I am pleased to have been invited to join the other members of this panel in speaking about putting social justice back into social work. Of course that implies there was a period when social justice was more central to social work, and then a period in which it was largely lost to social work, followed by a period in which we have at least been trying to bring social justice back into social work. I propose to touch upon three such periods and to share several main points.

The first period was the early to mid-20th century progressive tradition in social work, which was inspired by the settlement house movement here in the UK. Progressive social workers worked with individuals and families but also drew upon a vision of social justice to pioneer social group work, community organization, and social policy advocacy. Early on, Charles Booth argued that it was necessary to move beyond a purely religious orientation and focus on "ordinary human needs" (Booth, 1902, p. 286). But no clear conceptualization of human needs arose. That was a problem for fully bringing social justice into social work.

And that is my first main point: It will not be possible to bring social justice back into social work without committing social work to a theoretical reorientation which makes the concept of human need central to social work practice, social work research and social welfare policy. And to follow up on Gurnam Singh's point yesterday: doing so would just be the first step towards social workers in our daily practice insisting that our services and benefits fully address the human needs of our service users instead of the specialized social control functions of many of our agencies.

Support for the centrality of needs concepts for social justice can be found from within both social work and philosophy. Within social work, David Gil has argued that conceptions of social justice must contain a theorization of human need (Gil, 2004), and social welfare policy must be evaluated on the basis of its role in ensuring human needs are met (Gil, 1992). Jeffrey Olson has proposed in the Journal of Progressive Human Services that social work should adopt a need-based conceptualization as the basis for restoring social work's commitment to social justice (Olson, 2007). Culminating her lifelong activism and scholarship on human rights and human needs, the late Barbara Hunter Randall Joseph co-authored the first entry on human needs to appear in the Encyclopedia of Social Work (Dover & Joseph, 2008), which concluded that human needs concepts could inform a unifying paradigm for social work practice and would help fulfill social work's commitments to human rights and social justice.

From within philosophy, since the publication of Len Doyal and Ian Gough's A Theory of Human Need (Doyal & Gough, 1991), there is a growing view that, as both Gillian Brock and David
Wiggins have recently argued, basic needs concepts and standards are required for a plausible view of justice (Brock, 2005; Wiggins, 2006).

Although explicit needs concepts were not utilized during the progressive era of social work, by the mid-1940's Abraham Maslow had introduced his well-known hierarchy of need (Maslow, 1943). However, by mid-century, two intellectual trends began to work against the full adoption of human needs theory. First, Lewin's field theory seemed more consistent with social work's emphasis on the relationship of the individual and the social environment (Lewin, 1947a, 1947b) (Lewin, 1947a, 1947b). Field theory later became the foundation for the ecosystems theory of today, despite Maslow's explicit warning that field theory was no substitute for needs theory (Maslow, 1943).

Second, social psychologist Dorothy Lee criticized hierarchies of primary and secondary need as products of Western individualist thought which were inconsistent with the anti-racist principles of cultural relativism (Lee, 1948). She did so despite the fact that Maslow clearly recognized that there were culturally different ways in which universal human needs are met.

One reason these two arguments were persuasive at the time was that, as Alfred Kahn pointed out, needs theory was insufficiently developed at the time (Kahn, 1957). True, Maslow's theory was a flawed attempt at a psychological theory of universal need, one which did not benefit from philosophical rigor.

However, during the second period, from approximately 1950 to 1991, it became apparent there was a third, more explicitly political reason, why human needs concepts were resisted. During a period of anti-communist hysteria, the US federal government destroyed the plates of the book *Common Human Needs* by Charlotte Towle (Posner, 1995; Towle, 1965[1945]).

This leads to my second main point: irrational levels of anti-communist intellectual prejudice help explain why the concept of human need has not become more central for social work. Within US political discourse, talk of human needs raised and to some extent still raises the specter of the Communist manifesto's slogan, “From each according to his abilities, to each according to his needs!”

In many respects, the Cold War was a struggle over the concepts of human rights and human needs. The West claimed to champion human rights while the East claimed that only Communist-governed forms of state socialism could meet human needs. The Western welfare state had Bismarckian, Fabian and Depression-era origins, but it never really took off until, during the Cold War, elites consented to demands from below for social welfare. That elite consent was motivated by a preference for therapeutic doses of social welfare over the threat of socialist transformation (Dover, 1998). Since the Cold War, that elite consent is rapidly dissipating, as yesterday's discussion of impending cuts may indicate. Neoliberal elites have come to increasingly dominate social policy formation.

Unfortunately, since the Cold War, Western social work has not fully embraced the centrality of human needs concepts. Although struggles for universal human rights are often stressed, human needs are not seen as universal (Ife, 2001, 2002). Yet human rights are only universal to the
extent we can ensure our ability to make claims upon them. Human needs, however, are universal within the reality of our daily lives.

During the past 20 years, a growing trend in philosophy has concluded that there is a set of human needs which can be declared truly universal in all human cultures, although they may be perceived and met differently. From philosophy, David Wiggins has pointed out, giving too little emphasis to needs and loading too much of our attention on rights risks jeopardizing the very absoluteness which we claim for rights (Wiggins, 2002). Also from philosophy and from a background on the left, Jeff Noonan's *Democratic Society and Human Needs* contends that rights-based theories of liberal democracy ultimately give primacy to property rights over demands for human need satisfaction (Noonan, 2006). And from social policy, Britain's Hartley Dean has drawn on Nancy Fraser's concept of needs interpretation and on Doyal and Gough's theory (1991) to argue that human needs can be translated into claims and asserted as rights (Dean, 2008; Doyal & Gough, 1991; Fraser, 1989).

What are the practical and political implications of such a focus on needs? One way in which social work can bring social justice back into social work is to engage in needs-based policy analysis and advocacy. One way to counter neoliberal domination of social policy is to insist upon utilizing class, organizational and institutional analysis in order to determine, within each policy domain, what is the best mix of the public, nonprofit and market sectors to fund and to deliver services and benefits in order to meet human needs consistent with human rights. We must mobilize human rationality, caring and democratic processes to make such decisions, rather than permit neoliberalism to insist that markets be the determining factor in social policy (Dover, 2007).

Beginning with the early 1990s, a third period began, one in which veterans of the 60s and 70s social movements began in earnest to try to bring social justice back into social work. However, this process was hindered in part because of the reluctance of US social work in particular to incorporate human needs theory. A form of ecological systems theory was still dominant. Although ecosystems theory ably maps the social environment, it undertheorizes what happens at the intersection of the individual and the social environment. The statement of principles of the International Federation of Social Workers and the International Association of Schools of Social Work declares that social work intervenes where the very points where people interact with the social environment. Arguably, it is at that intersection where human needs are either met or where barriers rooted primarily in oppression, dehumanization and exploitation prevent people and communities from meeting their human needs in their culturally chosen manner (Dover, 2008).

Social workers stand beside people at that moment. We work together with clients and communities to understand the social and interpersonal forces at play and how to best ensure that the human needs of all concerned can be met, as well as how to draw lessons from that moment which can help build a just society. Yet 100 years since the Flexner report, social work hasn't defined what is unique about social work in large part because we have not taken seriously the centrality of human needs for social work theory and practice. In fact, the concept of human needs is now absent from the IFSW/IASSW statement of principles, and was recently removed from the statement of purposes of social work education by the Council on Social Work Education.
To be sure, social work has been searching for ways to bring social justice back into social work. Approaches to social work such as the empowerment model, the strengths model, the feminist model, and many varieties of anti-oppressive, anti-racist and anti-discriminatory social work have all been explicitly geared towards bringing social justice back into social work. Still, despite the end of the Cold War, a strong trend within the left and among progressive social workers continues to resist concepts of universal human need.

Until recently, many Marxian theorists viewed human needs as merely the products of historical eras defined by specific modes of production. However, recent work by Jonathan Hughes (2000) has interpreted Marx’s view of human need as consistent with the philosophical priority given to avoidance of serious harm (Hughes, 2000). Michael Lebowitz has stressed the primacy of needs and argued that social change takes place when people recognize that the existing social structure no longer permits the satisfaction of the very needs generated at that point in history (Lebowitz, 2004).

From within social work, a strong tendency still views any discussion of needs as disempowering, and that instead we should focus entirely on strengths. Yet the concept of human capabilities found in the strengths perspective is completely consistent with the use of the capabilities concept in human needs theory (Alkire, 2005; Gough, 2003, 2004; Nussbaum, 2000; Sen, 1985).

Furthermore, human need as a concept was incorporated by leading proponents of empowerment based practice (Cox & Joseph, 1998; Gutiérrez, Parsons, & Cox, 1998). Nevertheless, there is insufficient recognition of the manner in which the Doyal/Gough theory recognizes the culturally specific manner in which human needs are met, and that human liberation involves the adoption of ways of meeting needs which are consistent with our chosen ways of life.

In US social work, the N.A.S.W. Code of Ethics states clearly in its preamble, “The primary mission of the social work profession is to enhance human well-being and help meet the basic human needs of all people.” The British Association of Social Workers's Code of Ethics stresses in its section on social justice: “The fair and equitable distribution of resources to meet basic human needs.” However, in order to achieve such lofty objectives, social work needs to reinvigorate its theoretical foundation by more fully incorporating concepts of human need.

There is a growing trend within US social work which recognizes this. Recently, the gifted African-American social work educator, Prof. Edith Anderson of Cleveland State University, came to the conclusion that the major problem we face is how to better conceptualize human similarity. Human similarity. In other words, following social work's decades long effort to appreciate human difference, we now need to better understand what we share in common.

For another example, one pioneer of cross-cultural and anti-racist counseling, Clemmont Vontress, who authored an influential 1976 article on racial differences as impediments to rapport, has recently concluded that increased recognition of cultural common denominators is essential to efforts to advance cross-cultural counseling (Dover, 2009; Vontress, 1976, 2001). Cross-cultural common denominators.
This leads to the last point I would like to make. Just as we need to identify human similarity, universal needs, and cross-cultural common denominators, so we need to find political common ground. Human needs are not the property of any one political perspective. We won't be able to bring social justice back into social work merely by somehow seizing political control of social work schools and organizations. Yes, we need radical social workers. We need SWAN and we need SWAA. But I’m not sure that what we need is radical social work, despite what David Wagner has called the Quest for a Radical Profession (Wagner, 1990). Instead, if we want to transform social work into a profession truly committed to social justice, we need to devise a conceptualization of social work practice which is inherently oriented towards social justice because it is fundamentally focused on human needs. The primary barrier to bringing social justice back into social work the failure of progressive social workers to give real teeth to our conceptualization of social justice. And this can’t be done without reference to the centrality of human needs.

100 years ago, social work needed to move beyond religion. Today as a profession we must move beyond ideology. We need to design practice models rooted in a fundamental commitment to the human needs of our clients and communities. As one SWAN member said yesterday, we need to ensure that values are back on the agenda. We should become committed to the needs of people, not the needs of capital, but not because of a predilection for a particular political ideology. We should do so because of a fundamental theoretical and value commitment to human needs, a commitment which is essential to bringing social justice back into social work.


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