“We must ask ourselves who are in a better position and more called upon to act collectively, politically and responsibly for the goals of welfare than those who have made welfare their profession, that is, the dominant occupation of their lives.”

-Eugen Pusic
From Social Work to Social Justice

Many observers have attempted to define social work, but Klenk and Ryan point out the inadequacy of the linear form in explaining complex phenomena. Many factors contribute to this complexity: the lack of a “comprehensive frame of reference” for social work’s body of knowledge; confusion between values and knowledge; the lack of a “coherent framework” for social work method; disagreement along a continuum first described by Mary Richmond as wholesale-retail and since further developed by many more; and differing concepts of the nature of a profession.

Indeed, Gordon has pointed out that often scholars can’t agree on what to try to define: social work, social practice, etc. “One thing that seems sure: a social worker does social work. But what does this mean?” It means that this paper will only make an attempt to describe, not define.

The 1958 Working Definition, while describing only social work practice, refers to a constellation of value, purpose, sanction, knowledge and method, while Boehm refers to underlying assumptions, essential values, goals, functions and methods as the constellation of his description. The attempt of Boehm to describe the nature of social work, as modified to note contributions of others, provides the core of the present analysis, which describes and lists the characteristic aspects of each of the component parts.
of social work and the relationships between them: (1) professional structure, (2) values, (3) body of knowledge, (4) skill, (5) goals, (6) functions, (7) activities.

(1) The professional structure synthesizes the goals, values, and body of knowledge of the members of the profession and imparts skills, promotes methods, defines activities and outlines functions undertaken within the aegis of the profession. In doing so it is ultimately accountable to and has received the sanction of society in general and social welfare in particular. The structure is characterized by:

“professional authority and professional standards of work”\(^{12}\); respectful relations among colleagues; a code of ethics embodying societal, basic professional and social work values; a “subculture or community whose members shared a group identity”\(^{13}\); schools or “organized agencies of acculturation”\(^{14}\); “symbols of membership,…regularized channels of entrance”\(^{15}\); “a formal professional association.”\(^{16}\)

The structure’s distinction from that of other professions is embodied in the specific forms it takes and in its values and other components discussed below.

(2) The values of social work are of 3 different kinds: (a) societal values, (b) values of professions, (c) values related to social work’s specific contributions to service. Pusic points out that professions have the unique privilege of maintaining a degree of independence within society,\(^{17}\) and Boehm adds that social work’s values are not altogether those of societal values, but rather build on them. Nevertheless, these values are influence by a number of factors, including.

“functional specialization” leading to the need for unifying values and a rejection of “moral pre-conceptions”\(^{18}\); “administrative exigencies” in social agencies\(^{19}\); funding sources helped it to reflect “current fashions”\(^{20}\), the desire for status and acceptance.\(^{21}\)

In the realm of values, these influences were not always as damaging to the semi-autonomous nature of our professional value system, as they have been in the realm of day to day practice. Nor do societal influences work only to restrain the idealism of

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\(^{12}\) Wilensky and Lebeaux, p. 303.

\(^{13}\) Lubove, p. 118.

\(^{14}\) Ibid., p. 124.

\(^{15}\) Encyclopedia.

\(^{16}\) Greenwood, quoted in Varley, p. 84.

\(^{17}\) Pusic, pp. 90-92.

\(^{18}\) Lubove, p. 35.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 157.

\(^{20}\) Robert Lindemann, quoted Lubove, p. 121.

\(^{21}\) Herbert Bisno, quoted in Beck, p. 192.
social work value system. In fact, Rein points out that one societal and social work
value, “self-actualization,” is actually a radical creed.22

Following is a list of the characteristic values in the 3 areas:

(a) Societal values: self realization of a man’s potential23; responsibility of man to
society and vice-versa; basic “human worth”24; the inherent dignity of man;
“humanitarian and democratic ideals.”25

(b) Professional values: “ideal of disinterested service …for its own sake”26;
“rationality, universalism, disinterestedness, and specificity of function”27;
“holistic perspective”28; “consistent in using a body of knowledge”29;
“emotional neutrality,” impartiality30; awareness of “limited competence”31;
“professional responsibility over personal interests,” and responsibility to
promote the profession32; and other values all professions share.

(c) Social work’s specific values: “Client participates in defining the kinds of
opportunities”33; “activity …directed to some change in the human condition”
and “expressive rather than repressive approaches to human nature”34;
“recognition of the essential relation between social justice, individual
fulfillment, and social well-being”35; importance of supervision; belief in
institutional concepts of social welfare36; an “integrative view of the
individual or the human situation”37; “neither the right nor the ability to judge
is fellows in terms of what they deserve,...helping people find their own way is
better than controlling them,...people as subjects and not as objects”38;
“individuals … the ultimate beneficiary of social work activities”39;
“maximization of self-determination”40, opposition to radical discrimination
in service and society; “directly concerned with individual human welfare”41;
and other values embodied in the code of ethics, goals and activities of social
work.

22 Rein, p. 16.
23 Beck, p. 191.
24 Bernstein, p. 7.
25 Code of Ethics, N.A.S.W.
26 Lubove, p. 122.
27 Talcott Parsons, quotes in Lubove, p. 121.
28 Brill, p. 100.
29 Wilensky and Lebeaux, quoted in Varley, p. 85
30 Wilensky and Lebeaux, p. 299.
31 Ibid., p. 307.
32 Code of Ethics
33 Klenk and Ryan, p. 4.
34 Schneiderman, in Klenk and Ryan, pp. 37-41.
35 Brill, p. 100.
37 Kahn, p 26, Issues, p. 9.
38 Keith-Lucas in Federico, p. 27.
39 Boehm, p. 13.
40 Bernstein, p. 8.
Boehm points out that while all professions profess the value of seeing the wholeness of man, each concentrates on “one aspect of man’s functioning as the primary focus.” For social work this is a social interaction, which helps define the limits of social work’s knowledge, goals, functions, and activities.

(3) In order to help delineate the forms and content of social work knowledge, Boehm classifies it into tested knowledge, assumptive knowledge, and hypothetical knowledge, and stresses the necessity of social workers being aware of which they are using. Gordon warns, however, that social work should “place…it’s knowledge base clearly in the realm of science” and be careful not to allow possible conflicts between values (what is preferred) and knowledge to affect practice. Following is a list of some aspects of social work knowledge:

“social relationships and…the interaction between man and his environment”; “knowledge of human development and behavior; of social economic, and cultural conditions, and of the interaction of all these factors”; knowledge of the practitioner about himself; information and theories of other disciplines and knowledge based upon the various methods of social work activities.

All “knowledge needed for social work is determined by its goals and functions and the problems it seeks to solve.”

(4) According to Klenk and Ryan, skill is derived from knowledge. Boehm adds that skill can be seen as the creative selection and “fusion of his knowledge with social work values.” The “mastery of a body of knowledge,” “the internalization of its values and norms” and the shaping of a “group identity” are components of the “professional self,” and in this context can be seen as the epitome of the skilled practitioner.

The terms goals, functions, and activities are related to each other in the following manner by Boehm: the activities are the means by which the functions are achieved, the function are the means by which the goals are attained. “Goal here signifies the ultimate goal…the desired result,” as opposed to values, the images of a preferred state. Function is poorly defined by Boehm as “specific categories of socially sanctioned aims,” (my emphasis) which mixes functions up with goals. The relationship of function to activities and goals can also be described in the following manner: goals are

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43 Ibid., p. 11.
45 Wilensky and Lebeaux, p. 7.
46 1970 N.A.S.W. Definition.
47 Boehm, p. 11.
48 Klenk and Ryan, p. 3.
49 Boehm, p. 11.
50 Code of Ethics.
51 Lubove, p. 118.
52 Wilensky and Lebeaux, p. 229.
53 Boehm, p. 13.
54 Ibid.
realized by function are realized by activities. The characteristic aspects of each component follows.

(5) Semantic problems again obscure goals, aims, purposes, etc. but Klenk and Ryan, Schneiderman, Boehm, and the 1970 N.A.S.W. definition all see the direct or indirect enhancement of social functioning as the main goal of social work. Gordon sees the “goals of practice” to be “the conditions to be brought about to facilitate the value outcome.” Klenk defines social functioning as “those activities considered essential for performance of the several roles which each individual...is called upon to carry out.” The origin of the defined goal lies in social work’s value system as filtered through its knowledge. A goal can be reached, a value or purpose or belief can only be held.

(6) Boehm outlines the 3 basic functions of social work towards which activities are directed, preferably consciously: (a) restoration (curative or rehabilitative), (b) provision of resources (developmental and educational), and (c) prevention (of problems of dysfunctional interaction and social ills.) He points out that these functions are not completely separate, and that social workers need to be aware of which functions their activities are or are not realizing at any one time. Other concepts of social work functions are:

“provision of interventive services at the level of the social system and at the level of the action”; “helping persons to use maximally the social resources potentially available to them”; “contribution...to normal socialization and social control.” Activities collectively realize these functions. A social worker doesn’t carry out functions, but activities.

(7) Activities can be seen as being made up of (a) methods of practice, within which the “social worker in action” applies (b) techniques, and uses (c) instruments of practice. The five basic methods of casework, group work, community organization, research and administration utilize various techniques variously comprised of “models”, step-by-step conceptualizations, systems approaches, and others too numerous too list. Useful in these methods and techniques are the various instruments of practice (Gordon’s term) such as recording, supervision, case conferences, consultation, review and evaluation referred to by the Working Definition).

The above description of the nature and characteristics of social work is deficient in at least one area: the relationships of the 7 component pars to the system of social

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55 Klenk and Ryan, p. 9.
56 Schneiderman, pp. 357-360
58 Boehm, p. 13.
59 Atherton, quoted in Loewenberg and Dolgoff, p. 10.
60 Rosen and Connaway, p. 91.
62 Schneiderman, in Klenk and Ryan, p. 140.
welfare institutions. The author’s conceptualization of this in the appendix serve to give a graphic idea of that relation. Following is a description of the nature and characteristics of social welfare.

Our Commitment: Social Welfare

Wilensky and Lebeaux attempt to list the necessary and sufficient “distinguishing characteristics of activities which fall within the range of welfare practice,” and also describe their five points as “criteria to define the field of analysis,” (My emphases.) In my view this means that he is stating that his five points are necessary and sufficient components of social welfare and of any institution within the field of social welfare.

Their first 3 criteria, formal organization, social sponsorship and accountability, and absence of the profit motive as dominant program purpose are interesting but almost obvious except in certain specific cases. But functional generalization tied to an integrative view of human needs is true only of the kind of advanced system of social welfare which social work sees as a goal. Also, this criterion is not a necessary condition for all agencies within social welfare, as they admit.

While social work sees the individual and that person’s immediate consumption needs as the ultimate beneficiary of and target of social welfare (respectively), the person and that person’s immediate consumption needs are not necessarily the direct beneficiaries, Wilensky and Lebeaux postulate in point 5. For instance, Dunham cites examples of indirect “non-consumer service” forms of social welfare agencies.

Thus, Wilensky and Lebeaux do not achieve the goal they implicitly set for themselves of defining the set of necessary and sufficient conditions of social welfare as a field and of agencies within that field.

Utilizing several of the criteria of Wilensky and Lebeaux, however, and the work of Rosen and Connaway, I have attempted to construct a conceptualization of the necessary and sufficient characteristic components which describe social welfare as a set of institutions and also any of its single institutions. The components are (1) goals, (2) functions (manifest and latent), (3) criteria for clientele, (4) means, and (5) overall administrative structure.

First, however, I discuss the question of values and ideology. Social welfare institutions, unlike people, hold no values, only expressed and implied goals “derived from the dominant set of social values of society.” Many of the societal values discussed above as influencing social work also influence society’s motivations for social welfare. But conflicting values of segments of society lead to “issues of ideological
Peirce warns against ignoring various un-altruistic motivations for social welfare. Pusic points out such motivations as the threats of mass destitution, the "economic and political struggles of the working class" to the existing order, and the "feeling of pity which derives its existence from the deep solidarity of the primeval human group."

This multiplicity of motivations is reflected in the manifest and latent functions of social welfare described below. Actual goals often reflect a compromise between the values of "individualism and free enterprise" and "security, equality and humanitarianism." Axinn and Levin see views of human nature itself as crucial determinants.

Social work also holds values related to the ideal nature of social welfare, and these can be distinguished from the actual goals of current social welfare. Smith warns against social work exaggerating social welfare’s actual current goals. An example of this is Schottland's outline of the current goals of the "welfare state," although he admits they won't be reached for decades. These idealistic goals may be Schottland's, but they are not the welfare’s state’s! Not today’s anyway. Rosen and Connaway also stress that social welfare’s goals may not be what they seem to be. McEntire and Haworth identify a social work goal of social service based on merit and request rather than tired subtly to public financial assistance, but they introduction of social service, which the profession applauded in the 1960’s, did not mean that the social welfare system had taken our final wish as their goal. Indeed, to cite a converse situation, Piven and Cloward cite as study which shows that some of social work’s professional values, perhaps questionably applies, sometimes inhibit present goals of public welfare. Mencher and Pusic urge the profession to reject neutrality on the questions of value and ideology which result in the goals of social welfare.

Peirce criticizes Wilensky and Lebeaux’s concepts of residual and institutional as lacking a functional analysis, but the terms are generally accepted. Because actual programs are often a compromise, Wilensky and Lebeaux refer only to the concepts of institutional and residual, not to residual and institutional programs. Most definitions of social welfare reflect the institutional view, because they often omit functions and aspects that are inconsistent with social work’s goals for social welfare. Residual and institutional concepts tend to reflect the varying values of society towards social welfare.

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68 Mencher, p. 10.  
69 Peirce, p. 40.  
70 Pusic, p. 77.  
71 Wilensky and Lebeaux, p. 138.  
72 Axinn and Levin, p. 5.  
73 Smith, p. 97.  
74 Schottland, p. 15.  
75 Rosen and Connaway, p. 91.  
76 McEntire, p. 28.  
77 Piven and Cloward, Regulating the Poor, p. 175.  
78 Mencher, p. 11.  
79 Pusic, p. 81.  
80 Peirce, p. 42.
goals, and result in certain distinguishable, characteristic concepts and characteristics being reflected in social programs:

Residual concepts: family and market have basic responsibility; de-emphasis on human rights; righting the wrong is the goal (as if such a wrong is an aberration, and there is nothing fundamentally wrong with the system); the work ethic; emphasis on private welfare; no national welfare policy; in-kind programs are better; programs should only for those unable to work if possible; normal people can manage on their own; emphasis on case service.

Residual characteristics: temporary; insufficient, minimum help; stigma; means test; crisis related; frequent re-certification; mandatory counseling.

Institutional concepts: social welfare is a right; programs aimed at self-realization not maintaining dependency or force-work; inability of individual to meet all needs is seen as normal; regular agency status; positive goals set; social broker and advocacy part of welfare; first line function.

Institutional characteristics: No stigma; no means test but rather user-status or user option; no emergency; no abnormalcy; legal rights; sufficient level of aid.

Similar concepts to residual and institutional are Wolin’s type A and type B programs, and the universal vs. selective dichotomy discussed by Kahn.

The five necessary and sufficient characteristic components which describe social welfare as a set of institutions and also any of its single institutions are:

I have attempted to construct a conceptualization of the necessary and sufficient characteristic components which describe social welfare as a set of institutions and also any of its single institutions. The components are (1) the goals of social welfare, (2) the manifest and latent functions of social welfare, (3) criteria for the clientele of the social welfare system, (4) the means of delivery of social welfare, and (5) the overall administrative structure of the social welfare system.

(1) The goals of social welfare: The goals of social welfare can be distinguished from the functions in the following manner: goals are stated and not always reached. Goals are what social welfare tries to do. Functions are what it does, consciously or not. Consequently some goals are realized by functions, by some functions are contrary to stated goals. Goals vary with the outcome of current value conflicts. Goals also vary with the level of output of the economy. The minimum re-distribution of income possible to maintain a minimum acceptable subsistence standard, combined with measures to discourage dependency and provide for certain needs which have not been met by non-social welfare functions of society, would seem to be a brief description of the current goals of public welfare. Schottland’s goals mentioned above, which we can see as ideal goals are: “full employment, economic and social security, equality of
opportunity, social benefits available by right; and public provision to assure all citizens of proper medical care, housing, education, and other social services.”

(2) The manifest and latent functions of social welfare: Peirce’s identification of manifest and latent functions provides a handle for analysis. First, functions are active occurrences, not passive statements. Manifest functions are “intended and recognized,” and latent functions are undesirable, it should be pointed out, but many of the undesirable ones have been intended by some but not related to openly stated goals and therefore not generally recognized. Some latent functions correlate with manifest functions either as complimentary or contradictory twins. For instance the manifest function of re-distributing income fairly may have a dual latent function of re-distributing it mainly from the middle income brackets rather than throughout society as intended. A list of various manifest and latent functions follows:

Manifest: Protecting the sick, aged, disabled; helping individuals and families adjust to society; distributing goods, resources, services; protecting and stimulating the economy through income maintenance; “system maintenance, system control, system change”; “reducing discontent.”

Latent: “regulation of marginal labor and the maintenance of civil order”; “latent ‘poor house’ function” of removing young and old from society, “maintain society essentially as it is,” “acceptable means of social control” rather than “self-determination” or the “poor house, lynching, debtor’s prison,” “providing an…innocuous stage…[for]…the social reformer,” “appearance of social change” neutralizing those who demand real change” “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” ; “to resolve contradictions between…production and consumption” .

(3) The criteria for the clientele of the social welfare system: Rosen and Conaway’s concept of “criteria” is the component which identifies the potential clients and sets the requirements for service eligibility. “These defining criteria are not independent of the welfare system and usually reflect its goals.” Concepts of criteria, therefore, differ, and reflect either residual or institutional conceptions or elements of both residual or institutional concepts of eligibility, which range from universal, to user option, to user status, to income eligibility, geographical location, and other criteria. “Criteria” also varies with manifest function (similar to what Rosen and Conaway call “operation purpose”) and determines who is affected by means.

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86 Schottland, p. 15.
87 Merton in Peirce, p. 41.
88 Peirce, p. 43.
89 Lenk and Ryan, p. 358.
90 Wolins, p. 109.
91 Pivens and Cloward, p. XVI.
92 Peirce, p. 43-47.
93 Bailey, p. 20.
94 Mencher, p. 6.
95 Rosen and Conaway, p. 88.
(4) The means of social welfare: “Means for accomplishing goals” is the delivery component of social welfare. It varies with goals, criteria, and should vary with the current “state of empirically verified knowledge of social systems.” Thus, its current form should be considered “disposable.” Many professional and non-professional employees and material resources are part of the means component. Dunham identifies 11 “functional fields” which can be considered part of the component:

income maintenance; family welfare; child welfare; health and medical care; physically handicapped; mental health; adult offender; group services; mass recreation and informal education social planning and development, and other.

Levitan would divide means into 3 forms of services: (1) assistance to those outside the labor force, (2) programs to aid those in the labor force, and (3) services for people regardless of participation in the labor force. Federico identifies 3 forms of services also; curative, preventive, and rehabilitative. McEntire and Haworth see two: income maintenance and social services. All are useful breakdowns which facilitate analysis of effectiveness and gaps in service.

(5) The administrative structure of social welfare: The specific characteristics of the administrative structure of social welfare, along with the specific content of the criteria and means components, help to distinguish social welfare from other institutions of society which may have similar overall components, and make sufficient the necessary criteria in the present conceptual format. The overall administrative structure is characterized by formal organization, lack of profit motive, and concern with human consumption needs. It is not inherent in the nature of the state. It is formally accountable to and receives sanction from society through all or any of the following: governing boards, advisory boards, government and associations of clients. It is also responsible for the overall coordination of social welfare’s components.

The above outlines of social welfare and social work undoubtedly have conceptual weaknesses. Perhaps not all the necessary components were mentioned, or the descriptions were not sufficient to define the boundaries of each. The relationship between social welfare and social work is an important one, however, which can help further distinguish between social welfare and social work.

Further Distinctions Between the Two

Social welfare has no values, social work does. Social work’s values are reflected in its practice (hopefully), but certain agreed values of society are often not reflected in the goals of social welfare. The functions of social work are based upon its skills and knowledge, but the functions of social welfare often do not reflect its stated goals. The clients of a social work professional who is unhampered by serious negative

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96 Ibid.
97 Dunham, p. 18.
98 Levitan, p. 170.
99 Federico, p. 20.
100 McEntire, p. 22.
administrative factors are given the best the particular social worker can offer. The clients of many social welfare institutions are often not served in a way compatible with social work’s values. There is a reason for this: social work is a conscious, collective body of people. It is one of many professions which are delivery arms of social welfare, but social work also maintains an independence conducive to reflection and critical thinking.

Social workers receive remuneration largely from social welfare institutions, yet social welfare is also dependent upon social work for its skilled personnel. This interdependence has both positive and negative effects on each. Rosen and Connaway point out the “essential role the social work professional plays in incorporation of general welfare goals into specific service purposes.” But they warn that all three of their criteria for “method” selection must be used. (Their term method corresponds with my above use of “technique” as part of social work’s activities component.) Without using all three criteria, social work can fail to distinguish its goals and values from the immediate purpose of service, as well as from the currently differing goals of social welfare. The 3 criteria are: (1) purpose-method correspondence, (2) method efficacy, and (3) method-value consistency. Social work can make important contributions to the means component of social welfare, not only by applying these 3 criteria in its activities as much as possible, but also by making the administrative structure of social welfare aware of the importance of the changing and “disposable” nature of its means component, even if such changes might have a temporary adverse economic impact on sectors of the profession.

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101 Rosen and Connaway, p. 88.
Reference List


