Book Review of "The Origins of Social Work: Continuity and Change". Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, by Malcolm Payne

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Malcolm Payne's latest work proposes to survey the continuity and change in social work from its inception and origins, up until the present day. In order to do justice to the theme, its author could have concentrated on developing a narrative of a national enterprise, or restricted himself to a regional analysis (Western European Social Work) or opt instead for a more narrowly focused cultural exploration, White Anglo-Saxon Social Work (WASSW). One can only infer that limiting himself in this fashion would have struck the author as parochial, or rather, that only a truly global enterprise could satisfy his capacious mind. One is left to marvel at the invocation of Darwin's great work and wonder what was the process of the author's "natural" selection of this material.

Having had the temerity to psychologize the author, it would not, similarly, be unfair to summon the apparition of the reader. Who is the author writing for? From the perspective of this humble reader, it appears that the recipient of this book's largesse is an under-graduate student of social work in one of the U.K's academic institutions. African, Japanese or American readers will inevitably feel short-changed by the often cursory references to their social work history and traditions. The most fully developed history belongs to the author's homeland, the UK.

In fairness to the author, in the body of the text, he is quick to disclaim that his work is a comprehensive treatment of the subject, and he seeks to avoid being cast in the role of all knowing patrician pedagogue "I have tried to be critical of the interpretations given to the conventional narratives and invite you to be so too" [p.10]. Ah, we happy band of brothers! It seems in this light that we are going on a journey with an older and more experienced guide, whose role is to outline some of the important trends and connections in the archaeological topography of the social work past; down then into the underworld.

The intention behind this journey seems to be to "stimulate you to go into detail, which will allow histories of social work to be developed and reconstructed to offer new interpretations and understandings in the future"[p.12]. The author, therefore, serving not only as guide but as inspiration for further endeavors. Without begrudging this note of optimism, it is difficult to imagine an audience other than that of undergraduates taking such encouragement in good cheer; even after a short period the varnish of such rhetoric soon wears off.

Those who accept the master's invitation to a life of enquiry will soon realise that many of the generalisations offered are untenable (the impact of Darwinism rather than organicism); and those that remain are so overcooked and unseasoned that any informed palate would refuse

them. However in justice, the book is valuable even if just for its bibliography, which in itself is an indication of the author's erudition.

The promise this book held out for me as a reader, was to see if there were any developing themes from the origins and inception of social work that have endured; which would throw a light on the family resemblances of past times, to the contemporary debates and conflicts of the present. In so doing I had hoped that the author would assert his authorial voice in order to make judgments about contemporary social work in the light of the professions founding principles. This I am afraid did not occur. Despite acknowledging the subjectivity of the selection process and the inherent judgments necessary to make these selections the author never really departs from the "objective" description and chronology of events. One of the few judgments he chose to make, was the view that to understand social work as it is today it was important to focus on the recent past, which is where he regarded the most important origins of social work were laid. This is why he chose to focus on the period between 1950-2000.

I regard this selection as a mistake as this period has been covered extensively in the literature, both with greater depth and specificity than Payne could manage with such a wide brief. John Harris' "The Social Work Business" (2003) which Payne himself refers to, is a more than adequate text when looking at the last thirty years in UK social work. In foregoing a more thorough analysis of the period before the First World War, Payne undermines the rasion d'etre of any genealogical exercise which is to understand where do I come from, how did I get here, and why are we like the way we are?

We are familiar with the recent past, not so the Victorian era. This is not to say the ground wasn't covered, only that the implications of this period for social work were not fully addressed and were only lightly touched on. He alludes gnomically to the possible relationship between the role of social work and it's similarity to the administration of the Poor Law, without reaching a verdict in the matter.

At the outset of the book Payne refers to the dilemma raised through the Intermediate Treatment programme for young offenders that highlighted the concepts of deserving and undeserving treatment of citizens; these arguments are located in the formative years of the profession, yet Payne never presents his own ethical stand on the conflicts of this time. It feels from this reader's perspective that Payne is turning a blind eye to a dark secret in the family; one which may perhaps go back to the Reformation.

Such omissions are confusing for at the outset Payne wishes to create a definable space for social work that distinguishes it from the provision of charity and welfare. He goes onto to do this by delimiting the social work role in the administration of social justice through the profession's specific task, of working with "dependent people in need of care rather than more generally on tackling unemployment and poverty directly" [p.122] Payne repeats the stance of the distant observer in his treatment of the Thatcher onslaught of the welfare state; he never fully engages with the politicization and the moral judgments necessary to define "need" which I have indicated have their roots at least as far back the Victorian era.

This in part can be explained by the way Payne envisions social work and its role. It comes as a corollary of the welfare state operating in tandem with universal services but attending to families and communities who need help to gain benefits from social policies. " For social work, the services within which it could make a contribution did not arise until this growth in

the state".[p.245] Payne therefore abandons his earlier dichotomy of the social work role as both a social movement designed to focus on economic and social development to a limited pedagogical role, working predominantly with problem groups. Again, it seems there is a relative silence on the author's own view of how best to work with those groups who experience the problems caused in large measure by poverty.

The acceptance that social work is merely the handmaiden of social policy explains the question Jordan has raised; why has social work been so adaptable in its relations with governments of such differing ideologies. The unsettling reality is that social work has abandoned the importance of considering how best to influence and change social policies, partly because historians of social work have neglected or expurgated the influence of social movements (like the settlement movement) and failed to make value judgments on the defining influences of the past, for example, The Charitable Organisation Society.

That the casework method of assessment was partially derived from this organisation in order to establish need amongst the poor and vulnerable ought to serve as a warning to social work practice. These secular moralists have been trenchantly exposed by Kathleen Jones in her excellent book the "The Making of Social Policy in Britain 1830-1990". Jones records that even the basic elements of social justice that were campaigned and fought for, and finally incorporated into the welfare state were opposed by this offensively superior and morally inadequate organisation. That free school meals should be opposed in principle as being a barrier to self help and that the concept of empowerment extends only to the "morally" deserving is a fine heritage for the profession of social work to fall back on. Payne's neglect in fully informing us of the Charity Organisation Society and its role as a brake to social justice is significant.

The influence of the casework model which interprets and accommodates itself to the governing ideologies and social policies of the day is all too clear. This calls into question the values of the profession and demands a clearer vision of social justice and the profession's obligation to advocate and participate more broadly in social movements to achieve political goals. In so doing it would help social work re-connect with a more honourable tradition which it appears to have neglected.

Just as at the turn of the 20th Century; the economic productivity of the nation became a priority to the extent that the poor were raised to a degree of health which would permit them to participate meaningfully in warfare and advanced industrial production; the current policies of the government emphasise raising the inhabitants educational status to become the knowledge economy workers of the future. However the role for those who do not empower themselves in this way, is not at all clear; will we return to the morality that dictate that the supposedly slovenly and dissolute are beyond reach and can only contained in the ghettoes of the dispossessed?

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