From Social Work Practice to Sociological Theory: Theoretical Perspectives Arising from Direct Practice, Teaching Practice, Social Change Activism and Social Policy Analysis

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In this workshop, I share a rather eclectic set of theoretical perspectives that I have been presenting and publishing on in a variety of venues. These theoretical perspectives arose out of the need, in my practice and teaching and writing, to draw connections between various theoretical perspectives. I’ve done this by developing a variety of typologies of existing theories which may point the way towards the development of new models for social work practice, towards better understanding the sources of social injustice, towards re-thinking the nature of various kinds of social change activism, and towards conceptualizing a form of policy analysis that can counter neoliberalism’s policy assumptions.

My packet contains four modules for small group discussions in this workshop, including suggested questions for individual written reactions and feedback which can then be discussed within the group. In doing things this way, I’m hoping to bring out of the classroom something which in my teaching I’ve called “class theory.” By class theory, I don’t mean Marxist class theory, I mean theory which arises out of classroom learning and teaching, or in this case out of discussion at a conference workshop. A note on the format: as a workshop, I am hoping that in addition to our discussion, there can be some written work, within the groups. I hoping that this will sharpen some of the subsequent discussion, but obviously it also provides me with feedback to incorporate in future work. In fact, if you would like to put your name and email on anything you write, I will be in touch with you about that and would of course attribute any ideas you share.

Following are the examples I would like to address and around which I’m hoping we can form discussion groups for about 30 minutes. The theories and the groups are organized according to general interest areas: direct practice, theory development, social change activism, and policy analysis/advocacy.

1. Direct Practice: Based upon my practice with union members and the work of my students as I have taught about oppression, I share a compendium of the words and affective phrases associated with the experience of moment of oppression or dehumanization or exploitation, and the practice and practice research implications of that compendium. I’d like to ask the group that discusses this: What implications does this compendium have for anti-oppressive practice models and further research on the experience of oppression, dehumanization and exploitation?

2. Theory Development: Arising out of the development of that compendium, I share a typology of theories of oppression, dehumanization and exploitation, and the theory development implications of that typology. I’d like to ask: What implications does this typology have for an improved conceptualization of the sources of injustice?

3. Social Change Activism: Here I draw lessons from my activism and the recent Obama campaign and presidency. I present an alternative continuum for how to conceive of the traditional right-center-left spectrum, one which distinguishes between utopianism, libertarianism, pragmatism and other perspectives in terms of their right-center-left varieties. I wonder: does this alternative continuum help clarify distinctions among various trends on the left, and shed light on the Obama phenomena?

4. Social policy analysis: I present a framework for policy analysis which is geared to what in British terms would be called welfare pluralism but which, as the previous topic implies, I conceive of as a viable strategic alternative to the neoliberal domination of social policy. Does “thinking within the box” help to systematize and clarify policy options and help deconstruct neoliberal assumptions that the market should be the primary mechanism for production and distribution?

After the group discussion, in the last 25 minutes I’m hoping we can have report backs about the outcome of the discussions in the groups and some general discussion.
Introduction: In past workshops, I have sought only to enable the doing of the exercise itself, which generates more words and affective phrases. Today, I am hoping that this group can move right to an examination of the content of the compendium starting on page 8 of the article in your packet, “Oppression, dehumanization and Exploitation.” You will see from the article at the end of the packet that the compendium beginning on page 8 has created a typology of the words and affective phrases generated, into Core Emotions (emotions experienced at the moment of an act of oppression, dehumanization or exploitation), Reactive Emotions (emotions experienced minutes, hours or days later), Adaptive Emotions (evolved adaptive responses), and Maladaptive Emotions (evolved maladaptive emotions, which are described in a paragraph at the top of page 12). This typology (Core, Reactive, etc.) has no empirical or theoretical basis, but was something we generated in the class. The distinction’s core element is a time factor, i.e. immediate (core), reactive (just afterwards), and longer term (evolved). The goal of the exercise was to get at core emotions, and experience shows this is the hardest for participants to develop, with those who have difficulty getting in touch with such a moment from the past simply providing a reactive emotion. Clearly, one could quibble with some of the coding of words as in one as opposed to the other category, but what I am hoping the group can do is to read through some of the words and to think critically about the typology itself. Please note that no effort was made to distinguish over the years between emotions stemming from acts of oppression as opposed to acts of exploitation or dehumanization. In part this is due to ideological and theoretical opposition to the notion of any hierarchies of oppression, and in part it was due to doubts that there is either a qualitative (type) or quantitative (degree) difference between the feelings produced by oppression, dehumanization and exploitation, all of which of course are ultimately human emotions of immense complexity and contexuality.

Discussion questions:
1. Does this typology seem to you a valid one or not, and why? For instance, is it useful in daily practice to distinguish between the core emotion of the experience of an act of oppression in a particular moment, subsequent reactions and evolved emotions?
2. Do you see a compendium such as this as having practice applications in work with clients? How might it be used?
3. What additional research might be done to further develop this list and better code the responses?
4. Would it be useful to ask future respondents to identify whether the event from which they drew their word or affective phrase was considered by them to be a moment of oppression or of dehumanization or of exploitation as defined by the theoretical typology?
5. Additional Question/Concerns (identify on feedback sheets).
Introduction: I am hoping that this THEORY group can move right to an examination of the typology found on pages 2-5. As you can see, I have sought to identify from within the various theories of oppression, of dehumanization, and of exploitation those which provide boundaries for their theories, i.e. those which don’t overlap with each other. For instance, Cudd’s theory of oppression carefully distinguishes itself from exploitation, and doesn’t address deinstitutionalization. Haslam’s theory of dehumanization distinguishes two types, animalistic (which is consistent with Cudd’s theory of oppression), and mechanistic (which is distinct from both oppression and deinstitutionalization). Hahnel’s theory of exploitation also carefully places itself as merely one source of injustice, rather than claiming that all injustice is caused, say, by capitalism as a system of exploitation. I am seeking your feedback on the utility of my typology as a way of providing a road map for those interested in systematically identifying three overriding, higher order constructs, namely O, D, and E.

In their classical theoretical origins I link O, D, and E, to three theoretical perspectives from the social sciences. I link theories of oppression to Weberian theories of social groups and social status. I link theories of dehumanization to Durkheimian institutional analysis. And I link theories of exploitation primarily to Marxian class analysis. In their modern and most recent theoretical expression, I link these O, D an E to Ann Cudd’s full-length philosophical study of oppression, Nick Haslam’s social psychological theory of mechanistic dehumanization, and Robin Hahnel’s post Marxist-theory of exploitation. This is a typology of three higher order constructs, Oppression, Dehumanization and Exploitation. Drawing on Cudd, Haslam and Hahnel, I distinguish conceptually among the O, D, and E. By clearly distinguishing between theories of oppression, dehumanization and exploitation, confining each theoretical perspective to a particular domain, it becomes possible to avoid attributing all injustice to oppression, or to exploitation. And it becomes possible to give dehumanization the attention it deserves as a major source of injustice. Finally, I suggest, perhaps provocatively, that all sources of injustice can be attributed to either oppression, dehumanization or exploitation and the underlying and occasionally overlapping mechanisms by which they are carried out, and that there are no other identifiable higher order constructs which could render this typology invalid. It is that assertion in particular that I am hoping that the Oppression, Dehumanization and Exploitation group can examine.

Although the article doesn’t address it directly, I see follow up on this typology as moving in two directions:

(1) Expansion of this section into a full-length article presenting this typology and more fully explaining the need to better constrain theories of oppression, dehumanization and exploitation so that they don’t each seek to explain all injustice. Many theories of oppression have become so all-encompassing that they do exactly that, for instance by reducing class exploitation to “classism” and positioning it as merely one type of oppression. Many theories of class exploitation subordinate and minimize oppression (racism, sexism and heterosexism, etc.) to class oppression in importance and contend that ending capitalism is sine qua non of ending oppression. As for dehumanization, it remains poorly theorized and is widely neglected by theorists of oppression and exploitation.

(2) Developing, in collaboration with a philosopher, a partial theory of injustice that asserts that all injustice is produced by O, D, or E and the overlapping mechanisms and processes which are associated with each.

(Discussion questions after the chart)
| **Chart of Typology of Theories of Oppression, Dehumanization and Exploitation** |
|--------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| **Oppression** | **Dehumanization** | **Exploitation** |
| **Definition according to typology** | Four necessary and sufficient conditions for oppression: (1) institutionalized harm condition for social group B, (2) social group condition (social group A initiates institutionalized practices directed at a pre-existing social group B; (3) privilege condition (social group A benefits from continuation of (1) and (2); (4) Coercion condition (institutional practices in (1) and (2) must be coercive in nature. Also, oppression has a common set of material and psychological features. | Involves the treatment of others as not possessing the core features of human nature. Involves a view of the dehumanized individuals or groups as being automata (not animals, nor members of particular social groups). Characteristic of the application to human beings of "standardization, instrumental efficiency, impersonal technique, causal determinism, and enforced passivity" (Haslam, 2006, p. 260). Montagu and Matson (1983) linked dehumanization to large scale social processes such as industrialization, compulsive obedience, mechanized behavior, and the impact of the scientific revolution. This leads to technological dehumanization: the reduction of human beings to machines. Dehumanization may be disproportionally experienced by certain social groups but it isn’t typically practiced by a dominant social group but rather by states, organizations, corporations, and powerful individuals who may care less who is dehumanized. | Exploitation is simply based upon unfair advantage. Exploitation can be analyzed in terms other than Marxian theories of surplus value. Assuming free markets for labor and credit, Hahnel demonstrated that even mutually beneficial, voluntary economic exchanges can worsen the degree of inequality. Assuming shortages of capital and a free market for labor, those who begin with more income and assets have a competitive advantage in economic exchanges. because they operate with greater efficiency. This leads to further efficiency gains with each exchange. The result is still greater inequality of income and assets, via accumulation. Unjust outcomes necessarily follow from transactions between unequal parties tied to a formal social relationship within an institutionalized environment. In such a case, the outcome is a result of exploitation (Hahnel 2006). |
| **Boundaries between elements of typology** | According to Cudd, exploitation differs from oppression and is not necessarily coercive and therefore not necessarily oppression. | Haslam’s theory of animalistic dehumanization involved mechanisms consistent with Cudd’s theory of oppression. But his theory of mechanistic dehumanization represents neither oppression nor exploitation. | According to Hahnel, unjust outcomes can happen outside the context of exploitation as well (Hahnel 2006). |
| **Classical Theoretical Origins** | Weberian theory of groups and status; Marxian theory of the oppression of women and division of labor and “the ability of one group of people to coercively appropriate the product of another’s labor’’ (Cudd, 2006, p. 9). | Durkheimian theory of anomie and the loss of traditional sources of human community and social trust; Weberian theory of the ‘iron cage’ of bureaucracy; Marxian theory of the dehumanizing/alienating nature of capitalism. | Marxian and Weberian theories of class. |
1. Based upon the summary in the paper, what are your reactions to Cudd’s theory of oppression? Are their additional theories of oppression or suggestions you have for how to develop the theory of oppression within this typology?

2. Based upon the summary in the paper, what are your reactions to Haslam’s distinction between animalistic and mechanism dehumanization? Is it clear why I see animalistic dehumanization as consistent with the group-based theory of oppression of Cudd? Are their additional theories of dehumanization or suggestions for further developing the theory of oppression within this typology?

3. Based upon the summary in the paper, what are your reactions to Hahnel’s theory of exploitation. Are their additional theories of exploitation or suggestions you have for how to develop the theory of exploitation within this typology, keeping in mind that it needs to be one which is independent of social system (capitalism, socialism, etc.)?

4. Please focus on the table that explains the typology. From the material presented, are the boundaries between O, D, and E well explained? Are they convincing with respect to the alleged distinction between oppression, dehumanization and exploitation?

5. Is there a missing fourth column? In other words, is there a fourth major source of social injustice? Is there a forth higher order construct such as oppression, dehumanization or exploitation that produces injustice, one that can’t be subsumed under either O, D, or E. If none can be developed, does that mean that the existing typology is the foundation for a partial theory of the sources of injustice? (Partial, because a full theory of injustice would require a fuller identification of the actual mechanisms by which O, D and E are carried out.)

6. Additional Question/Concern (please write on discussion sheets).
Introduction: This segment represents one theoretical outcome of my work as an activist on the organized and not so organized left. These experiences compelled me to re-think the traditional assumptions behind what is considered right, center and left. As the following chart contends, much of what has passed as scientific socialism has really been infused with healthy doses of utopianism. My own thinking evolved in a decidedly post-Marxist, welfare pluralism direction, so that I view the alternative to neoliberalism not as socialism as the following: “We need to use class, organizational and institutional analysis as well as equity analysis linked to understanding the role of gender, race and class in order to ascertain within each policy realm (health care, employment, housing, etc.) what is the best mix of funding sources (public, private-for-profit, nonprofit) and delivery vehicles (public, private-for-profit, nonprofit) to create culturally-specific ways of ensuring universal human needs are met, consistent with human rights.”

This meant I was no longer on the left as traditionally defined in row one. It meant I was what I term a progressive pragmatist. But where is pragmatism on a traditional right/center/left divide and what is the fundamental outlook on power of pragmatism, compared with utopianism, libertarianism, authoritarianism, and individualism? Thus, my chart.

I am hoping that this Alternatives to NeoliberalismIDEOLOGY group can focus on a critique of this chart, which everyone has in their packet. Let me say one thing first about this. With respect to utopianism, and both orthodox and revolutionary Marxism, in an article Tearing Down the Walls of the US left I cited something which the late Joe Slovo, a leader of the African National Congress and Community Party of South Africa, said about that at a conference in NYC I attended in early 1991: “I remain an unrehabilitated utopian. I believe that the human soul is quite capable of reaching a form of society in which one person does not live off the labor of another. And that kind of idea is not only that which is an expression of the basic normative values of all radicals both before and after Marx, but is that which will in the end be capable of realization. It will come about through the organization and struggle of the wretched of this Earth - the 90% or more of humanity for whom if socialism is not an answer, there is no answer at all. And that is not how human society works.” (Typo in the original deleted the word not in the last sentence.)

Thus, how society works is that we do in fact look for answers geared towards human survival. This statement still inspires me. Give me a beloved utopian any day over a cynical conservative. But as I argued in that article, “most on the left in the US, including most considering themselves to be Marxists and scientific socialists, have really been practicing a disguised form of idealism and utopian socialism rooted in 19th century utopian socialist and anarchist traditions. When confusing historical developments threatened our belief systems, these utopian and idealist beliefs were protected by and began to coexist with dogmatism and sectarianism, but also with a stubborn and admirable refusal to give up day to day struggles here in the U.S.A...This leaves a number of questions unanswered for the Left and social workers on the left. For instance, now that many have concluded that transitions to socialism will be uneven, diverse and long-term, where does that leave the immediate survival needs of people?...It is clear that progressive social workers need to enter the fray of these debates on the Left in order to ensure that meeting human needs is the number one objective of any political rethinking.”

In the handout that follows, the alternative to a left/center/right continuum may be to construct a bull's eye in which the center of the target is the concept of "minimum necessary social intervention". This is a dialectical concept which embodies and makes historically specific the kind of social intervention is needed. By using the word ‘social intervention’, it doesn't assume that the source of the intervention is state intervention. Social intervention may emanate from institutional sectors other than government. It may arise from religion, from the nonprofit sector, etc. This leaves room for "thinking with the box" of the kind provided for in my other work about the various sectors or mix of sectors to fund and deliver social interventions.

In some ways, this makes the distinction between pragmatic liberalism and progressive pragmatism less relevant. In a period of
minimum capacity for state intervention (such as early American states), the principle may have made reinforced classical liberalism's belief in unfettered markets. But the fact is that in the current particular historical period we have that capacity and, moreover, many necessary social interventions are called for. However, it may also have been the case that markets and institutions were more closely intertwined all along, even in early American states. We have always had a "mixed economy" of public, nonprofit/religious and market organizations and institutions. The question is what mix do we want, who decides and what principles govern our choices?

Social Change Activism Group Handout

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Towards an Alternative to the Right-Left Continuum - Michael Dover, August 2009</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Columns</strong>: Place on the right-center/left continuum. <strong>Rows</strong>: A typology of several alternatives to the right-center/left continuum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Right</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utopianism (Power in Service of Various Ideals)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Libertarianism (Power in Service of the Concept of Freedom)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pragmatism (Power contingent upon the historically specific application of the principle of ‘minimum necessary social intervention’, and in service of various emphases on the needs of capital vs the needs of people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individualism (Power assumed by or exercised by an individual and those loyal to that person)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Group III Discussion Questions: Social Change Activism Group

1. There are a number of exercises presented in various social welfare policy texts which ask students to classify their personal beliefs according to conservative, liberal or radical, and ask them to see whether their classification differs whether they are talking about the economy, the family, religion, etc.. But this is a conference of activist social workers, so is it safe to ask whether the right hand column provides any clarification about the range of beliefs on the left?

2. Keeping in mind that pragmatism is one of the few original US contributions to philosophical thought (be nice to Yanks please!), what is your view of the notion of progressive pragmatism?

3. The chart indicates that the unifying principle of pragmatism is that power should be exercises in a manner consistent with the principle of “minimal necessary social intervention” or minoptimal social intervention, to borrow a term (minoptimal) from the Doyal/Gough theory of human need. Does this concept have merit as a compromise between alternative rows which perhaps either favor the lowest possible level of social intervention or perhaps imply the need for massive state intervention in the interests of one social group or another?

5. Additional Question/Concern
Introduction: British students of social work and social policy are perhaps well versed in thinking about welfare pluralism, ever since Norman Johnson’s critique of welfare pluralism in The Welfare State in Transition: The Theory and Practice of Welfare Pluralism. However, in the US, confusion reigns about how to think about the question.

In the US, our assumptions are that the nature of our society is fundamentally a market economy. Leading textbooks in the social welfare policy in the US refer to the US as having a market economy, and the political discourse starts with the assumption we are living in a market economy, a capitalist economy, etc. Therefore, what is good for markets is good for the US; what is good for capitalism, is good for the US. Neoliberalism rules in social policy in the US in part because of the unquestioned assumption that we live in a market society.

However, my dissertation research on the social system of real property ownership in Ohio’s urban areas over the past 50 years results in some interesting conclusions. Among them is that the growing proportion of real property owned by public (governmental), nonprofit charitable, nonprofit educational, nonprofit cultural, and nonprofit religious institutions, as well as the growing amount of residential property owned by individual and family homeowners, not to mention the remaining (albeit shrinking) family farm sector. One conclusion I have reached and presented is that capitalism may not be what we think it is. We may, more than we realize, live in a mixed economy, even in the US, the most market-intensive of the advanced capitalist countries.

Once we realize we live in a mixed economy, suddenly the neoliberal emperor has no clothes. Suddenly the main question becomes not, “how can we subsidize the market sector” or “how can we help capitalism develop further”, it becomes, “what is the best mix of the public, nonprofit, and market sectors?” Suddenly, human rationality and caring must be mobilized in order to answer that question, rather than blindly conforming to the demands of capital. So, in the US context at least, recognizing the value of a purposeful welfare pluralism becomes not a retreat from previous gains in public social welfare, but a formula for insisting upon the further development of social welfare. Welfare pluralism becomes part of a viable alternative to neoliberalism.

Instructions:

1. Take 5-10 minutes to read the above introduction, review the handout on the next page, and engage in initial discussion/questioning.

2. Review the questions on the pages that follow the handout, and identify any additional questions/concerns.

3. Individuals choose a question and spend about 5 minutes writing their response.

4. The group discusses individual responses and other reactions for 10 minutes and comes to a conclusions a report back.

Please turn the page for chart and discussion questions
Social Policy Analysis Group: An Alternative to Neoliberal Models of Social Policy Analysis

Whether we are analyzing a social cleavage or ascertaining which kind of legislation and regulation we need in a particular policy domain, we need to use class, organizational and institutional analysis as well as equity analysis linked to understanding the role of gender, race and class in order to ascertain within each policy realm (health care, employment, housing, international cooperation for each and security, etc.) what is the best mix of funding sources (public, private-for-profit, nonprofit) and delivery vehicles (public, private-for-profit, nonprofit) to create culturally-specific ways of ensuring universal human needs are met, consistent with human rights. The following chart illustrates this model of policy analysis:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources Of Delivery By Sector</th>
<th>Sources Of Funding By Sector</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>Public: Federal, State, County, Local, Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-profit</td>
<td>Nonprofit Organizations: Charitable, Religious, Cooperative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private-for-Profit</td>
<td>Private-for-Profit Organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family</td>
<td>Family/ Individual direct payment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual</td>
<td>Note: One service or benefit may have more than one sources of funding and &gt;1 source of delivery.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Class analysis is seen as using concepts such as domination and exploitation by a dominant class to help explain the various dimensions of inequality. Class analysts see organizations as tools of class domination, sites of class struggle or organizational bearers of class relations. For these purposes, questions arise about the role of services and benefits in reducing social inequality; the impact of proposed changes on workers in the various sectors, etc.

Organizational analysis examines status and power from the distinctive standpoint of organizationally-centered structures and processes. While these structures and processes may intermediate between individuals and larger social structures such as social institutions (Scott 1995: 142), the focus of organizational analysis is primarily on organizations and their immediate environments, units and internal actors. For these purposes, it focused on questions of the optimum organizational environment for carrying out the proposed services or benefits.

Institutional analysis is narrowly defined here as a form of analysis which accounts for the influence of social institutions on classes, organizations, and individuals. Institutional analysis identifies a variety of regulative (including coercive), normative and cognitive processes that convey the resource requirements, standards, values, and schema embedded in institutional logics, mechanisms and bases of legitimacy and compliance. For these purposes, it focuses on questions of institutional legitimacy and continuity, institutional trust, etc., with an effort to understand which mix of sectors are best suited for carrying out the proposed services or benefits.

These three kinds of analysis may result in differing recommendations regarding optimal sectors, and these conclusions require reconciliation as part of part of rational, caring, democratic decision making, as opposed to starting with the assumption of the predominance of the markets sector.

Group IV: Social Policy Analysis Group Discussion Questions

1. In formulating social welfare policy, is it helpful to think systematically about what sector(s) should fund it and what sector(s) should deliver it? Or is this just a bunch of welfare pluralist nonsense, or, as one British Marxist business school professor responded to my model at a US conference, is it “consistent with Tony Blair’s genocidal social policies”? (;)

2. What about the notion of using class analysis and organizational analysis and institutional analysis to think about policy questions? Aside from the fact most individuals (including myself) might find it difficult to do and that this makes such an analysis a collective/group endeavor, does it make sense to discipline ourselves to post potentially complementary but possibly competing questions from each of these 3 kinds of analysis? Or is it just more unnecessary obfuscation covering up reactionary efforts to dismantle the public sector? (;)

3. Pose your own questions/concerns! I’m plum out!
Discussion/Feedback Sheets. Group #: _____ Discussion Question #: _______

Name and email (optional): ____________________________

Additional Discussion Question/Concerns:

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Feedback:

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