (lucrative) career path for social workers, pose the same type of dangers as engagement with the seemingly contradictory and perhaps destabilizing rationality of welfare reform. As I indicated earlier, the outcomes of engagement are largely assumed as opposed to empirically verified. In other words, we don't really know what the implications are for the future of social work, particularly in terms of social work's identity. The same caveat applies to the context of engaging in the newer forms of faith-based service delivery. Will the rationalities of the participating religions overtake those of social work? How will service users and their presenting issues be constituted in the discursive practices of the congregations? In other words, these developments may challenge assumptions about service users and social workers made by the modernist professional project. Finally, while the spaces opened up by communication and information technology are exciting they do point to a new (yet logically similar) pitfall. As I indicated earlier, inserting practice into the domain of information technology inevitably means constructing practice within the logic of hardware and particularly, software designers. As Bovens and Zouridis (2002) point out, in the new world of welfare, it is software designers not social workers who are the new street-level bureaucrats. This point is readily demonstrated by examining the impact of computer-mediated assessment tools at the front line of public welfare. McDonald, Marston and Buckley (2003), for example, demonstrate empirically how

the identity of unemployed Australians is negatively constituted, as passive bodies to be acted upon by state-authorized agents (social workers) through the application of a screen-based assessment tool known as the Job Seeker Classification Instrument. As with the other suggestions canvassed here, engagement with computer-mediated technologies may carry a significant sting in the tail, particularly for the unwary.

A strategic profession?

The final entrepreneurial option canvassed in this chapter is presented by a variety of authors who are acutely conscious of the trickiness of the contemporary context. This group suggests deliberately working strategically, suggesting that social work is at a critical juncture. Each offers a road forward. I draw on three examples, two from Australia and one from the United Kingdom, as each represents a different *political* orientation social workers might adopt.

The first of these, provided by Jones (2000), suggests that social work re-make itself as an enterprising profession, a pragmatic and essentially strategic approach to the future which seeks to capitalize on contextual developments. It is an approach which rejects the 'aspirant' model of the modernist professional project (but which, in some ways, re-affirms it). It suggests that social workers develop different characteristics – those of successful business and political leaders. As the reader will recall, the professional project was essentially designed to achieve characteristics exemplified by the established professions, documented as 'traits' of professionalism in the occupational sociological literature. Within this model, social work's progress towards full professional status was explicitly measured against such criteria as societal recognition, common purpose, distinctive technique based on scientific knowledge, an ethical code, and a sense of public responsibility. This strategy, Jones argues, while reasonably successful during the benign period of the welfare state, has become increasingly inappropriate for all the reasons canvassed in Part 1 of this book, particularly the effects of New Public Management discussed in Chapter 4. In its place, Jones proposes the development of a new form of professionalism, a renewal which has several dimensions.

Social work must become an *engaged profession*, participating as politically significant actors in the social institutions shaping the contemporary environment. It cannot (and must not) sit outside the arenas of power. Social workers may also work towards the development of alternatives, but not as a substitute for engagement in the contexts and processes shaping contemporary and future practice. It must become a *sustainable profession*. Social work must pay attention to such time-honored concerns of traditional professionalism in attempting to protect the conditions of autonomous practice, favorable public opinion, commitment to community service, creation of new opportunities for practice, and promoting the general interests of its clients. However, it must take a proactive stance in that it must continually look to new and emerging opportunities for professional practice. Here, Jones notes that the rapid re-construction of the service delivery system opens up as many opportunities as it closes down. These need to be identified, and social work needs to recognize and build on its strengths as a multi-faceted and versatile profession. He would, for example, approve of the activities of American social workers in seeking new contexts and modes of practice in the advent of welfare reform and managed care.

Social work must also develop *permeable boundaries*; it must foster a capacity to reshape professional boundaries to make the category of 'social worker' open to other categories of human service worker. Social work needs to become an omnibus term for much broader range of occupational identities, partially by being less wedded to the sanctity and inviolability of the identity promoted by the professional project. Rather, social work needs to become a diverse profession in which difference is tolerated and promoted. Because social work needs to develop and sustain new identities and roles in increasingly diverse contexts, it also needs to acknowledge that there is no such thing as 'real social work'. Finally, *new forms of collaboration and cooperation* need to be actively explored: joint ventures, consortiums, strategic partnerships, networks and linkages of many kinds. It needs to find new ways of marketing and presenting the services it offers.

By adopting an explicitly strategic approach, Jones is clearly indicating that the political dimension must not be ignored. It is also a response which adopts an approach to strategic activity in that it presumes the existence of an influential organizing body

which will, at a minimum, provide astute leadership cognizant of and well versed in the operations and strategies of power and influence. Social work, in other words, needs to be led to a new future by entrepreneurial and politically engaged leaders unabashed by the cut and thrust of the top end of town, unfazed by potential moral hazards of engagement, and unafraid of what the future has to offer.

The strategy of fostering strategic partnerships is also taken up by Healy and Meagher (2004), but in this case, the partners of choice occupy a different position politically in the institutional arrangements of modern societies. Eschewing the orientation of the modernist (classical) professional project, these authors call for a new form of professionalism. Classical professionalism, they argue, has not served social work particularly well, even in relatively untroubled times. Not only did it fail to enable social work to achieve occupational closure, the relational nature of direct social work practice as well as the diversity of practice contexts were and are incompatible with the technical and rational framework of conventional professionalism.

They contrast classical professionalism as a mode of collective organization to achieve occupational recognition with that of classical unionism. In the case of unionism, coherence was derived not from a professional identity but from the imperative to negotiate and shape relationships, particularly those between members of occupational groups and employers. While successful within a range of industries (albeit for a period which appears to have reached an end), for a number of reasons classical unionism proved less useful in the domain of social services. Both classical professionalism and classical unionism should, these authors argue, be replaced by a new form of professionalism which represents a strategic convergence of new unionism and new professionalism. New professionalism, they argue, is that which acknowledges professional expertise while promoting active collaboration with other groups of service providers and with service users. New unionism, on the other hand, concerns itself not only with wage negotiations, but also with the promotion of career paths through facilitating acquisition of formal qualifications by non-qualified or lesser qualified social service employees. In other words, these authors explicitly nominate a strategic alliance between the unions and social work in a way

that privileges neither, but which provides increased strength through a wider representation of interests and an active political and developmental agenda. While attractive, it is a strategy that downplays the role of the state which is increasingly hostile to both professions and unions. It is also underplays the types of economic developments discussed in Chapter 3 which have and will continue to undermine the capacity for labor to organize in re-structured markets. Because of this oversight, its strategic intent is somewhat compromised.

The final strategic option I canvass here is one which (like Jones) suggests engagement with the political and economic realities of the contemporary context, but which (like Healy and Meagher) does so from within a clear critical (left) politics. This position is well illustrated by Jordan (2004, 2001, 2000). Drawn within a critique of the individualizing tendencies of much of the modernist professional project of social work, and adopting a stance which is wary of the Third Way agenda in Britain, Jordan nevertheless suggests that social work needs to proactively engage. Specifically, social work needs to articulate how the expertise and capacities of social workers are particularly well suited to reforming what he considers to be an unworkable Third Way policy framework. If it acts with imagination and daring social work has, argues Jordan (2001), the capacity to re-configure the Third Way into a more progressive program at the level of intervention. Social work needs to position itself in the spaces of practice developing under the Third Way auspice outside of the destructive environments of the social service bureaucracies – for example, working developmentally in disadvantaged locations (the Employment Zones), working with communities to hold their local services (health, education and welfare) more responsive and accountable, and in developing cross-sectorial partnerships. In these spaces, it needs to promote its capacity to work with diversity, appreciate interdependence, power and conflict, and value and promote cooperation. But it needs to engage within a framework of mutuality and democratic solidarity (Jordan, 2004). If social work is successful, it can create a win-win situation – both in terms of occupational futures and in terms of social outcomes.

Looking across these three examples suggesting a deliberate strategic engagement in response to the exigencies of the contemporary contexts of practice, it is clear that their major difference

lies in the politics promoted and in the institutional arenas which constitute the target systems. What they have in common (and what they also have in common with the previous variants of entrepreneurialism presented in this chapter) is a willingness to engage. Each is intent on occupational survival and offers a clear way forward. But as indicated earlier in this chapter the key question is not whether social work will survive, but rather what will social work become if it follows the strategic directions put forward in the spirit of entrepreneurialism. As we will see, this question can also be asked of the next major option canvassed in Chapter 9 – the call for evidence-based practice.

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9 Evidence-Based Practice

The various strategies representing the promotion of social work as an entrepreneurial profession attempting to re-make itself in the contemporary conditions do not, of course, represent the only option. The second strategic response we will examine is the contemporary resurgence of a long-standing orientation towards social work practice – variously called scientific practice, empirical clinical practice, research-based practice, or evidence-based practice (Trinder, 2000a). Occurring on a broader scale than social work, the renaissance of evidence or more particularly of a specific form of 'evidence' in the contemporary regime of welfare is entirely congruent with the times. As we will see, discussions about the delivery of social welfare as well as contemporary approaches to social policy in the advanced welfare states increasingly make reference to the proactive use of evidence.

Evidence-based practice is, according to Munro (1998, p. 23) an approach to social work which 'encourages social workers to use empirically tested methods of helping to formulate their reasoning and to evaluate their own work rigorously'. Marking social work as a quintessentially modernist project, the positivist orientation embodied by evidence-based practice has been articulated and debated within the formal social work literature virtually since the profession's inception (for example, Richmond, 1917). Over the last decade evidence-based practice has experienced a revitalization, mooted by some social work scholars and practitioners as the most productive development seen in some time. Its contemporary emergence has been spurred by a range of objectives, the most intuitively compelling of which are ethical in intent. The (desirable) promotion of practitioner accountability to people who use social work services and to other relevant bodies is vigorously advanced as a key reason why social workers should embrace evidence-based practice (see Gambrill, 2003, 2001, 1999; Rosen, 1999). An important (although not

as clearly acknowledged) impetus also arises from the desire to counter the increasingly precarious image of social work in the (unfriendly) New Public Management (NPM)-inspired state (Foster and Wilding, 2000; Trinder, 2000b). Essentially, evidence-based practice proposes that social work intervention knowledge should be developed through the application of (for the most part) positivist research methods, and that social work practice, particularly the decisions that social workers make in the conduct of case intervention, should be based on the best available evidence.

One way of critically engaging with evidence-based practice is to review the technical and epistemological debates found in the social work literature (for example, Goldstein, 1992; Trinder, 2000b; Witkin and Harrison, 2001; Webb, 2001). This is an important and informative debate with which social workers should engage because it speaks to the heart of the uncertainty and ambiguity which bedevils social work. As such, it will be reviewed later in the chapter. Irrespective of the validity and intellectual integrity of the claims and counter claims made, it should be noted that such accounts employ distinct positions. Specifically, their assumptions about what constitutes knowledge are very different and are unable to account for the assumptions embedded in each other, much less engage with each other in some sort of mutually constitutive dialogue over the 'best' way forward. I engage with evidence-based practice by proposing another approach – one that decenters assumptions about the nature of knowledge as the primary evaluative axis. My purpose for taking this approach is to shift our consideration of evidence-based practice out of the *good-bad* binary divide in which it is often located, particularly in the social work literature. It is more important to focus attention not only on the contested intellectual and practice merits of evidence-based practice, but to locate it within a broader appreciation of the range of developments in social work attempting to respond to contemporary conditions. Again, I focus on the strategic merits. I do so by advancing the proposition that developments such as evidence-based practice can also be understood, strategically, as a response articulated by sections of a de-stabilized occupational group in a context of institutional upheaval. My position in this book, is that it is *at this level*, that evidence-based practice is worthy of serious consideration.

Developing evidence-based practice

Professional social workers should systematically employ disciplinary knowledge expressed in the social and psychological sciences; applying their insights and explanations to social problems and to problematic people. This is a long-standing approach, originally developed by Mary Richmond (1917) in her conception of social diagnosis and developed further by such seminal social work theorists as Florence Hollis (1966) who promoted the idea of casework as science. Since then, there have been many attempts to establish a scientific foundation for practice (Reid, 2002) as part of the ongoing progression of the professional project. While writers such as Richmond and Hollis provided the foundations, it was not until the 1950s and 1960s that the practice-as-science movement achieved any significant purchase in the profession. Unfortunately, limited success in establishing the effectiveness of social work interventions through controlled experiments bedevilled early attempts to establish and entrench the empirical practice movement (Reid, 2002; Kirk and Reid, 2002).

Clearly informed by developments in psychological behavioural theory, some social workers (particularly academic social workers) began in the 1960s and 1970s to promote practice as instances of research through what became known as the single-subject or single-system design (SSD). Actively taught in the (American) universities, practitioners using SSDs employed such methods as structured observation, standardized tests and client reports to establish a base line of data about a client's functioning. This base line is then augmented in successive stages post-intervention, and client progress evaluated. Despite determined advocacy, the SSD approach to practice did not become a core feature of social work (or even particularly influential with practitioners). Although their lack of engagement with research was repeatedly 'blamed', the relative failure was, in part, caused by differences between its supporters and detractors, its inability to demonstrate itself as applicable to many domains of social work practice, as well as technical difficulties in the SSD design itself which severely limited the knowledge claims that could be made.

Subsequently (and primarily in American social work), several influential social work academics began to develop an approach to

practice modeled on research and development projects of other industries. This culminated in what Kirk and Reid (2002) call the *design and development* approach to practice research or the *intervention research* approach (Rothman and Thomas, 1994), designed to develop empirically tested intervention methods in social work. More recently, evidence-based practice in social work has begun to employ the tools of experimental design (randomized controlled trials), review (wherein a number of studies are examined for what they can offer) and meta-analysis (in which results of a series of studies are pooled and tested) (Reid, 2002). Kirk and Reid (2002, p. 153) claim to have identified good examples of the use of randomized designs in many areas of social work practice – in mental health, child and youth behavior, substance abuse, aging, health, domestic violence, mental health and child abuse.

Both simultaneously and subsequently, developments such as these have transformed into the contemporary evidence-based practice movement in both the USA and Britain (but to a lesser extent in Australia) (Sheldon, 1986; Kirk and Reid, 2002). Evidence-based practice in social work draws on developments in the health field (Trinder, 2000b). Evidence-based practice is clearly one of the dominant paradigms in health care, and from there, it spread into social work.

With several variations, evidence-based practice has risen to considerable prominence, particularly in the United States and Britain. Some proponents advocate a rather narrow form (for example, Thyer, 2001), in which interventions or *treatments* are chosen on the basis of the scientific support for them and which are simultaneously subject to ongoing evaluation of outcomes through the application of single system and other more rigorous research designs. Others such as Gambrill (2003) and Sheldon (2001) promote a broader form of evidence-based practice. While still advocating quite specific methods of drawing evidence into practice (for example, reviews and meta-analysis), this latter approach is less strictly confined to practice as empirical research and is more an overall approach to how practice should be undertaken. For Gambrill for example, evidence-based practice is as much a philosophy of practice as well as a concrete mode of engagement. Still others (such as Rosen, 2003, and Rosen and Procter, 2003) have promoted the notion of carefully

developed empirically-validated practice guidelines applied along with systematic planned practice and single-system designs.

One of the major justifications for the promotion of evidence-based practice is the desire by its proponents to lift social work out of what is presented as a quagmire of irrationality. Gambrill (2003), Rosen (2003) and Sheldon (2001), for example, all argue that social work in general fails to justify its actions by reference to any discernable (and hence testable, or at a minimum contestable) logic. Social work, as Gambrill (1999) famously asserted in a seminal article on evidence based practice, is an 'authority-based profession' and its claims to 'authority' are, for the most part, spurious. In one of her many publications on the topic (2001, p. 170), she argues that social work practice not informed by evidence is a 'recipe for bamboozlement' characterized by such factors as a fine-sounding but unimplemented code of ethics, reliance on methods of investigation that obscure rather than reveal what social workers do and to what effect, advocacy of a relativistic view of knowledge in which all modes of knowing are equal, propagandistic strategies and hyperbole.

Apart from the purely ethical impulse to render social workers more accountable for what they do, there are several reasons why evidence-based practice has re-emerged in the contemporary environment. Articulated differently in different contexts but reflective of the same theme, these involve first, the current misgivings about social work, particularly as articulated by less than friendly governments, and second, the re-construction of the institutional framework of practice with its subsequent impact on the profession (as extensively discussed in Chapter 6). In the former instance, in Britain for example, social work's apparent 'failures' have lead to the widespread introduction of care management in social services and the removal of social work out of the field of corrections.

While Sheldon and Macdonald (1999, p. 1) clearly locate evidence-based practice as part of that identifiable tradition of scientific research and evaluation, they also acknowledge the strategic objectives of scientific approaches to social work. In the United States, the rise of managed care has created circumstances in which social workers *must* demonstrate effectiveness (or at least attempt to do so) to effectively compete for survival. As indicated earlier and notwithstanding these contemporary developments,

the impulse to engage with social work as a form of scientifically informed practice has a long heritage, in part due to a core feature of the profession. Social work has continuously articulated its objective to stand on the side of those who are/were the objects of their interventions, committed to 'working with and enabling people to achieve the best possible levels of personal and social well-being' (Australian Association of Social Work 1999, p. 1). This essentially humanist orientation often stood (and still stands) at odds with those aspects of social work that are intrusive and controlling, illustrating the moral ambiguity and contradictory nature of many social work roles (for example, in child protection, mental health, juvenile and adult corrections and increasingly in forms of practice associated with workfare). The professional literature is replete with discussions and suggestions about ways of managing this potentially disabling ambiguity which, in one form or other, constitutes a core struggle within the profession.

For some, resolution of the dilemma involved developing alternative 'radical' forms of practice that recommended shifting social work out of the contexts that induce ambiguity in the first place. For others, resolution to the dilemma was sought in different ways that involved proactively engaging in ambiguous contexts of practice to better understand how effective social work intervention may be developed. These modes of responding rested on the assumption that social workers can retain their commitments to client well-being through, for example, the judicious use of valid knowledge rigorously developed, applied and evaluated within the framework of professional values and commitments. In fact, the overall approach was and is argued to *represent* those commitments, and is illustrative of the *morality* of evidence-based practice.

This tradition or way of responding to morally ambiguous contexts has, for quite some considerable time, promoted empirical research in clinical social work practice, particularly as a means of advancing client well-being (and professional ethicality). The adoption of evidence-based practice can be understood as the latest manifestation of this response; that is, a continuation of attempts to deal with moral ambiguity and uncertainty. I also suggest (in company with Witkin and Harrison, 2001) that the current engagement with scientific research in the form of

evidence-based practice by its proponents represents, in part, a contemporary enactment of the long-standing professional social work project. This is exactly what Rosen (2003, p. 198) means when he claims that evidence-based practice signifies the profession's commitment to a scientific knowledge base as one of the basic premises of professional social work practice. A recent publication by the Centre for Evidence-Based Social Care in Britain for example, states that 'it is important that professionally qualified social workers base their practice on the best evidence of what works' (Newman, 2002, p. 2), and that a social worker's claim to authority resides in her claim to 'expert knowledge' (ibid, p. 3). In this manner, the deployment of evidence-based practice 'can be considered as an enactment of cultural beliefs about what a profession should do and be' (Witkin and Harrison, 2001, p. 294).

Undoubtedly, a range of motivations encourage the promotion of evidence-based practice in social work, and as indicated, the most often expressed are those relating to fostering client well-being and professional accountability. It is also important to acknowledge that it is being promoted within a particular institutional, economic and organizational context shaped by the processes discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5. These processes as they relate to the professions have been discussed in the social sciences literature for some time (and in Chapter 6 I tied them down to social work in particular), variously nominated as de-professionalization, proletarianization, or de-skilling (Fournier, 2000; Hugman, 1998, p. 117). And as discussed in Chapter 6, in regards to professions such as social work such processes translate into developments such as the whittling away of professional privilege and autonomy, the tightening of professional accountability to managers, and the relaxation of professional boundaries. In human service organizations a focus on outcomes has emerged, in which organizational inputs (such as social work interventions) must demonstrate desirable outcomes. It is in *this* context that evidence-based practice has re-emerged. Its proponents position it as one of, if not the most appropriate strategic option to re-invigorate the professional project at a time when professions generally (and social work in particular) are viewed sceptically by managers. And in the ambiguous and morally contested fields of child protection, juvenile corrections,

and mental health for example, that evidence-based practice has been promoted as the *best* response to manage what is increasingly characterized as risks to the populations in question and to the general community (Powell, 2001; Power, 1997). In this way, evidence-based practice as a key contemporary manifestation of the social work professional project is positioned as an important strategy for managing contemporary environmental conditions.

Some claim that the current popularity of evidence-based practice resides in its apparent capacity to respond to the NPM-inspired agendas of contemporary governments concerned with such issues as effectiveness and accountability (Harris, 2003; Webb, 2001). In Britain, the primary pressure prompting its adoption has been one of rescuing social work's reputation and role in the personal social services, particularly child protection, in a context highly critical of its past failures and seeming ineptitude. Evidence-based practice also dominates in the United States, reflecting the desire by the profession there to continue to exhibit clinical effectiveness in the context of managed care. A recent policy document produced by the National Association of Social Work, for example, called for 25% of all physical health, mental health and substance abuse dollars be spent on research-based prevention and intervention services (Proctor, 2002). Promoted by the health insurance companies, the ubiquity of the case management model in that country has prompted the profession to urgently and seriously engage with evidence-based practice in an attempt to retain its significant role and labor market share, particularly in mental health. In Australia, the pressures are not as clear-cut, largely due to institutional differences in the delivery of health and welfare services and the differently articulated role of social work in those systems. Nevertheless, escalating competition in the human services labor market (McDonald, 1999), expansion of evidence-based practice in medicine and the allied health field, and increased political pressure for effective intervention in child protection – all provide the impetus for active engagement. So, evidence-based practice is poised as one of the key options for propelling the future of the profession, a future which clearly projects the tradition of the modernist professional project. As indicated above, this is not uncontested, and it is to this contest that I turn.

Arguing about evidence-based practice

Obviously evidence-based practice has its critics. These are essentially of two types – one critical of it from within the same paradigm or sets of assumptions about what constitutes knowledge (within-paradigm), and the other critical of it from a different paradigm (outside-of-paradigm). The first group, in the main, has become known as post-positivist (a group which while upholding positivist scientific approaches, increasingly acknowledges the contribution of qualitative data, but still within a traditional scientific framework). The second group is drawn from either a critical and/or constructivist approach, with some criticism posed in the spirit of contemporary theory (see Chapter 5).

Perhaps the most cogent within-paradigm critique was made in an influential article by Wakefield and Kirk (1996) in which they claim, damningly, that there is no evidence for the effectiveness of evidence-based practice, and what are held out as 'evidence' of effectiveness are, in fact, clinical anecdotes. (Also within-paradigm, Trinder (2000b) and Kirk and Reid (2002) make the same point.) In fact, a review by Faul, McMurtry and Hudson (2001) found only two studies which addressed the effectiveness of evidence-based practice. Wakefield and Kirk (1996) have other criticisms. First, they make the point that the single-system design is unable to generate knowledge about causal relationships. The very design proposed by advocates of evidence-based practice cannot provide insight into whether a social work intervention caused any observable effect. Second, they note that evidence-based practice promotes the use of rapid assessment instruments (standardized assessment instruments – see, for example, Fischer and Corcoran, 1994), which, they argue, have not been shown to be any more valid, reliable and effective than finely-honed practitioner critical reflexivity. Accordingly, evidence-based practice claims to accountability are, they argue, flawed. Taking a slightly different tack Wakefield and Kirk are also affronted by what they argue is the overly narrow focus on behavioral theories (for example, cognitive behavioral therapy). Such a focus, they claim, is unable to account for other theoretical approaches commonly employed in social work which are relationship-based. Finally, these authors reject the tendency for proponents of evidence-based practice to 'blame the practitioners'; a stance they argue

which fails to account for the complexities of everyday practice outside of the clinical trial.

Others follow in a similar vein. Trinder (2000b) argues that social work at the every-day level of practice is too messy, too contingent, and too morally and politically ambiguous to be adequately captured by the classic formulations or models of evidence-based practice. This general point is acknowledged by Rosen (2003) when he notes that evidence-based practice downplays the reality of the constraints placed on every-day practice by policy (and I would add, organizational ideology). Echoing Wakefield and Kirk, Trinder also raises the general impracticality of using randomized controlled trials in every-day practice. (Wakefield and Kirk (1996) prophesied that there would be howls of outrage from clients if they learnt that they were randomly selected into a non-treatment group when treatment was available.) In similar vein Kirk and Reid (2002) question the soundness of the evidence base, as does Smith (2000), a point acknowledged by Gambrill when she notes that much research done under the auspice of evidence-based practice is, in fact, poor research which tends to overstate the claims made (Gambrill, 2003, p. 5). These criticisms notwithstanding, many of the issues raised are within the realm of the addressable. That is, with sufficient care and resources, these issues could be managed and their effects ameliorated. The same cannot be said about the criticisms made of evidence-based practice from outside of the paradigm in which it is located.

This latter debate between the advocates and critics of evidence-based practice is, at its essence, a debate about meaning. It is also a debate about the essence of social work – of social workers, of clients, and of the interactions between the two. An important voice critical of evidence-based practice is that of American Stanley Witkin (1995; Witkin and Harrison, 2001). He notes that evidence-based practice is grounded in a very western and modernist ideal of individualism, one which positions the individual a rational actor separate from the social worker, capable of acting and being acted upon. As such, it is a conception which stands in start contrast to one drawn from a constructivist perspective which would understand the person (client and social worker) to be a result of a series of interactions between people, located within and conditioned by other sets of constitutive

relationships, institutions and structures. Recall the discussion in Chapter 7 about discourse and identity – about how social workers and welfare organizations promote certain identities to be taken up service users. That discussion used a constructivist perspective of the type advocated by Witkin in his consideration of evidence-based practice. He (1995, p. 72) suggests that evidence-based practice adopts a false notion of an independent knowable reality, as opposed to his preferred position that reality is created through social processes. He also argues that evidence-based practice promotes an ideology of individualism as opposed to one of collectivism. In other words, social workers when adopting evidence-based practice forms of social work focus predominantly on individualized work and individualized solutions to clients problems, when collective work and collective solutions might be more appropriate. Finally, Witkin takes offence at the notion that social work practice is a method of experiment (on clients as passive bodies), as opposed to a democratic process of discourse and dialogue between equally valued people. Certainly, Witkin illustrates the near impossibility of *rapprochement* between his position (and positions like his) and that of evidence-based practice supporters.

His is not a lone voice! His emphasis on the immediacy and importance of context in shaping social work encounters (and their outcomes) has been taken up by others (Healy, 2005; Smith, 2000). For Smith, the evidence-based practice assumptions about reality are unable to account for the complexity of context – continuously changing with time and space. The evidence-based practice is preoccupied with outcomes, but in a de-contextualized manner which inevitably results in research and practices which are non-significant and inconclusive (or at a minimum, hard to translate into other contexts). From Smith's perspective, the real imperative for good social work practice is to work out what is contextually useful, while remaining aware that the context itself is unstable. Of course, Witkin and Smith are both influenced by the constructivist critique of positivism. As such, they would argue that the claims made by evidence-based practitioners (that is that we could ever know what works, or even what constitutes 'real' practice contexts or social work interventions), are little more than pious hopes, and are more likely to be fundamental misrepresentations.

Another critic, Webb (2001) picks up the point I made earlier in the chapter when he aligns evidence-based practice politically with NPM, thereby positioning it as a tool for *managing* a potentially unruly group of people (social workers and the people who use their services) in times of the neoliberal re-make of the welfare state. In all fairness though, it should be noted that both sides of the evidence-based practice debate use a particular notion of morality and ethicality to stake their claim. In such circumstances, resolution or *rapprochement* between the two camps retreats ultimately to the murky (and in many ways, very private) realm of values and beliefs.

The strategic viability of evidence-based practice

But what of the daily realities of social work in the contemporary conditions? Will evidence-based practice result in the sorts of outcomes claimed for it? Will evidence-based practice create a more responsive, effective and accountable profession? Ultimately, will evidence-based practice provide a solid foundation for the future of social work? In some contexts of practice, particularly those where the presenting client conditions can be tightly defined and environmental contingencies can be somewhat moderated, it probably will be quite effective in assisting social workers to make decisions in informed ways. Such contexts might be residential treatment facilities for young people in conflict with the law or education programs for parents struggling with their roles. As such, it will help secure a future for social work practice in such areas, and is, accordingly a significant contribution.

Without a doubt, evidence-based practice is conceptually congruent with the sorts of developments re-structuring the contexts of practice discussed in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, as is clearly demonstrated in managed care-funded mental health services in the United States. The actual reach of evidence-based practice across the broad field of social work internationally really depends on the extent to which similar conditions are recreated elsewhere, and it is here that at least one caveat can be noted. As indicated, evidence-based practice is highly suited to some practice contexts. The extent to which such contexts dominate in any

one country (and the extent to which social work practice itself is constrained to a few contexts and roles), the more likely it is that the orientation of evidence-based practice will flourish. This explains, to a large extent, why evidence-based practice is emerging so strongly in Britain. In Australia, on the other hand, the sites of practice are highly diverse and there is nothing like the institutional imperatives (such as those emanating from the US health insurance companies or from the UK Home Office) bearing down in any comprehensive way. For these reasons, it is unlikely that evidence-based practice will have significant impact on the breadth of Australian social work.

Finally, (and picking up the ideas presented by contemporary theory in Chapter 5) it should be acknowledged that all social science knowledge is partial, both in terms of what it is able to 'know', and how it is able to do so. Social work is a range of activities mediating an ever-shifting and often-contested relationship between the state and its citizens. It is also a set of activities attempting to promote individual and social well-being which, given the state of social science knowledge, is inevitably limited and inexorably partial. In such conditions, placing boundaries around what can be known and how knowing is done is probably counter-productive. Rather, if social workers in all of their many guises are to be in any way successful in promoting the undeniably optimistic goals of the profession, then all forms of knowledge and ways of knowing need to be available and, as far as is humanly possible, taken up.

Cognizant of the evidence-based practice impatience with the 'knowledge is relative' position (and with their rejection of the 'irrationality' of contemporary theory (see Wakefield and Kirk, 1996)) it is nevertheless the case that an evidence-based practice framework does not reflect the sometimes contested and divergent knowledge brought into play in the many places and ways social work is practiced. Even though positioned as a 'flight from reason' (ibid, p. 94), the sorts of insights provided by contemporary theory (Chapter 5) for example, weaken the the knowledge-claims made by proponents of evidence-based practice. For example, contemporary ways of understanding young women with eating disorders swing between the polar opposites of a psycho-medical approach to one informed by various bodies of feminist theory and other developments in contemporary

theory. Similarly, social workers working with people with disabilities need to 'know' about impairment and its effects from the evidence available, but they also need to 'know' about the social and political experience of living in a disabling world, and how interactions between service providers and service users discursively create disability. Evidence-based practice frameworks limit the capacity of practitioners to draw, in the first instance on contested and oppositional knowledge (feminist and other contemporary approaches to eating disorders), and in the second instance, on 'knowledge' developed by and with people with disabilities. In the case of the latter, it is not so much that this knowledge is rejected. Rather, (and despite claims made that users' insights are included) the modes by which what is judged as 'evidence' tend not to be sympathetic or grant legitimacy to the views of such groups. Instead, evidence-based practice ways of knowing render service users as passive recipients who pass judgement on pre-determined professionally-prescribed interventions.

Evidence-based practice attempts to overlay a particular and bounded template on the diverse and extremely complex conditions of social work practice that may well be shaped by different sets of assumptions. Accordingly, it cannot always 'see' what is going on or 'hear' the noise generated on the ground (Trinder, 2000b). In many contexts, such as working with indigenous people or engaging in community development, evidence-based practice probably asks the wrong questions. In working with indigenous people in an acute health care setting, for example, a social worker employing an evidence-based practice framework would not, in all likelihood, consider the impact of dispossession or alienation. Similarly, an evidence-based practice framework would not assist a practitioner to attend to the importance and impact of culture in groups of people such as the profoundly deaf.

In these forms of practice, evidence-based practice would fail, and more importantly, it would fail in terms of its own indicators of success. What I mean by this is that by not encouraging attention to such defining factors as culture or power, interventions designed within an evidence-based practice framework would not achieve the sorts of measurable outcomes desired, and in fact, may exacerbate the presenting 'problem'. For these reasons (and for the technical reasons discussed in the previous section), doubt

must be held about the capacity for evidence-based practice to successfully propel either the narrowly defined professional project or the broader collection of activities of social work into the future alone. If social work is to continue doing what it does in all its diversity and if it is to engage in new arenas and in new ways of delivering welfare, it probably needs to look beyond evidence-based practice for direction. This does not mean, however, that social work should abandon the impulse carried by evidence-based practice. The ethics of evidence-based practice – that is, its wish to promote a more effective and accountable social work – is a worthy ambition and one which social work should retain. How this is done with maximum impact is the real question of interest. As Kirk and Reid state (2002, p. 165), science (read 'knowledge') for practice needs to be disentangled from scientific practice. There are many ways to do this, but the recent suggestions by Rosen (2003) and Rosen and Proctor (2003) about the development and use of practice guidelines seem eminently suited to a profession which has long displayed difficulties in engaging with research-based knowledge. Indeed, recent research by Mullen and Bacon (1999) suggests that practice guidelines used in professional supervision would be an effective route of promoting the underlying objectives of evidence-based practice of effectiveness and accountability.

Evidence-based practice clearly has something to offer. But if the 'one-size fits all' approach prevails (as some proponents of evidence-based seem to propose) they do the profession few favours. While the strategic merits of evidence-based practice are apparent, as merits they are also bounded. Clearly, in terms of the three major challenges posed to the profession outlined in Part 1 – the economics, politics and ideas of change – evidence-based practice responds to some and not others. As a strategy, it is congruent with the economics of change and with the politics of change. The ideas of change represented by the challenge of contemporary theory would at the same time, undermine any capacity to make the sorts of truth claims that evidence-based practice needs to make to have legitimacy. In consequence, far from providing the guaranteed and fool-proof way forward, evidence-based practice is reduced to being one, relatively limited (and even limiting) option. In the next chapter I turn to another strategic option, but in this case (and in the

case of the final option we will canvass in Chapter 11), the orientation, foundations and even the purpose suggested radically depart from those proposed by both the entrepreneurial profession and the evidence-based practice informed scientific profession.

10 Critical Practice

Entrepreneurial social work and evidence-based practice can be understood as attempts on the part of their advocates to respond to both the *economics* and the *politics* of change. In this chapter we turn to another complex stream of social work theory and practice which, in some recently developed forms, claims to have also engaged with the *ideas* of change, presented in Chapter 5 as the challenges posed by contemporary theory. My use of the omnibus term *critical practice* refers to the many and varied heirs of a long tradition of radical social work. According to Powell (2001), critical practice has had an astonishing impact on the profession's consciousness somewhat at odds with the actual numbers of people adopting it as their referred mode of practice.

Critical practice has developed through several iterations throughout the twentieth century, with present forms drawing their impetus largely from developments in social work accompanying the social movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the United States, Britain, Australia and Canada, a movement grew up in and around social work, informed by a flourishing literature (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978; Galper, 1975; Moreau, 1979; Specht, 1969; Throsell, 1975). This group contested many of the assumptions of the mainstream professional social work project, for example the nature of social work knowledge and the limitations of relying solely on positivist paradigms. The overall *oeuvre* of critical practice has several variants which are not all congruent with each other. Given space limitations, this chapter focuses on the most recent (and if publications are any indication), the most influential developments. I discuss structural social work, human rights practice, anti-oppressive practice and critical social work. While the early formulations were unarguably grounded in Marxist theory, the key development in the past ten years has been an increasing engagement with critical

social theory – a contemporary form of neo-Marxism that emphasizes the interconnectedness of the economic, social, political and cultural realms in the ongoing maintenance of a capitalist regime of accumulation, and which in some instances, attempts a limited *rapprochement* with constructivism. The post-Fordist-inspired analysis presented in Chapter 3, for example, presents one variation of this extensive theoretical corpus. Some versions of critical social theory attempt to link the structuralism of neo-Marxist theory with the concern for subjectivism or a constructivist perspective (Fairclough, 2000). It asks, for example, how is it that people in their everyday actions and relationships constitute and reconstitute social structures?

In certain instances critical social work (but less so critical social theory) engages with contemporary theory (Chapter 5). Despite purposeful linkages to these genres of (extremely complex) social theory, contemporary critical practice is nevertheless just that – it is a *set of practices* and *prescriptions for action* – couched within a particular world view. In this way, critical social work carries the intent or the politics of critical social theory into the realm of social work practice. As with the previous chapters, my purpose here is to explore the 'fit' between critical practice and the contemporary conditions in which it is proposed – conditions shaped by the economics, politics and ideas of change. By engaging with the genre in this way, readers are better placed to assess the strategic merits of adopting critical social work in their own contexts of practice. Before this can be done though, the variegated contours of contemporary critical practice must be drawn. We begin with structural social work

Structural social work

Developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Moreau (1979), contemporary structural social work is most clearly represented by the work of Mullaley (2002; 1997). In his most recent book Mullaley (2002) adopts the conflict (Marxist) perspective which he explicitly contrasts with the classic sociology of Durkheim, Weber and Parsons. He argues that the various forms of psychosocial and systems social work largely adopt the latter (read conservative) paradigm, whereas structural social work adopts the former

(read radical) approach. He also claims that his approach incorporates most if not all of the significant developments in the conflict perspective over the 20th century. Accordingly, structural social work purposefully adopts a theoretical perspective informed by aspects of the range of what he calls the recent and contemporary critical social theories, incorporating classic and contemporary Marxism, feminism, Marxist-inspired political economy, the work of the so-called Frankfurt School, neocolonialism and aspects of contemporary theory. In application, this undeniably complex theoretical framework supports a wide-ranging analysis, and different levels and modes of intervention which attend to the multiple levels and dimensions of social experience.

As its name implies, structural social work is primarily concerned with understanding and overcoming the oppressive effects of social structures. Oppression in its various forms is a central organizing theme. In particular, structural social work is concerned with the many ways in which domination of some groups in society by other groups is sustained by structural processes. The central plank of its practice is to assist people, particularly oppressed people, to understand how their specific and local circumstances – their experiences, relationships, feelings – are shaped by dominant economic, political, social and cultural institutions. Since it is firmly committed to change, a second key objective is to assist people to develop alternative systems and processes which challenge the dominant structures.

Drawing on the insights of critical social theory which, as indicated earlier, charts the interconnectedness of the various institutions and levels of social and economic reproduction, structural social work also organises its interventions on different 'levels' so to speak. It does this largely to attempt to attend *in practice* to the complexities of social regulation and reproduction illustrated by critical social theory. In other words, structural social work models its practice on the multi-layered analyses of critical social theory. The first level is that of the personal. Here, Mullaley argues that structural social work needs to focus, through a range of fairly standard intervention methods, on the personal problems attendant to oppression – be they environmental (such as inadequate income or poor housing), interpersonal (such as poor personal relations or domestic violence) or intra-psychic (such as

poor self-esteem, guilt, ambivalence). In doing so, the work is guided by and grounded in the imperative to make the personal political. In other words, the aim is to ensure that the private problems people experience are understood by them as political problems imposed by an oppressive social system. Nevertheless, by attending to this level of the personal, Mullaley is grounding structural social work practice in the classic domain of social work practice more broadly – the person in environment. Second, and again, clearly picking up the analysis of critical social theory, Mullaley nominates the realm of the cultural as an important field or domain of practice. Here he suggests engagement in and with alternative and counter-cultural activities, the deliberate enactment of creative acts of resistance. He recommends that social workers work with people in the creation of alternative discourses (music, art, poetry, drama) about, for example, the causes of welfare dependency or the effects of disabling social policies. Finally, as the name would suggest, one very important domain of practice is the structural, or in practice, the institutional level – the development of alternative services and service structures, engagement in critical social policy practice and the revitalization of political life through active political engagement.

One of the considerable strengths of Mullaley's model of structural social work is its explicit nomination of a psychology of oppression. Drawing on a number of liberationist authors (such as Franz Fanon, 1966) he provides a clear alternative framework for thinking about why people develop personal problems, plus proposes a means for addressing them. More importantly, adopting such a psychology provides a eloquent reason for engaging at the intra-psychic and interpersonal level – a justification which was to a large degree missing from earlier accounts of radical social work. It is also an approach from which an analysis of the operations and consequences of the economics and politics of change (that is, of neoclassical economics, economic globalization, and neoliberalism) can be drawn. This, in turn, provides a rationale for why social workers should continue to practice in the contemporary conditions.

While Mullaley claims to incorporate the insights of contemporary theory, he does so in a quite minimalist way which doesn't really engage with the ideas of change discussed in Chapter 5. Finally, and to a certain extent in common with

the other modes of critical practice to be canvassed here, the other limitation of structural social work lies in its general failure to address the realities of the existing and emerging institutional and organizational contexts of practice experienced by most social workers – contexts shaped by the dictates of New Public Management (NPM). In other words, other than to recommend the development of 'alternatives', the ongoing and widespread re-organization of the majority of sites of practice inspired by public choice and agency theory is not fundamentally acknowledged. Accordingly, it would be very difficult to practice structural social work in the bulk of sites where social workers actually engage.

Human rights-based practice

Another version of critical practice is informed by a human rights perspective. While proposed by such prominent American authors such as Stanley Witkin (1998), and recently expanded by Reichert (2003), the most important contemporary advocate of human rights practice is Ife (1997, 2001). Formally codified in the various United Nations Declarations and Covenants, it is a mode of practice which is most comfortably located within a modernist framework, but it makes some cautious gestures towards contemporary theory. In many ways, human rights-based practice is ideally suited to the times because it provides an intuitively attractive and hence galvanizing moral flavor to social work practice. As such, it provides a strong platform for social workers to articulate an alternative discourse to neoliberalism.

For Ife, human rights are not some abstract political formulation. Rather, they are grounded in practice in that it is 'the relationship between the discursive construction of human rights and the practice of human rights' which is crucial (Ife, 2001, p. 133). He suggests that there are two ways that a social worker might go about promoting human rights-based practice. The first is deductive – in which a social worker asks what the meaning of and application of an articulated human right might be in different contexts of practice. Answering this question provides, in turn, practice goals and informs practice processes. The United Nations International Convention on the Rights of the Child,

for example, can be used to assess the functioning of an alternate care service in terms of whether or not the service promotes or retards children's rights. The alternative approach (to be used in a complementary fashion) is inductive in that is begins with a practice context or problem and asks what rights should be upheld.

Ife (2001) uses a template drawn from three generations of human rights to locate modes of practice. The first generation are civil and political rights. The dominant interventions were and are advocacy, work with refugees and asylum seekers and prison reform. The dominant profession and the dominant framework is that of the law. The second generation are the economic, social and cultural rights characteristic of a mature social democracy and modernist welfare state. Here, traditional modes of social work such as direct service, policy development and advocacy research dominate. The third generation of rights are the collective rights (which have as yet little institutional legitimacy but plenty of global support from, for example, social movements and non-government development agencies). This tranche of rights is more closely aligned with community development and as we shall see in Chapter 11, a more fully-fledged model of social work as social development.

In 1997, Ife discussed how human rights could be employed as a conceptual framework for underpinning social work practice. He developing an argument that social work practice can be conceived as promoting a universalist view of social justice balanced by and expressed through a relativist view of human needs, varying from person to person and from context to context. It is in this relativizing process that this form of critical social work recognizes the complexities and diversities of people's lives and needs accentuated by contemporary theory. Further, the meeting of people's needs is lifted out of the long-standing conceptual quagmire of need versus merit through its linkage with rights. Needs claims when linked to rights claims become, Ife asserts, unambiguously legitimate. Adopting a human rights-based perspective of practice also challenges the modernist professional project in that it provides a critical framework to examine distancing and disempowering processes that social workers might employ. The language of social work, such as 'client', 'intervention' and 'supervision' are essentially metaphors which, when

examined with a human rights lens, position clients in a less than equal position to be acted upon by the professional social worker. Ife is similarly critical of the ongoing operations of the professional project through the professional structures and education of social workers, all of which are, from his perspective, little more than an employment of inappropriate power, subsequently de-stabilized by a human rights perspective. In a similar vein Witkin (1998), in an editorial in the American journal *Social Work*, argues that human rights can usefully serve as a framework for social work research, evaluation, practice and pedagogy. (It should be noted that some versions of human rights practice are entirely uncritical of the professional project and locate rights-based practice as good *professional* practice – for example, see Reichert, 2003.)

The strategic value of human rights-based practice in the contemporary conditions is clear. First, as indicated above, it provides a unambiguous and inspiring morality and politics for practitioners made despondent by the harshness and intractability of the contemporary workfare state. For this reason alone, human rights-based practice provides a viable platform for the future of social work. Second, it provides a framework for making conceptual linkages across the private-public divide and articulating arguments for constructive public engagement in what is increasingly cast as private domains. In other words, the goal of upholding human rights gives social workers the legitimacy to suggest that the state should not abandon disadvantaged individuals, families and communities. Finally, it provides a clear set of foundational documents in the form of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. In a context in which the legitimacy of government investment in social infrastructure is increasingly weakened, such documents provide a basis for arguing the opposite. They also, as suggested previously, provide the foundations of an evaluative template which may be applied to social welfare organizations, services and social work practices. In summary, human rights-based practice both confronts and responds to the economics *and* the politics of change. Ultimately, fearing de-stabilizing tendencies particularly in relation to such universalist ideas as human rights, this form of critical practice does not (and its advocates

in all probability would not) want to fully engage with the ideas of change.

Anti-oppressive practice

The next variant of critical social work to be considered here is anti-oppressive practice (Dominelli, 1998; Dalrymple and Burke, 1995), an increasingly influential approach in social work, particularly in Britain. Contemporary articulations have arisen out of a range of developments in the broad genre of radical or critical social work of which feminist practice, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory practice are the most influential. All address the diversities and multiplicities of inequalities, marginalization and disadvantage, and in doing so, inform the development of a more generic anti-oppressive practice. Black feminism (Hill-Collins, 1990) in particular has been a driving force behind the development of anti-oppressive social work practice. Anti-racist and more latterly anti-oppressive practice considers the interconnections between the major social structures and divisions of race, class, gender, disability, sexuality and age. As with structural social work, anti-oppressive practice is concerned with how it is that personal issues are reflections of broader structural processes arising from social divisions.

Anti-oppressive practice has a number of key principles (Dominelli, 1998; Burke and Harrison, 1998, p. 231). The first of these is *recognizing social difference* arising from race, gender, class, sexual preference, disability, and age plus those arising around religion, region, mental health and so forth. The second is *linking the personal and political* in which personal biographies and personal experiences are placed in a wider social context. Third, anti-oppressive practice has a specific understanding of *power* as a social process (or more accurately series of processes) that operate in all spheres; the public and the private, at personal and at structural levels. The fourth principle is that of appreciating the contingent effects of *historical and geographical location* in which individual life experiences and events are considered as constituted within a specific time and place, and as such, are given meaning within the context of prevailing ideas, social facts and cultural differences. Fifth, anti-oppressive practice is centrally

concerned with *reflexivity/mutual involvement* where reflexivity is understood as the constant consideration of how values, social difference and power affect the interactions between individuals. These interactions (for example, between social worker and service user) are to be understood not only in psychological terms, but also as a matter of sociology, history, ethics and politics. The driving force of anti-oppressive practice is the *act of challenging* and opportunities for change are created by the process of the challenge. A challenge invokes changes at micro and macro levels. The dynamic link between theory and practice is the case scenario, the autobiography, the narrative, or the tale.

Anti-oppressive practice is, claim Wilson and Beresford (2000) and Williams (1999), currently very influential in social work, particularly academic social work in Britain, so much so that it has taken on the characteristics of a contemporary social work canon! By positioning itself as against the manifest and manifold wrongs of oppression (and therefore explicitly on the virtuous side of a good-bad binary divide) it also positions itself as inevitably 'correct' – a point also noted by Healy (2005, p. 190). From Wilson and Beresford's rather robust perspective, anti-oppressive practice is somewhat problematic. It is, they claim, an approach which has failed to engage in critical reflexivity of its own position and its own practices. For Wilson and Beresford, this manifests itself in its incapacity to engage with the service user movement in genuinely anti-oppressive ways. To be more precise, anti-oppressive social work has taken on an authority to determine what is knowledge and what is 'good' practice; it promotes a set of truth claims which both appropriate service users knowledge, experiences and ideas 'whilst retaining the power to determine just what counts as anti-oppressive' (ibid, p. 566; Healy, 2005, p. 190). For Wilson and Beresford this means that anti-oppressive practice is, from their perspective, just the latest of a series of attempts by the social work professional project to position itself as a legitimate and hence powerful purveyor of truth, justice and liberation. In terms of the analytical framework adopted in this book, Wilson and Beresford's claims are pertinent in that they illustrate what may well be an outcome of the lack of engagement by the sponsors of anti-oppressive practice with contemporary theory. In other words, despite its inclusive intent and its structural political analysis, anti-oppressive social work, from a contemporary

theory point of view, is little different from other more traditional modernist forms of social work as a professional project. That said, anti-oppressive practice, like human rights-based practice and structural social work explicitly engage with the effects of the economics and the politics of change in the lives of disadvantaged people.

Clearly, proactive engagement with contemporary theory is not a key feature of the three variants of critical social work examined to this point. I have argued that in slightly different ways, all bear significant likeness to the modernist social work project and can even be considered to be variations of these within a similar modernist structural framework. The next group unambiguously claims to be different and its proponents, to varying effect, explicitly locate themselves within the framework of critical social theory *and* contemporary theory.

Critical social work

Emerging out of the tradition of radical and structural social work, some of the most recent developments in social work practice theory are found in a growing body of work informed by both critical social theory and by contemporary theory. The mix or theoretical emphasis does, however, vary. Some authors in the genre draw more on critical social theory; others attempt to incorporate the insights of contemporary theory. In this way, Ife (1997) for example, would position his work within the critical social work tradition, but his actual engagement with contemporary theory is both limited and quite critical. Those that do engage more directly with contemporary theory represent what is promoted as a qualitatively different and significant advance, in that the dual theoretical engagement claims to shift the foundations of social work practice sufficiently to challenge the modernist professional project. Here I discuss key proponents whose work falls directly into the category of social work practice theory – for example Fook (2002), Pease (2002), Pease and Fook (1999), Healy (2000), and Parton and O'Byrne (2000). I focus specifically on practice theorists because, although other social work authors have applied the theoretical insights of contemporary theory to social work (Chambon, Irving and Epstein, 1999; Leonard, 1997;

Howe, 1994), the work of the practice theorists listed above represents a maturation of the genre in that it applies contemporary theory developmentally to practice. By this I mean that these authors argue an alternative mode of doing social work, and as such, present an alternative strategic option.

Jan Fook (2002) represents an important example of an author who is attempting to incorporate critical social theory and contemporary theory into everyday practice. She suggests that both bodies of theory are relevant for strengthening social work practice for a range of reasons (see Fook 2002, pages 13 and 14 for the full list). Overall, her position is that a positive reading of contemporary theory in conjunction with critical social theory allows for a more nuanced and liberated approach to practice with marginalized people, one which, through its critique of mainstream practices, opens up the potential for new ways of engaging. In other words, her central claim is that contemporary theory augments structural approaches to social work.

One of the major ways by which this occurs is through the re-conceptualization of power (and hence empowerment) that is possible through the application of contemporary theory. This, of course, is central to social work practice in that power is a core dynamic in practice and empowerment a primary goal. It is here that the attraction of these developments for social workers starts to become clear. Fook (2002, p. 48) notes that modernist conceptions of power are inadequate for five reasons. First, power is conceived as a finite commodity which can be transferred (via empowerment for example) only at the expense of others. Second, modernist conceptions of power split the world into two mutually exclusive groups – the powerful and the powerless. Such a characterization, for example, does not allow for the exercise of power by the powerless – such as the power exercised by otherwise disadvantaged men in relationships characterized by domestic violence. Third, power (or empowerment) from a modernist perspective implies that everyone should be treated the same – a conception which does not encourage responsiveness to difference. Fourth, accounting for why some people appear to willingly comply with their own disempowerment is difficult from a modernist perspective. Finally, engagement in processes of 'empowerment' may paradoxically be experienced as disempowering by the very people they are meant to empower.

Drawing on the work of Foucault, Fook notes that from the perspective of contemporary theory, power is exercised not possessed; power can be both repressive and productive; and power is multi-dimensional and ubiquitous. Power becomes both a core factor in and a key tool in all social work practices. In a significant article Pease (2002) expands on the importance of this way of thinking about power, particularly in terms of the social work goal of empowerment. His premise is that critical social work should engage with contemporary theory because it allows us to think about and develop new strategies more relevant to the contemporary era, and ones which directly counter those of neoliberal politics and policies. Acknowledging that traditional 'empowerment' by a social worker is essentially the exercise of power, Pease suggests that instead, we should think about empowerment as attending to and encouraging the expression (insurrection) of 'subjugated knowledges'. At the same time we should be challenging the status of our own professional knowledge. In this way, the key strategy nominated is one which involves a particular way of working with disempowered (silenced) groups. It largely involves creating real alliances between practitioners and 'clients' (both temporary and permanent) in which alternative stories can be told and in which alternative strategies can be both imagined and developed.

Interestingly, Pease grounds this approach in a practice example drawn from the work of the Dulwich Centre with a group of Indigenous Australians whose relatives had died in custody. The Dulwich Centre is a private family therapy agency devoted to developing and promoting narrative therapy – a form of intervention which claims to be underpinned by contemporary theory (White and Epston, 1990). As we will see, it is an approach which another of our exemplars of critical social work, Nigel Parton, draws on extensively. The third example of influential authors in developing and promoting contemporary critical social work which draws on both critical social theory and contemporary theory is Healy (2001, 2000). Healy's work is intellectually very sophisticated and the linkages between critical social theory and contemporary theory are more convincing than many in the genre. Her specific intent is to revive the critical social work tradition by demonstrating how to overcome the split between theory and practice, a split which has seriously undermined critical

practice. Further, her other core objectives are to understand the importance of context in social work practice, to understand the role of power and to address the challenges posed by the NPM-inspired developments in public administration. Here, she argues, but to a lesser extent demonstrates, that the contemporary context of practice provides potential sites for the re-invention and re-invigoration of critical social work practice theory.

Healy's work has significant strengths, particularly in regards to the contemporary environment. First, she addresses what is an important problem for radical and critical social work. Through her intent to develop a means of overcoming the split between theory and practice, she confronts head on the phenomenon of parallel universes, one occupied by critical (academic) social workers and one occupied by practitioners in the field. To the extent that she is successful in doing this, her work provides an invaluable example of how critical practitioners can confront the developments in the field outlined in Part 1. She also confronts another key problem for critical social work wherein she exposes the inherently irrational 'truth claims' of those forms of critical practice which marginalise dissent. Further, she demonstrates how practice can be undertaken by drawing on real examples of practice with young mothers. This last point is the major strength of what Healy offers in that she shows that critical social work informed by contemporary theory is actually possible. Similarly grounded in the real world of practice (in mental health, child protection and income security, for example) an edited volume by Napier and Fook (2000) illustrate how the ideas of contemporary theory can be applied to social work practice.

The final example of influential exponents of critical social work deliberately employing contemporary theory is provided by Parton (1998, 1994) and Parton and O'Byrne (2000). Here, the need to engage with the contemporary conditions of practice is proposed as a core reason about why alternative modes of practice need to be developed. In particular, Parton (1998) and Parton and O'Byrne (2000) argue that the contemporary conditions, especially those experienced in the British social service departments, make the development of alternative ways of practice urgent. Further they (Parton and O'Byrne, p. 7) note that contemporary policy discourse in Britain explicitly nominates that state-provided services should be user-centerd. In doing so, the

policy context actually provides both the opportunity and the legitimacy for different forms of practice. Parton and O'Byrne are arguably the most strategic-minded of the critical social work authors discussed in this chapter. Importantly, they (like Healy) also argue that their work is designed specifically for the 'hard' sites of practice – that is, child protection and other forms of statutory work.

They developed what they call 'constructive social work'. Drawing extensively on the narrative work of Michael White (White and Epston, 1990), constructive social work emphasises process and the plurality of both knowledge and voice. They use the term 'constructive' deliberately – to indicate a particular theoretical orientation (that is drawing on constructionist and narrative approaches) and metaphorically (to indicate that this is an approach which draws on the distinctive nature of social work in a positive manner).

They outline the key theoretical themes of constructive social work which clearly illustrate their engagement with constructivism and contemporary theory. The first of these is the dynamic and constitutive notions of narrative and 'spin' - that is, encouraging the telling of and listening to people's stories and listening to the contingent context and nature of each story. Second, like Fook, Pease and Healy, constructive social work uses a conception of power drawn from contemporary theory. Third, constructive social work interprets users' life stories in a way that is similar to the reading of texts, and each reading opens up the possibility for a new reading or new text. Fourth, instead of assuming that we (social workers) have some privileged ways of understanding, constructive social workers assume that they have misunderstood, and work constructively with people to minimize misunderstanding. Fifth, keeping the focus squarely on language (and hence discourse), constructive social work is continuously aware of its constitutive effects. Accordingly, one of the key principles of practice is to 'mind your language'. Sixth, constructive social workers hold conversations with people, conversations that are designed to work towards the co-authorship of a new story. Seventh, constructive social work aims to activate constructive agency. Eighth, constructive social work promotes a view of the past as *past*. That is, while it acknowledges the destructive or restrictive impact of past events, for example, it asks that we focus

instead on successes or exceptions. Finally, in constructive social work practice, resistance is re-defined not as a problem or issue for the service user, but as worker error in not listening properly to the user's goals.

Like Fook (2002) Parton and O'Byrne (2000) go on to develop quite detailed orientations to practice as well as guidelines for undertaking constructive assessment. Finally, acknowledging the contemporary fixation with demonstrating effectiveness and practice-related outcomes, Parton and O'Byrne include a chapter on whether constructive social work actually works. As they have no studies of effectiveness of their model to report, they instead drawn on effectiveness studies of other related constructive modes of practice such as solution-focused and narrative interventions undertaken in a range of settings. These, they argue, demonstrate sufficient effectiveness to warrant similar faith in constructive social work. Nevertheless, they are not constructive social work and as such, Parton and O'Byrne's claims should be treated for what they are – claims. That said, it must be acknowledged that Parton and O'Byrne's work focuses most pointedly on the politics of change and the contemporary re-working of the organizational contexts of social work practice.

Overall can critical social work find or create space in the contemporary institutional contexts of practice? Does it represent a real option for social work? Here, I link back to my introductory comments to this chapter where I suggested that critical social work was never at the center of social work practice broadly conceived and (despite ambitious claims) is still is at the margins. In reality, the institutional 'spaces' for practice as conceived within the genre are increasingly constrained by the developments within the environment. Earlier forms of radical practice did find institutional homes, paradoxically authorized by the state (for example in the British Community Development Projects, the American Model Cities program and the Australian Assistance Plan in the 1960s and early 1970s). But no such state-sponsored habitat exists today. Rather, the spaces for practice are small, non-state and marginal. That said, if we think about critical practice broadly defined as an expression of morality and politics, it will, in all likelihood, continue to occupy a larger position in the collective professional imagination than the realities of contemporary practice actually dictate. As Healy (2000) so aptly notes, critical social

work like other modernist forms of practice, awards itself a 'truth status' and a unifying orientation in which is it positioned as a possible (read 'best') form of practice for everyone. This suggests that underneath, there is an enduring attachment to part of the intent of the professional project to shape social work. In conclusion, I suggest that most, of not all forms of critical practice will continue to be vigorously advocated if not necessarily undertaken – but it will continue on the margins of mainstream social work – or will be practiced in completely different spaces. This point is taken up in Chapter 11 where I explore the contours of global social work, and in particular, in a developing form of social work as social development, for it is here that, again, the theoretical impulse of critical social work is grounded in particular forms of practice.

11 Global Social Work[1]

The final strategic option, global social work, is one of the most interesting, and it is one which opens up a range of possible sites for practice. It is also an option which addresses the economics, the politics, and in some instances, the ideas of change. Paradoxically, it is a genre of social work which was once heralded to play a significant role in shaping the profession's emerging identity in the 20th century. After World War II and under the auspice of the United Nations, social work was positioned as a (if not *the*) key occupation to undertake social development in the so called 'developing' nations. The paradox is that as the modernist western welfare states developed in the nations of what is known in development circles as the global North (Britain, Europe, the USA, and Canada, but which includes white Australia, white New Zealand and white South Africa), social work as a profession seemed to lose interest in (or at least failed to convincingly articulate) its potential role in social development. As those modernist welfare states weaken and are re-constituted into workfare regimes, the possibility re-emerges for social work to play a role in international social work and social development. That said, it must still be acknowledged that the long shadow of the welfare state remains. Organized along national lines and promoted by modernist professionalized and bureaucratized social welfare, the welfare state continues to inhibit the capacity of social work collectively and individually to think internationally and to imagine the full range of possibilities for global practice (for an example of this, see Webb, 2003).

In this chapter and under the rubric of global social work, I explore what is more commonly known as international social

[1] Some of the ideas presented in this Chapter are informed by my collaboration with my colleague, Ingrid Burkett (see Burkett and McDonald, 2005); I acknowledge my debt to her.

work and social development. As we will see, some forms of international social work and some forms of social development are essentially modernist in their orientation, and as such, are congruent with the maintenance and projection of the professional project into this arena. In contrast, some of the recent advances in social development have proactively engaged with ideas of change as expressed in contemporary theory, largely via post-modern development studies and critical geography. It should also be noted that this is a genre of theoretical work and practice, and indeed social development more broadly, which specifically confronts the economics of change. Elsewhere, a colleague and I (Burkett and McDonald, 2005) have argued that contemporary social work can learn from these developments and can incorporate them into social work practice not only in countries of the South (the so-called developing countries, for example, in Africa, the Pacific and South America), but also in contexts characteristic of the South that exist *within* countries of the North (for example, the experiences of indigenous peoples in Australia, New Zealand, Canada, and the USA in particular). When applied to social work, the mode of development practice informed by contemporary theory stands very much in opposition to the professional project. I have dubbed both forms of development practice *social development work*, but nevertheless distinguish between them. We begin though with the well-established genre of international social work.

International social work

International social work as an area of social work practice has been around for as long as social work itself. Recently, interest in it as a distinct field of practice has escalated partially as a result of economic, social and cultural globalization, and partially as a result of the destabilization of national welfare regimes and the subsequent de-stabilization of the social work professional project within those regimes. As I noted earlier, the establishment of the United Nations post World War II exerted a powerful influence on social work to engage in international activities and was largely responsible for the spread of social work education programs throughout the countries of the South, establishing social work

within nation state regimes. Immediately after World War II, the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration was formed with a specific role for social work in its social welfare division. Over the 1950s and 1960s, the UN strenuously engaged in the promotion of social work as integral to its development programs via a series of reports and conferences (Healy, 2001). More recently, there are calls emerging suggesting that there *should* be a role for social workers at the global level (Powell and Geoghegan, 2005), but there is less clarity about the real dimensions and practical activities of that role. So, what is international social work?

Immediately, we land in controversy! A key advocate for social work as social development, James Midgley, notes that the term international social work is '. . . widely (although imprecisely) used to denote the exchanges that take place between social workers from different societies and cultures' (1990, p. 295). Clearly this is a definition that exhibits a high level of generality, but it doesn't say much about what is actually done in the name of international social work. In their review of literature on the topic, Nagy and Falk (2000) have highlighted the lack of clear terminology used by various authors. As a result, there appears to be no consensus on how the term is to be employed which, in turn, has implications from both a practical and an educational perspective.

Logically, any evaluation of the strategic merits of international social work in the contemporary conditions should incorporate an appreciation of the *imperatives* said to be propelling it. Healy (2001) provides an excellent summary organized around the notion of escalating global interdependence. The first form is *environmental interdependence* through which environmental issues such as pollution and resource depletion (mineral resources, forests, water and soil) are understood as trans-national issues affecting all peoples of the world. The second is *cultural interdependence* produced by advancements in communication technologies, inexpensive world travel (for some) and international movements of populations. All of us are familiar with one major form of cultural globalization, often called the 'Americanization', 'westernization', or 'cultural imperialism' referring to what many believe to be the homogenization of culture across the globe. Driven by the largely North American mass media and the

relentless global marketization of iconic products (Coca Cola, blue jeans, McDonald's, rock music), cultural globalization is represented as a type of universal solvent dissolving cultural differences in its wake. Often understood as a primary mechanism of neo or post-colonialism driven by first world economies, cultural globalization is conceptualized as the new symbolic and psychological means by which dominant economies can exert control over emerging economies and facilitate their entry and location in the emerging economic order.

The third form of interdependence nominated by Healy (2001) is *economic interdependence*. In Chapter 3 I discussed the economic developments which have made all countries and all national economies interdependent, or more accurately, dependent on and influenced by global economic activities and processes. In addition to these three forms of dependence, there is also the growing acknowledgement of interdependence around security, particularly in relation to the threat of terrorism.

There are at least four forms that international social work can take (Healy, 2001). The first of these is internationally-related domestic practice and advocacy: for example, refugee re-settlement, settlement and support work with other international populations (migrants – both legal and illegal) within nation states, international adoption work, and social work in border areas. The second is professional exchange which she describes as the capacity and practices of exchanging knowledge and experience relevant to domestic social work between different nation states. The third area which we will cover in more detail later is international practice – the preparation of some professional social workers to contribute directly to social development work either through employment or formal volunteer programs in international development agencies. The fourth and final area is international policy development and advocacy in which social work as a world-wide movement formulates and promulgates positions on important social issues and makes a contribution to the resolution of important global problems related to its sphere of expertise.

International social work can lay a claim to expertise and potential roles in each of the areas nominated above and some social workers are engaging in activities in each category. Two issues present themselves. First, for the most part the type of social

work proposed in each of the four arenas of practice is essentially that of the professional project in which social work is positioned as having specific knowledge and expertise to engage. Accordingly, it is a form of global practice that does not address the challenges posed by the ideas of change. Nevertheless, some roles (for example in international policy practice) respond to the economics and politics of change, albeit still within the framework of the professional project. The second issue, however, illustrates that strategically, this form of global social work is a little more ambiguous. As I have indicated previously, for social work to exist there must be actual places or arenas of practice where social workers are able to do what they do, whatever that is. In other words, social work needs an auspice of some form. Clearly, potential auspices exist in each of the four categories identified above: in child welfare departments, in state and non-profit agencies offering settlement services for refugees, in international development agencies (such as the United Nations, Oxfam, Save the Children, World Vision), and international policy and advocacy agencies (for example, the International Council on Social Welfare or Amnesty International). Except for the instance of international adoptions, social work unfortunately has no *institutionally derived* mandate to engage. To that end, it is one of several occupations which might lay claim to the specific domains.

Indeed, Healy (2001) claims that the profession's preoccupation with the promotion of its own professional project within the United Nations context (as opposed to the promotion of the goals of social development) ultimately lead the United Nations to marginalise social work in its own programs and projects. It is, for example, the International Council on Social Welfare, not the International Federation of Social Work or the International Association of Schools of Social Work, which has Category 1 status with the United Nations' Economic and Social Council. This high degree of recognition allows the International Council on Social Welfare to be influential in global social policy, as witnessed by its involvement in setting the agenda for the 1995 United Nations Social Development Summit. Originally, the International Council on *Social Welfare* was called the International Conference on *Social Work*. In its current form however, it has evolved to reach beyond social work to involve various non-social work disciplines and groups (Healy, 2001). Successful

as it has been for promoting the interests of disadvantaged people in global forums, a development such as this is, for social work, more illustrative of opportunities lost in the international domain than it is of any strategic gain by the profession.

Social work and social development

The concluding sentiment in the previous section would, in all likelihood, be endorsed by James Midgley (1999b, 1997, 1996, 1995, and 1990) who, as I suggested earlier, is one of the most influential advocates for social work to engage in social development. As we will see, Midgley's account of social development, while still essentially within the modernist tradition in that it assumes that progressive development is possible, is nevertheless a form of practice which social workers can engage. It is practice, however, which does not privilege the social work professional project. Indeed, Midgley's work has similarities with social development theorists such as, for example, Parfitt (2002) who, while being critical of 'top-down' approaches to development characteristic of the United Nations and Western-dominated programs, is optimistic about the potential for 'bottom-up' or participative forms of development. It is easy to see why social work engagement in social development is not that great a leap conceptually and politically, particularly given the profession's long standing engagement with community development as a core mode of practice (Ahmadi, 2003). For Midgley (1997, 1995) social work as social development is informed by a perspective which attempts to harmonize economic and social development policies and practices. It is grounded in an appreciation that 'distorted development' (1995) occurs when economic goals are prioritized over social goals. In such situations, the degree of maldistribution escalates dramatically within a context of overall economic growth and expansion. Where there is distorted development, a few people become very wealthy but the majority remain in significant poverty. For strategic purposes the developmental perspective rejects the re-distributive approach to traditional social welfare which dominated, and to a large extent (particularly in terms of percentage of overall welfare expenditure on income security), still dominates the welfare regimes of the North. Instead, Midgley (1999b) argues that the successful linkage of economic stagnation

with high levels of social welfare expenditure by neoclassical economics and neoliberal politics in public discourse means that an alternative strategy is imperative.

The strategy proposed is social development, and it is a strategy which can be employed both in the nations of the South *and* the North. Midgley's developmental strategy has three overall components (1997). First, it establishes the institutional and organizational mechanisms for the integration of economic and social policies. If the strategy were to be employed in a Northern country, for example, this would mean that the central banks develop a clear and progressive social policy agenda designed to promote social well-being, integrally linked with their economic policy orientation. It would mean, for example, that unlike current orientations, central bank policies designed to prioritize the containment of inflation over employment growth would need significant re-adjustment. This relates to the second principle of a developmental strategy – economic growth must have a positive impact on people's welfare. Again using the above example, a developmental strategy would not sanction an orientation to macroeconomic policy which promoted overall economic growth *and* sustained high unemployment. Accordingly, this strategic direction would *insist* that there was significant public expenditure on job creation and self-employment opportunities – an approach currently rejected outright by neoclassically-informed economic policies. Third, a developmental strategy would insist on the introduction of a range of social programs which, rather then being ameliorative and remedial, actually constitute social investment.

In 1999 Midgley (1999b) provided a range of examples of what a social investment strategy might entail if applied in the 'advanced' welfare states of the global North. One of these is the development and implementation of social programs which invest in human capital, an approach more commonly employed in countries of the South but which could easily and productively be employed in the North. Citing economic research undertaken by the World Bank (1991) and an authoritative body of early work linking education and economic development (for example Becker, 1964; Harbison, 1973 and Schultz, 1981), Midgley argues that the same ideas can be applied to social welfare. Investing developmentally in mothers and families in

community and preventative settings, for example, can produce more sustainable and positive outcomes individually and collectively than current high cost conventional and remedial child welfare services.

He also suggests that social workers in community development roles should broaden their ambit from social and political projects to incorporate local economic development. In such projects, the standard social work/community development objective of creating what is increasingly called 'social capital' (inclusive social networks and their associated social and individual by-products), at the level of local communities is augmented with projects which locally generate much needed economic wealth. Both of these suggestions form part of a more comprehensive program. If actively promoted as part of a concerted policy platform by governments proactively engaged within overcoming spacial disadvantage in developed countries (the Northern version of distorted development), it could provide a multitude of opportunities for social workers. Indeed, in the past it has done, for example in the British Community Development Projects, the American Model Cities program and the Australian Assistance Plan.

To a certain extent, policy initiatives along these lines have been revived in the developed countries. In Britain, for example, the depressed areas of Northern England have been designated Enterprise Zones subject to local economic development programs as part of New Labour's Third Way policy program (Powell, 1999). Conceptually similar programs, in this case explicitly linking social and economic investment strategies, are being deployed with extremely disadvantaged indigenous communities in Australia's Cape York Peninsula in far north Queensland (Pearson and Sanders, 1995). In South Africa, the traditional social work role of tending to the poor white population was and continues to be challenged by new policy imperatives thrown up by that country's transition to democracy and the related imperatives to engage developmentally with the previously disenfranchized and economically marginalized population (Gray and Mazibuko, 2002). The question raised for British, Australian and South African social workers respectively is the extent to which they have been able to forge connections between these initiatives and their traditional activities and institutional roles to leverage a place in the emerging sites of practice. As similar policy developments play out across

the global North, the challenge is clearly posed to social work to assert itself as an occupation well suited to initiate and support social investment in a range of forms.

The form of social work as social development and investment promoted by Midgley (1999b) manifestly confronts the economic pressures bearing down on the advanced welfare states discussed in Chapter 3. It does this because it *specifically* espouses a role for social work to proactively engage with the consequences of economic globalization. In other words, it unequivocally focuses on distorted development in the global North; on increased spatially-defined poverty, disadvantage and inequality in economies characterized by soaring profits and escalating wealth. Further, as Midgley (1997, p. 21) notes, a developmental approach to social work is congruent with the traditional focus of social work in that it explicitly addresses poverty and disadvantage. Social development work is, of necessity, less concerned with psychological dysfunction and individual deficit. It orients itself away from the therapeutic and towards the material and the practical within a clear normative framework of social justice.

While the political and normative orientation of social development work might stand at odds with contemporary conservative governments of the global North, those same governments are nevertheless often creating the programmatic and institutional space where this form of social work could be undertaken. While such policies and programs of locality development are often propelled by a neoliberally informed distaste for 'welfare dependency', the programs that flow out from them nevertheless provide obvious opportunity. In many instances, the actual 'spaces' of practice emerging are not formally within state bureaucracies, but are instead located in the semi-autonomous sphere of the non-profit or third sector, sometimes also known as 'civil society'. In all likelihood it is here that social work as social development may find its niche, rather than in the large but crumbling welfare bureaucracies of the modernist welfare states. And it is here that social work as social development is, paradoxically, congruent with the politics of the contemporary era.

The assumptions and imperatives that underpin this form of social development work are, as suggested earlier, essentially modernist and as such are less sympathetic and responsive to the intellectual challenges posed by contemporary theory.

Nevertheless, social work as social development in no way privileges social work as the 'best' profession to engage in social development; in fact, it is highly critical of social work's remedial focus (see Midgley and Tang, 2001). That said, this form of social development work upholds the professional project in the sense that it assumes that social work can engage progressively and developmentally without becoming enmeshed in and compromised by, for example, the neoliberal political agenda or neoclassical economic program. In other words, like the traditional professional project conception of social work, it presents as a practice that, perhaps as a result of its materialist focus, can resist the constitutive nature of the contexts in which it may practiced, especially in the workfare state. In summary, this form of social development work responds specifically to the economics of change and to the politics of change in that it takes up the opportunities to engage offered by the new institutional arrangements of welfare in the global North. Further, it retains an (albeit as yet small) role in development practice more broadly and it continues to invite social workers to engage in the global South. Finally, it provides an interesting and potentially expanding opportunity to engage with the South manifest in the North, with for example indigenous communities in Australia, North America, New Zealand and South Africa. Interestingly, another body of more recently developed development theory also offers a potential future for social work along similar lines. Unlike the form of social work as social development proposed in this section of the chapter, this newer mode attempts to move beyond the material. It is also a form of practice which is explicitly critical of the progressive and modernist assumptions embedded in much development practice. It does this by engaging with (or, depending on which author one reads), attempting to engage with aspects of contemporary theory discussed here in Chapter 5.

'Glocal' social development work

My use of the unusual neologism 'glocal' in reference to this mode of social development work is deliberate. It is a term increasingly being used by development practitioners (and by those that wish to infuse social work with these ideas) to indicate that they too are concerned with addressing the impact of global processes

on local communities, but in new ways (Burkett, 2001; Burkett and McDonald, 2005). What differentiates this mode from the previous mode of social development work is the explicit engagement with critical theory and contemporary theory, and the insistence that it is a form of practice that is *relational* and *processual.* But what does 'relational' and 'processual' practice mean? To fully appreciate what is being suggested, we need first to be conscious of the types of theoretical insights being brought to bear on development practice. Once they are understood, the implications of notions like 'relational' and 'processual' as it applies to this form of social development practice becomes clearer.

Much of the intellectual edifice of glocal social development is drawn from contemporary theory, taken up and extended by critical geography (Harvey, 2000), and then applied to forms of development theory increasingly known as *post development theory* (Escobar, 1995). As indicated, the origins and the complex of ideas employed are conceptually similar to that of critical social work discussed in Chapter 10, but with a slightly different spin. Developed within the genre of critical geography (a body of geography influenced by Marxism and neo-Marxism, and increasingly by contemporary theory), a corpus of work known as *spatial theory* has developed which attempts to understand how, through the deployment of political, economic, cultural and social processes, people create spaces (localities, communities) (see Benko and Strohmayer, 1997 for an overview). Social space is understood to be more than an inert vessel or container in which life in all of its forms unfolds (Lefebvre, 1996, 1974). Rather, space is a *social product* in its own right. This is something which is fairly easy to appreciate as any systematic exploration of a contemporary city would illustrate. It is obvious that we create the spaces in which we live, but it may be less obvious that those spaces in turn, discursively create us. To add to this insight and alert to the understandings of critical theory (of the sort used in Chapter 3), spatial theory argues that the practices associated with producing space reflect the dominant mode of capital accumulation, and the associated social modes of regulation and reproduction. In other words, we create space and it creates us at the micro level. Simultaneously and continuously, we (through all of our complex economic, political, social and cultural processes) create, through space, the macro level mode of accumulation and regulation while

being created by it. Accordingly, the discursive production of space is multi-dimensional. So, while having a local history which impacts on the present, spaces (for example neighborhood spaces) are continuously reinscribed by macroeconomic, political and social practices attuned to the dominant accumulation regime. In this way, 'global' becomes a metaphor for macro processes, and 'local' for micro. The neologism 'glocal' is an attempt to capture both. Glocal social development practitioners use the term, in part, to signify that they act as interpreters of the global and advocates of the local.

It is also an attempt to represent metaphorically the theorized interconnections between the spatial and the social. Attending also to the nuances of contemporary theory, this genre of writing attempts to move beyond the strict structuralism of critical theory and to develop an awareness of how every day consciousness is discursively shaped through the micro operations of power at the local level. Authors such as Giroux (1992) and Dirlik (1996) have sought to show how the complexities of the global play out and are taken up and transformed at the local level in the context of social relationships – in what is understood as the global-local nexus. In doing so, they develop a theoretical justification for engagement at the local level through *relationships*; in that it suggested that it is at *this* level that potential disruptions of the dominant regime become possible. Further, Giroux (1992, p. 79) suggests that 'cultural workers' (teachers, lawyers, social workers) become 'transformative intellectuals' charged with the imperative to link the global and the local in ways which encourage the development of local critical consciousness, in the context of relationships, as the basis for transformative action.

Contemporary theory has also been taken up extensively in an influential body of thought informing glocal social development practice – post-development theory. This is a body of writing which is highly critical of modernist forms of social development such as those promoted by the United Nations and the World Bank (and by many of the large non-government aid organizations). Adopting an explicitly Foucauldian analysis, theorists such as Escobar (1995) focus on development as discourse. Rather than accepting its modernist assumptions about linear economic, cultural and social progress, Escobar argues that development is an historical construct and a discursive process which allows

countries of the South to be examined, analysed and acted upon by agents of the North. In the same way that contemporary theory illustrates how the discourses of modernist social welfare allow social workers to act on the bodies of the poor, the sad and so forth, when applied to the context of development, international aid organizations for example, become the therapeutic agents of the North sent to remedy the ills of the ailing South. But in doing so, these agents of the North and of 'development' create and maintain the South as the 'other', fundamentally different from the North and very much in need of remedial intervention. In the case of modernist development, institutional support comes not from the welfare state, but from the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank. Through these organizations, and through the thousands of organizations and networks that take their legitimacy from the overall modernist project, an international undertaking of monumental scope has shaped and continues to shape the countries of the global South, intimately affecting the lives and the life chances of their populations. Escobar would, for example, think about the infamous structural adjustment programs of the IMF (which forced Southern countries to cut expenditure on social infrastructure) as discourses which, rather than promote development, actively damage the social and economic fabric of the societies where they are applied. Drawing on this form of critique of (Northern) mainstream, modernist and 'progressive' development, a growing body of influential (Southern) literature has emerged, which re-writes development theory in ways that expose the many contradictions and harmful consequences of the project (Cowan and Shenton, 1996; Rahnema and Bawtree, 1997; Esteva and Prakash, 1998).

Accompanying the post development critique are significant attempts to re-construct development *practice* (Kaplan, 2002, 1996), and it is from this body of work that new possibilities for social work emerge. It is a set of practices which draws on a rich tradition of liberationist and emancipatory literature, such as the work of Paolo Freire (1972), Franz Fanon (1966) and Vàclav Havel (1992). It describes modes of practice wherein people are engaged as co-producers in endeavours to enhance their welfare, rather than as recipients of welfare 'solutions' designed by modernist professional development practitioners. Strategies

such as co-production, forms of mutual aid (particularly those addressing financial exclusion), 'co-management' and endogenous development processes are examples. These are modes of practice in which notions of power and power relations are scrutinized, with much attention being paid to opening up 'real' spaces for participatory ways of working and examination of what are held to be colonizing agendas in practice.

As indicated above, glocal social development practitioners are 'cultural workers'. Cultural workers place themselves in a position of creating possibilities for social justice in the uncertain and ideologically fraught spaces where both mainstream and critical traditions of understanding of development confront challenges of the post development critique. Like critical social work, glocal social development practice is held to be transformative, reflexive and culturally sensitive.

Earlier, I suggested that glocal social development practice was *relational* and *processual* in nature. As well as being attempts to address the theoretical complexities held to be informing glocal practice, these words also signal a position which suggests that social relationships form the building blocks of human existence. In other words, it is in the context of relationships that people come to apprehend, appreciate and work towards human well-being, both individually and collectively. Furthermore, *how* practice is undertaken is as important, if not more important than *what* is actually done or the specific strategies adopted. In this way, glocal social work doesn't privilege any one strategy over another but would suggest that engagement in good process will contribute to the success of whatever strategy is locally devised by the participants. Glocal social development practice builds on three main fundamentals. As I have demonstrated, the first is that glocal practice acknowledges that it is undertaken not only within the realm of the material, but also within the realm of the social. Second, and as I have suggested, glocal practice occurs within the context of relationships. Third, glocal practice implies the development of a particular *sensibility* as well as a set of skills on the part of practitioners (Kaplan, 2002).

This 'sensibility' will be both familiar and intuitively attractive to many social workers, for when examined, it consists of an ethics and a politics not unlike those promoted, for example, by critical social work. It is an approach that values authentic participation,

empowerment, local capacity building, equity, social justice and sustainable development (Tembo, 2003). It is a sensibility which also promotes a particular aesthetics – one which values creativity and which appreciates and can attend to practice as *process*; as a 'river of rhythm and form . . . a pulsing movement . . . both progression and oscillation, a spiral flow' (Kaplan, 2002, p. xvii). The glocal practitioner is, in Kaplan's words 'an artist of the invisible'.

In rejecting the modernist principles and assumptions of progress embedded in traditional development practice, glocal social development rejects the modernist orientation of development practice. Likewise, if social workers choose to engage in glocal social development, they would presumably be called upon to reject the modernist professional social work project. (It should also be noted, however, that the actual projects undertaken and strategies adopted differ little from Midgley's mode of social development practice.) That said, glocal practice nevertheless provides a direction for practitioners who wish to move away from traditional modernist social work practice, and who wish to engage in an alternate way of practicing in non-welfare state contexts. As such, it is a mode of practice entirely suited to the contexts shaped by the new social movements and civil society, and overtly responsive to the issues generated by the economics and politics of change. It does so, however, from outside of the state. Importantly for social workers in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA, it is a form of practice more attuned than most to the issues and sensitivities of the global South (the experiences of indigenous peoples) located within countries of the North.

As with the other strategic options canvassed in Chapters 8, 9 and 10, there are no easy answers or unambiguous relief to be found in the various forms of global social work. Rather, we are left with a complex and often contradictory collection of practices, each of which provide some direction and address some of the issues raised in Part 1, but they do not provide clear answers to the vexed question of 'which way forward?' In the next concluding chapter, I return to the notion of the professional project in the context of institutional change and in light of the challenges posed, outline the broad parameters of a possible future (or as we will see, futures) for social work.

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12 Thinking Our Way Forward

In Part 1 I considered the forces and processes of change at a pace and in a manner designed to create awareness on the part of readers of the scale of what has occurred in the various contexts where social workers find themselves. The message was (I hope) clear – there is no going back. The conditions under which social work was established, especially in the post-World War II modernist welfare regimes, have been utterly transformed. Economic globalization has had significant consequences and national economies (both North and South) have been re-constructed with a range of often devastating (but at a minimum, disturbing) costs. Similarly, the political consensus between capital and labor which developed in the post-war decades has broken down and the state has transformed itself, particularly the liberal 'Anglo' states. In those countries, the relationship between the state and the people, encapsulated metaphorically and practically in the notion of citizenship, has been fundamentally re-constructed, so much so that contemporary 'citizens' struggle to articulate, much less activate social rights. Instead, the 'neo-citizens' of neoliberal states are a divided lot, increasingly pitted against each other by governments more attuned to the needs of capital. Finally, the intellectual edifice which supported the project of modernity, of welfare and of social work has been de-stabilized by the criticisms of contemporary theory. In the eyes of its supporters, any comfort social workers might have drawn from the profession's alleged humanist and emancipatory impulses is diminished in the face of its sceptical gaze.

Throughout Part 2 we canvassed four very different and of themselves broad categories of response articulated and promoted within the professional literature. Each option has, as I demonstrated, merit and therefore has something to offer. The entrepreneurial profession in its various manifestations explicitly engages with the politics of change by suggesting active engagement with the

new spaces of intervention emerging in the neoliberal workfare regime – for example, in care management, managed care and welfare reform. Similarly, evidence-based practice promotes a mode of engagement which unambiguously responds to the economics and politics of change, particularly those developments propelled under the auspices of New Public Management. Conversely, while critical practice in its more recent manifestations attempts to engage with the ideas of change in the form of contemporary theory and while it continues to propel the progressive intent of social work, it does not engage with the politics of change and the consequent shrinkage of spaces where such practice can be undertaken in the neoliberal workfare regime. Finally, we examined global social work, a diverse range of practices which actively seeks to engage with the human consequences of the economics of change. Like critical practice some forms of global social work attend to the ideas of change. Further, global social work offers significant potential for social work, if not the institutional auspice, outside the confines of the nation state.

Thinking about change

In this book I have deliberately employed two analytical themes, albeit one more often than the other. The first of these is the notion of the professional project, developed initially in Chapter 1 and then employed extensively in Part 2 to provide a reference point by which to assess the various options canvassed. As indicated above, my intention in Part 1 was to illustrate just how profound and wide reaching the forces of change are, and how the assumptions a modernist professional project like social work makes about its context (and about itself) are increasingly detached from reality. In Part 2, I showed how each of the strategic options canvassed positions itself in respect of the professional project. In doing so, we are able to appreciate in a short-hand way how much each option represents real change, or conversely, continuity. My over-arching argument is that the social work professional project was and is a creature of modernity and as such, is conceptually and temporally congruent with the high point of the post-war 20th century modernist welfare state. In terms of the body of theory I have used to support the analysis, the boundaries and practices of the professional community

of social work was *isomorphic* with the modernist welfare state (Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings, 2002). By this, I mean that social work and the modernist welfare state correspond with each other. Currently, we have moved beyond that point of correspondence and into what can as yet best be described as partially chartered waters. As I discuss shortly, retaining an uncritical commitment to the unre-constructed professional project is not, I suggest, a particularly constructive response to contemporary conditions. This, of course, is a position which needs to be argued not merely asserted.

To do so, I turn in a more substantial way to the second analytical device – the notion of institutions and institutional change. In Chapter 2, I suggested that we can think about the welfare regime as an institution, and the entire edifice of welfare services and practices as an institutional field. Further, we can consider social work to be a key institutional practice congruent with the field; a set of activities designed to undertake the 'work' of the overarching institution – in this case to pursue the modernist, developmental and progressive impulses embedded in (advanced) welfare states. As such (and as I argued in Chapter 2) social work was congruent with the dominant institutional complex of the welfare state – which gave the profession legitimacy to both exist *and* act, and in a small way (depending on the context) to contribute to the ongoing stability and maintenance of the overall institutional order.

We can specify theoretically how this happened. First, in the process of institutionalization, specific modes of operating within an institutional field take on a taken-for-granted quality and becoming 'a means of ensuring the perpetuation of institutionalized patterns' (Tolbert, 1988, pp. 101–102) – for example, the production of welfare within modernist bureaucracies. Second, as an institutional field develops, participants develop a particular language and way of thinking about the field over time, generating among other things particular interpretive frameworks, logics and rationalities (Meyer and Rowan, 1991) – for example, social justice, social rights, human progress and development. In using these language formations or *discourses* (and inherent in the rationalities), institutional operatives such as social workers 'create' the institution (the welfare regime) (Phillips, Lawrence and Hardy, 2004). Continued employment

of dominant rationalities both account for and recursively legitimize the actions and behavior of social workers within the social welfare field. Third, institutionalization is promoted through the achievement of a high degree of ideological consensus within any given field. This occurs largely through processes of *normative isomorphism* (that is, people holding similar values frameworks and passing these onto others) generated through, for example, a common professional education. As readers are no doubt aware, professional social work education, wherever undertaken, largely relies on a generic core of professional knowledge and values.

Unfortunately – as has been amply demonstrated by the disassembling and re-constitution of the welfare state discussed in Part 1 – institutions and institutional fields are not stable. Some theorists in the genre from where this analytical framework is drawn have attempted to elaborate models of institutional change. There are – theoretically – four phases in institution building and transformation: institutional formation, institutional development, de-institutionalization and re-institutionalisation (Jepperson, 1991). Of these, the latter two are of interest at this point as they allow social workers to ask 'how does an institutionalized field (for example, all of the organizations and operatives which make up a modern welfare state) exit from one institutional order and enter another (for example, a neoliberal workfare regime)? As I illustrated in the preface to Part 1, Oliver (1992) hypothetically enumerated a series of external pressures, and to a lesser extent internal responses, that may prompt an institutional field to erode as a function of de-institutionalization. Broadly, these are political, social and functional antecedents to change; a series of phenomena and processes observable within an institutionalized field such as mounting performance crisis, growth in intra-sectorial criticism, increased pressure to innovate, changes to external expectations of what constitutes procedural conformity, shifting external dependencies, withdrawal of rewards for institutionalized practices, increases in technical specificity or goal clarity, changes in statutory environment, growth in intra-field criticism, and conflicting intra-field interests. And as enumerated at some length in Part 1, all of these are represented in the complex of processes eroding modernist welfare states.

In Chapter 2, I also suggested that different institutional orders both promote and are legitimized by different institutional

logics. In doing so, I posed the question of 'what happens when institutional logics contradict one another?' In other words, the modernist welfare state promoted one dominant rationality, constructed within the broad complex of social democracy and represented in the edifice of a welfare state nurturing and protecting its citizens within a framework of social rights. The neoliberal workfare regime on the other hand operates within a completely different rationality – one which valorizes market freedoms over social rights and promotes individualism over collectivism. It is a rationality which suggests that active states (engaging in service provision, for example) are more destructive than they are enabling. It is one which prioritizes citizens' obligations *to the state* as opposed to the state's obligations to its citizens. In other words, the emerging rationality of the neoliberal workfare regime stands in stark contrast that that which went before it.

I also suggested in Chapter 2 that this poses a problem for social work. If, as I have argued, social work is a key expression of the welfare state and if, as I have also claimed, it is a key constitutive set of institutional practices in that institutional order, what happens in contexts of institutional change? What happens when the institutional order representative of and constituted by social work comes into contact with the opposing rationality of neoliberalism? At this stage I suggest that this is still largely an empirical question in that we really *do not know*. Nevertheless, if the disquiet in the professional literature about, for example, the impact of welfare reform, managed care and care management on the profession in Britain and the USA is anything to go by, there are numerous social workers who are worried about the future. Nevertheless, there are some indications of the impact of such collision of rationalities drawn from empirical studies in other contexts, two of which are particularly informative.

Learning from others

The first of these is a study undertaken by Townley (2002) who examined the impact of New Public Management-inspired reforms on the functioning of museums and the professional practices of curators. Not surprisingly, she found that the rationality

of NPM swamped that of the curators and as a consequence, their professional identity was re-shaped. The implication of this is clear – the rationality of the neoliberal state (the 'stronger' force in the field, driven by the state which has control of resources) will dominate that of the profession (the 'weaker' resource-dependent participants in the field).

The second study is closer to home, and is similarly instructive (albeit in a counter-intuitive way). In this case it is a study of a rape crisis centre in Israel undertaken by Zilber (2002). The centre in question had originally been established by a group of volunteers and was grounded within a strongly articulated feminist framework. For some time, it continued drawing its operational principles and practices from within the guiding rationality of feminism, largely due to the dominance of volunteers committed to feminist principles. More recently, the background of volunteers has altered as social work students began to volunteer, not as means of expressing their commitment to feminism, but as a means of gaining counselling experience. As a consequence of their involvement and at a time when they became the primary source of volunteer labor, the rationality and the practices of the agency shifted from being feminist, to those drawn from a version of a modernist profession, in this case a logic and values orientation drawn from the social work professional project. While this latter case represents a 'triumph' of the professional project (depending on the perspective adopted), the implications are clear. If there are sufficient actors promoting an alternative rationality (and as in the first case of the museums, those actors control access to resources) that rationality will dominate the original. What is important to note from both studies is that clashes of institutional rationalities, particularly in contexts of resource dependency, results in significant shifts in what constitutes good organizational and professional practice.

If readers accept that the developments discussed in Part 1 constitute institutional change, and if readers accept that the emerging institutional regime is promoting a different (and in all likelihood, conflicting) rationality to that of modernist social work, then it behoves social workers to ask questions about the implications of pursuing the various options outlined in Part 2. What role will each play in promoting or resisting the institutional

logics of the workfare state? In Chapter 8, I suggested that the entrepreneurial profession is, in the interests of survival, encouraging engagement with the new regime, and as a consequence, accommodation with the accompanying rationality. Such engagement will, in all likelihood, have a significant impact on the traditional rationalities of modernist social work; perhaps displacing or perhaps undermining the values orientation of the profession (our *substantive* rationality – see page 40 for a reminder), the role of practice theory in informing what social workers do (our *theoretical* rationality, ditto above) and our commitments to practice in professionalized state-based human service organizations (our *formal* rationality, again see page 41). Similarly, while admirable in intent, evidence-based practice is also largely congruent with and accommodating to the theoretical and formal rationalities of the neoliberal state. Critical practice and most instances of global practice, on the other hand, clearly articulate alternative rationalities, and would find it hard to engage with and accommodate those of neoliberalism. In the absence of empirical evidence it is hard to be definitive, but it would seem likely that the different strategic options will lead to quite different outcomes for social work.

Such an analysis suggests, for example, that the notion that social work will continue to possess a common identity if all four options are pursued becomes even less tenable than it has been to date. It also suggests that continuing promotion of the professional project as the primary strategy will not prove particularly useful for the totality of possible practices and spaces of practice emerging in the 21st century. While it is highly likely that aspects of the professional project mode of social work will continue to be promoted and will continue to exist, it is also possible that the nature of the range of practices undertaken in that mode will mutate through engagement with the new institutional rationality of the neoliberal workfare regime. These new modes of doing social work will in all likelihood become isomorphic with the values of neoliberalism, the practices of a New Public Management-inspired state, and with the market. And if some social workers take up the challenges posed, for example, by global social work as social development, it is likely that the professional project as a mode of organizing and of thinking about practice will increasingly become of limited relevance in those

contexts. In these instances, it is more likely that promotion of social development will take priority over the promotion of the profession. In fact, as I indicated in Chapter 11, this has largely already happened and it is one of the core reasons why social work has lost its privileged status with the United Nations and the development movement as a whole.

The role of leadership

Returning to the theme of social workers as knowing agents in the context of institutional change (albeit it in limited or *bounded* ways), I draw now on a selection of theoretically and empirically informed suggestions of how the profession might respond, particularly at the local level. Also using the notion of entrepreneurship, neoinstitutional theory has for some time thought about and explored the idea of and activities of *institutional entrepreneurs* in promoting both institutionalization and institutional change. In 1988, DiMaggio suggested that some social actors are better than others in producing or influencing desired outcomes. Institutional entrepreneurs are individuals and groups who adopt leadership roles in episodes of institution building and change (Colomy, 1998). Other theorists, such as Fligstein (1997, p. 398) suggest that such people have *social skill*, and as such, are able to 'size up' the condition of the field and figure out what kinds of action 'make sense'. Drawing on salient myths and potent symbols, skilled social actors have the ability to motivate cooperation in other actors by providing them with common meanings and identities in which actions can be undertaken and justified. He also suggests that a key factor in this is that those actors are able to 'imaginatively identify' with the experiences and understandings of others. He then goes on to list different tactics that institutional entrepreneurs use, linking each to whether the field in question is stable or unstable and to whether the actors (in this case social workers) are in a strong or weak position. In the contemporary conditions described in Part 1, social work institutional entrepreneurs would, in all likelihood, be trying to offer alternative accounts to those of the neoliberal workfare state about, for example, society's responsiveness to disadvantage.

Applying his generic insights to social work, some of the major tactics he would suggest for social work institutional entrepreneurs or leaders are (drawn from Fligstein, 1997, pp. 399–401):

1. *Taking what the system gives* – strategic social work leaders understand the ambiguities and uncertainties of the social welfare field and work off them. They have a good sense of what is possible and what is not. They know where they stand. They will grasp unexpected opportunities, even when uncertain of the outcome. They know the system and take what it will give at any moment.
2. *Asking for more, settling for less* – strategic social work leaders commonly press for more than they are willing to accept, either from other social workers or from those higher up the ladder.
3. *Maintaining ambiguity* – strategic social workers often keep their strategic preferences to themselves. This makes it difficult for other institutional actors to orient what they do in response, which in turn, makes them either act first, or not act at all.
4. *Trying five things to get one*. Strategic social work leaders have multiple courses of action plotted simultaneously or in sequence. They expect that most will fail but a few will succeed, and these successes are what are remembered by other actors.
5. *Networking with other challenger groups who have no other coalitions* – strategic social work leaders set themselves (and social work) up as the node in a network of these other groups who also challenge the status quo.

Fligstein (ibid, p. 403) also notes that in situations of crisis (or under conditions of institutional transformation):

> actors committed to the status quo will continue to use dominant understandings to structure interaction for as long as they can. Skilled strategic actors in challenger groups will offer *new cultural frames and rules* to reorganize the field (italics added).

Put another way, strategic social work leaders should have the capacity to take a reflective position towards current practices in the profession, coupled with a capacity to envision alternative modes of engaging in social work (Beckert, 1999). Such persons stand in contrast to what Beckert calls 'managers' – actors who adopt an unreflective stance towards the dominant rationality and

current practices. The latter, he suggests, orient their decisions on imitation and adaptation. And what is clear from this brief discussion to date is that social workers who wish to act as strategic leaders must *understand* the field in which they operate – an imperative which requires an orientation to the contemporary conditions such as that adopted in this volume.

Finally, Greenwood, Suddaby and Hinings (2002) demonstrate empirically how in the context of the profession of accounting (a profession profoundly challenged by institutional transformation albeit in different ways than social work), professional associations can play an important role in responding to institutional change. Their work leads them to suggest that:

> [Professional] associations can legitimate change by hosting a process of discourse through which change is debated and endorsed: first by negotiating and managing debate within the profession; and second, by reframing professional identities' (ibid, p. 59).

In charting the profession's response to the rise of what is known in accounting as the Big Five (large international accounting firms), Greenwood et al show how, as a result of their entry and eventual dominance of the field, accounting firms (both large and small) shifted the nature of their work from traditional accounting narrowly defined to a more broadly defined multi-disciplinary role of providing 'business services'. The accountancy professional associations were instrumental in this shift – which taken together is called *theorizing change* (Strang and Meyer, 1993). This had two parts (Tolbert and Zucker, 1996). First, they *framed* the problem in that the profession was presented as being under threat from the forces of change. Over a twenty year period the 'problem was insistently specified and generalised as affecting all members of the profession and change was presented as natural and progressive' (Greenwood et al, 2002, p. 72). Second, the language the associations used became steadily more *expressive and direct*, with the imperative for change being cast within the framework of professional values. In doing so, the associations promoted compliance with change in moral not pragmatic terms. In other words, what Greenwood et al (2002) show, is that the professional associations engaged in discourses that legitimated significant shifts in what accountants actually do, and in doing so,

re-shaped the definition of "what it meant to 'be"' an accountant. The lessons for social work are clear. Social work professional associations can, if they choose, act as strategic leaders and engage deliberately in a sustained process of *theorizing institutional change*. But they should be alert to the warning that such processes, to be successful, need to be vigorously sustained over a significant period of time.

Conclusion

This leads to my final point. I suggest there is nothing inherently wrong with the professional project even if it is, as I evidently think, somewhat outdated both conceptually and strategically. What *is* wrong is an unreflective promotion of an unre-constructed modernist vision (with all of its attendant accoutrements); one which has not thought through and evaluated its strategic strengths and weaknesses in *theorizing change*. Further, there is nothing wrong with holding some attachment to the notion that there is something special and worthwhile about social workers (who may or may not call themselves that). It *is* wrong in the contemporary conditions to assume that goodness of heart and purity of intent are sufficient characteristics to ensure desirable outcomes for the people who use social work services and for the profession. People doing social work can still (and should) hold on to the moral imperatives and the modernist optimism that marked its founding. What is important in the contemporary era is that we do this in a mature, informed and critically reflexive manner.

It has been my intent in this book to first, help readers understand why the contemporary circumstances in which social workers engage are different from what went before and different from what formal social work discourses largely assume. I did so to emphasize that social workers need to think about how to respond – both individually and collectively. My second objective was to evaluate some potential ways forward, and in doing so, to *model a means* by which social workers can themselves think about other options that may confront them. Finally, I have suggested that social workers can act as strategic agents in a framework of bounded rationality. In other words, strategic social work leaders

in different contexts can act – but to 'act' successfully they need to understand the fields in which they engage. This book is my contribution to the development of such understandings. Finally, I note that the positions I have taken here and the arguments developed are just that – they are positions and arguments which I place on the public record as my contribution to thinking our way into the future. Let there be many more.

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