Social Work Values in an Age of Complexity

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Abstract

As a profession that places values and ethics squarely in the center of its mission, social work must struggle with the criticisms and suggestions emerging in the last few decades under the inelegant moniker of postmodernism. This article unpacks taken-for-granted ideas about the development and performance of values and offers a framework for thinking about and enacting social work grounded in a postmodern values orientation.
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Introduction

What has come to be called postmodernism is predominantly critical, "systemically dismantling the corpus of modernist assumptions and practices" (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 6). These critiques render visible the epistemological and ontological basis for, and outcomes of, modernist commitments in relation to values. Dismissals of postmodernism frequently claim that nihilism and/or relativism are its universal, fixed, and essential qualities. Social work practices, policies, curricula, and codes that are informed by postmodern ideas—which tend to reject universal, fixed, and essential notions altogether— are similarly dismissed (Slattery & Rapp, 2003).

In reference to postmodernism, Gergen & Thatchenkery (1996) pose the question, "While faulting existing traditions, it has left the future in question. How do we now proceed?" (p. 6). This article attempts to respond to this vital question by examining modernist assumptions around values and offering the examples of Appreciative Inquiry (Anderson, et al., 2001) and the Public Conversations Project (Chasin & Herzig, 1994) as approaches to social work practice that are consistent with postmodern perspectives on values.

Unpacking modernist values

Gergen & Thatchenkery (1996) describe four "texts that shape the contours of modernism." This conception offers a useful lens for viewing values as embodied by modernism and its loftiest and longest standing project, the Enlightenment.

First there is *individual rationality*, which renders the individual and separate self as the essential agent of action. Locating the construction and performance of values in individuals makes sense within modernism as "the individual is the author of the [modernist] enterprise and the beneficiary of its fruits" (Borgmann, 1992, p. 38).

The Enlightenment has enjoyed considerable success in elevating inalienable and natural individual rights. In relation to social services, organizations commonly understand problems to be located inside of *individuals* (e.g., illness diagnoses or disorders) and *individuals* are held accountable for making change. Such mantras as "people only change if they want to change" and "helping people help themselves" depend on individualist discourse. Services offered to families who have experienced child abuse or child neglect are often limited to individual counseling for each member of the family (rather than the family as a whole), parenting classes for the offending parent(s) (where they learn "evidence- based" parenting techniques), anger management classes for the offending parent(s) (virtually always coming from a cognitive-behavioral perspective), and substance abuse treatment when alcohol or other drug use—which is seen as an individual addiction—is implicated in the referral (Franz, 1994; Swartz, 2004).

Funding streams for services clearly support modernism's individual rationality. Agencies can rarely bill for services to families or communities; and if they can, it is likely that billing for individual services is more lucrative. Service authorizations usually require documentation of individual needs and deficits, not the needs of families as a whole, or community members in relation to one another. This cements an individualist discourse by disallowing payment for a socio-cultural understanding of people's difficulties.

Borgmann (1992) notes that people in pre-modern times relied on the community to fulfill basic needs. One could not survive as a free-standing individual, bounded at the skin and autonomous from social and cultural contexts in which personhood is embedded. The fruits of the Enlightenment allowed the illusion of individuality to flourish. As an example, in pre- modern times, entertainment was only available through communal performances, often taking place in a community gathering place. Now one can access entertainment in solitude, without social

relations, by purchasing events on a computer or television. In classical times, *katharsis* referred to the experience of collective transportation to another place when groups of people witnessed a dramatic performance. Modernism has collapsed "catharsis" into the discharge and release of pent-up emotions contained inside of an individual, bounded ego (White, 2002).

In response to individual rationality, Gergen & Thatchenkery (1996) offer *communal rationality*. Applied to organizational practice, Anderson, et al. (2001), refer to this as "the relational difference." They note, for example, that most theories of leadership focus on the capacities of the individual – a set of traits or behaviors possessed by certain people more than others. However, "based upon a relational theory of organizing, collaborative participation offers an alternative way of making sense of leadership. Its defining element is that leadership is born in patterns of relationship. There are no leaders unless others are willing to work collaboratively with them, and there are no followers unless there are leaders who effectively invite them into such relationships" (p. 24). Within communal rationality, values are not fixed and natural, nor are they servants to a progressive end, nor yet are they relativistic. Values, instead, are negotiated through discursive processes.

Another quality of modernism is *systematic empiricism*. Beyond privileging the individual, modernism also privileges a particular way of establishing what is known called "rationality." Modernism and its project, the Enlightenment, dismisses intuition, spiritual guidance, ancestral stories, myth, or purpose as proper motivations for intentional action. These reasons may not even qualify as being "reasonable." Bacon's and Descartes' "methods," which are purportedly free of value, are the preferred systems of reason in modernism.

A postmodern response to systematic empiricism is *social construction*. Much has been written on the subject (see Lock, 2001 for an extensive review), so I will limit myself to Gergen's own description of social constructionism as those "writings attempting to vivify the socio-cultural processes operating to produce various 'pictures' of reality – both scientific and quotidian" (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 8). Limits and boundaries placed on epistemological validity construct all phenomena experienced and regulate the experience of all phenomena. In the context of values, social constructionism rejects natural and essential values just as much as it rejects relativistic or nihilistic projections of valuelessness. Values are quite real and certainly have real effects in people's lives, but within a different account of "reality" than systematic empiricism would have us believe.

Social constructionism requires us to attend to the political dimensions of values. This is manifest in the notion of *language as social action*, Gergen & Thatchenkery's (1996) alternative to the modernist theme of *language as representation*. For 400 years, the Enlightenment has sought discovery of simple, clear, and fixed fundamental characteristics of a world that is a priori "out there." Anderson, et al. (2001), operating from a postmodern perspective, claim "it is within the dialogue of the inquiry that new worlds are brought forth" (p. 10). Values arise out of the performance of linguistic constructions. With postmodern emphasis placed on the pragmatics of language, social work values and ethics can no longer be separated from moral and political debate. As a generator and purveyor of meanings, the social work discipline "inherently operates to the benefit of certain stake holders, activities, and forms of cultural life – and to the detriment of others" (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 13). NASW's recent display of censorship is but one obvious example (Falk, 2007).

Language is a constitutional effort, not a passive engagement. And as systems of power determine and establish what Stephen Madigan (1998) refers to as "what can be said, who can say it, and with what authority," we are left with a normative space inhabited by persons having unequal access to the Enlightenment's promises. The modernist claim to value-neutrality is not only impossible, it is a ruse that helps maintain personal, organizational, social, institutional, political, and cultural power relations that preserve modernism itself and marginalize alternative ways of knowing and being.

It is by virtue of the Enlightenment's last major plot, *the narrative of progress*, that this unequal access is made possible. The narrative of progress is the story that says "things are getting better." Whether the subject is medicine, physics, foreign policy, economic growth, microprocessors, internet bandwidth, democracy, or beer, we are inexorably moving toward a clearer understanding of the nature of the world and how to modify it to best suit our purposes.

Liberalism best embodies this last bastion of modernity. It also brings the four texts that shape the contours of modernism full circle, as individual rationality depends on the autonomous self treasured by liberalism. While "natural philosophers" Bacon, Descartes, Kepler, and Newton, and "moral philosophers" Kant, Bentham, and Mill are implicated in modernism's triumph over medieval times, it is perhaps the legacy of the "political philosophers"[1] John Locke, David Hume,

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[1] All of whom engaged in "natural" and "moral" philosophy as well, which was common for intellectuals of their time.

Bishop George Berkeley, and Adam Smith that has sustained modernism through the fall of Newtonian physics, the undermining of determinism, and the gradual recognition that context is primary (Borgmann, 1992; Hess, 1995; Slattery & Rapp, 2003).

Michael White's (2001) analysis of liberalism is revealing. "Modern liberal theory," he writes, "enshrines the individual's right to the ownership of private property...to improve one's assets, or mine [one's property] in order to capitalize on one's resources" (p. 8). Individual possession of identity is similarly regarded as a personal property issue. Instead of tangible, material personal property, the concept of personality properties emerges. One must cultivate one's properties to improve one's assets and mine one's properties in order to capitalize on one's personal resources. In social work, this is evidenced in the concept of personal and community "assets" that can be listed, measured, developed, and compared (Search Institute, 2006).

Above this, the narrative of progress supports liberal practices of "civilization." In the helping professions, this has resulted in a dominant professional discourse that says we are there to "liberate" people from their suffering. That is, we are there to free people from their servitude so they can exploit their inalienable, God-given rights to life, liberty, the pursuit of happiness, and property. To be clear, the narrative of progress requires one to adhere to a certain set of values and imposes disciplinary measures against those that do not.

The multi-culturation of meaning offers relief from modernity's failed promise of progress. Gergen & Thatchenkery (1996) suggest,

> The culture is made up of a rich array of idioms, accounts, and explanations, and these various forms of talk are constitutive of cultural life. To eradicate our ways of talking about love, family, justice, value and so on, would be to undermine ways of life shared by many people. In its search for the 'single best account,' science operates as a powerful discrediting device – revealing the 'ignorance' of the layman [sic] in one sector after another (p. 9).

Hope still remains for a "better way of living" within a postmodernist critique, but this hope is not disguised as natural; the better way of living is not regarded as an objective and fixed goal toward which things are inevitably unfolding. Multi-culturation of meaning results from the relational nature of language. When one accepts that language is a social event, one must also accept that meaning is relative. It ought to be said, however, that relative meaning does not imply "one

meaning is as good as another." There are real effects of varied meaning constructions (see Foucault, 1980).

The character of postmodern values

Within the postmodern community itself, there is considerable disagreement about its nihilistic, relativistic, pragmatic, and/or purposeful tendencies. Questions about and conceptions of "reality" reflect some of these variations. Reality can be presented as having an underlying structure that gets interpreted by autonomous selves who each experience it differently (Hess, 1995). Another suggestion is that there is a single, fixed reality for everyone. A result of which is the characterization of some people's thoughts about reality as being more correct than others (Borgmann, 1992). Alternatively, there may be no essential reality at all, rather people construct reality through socio-cultural relations (Bruner, 1990; Gergen, 2000). Regardless of the "camp" one sits with, postmodern thought around values is neither nihilistic nor relativistic.

Postmodernism is, in fact, filled with value-laden perspectives that transparently address ethical issues instead of discounting them as non-scientific or esteeming them as gifts of natural law, as modernism would have.

Values in a postmodern context are not neutral, they are not universal, and they are not present only in pivotal situations. Instead, values are partisan, ambiguous, and continuous. Values are not deduced from a priori conditions. They are not amenable to deontology, nor are they granted by "laws of nature." They cannot be discovered through inductive reasoning. In fact, they cannot be "discovered" at all. Values are constructed through relations of people and power.

Values are partisan because they always support or oppose certain positions. Additionally, nothing is outside a values system. All positions are value laden. This can lead to some interesting conclusions. We might decide that values aren't a particularly noteworthy construct to explore because what are referred to as "values" are just special cases of intentions, motivations, and positions, all of which are value-laden and socially constituted. That is, if *every* position inescapably articulates values, then those *particular* expressions that get called values are simply explicating the implicit.

Here is where the relativistic and/or nihilistic critique of postmodern accounts rears its head. One might argue: if everything occurs within a system of values, then no value can be privileged over another. On the other hand: if values do not stand outside of the same social influences as other phenomena, then they don't really matter...they are trivial.

Critical reflection on the *effects* of values-positions recognizes that, indeed, there *are* diverse systems of values. However, while no system of values is more "right" or "wrong" than another, systems of values do have real effects in people's lives and enjoy different power statuses. From a postmodern perspective committed to social justice, this differential status is centrally relevant for making sense of values. Moreover, it can motivate workers to render explicit social and cultural values and make use of the results for facilitating change (Slattery & Rapp, 2003). Borgmann (1992) says, "The failure of people and parties to take clear and vigorous responsibility for the order of things indicates the absence of any profound disagreement with the tangible character of contemporary life" (p. 115). Relativistic and nihilistic accounts of values do as little to challenge the status quo as naturalistic and essentialist accounts.

Postmodern values are ambiguous.[2] A postmodern construction of the world embraces non-certainty instead of discrediting it as systematic empiricism would have. Anderson, et al. (2001) note that "by cultivating an appreciation for ambiguity we remain sensitive to the ways in which our various goals, strategies, and policies are potentially limited. We are more prepared for a future that will unfold in unpredictable ways" (p. 51). In practice this means that a code of ethics, for example, is not a Constitution that can guide all decisions.[3] Thus, the National Association of Social Workers Code of Ethics (1999) suggests,

> Social workers respect and promote the right of clients to self-determination and assist clients in their efforts to identify and clarify their goals. Social workers may limit clients' right to self-determination when, in the social workers' professional judgment, clients' actions or potential actions pose a serious, foreseeable, and imminent risk to themselves or others (p. 7).

Whereas the laws vary somewhat from state to state,[4] social workers are bound by "mandated reporter" laws that require them, under threat of criminal penalty, to report situations of imminent harm to appropriate authorities. Self-determination values people's governorship of their own bodies. When an alcoholic client who has been diagnosed with severe cirrhosis of the liver tells a social worker that her/his doctor has made it clear in no uncertain terms that continued drinking will lead to death, what is a professional social worker to do? Self-determination might

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[2] "Ambiguity" should not be confused with "relativism." Relativism suggests the lack of an evaluative position while ambiguity merely points out the absence of universals.

[3] I'm not sure that the United States Constitution can even serve this purpose. While the foundational documents of the United States allege "inalienable" rights, these rights are regularly disenfranchised.

[4] Though minimum guidelines are required by the Federal Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act in relation to mandated reporting of child abuse.

suggest that this person should be able to do whatevevr she/he wants. Mandated reporting might suggest that the social worker needs to report this situation to proper authorities.

The value of self-determination is ambiguous. Commitment to self-determination does not dictate one's actions in all situations. Context matters. Does this person live alone? Does she/he have family? Children? Is this a woman who is pregnant? Is there a likelihood that she/he will be able to receive a liver transplant? At whose financial expense will the liver transplant take place? Who will have to wait longer for a transplant? To what extent does this person's captivity by a powerful and manipulative industry negate her/his self- determination? What are the social worker's experiences with alcohol and alcoholism? What if the scenario involved drugs other than alcohol? Does it matter which drug? This is not meant to be a list of questions for which answers might dictate a response. Rather, they are posed as obstacles to a fixed or universal account of values.

The firm stance of modernist values is replaced by a liminal stance of postmodern values, an *aporetic* position in which contradictions cannot always be overcome and conflict cannot always be resolved (Slattery & Rapp, 2003). Postmodern values invite social workers to become comfortable with ambiguity, as one no longer has to "have all the answers." When posed with the question, "What would you do in this or that situation?" the social worker operating from a postmodern values perspective can honestly say, "I'm not really sure. I would like to believe that I will act in consonance with the values that I hold dear, but context determines what I will or will not do."

Values from the perspective of postmodernism are not reserved for pivotal moments. Instead, they are always present. There are no "moments of truth" when one calls upon values to inform an action. Following the argument that nothing is outside a system of values, there are no key moments when values are supported or opposed. Values are maintained or degraded as one navigates each and every moment of choice life brings. This begs one to question the practice of a "values clarification" project as a free-standing and occasional ceremony. The sorts of "values clarifications" events that are most consistent with postmodernism are those that are continually enacted, reflected upon, revised, and re- enacted. Anderson, et al. (2001) write that Appreciative Inquiry, a values-based postmodern approach to practice, should be regarded as a "daily practice" instead of an intervention for developmental or crisis stages. Social workers' commitment to values is lived out through constant struggles and dilemmas we encounter in our lives. Our values

are performed and enacted continuously, not just when we are presented with a clear "ethical dilemma."

Zygmut Bauman (1993, pp. 10-14) offers some clear points on values from a postmodern perspective:

1. Humans are morally ambivalent, and we need to learn how to live without guarantees of a perfect society or a perfect human being.
2. Moral phenomena are inherently "nonrational" and do not fit a "means-end" schema. They are not regular, repetitive, or predictable.
3. Morality is incurably aporetic. Few, if any, choices are unambiguously good. Most choices are made between contradictory impulses, and most moral choices, if acted on, lead to immoral consequences (e.g., domination, oppression, annihilation).
4. Morality is not universalizable. This does not endorse moral relativism and a nihilistic view of morality. Rather, the universalization of morality has silenced the moral impulse.
5. Morality is and is bound to remain irrational. The social management of morality is a complex and delicate operation that cannot but precipitate more ambivalence than it manages to eliminate.
6. Given this ambiguous state, the moral responsibility of being "for the other" precedes being "with the other" and is the first reality of the self.
7. Thus, postmodern ethics does not propose a relativism of morality nor a "do nothing" attitude. Rather, a positionality of "for the other" compels a moral stance.

Postmodern values in action

Interpersonal, community-based, and organizational social work practices emerge from the criticism of taken-for-granted truths and invitation to consider alternative possibilities a postmodern orientation offers. While the approaches used by the Public Conversations Project and Appreciative Inquiry work are by no means the only, or even best, examples of how to engage in practice consistent with the sentiments of postmodernism, they are well documented, clearly linked to social work values, and relevant to practice across system levels.

The Public Conversations Project is a group of mediators, organizational consultants, and family therapists who wondered whether the practices and processes used to bring together families in chronic conflict might also be useful for bringing together persons divided by social issues. They noticed similarities between "conflicted families" and "political opponents" including:

1. People on one side do not listen to those on the other side.

2. Questions posed by one side to the other side tend to be rhetorical and often are designed to reveal suspected inconsistencies or ulterior motives on the part of the side being questioned.
3. Members of an opposing alliance are seen as being all alike; the most extreme leaders of the opposition are assumed to be representative of the entire group.
4. Within each alliance, members de-emphasize differences among themselves, especially in the presence of an adversary. This behavior tends to reinforce the other side's perception that their opponents are all alike.
5. Those who join neither side are viewed as suspect by both sides.
6. Mind reading of the other side is common; genuine curiosity about what they really believe is rare.
7. Fixed opinions about the other side are common. Open-mindedness is uncommon.
8. Statements made by the other side that indicate openness to conciliation are seen as propaganda ploys or as revealing logical inconsistency.
9. Fixed and simple convictions are openly displayed. Complexity, ambivalence, confusion, and inner conflict are concealed (Chasin & Herzig, 1994, p. 5).

These characteristics are firmly supported by traditional modernist accounts of the world, but they can be subverted by developing practices "that enable the unspoken positions to be expressed and circulated, and to enter actively into decision making processes" (Gergen & Thatchenkery, 1996, p. 12).

The Public Conversations Project invites people affiliated with opposing ideologies into dialogue (examples of past work include abortion, economic inequality, environmental issues, and sexuality in faith communities) with the goal of reducing potentially harmful interpersonal and community conflict. Their only real goal is "to lead participants away from deadlock and toward authentic dialogue" (Chasin & Herzig, 1994, p. 1).

Consistent with the continuous quality of postmodern values, for the Public Conversations Project, "intervention" begins at the first moment of contact with potential participants. The dialogue facilitator scaffolds a process of invitation for building trust, communicating goals, and setting expectations.

Facilitators are regarded as "relational leaders." Whether the process engages families, organizations, or communities, Anderson, et al. (2001) maintain "there are no leaders unless others are willing to work collaboratively with them, and there are no followers unless there are leaders who effectively invite them into such relationships" (p. 24).

The Public Conversations Project dialogue process is directive, but not instructive. The postmodern mediator prefers to highlight exceptions to old, no longer useful patterns of interaction and makes use of other dialogue participants' lived experience. Chasin & Herzig (1994) recognize

that in a "highly disengaged family in which each branch has embraced widely different lifestyles...understanding and collaboration are enhanced when the rapport- building phase fosters in all members a respectful appreciation of one another, particularly of their differing areas of strength and pride, and of their wishes and fears for the future" (p. 11). By adopting an inclusive process in relation to diverse perspectives, ambiguity is inserted into the certainty of people's positions.

Transformational dialogues conclude with time for reflection. This too embodies a postmodern ethic, as no structured engagement (like a multidisciplinary service planning meeting, strategic planning, or community forum) can stand outside of the context in which it takes place. Dialogues must have a recursive quality to them. Reflection at the end of the dialogue invites participants to step away from what they have just experienced and consider how the process has unfolded for each person and for the group in general (Chasin & Herzig, 1994). Participants thus offer feedback to facilitators for ways of improving the sessions and make their own experience richer in the process. This interactiveness is key to the practice of postmodern values. It mitigates against participants experience of the process as coercive or pointless, as can happen when people have no choice but to participate or have consistently found that high level administrators ultimately make decisions.

Like the reflective time at the end of a Public Conversations Project dialogue, Anderson, et al. (2001) note the importance of community-oriented evaluation in relation to Appreciative Inquiry. Individual evaluation of performance is challenged for its support of an "I am autonomous" (p. 42) standpoint. This is very familiar in traditional direct social work practice that evaluates client outcomes in terms of individual performance: how the client is doing with her/his service plan. Organizational practices evaluate individual employee performance: how is the worker doing with her/his cases. Appreciative Inquiry invites workers and organizations to consider the values inherent in such an orientation, and what alternative possibilities might exist for group evaluations. This might take the form of conducting a focus group with all the members of a particular building or all the clients in a program targeting a specific population. Organizationally, an entire unit may be evaluated as a team.

Appreciative Inquiry offers a different direction for service and organizational planning meetings. For example, organizations/agencies may wait so long to hold a planning meeting around an obstacle, problem, or crisis that repeated, yet unsuccessful, attempts to overcome the

difficulty contribute to a deficit-based totalization of an individual or group's identity. As more and more time is spent trying to manage the effects of a problem, and as more and more people are recruited into problem-solving endeavors, planning (or "strategy") participants can begin to understand and experience their situation as problem- full, rather than hope-full.

Anderson, et al. (2001) direct workers to "the importance in conversational partnering of narratives, most particularly sharing stories about 'what we have accomplished,' 'how we faced a challenge,' 'how we managed through bad times,' 'times when we worked and played well together'" (p. 19). These narratives offer exceptions to totalized problem stories. When these narratives of achievement become the focus of planning meetings, employee performance meetings, community forums, and client reviews, people's experience of the possibilities for solutions are strengthened.

The work of the Public Conversations Project and the practices of Appreciative Inquiry offer real ways to oppose the "four themes" of modernist culture. They exemplify communal rationality over individual rationality. They are grounded in social construction over systematic empiricism. They are committed to language as social action rather than language as representation. Finally, they depend on the multi-culturation of meaning instead of narratives of progress. Scores of other models for interpersonal, organizational, and community-based human service work that expressly embody a postmodern values orientation are accepted in mainstream human service work. These include asset-based community development, family group decision-making, health realization, motivational interviewing, the recovery model, restorative justice, student success teams, and wraparound (Swartz, 2004).

Concluding questions and dilemmas

The role of social justice in postmodern social work practice is—consistent with one of the tenets of a postmodern values-orientation itself—a bit ambiguous. There really isn't anything intrinsic in postmodernism that requires a position of social justice. Yet, embedded in the notion of language as social action is acknowledgement that we support or oppose the status quo through our every decision, intention, expression, and action.

In practice, there is a real dilemma in hurdling social justice and social control (Galper, 1978). Many practice settings have a coercive component to them. For example, most public social service organizations mandate compulsory activities for "consumers" under the threat of financial or criminal sanctions. As well, employees are under the supervision of employers (i.e., managers,

administrators, directors) who can require "corrective action plans"—even blood or urine specimens. How does one manifest a postmodern system of values within modernist systems of power?

Privileging the experiences of those who are participating in change-oriented endeavors, such as the processes constituting Public Conversations Projects or Appreciative Inquiry, can be regarded as a political act informed by relational values. But to what extent does the pressure to get something done conflict with the nature of values espoused in critical postmodern thought? In child protective services, for example, families are actually in jeopardy of having their children permanently removed from their homes if certain changes are not immediately implemented. Might a postmodern values-orientation impede this kind of crisis-driven process?

A business may be just months or weeks away from insolvency, putting at risk the livelihoods of thousands of workers if rapid and significant strategic change is not established. Borgmann's (1992) analysis of the so-called "Japanese management style" is that it is "management by stress" where "responsibility for a portion of the production process is given to the group as a whole, and the cooperation of the group in making production more efficient is solicited and honored." But, he says, "there is a thin line between stress as a diagnostic tool and stress as a goad to more strenuous exertion. The workers have no part in drawing that line, nor in drawing up the larger design within which they work" (p. 17). People may perform well in crisis situations when they have a strong sense of allegiance and accountability to the organization as a whole, but, ultimately, they are under a system of social control that *requires* their performance. Planning team members, employees, and families are not allowed to be passive receptacles.

A critical postmodern values-orientation requires one to ask the question, "Who benefits?" from an interpersonal, organizational, or community-based social work practice. In the current era of social service devolution, fiscally conservative ideology might actually support "communal rationality," contrary to what could be assumed due to the use of the word "communal." Borgmann (1992) maintains that "partisan republicans are sympathetic to the idea of a community, and philosophical republicans make it central to their political vision" (p. 127). Paradoxically, the communitarian challenge to modernism's individualism allows for de-regulation of oversight, the ability to form exclusive communities, and subjugation of the self. Without the commitment to social justice, social work values in an age of complexity can be manipulated to serve well those

who would cut social service funding, increase "choice" through the use of vouchers, and limit entitlement criteria.

As noted by Baumann (1993), postmodern values are aporetic. Situations social workers frequently experience present conflicts that cannot be resolved using modernist technology. Often, there is no totally satisfying resolution. In an era of postmodern values, social workers are handed unending opportunities for living out that which they are committed to. In the performance of those values, social workers maintain the status quo or resist it.

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