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## DILEMMAS OF PLANNING AND SELF-DETERMINATION

by

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### ABSTRACT

Self-determination is examined as the premier social work value. It is argued in this paper that the positive or negative impact of planning is dependent on who is planning what for whom, and that not planning may be a more serious threat to self-determination than planning.

This paper examines social planning in an advanced industrial society and its consequences for self-determination. There has been a recurring concern that the individual's self-determination is threatened by: 1) powerful, elitest, economic, and political groups who influence decisions on the basis of self-interest (see Mills, 1969; Auerbach, 1969); and 2) bureaucracies where important decisions are made on the basis of institutional need (see Newman, 1952; Cohn, 1965). In more recent years one finds in the professional literature, as well as in the political dialogue of the American people, a fear of elitest professional planning groups who make decisions based on knowledge of the planning process, knowledge of the service system, or on social science evidence (see Moynihan, 1969; Gyarfás, 1969; Agnew, 1972). The publication of B. F. Skinner's Beyond Freedom and Dignity (1972) enlivened this discussion. This paper will examine self-determination in the context of social work practice and the impact of social planning on self-determination.

### SELF-DETERMINATION AND SOCIAL WORK PRACTICE

Origin: Self-determination originated in social casework literature and has continued as a central value in that area of practice. An examination of the social group work literature reveals rare reference to the concept, and its complete absence as a central theme. The recent community organization literature has included the concept as a central theme, although its use is usually attached to a community, an organization, a race, or a social class, rather than the individual as in the social case work literature.

Self-determination was first mentioned in the literature in the 1930's (Perlman, 1965:411). Its appearance in the literature at that time has been attributed by Perlman (1965:411) to: 1) the liberating force of Freudian psychology, 2) the progressive education movement as influenced by John Dewey, and 3) the rise of totalitarian governments. While it may first have appeared in the literature in the 1930's, the concept is grounded in the unique American experiment with classic liberal economic theory. While social worker's motivating values of "helping one's fellow man" etc. are rooted in the Judea-Christian tradition, self-determination as a value has its origins in the the parallel birth of Calvinism and capitalism. The placement of self-determination as the premier social work value is part and parcel of the frontier's "rugged individualism" (see Kahn, 1969, Chapter 1).

Definition: A major problem with the use of the term self-determination is that it is sufficiently abstract to be used in a variety of ways for a variety of purposes without communicating specific meaning. As such, it is difficult to operationalize into precise practice behaviors. Perlman (1965), who has written a thought provoking paper on self-determination, defined the concept in the context of a "realistic view of freedom". "Freedom, in essence, is the inner capacity and outer opportunity to make reasoned choices among possible, socially acceptable alternatives" (Perlman, 1965:421).

This definition is useful for the purposes of this paper in that it qualifies self-determination within the reality limits of the individual and the society. Until recently, such consideration of the society as a qualifier of self-determination was unique in casework literature. Neither the self-determination limitations of the individual nor the society are considered in much of the community organization literature.

Limitations: Self-determination has had at least two distinct consequences from the perspective of social work practice: 1) that in direct client intervention social workers should not determine client outcome, and 2) that clients should have the social and economic opportunities required in order to be and do exactly what they want to be and do. In the extreme form of each, the first suggests a value free form of intervention while the latter suggests equality and an increasingly complete form of social control.

Neither complete equality, nor value free judgments create an ideal condition for assuring individual choices. Social goals and a system of social control that protects the right of each individual to maximize his ability to determine his destiny is required. "The guarantees of civil liberties that are built into democratic political systems...are essential to the achievement of positive freedom but are a form of social control" (Faunce, 1968:157). The dilemma is described by John Stuart Mill as, "the practical question /is/ where to place the limit--how to make the adjustment between individual independence and social control" (Quoted in Faunce, 1968: 157).

Self-determination in contemporary American society is very limited. Perlman (1972:210) states, "I believe self-determination is nine-tenths illusion, one-tenth reality." An individual's self-determination in any society is limited by the established laws, mores, prejudices, social customs, economic systems, and social institutions and structures of that society. In this advanced industrial society, it is also limited by dramatic technological and social changes and increasing complexity. The changes might be summarized as the process of technologicalization, institutionalization, nationalization, industrialization, urbanization, bureaucratization, secularization, centralization and internatinalization.

Other limitations of self-determination in this society that specifically effect poor people (and which, to a degree, also effect Blacks and women), include 1) a long history of prejudice which seems to have changed only in its subtlety during the last 100 years, 2) the market place as the central distribution center of rights, privileges, goods, and services coinciding with a lack of equal opportunity for all people to compete in that market place. The additional impact of planning on the above indicated encroachments must be evaluated.

#### SOCIAL PLANNING IN A COMPLEX INDUSTRIAL SOCIETY: THREAT OR OPPORTUNITY?

Social planning has the potential for both limiting and enhancing self-determination. Increased social planning in our society is assumed<sup>1</sup> which provides the opportunity for the social work establishment to: 1) try and combat it, 2) be neutral to it, or 3) participate in it and therefore influence its process and method.

Social planning potentially limits the individual's control over his own life and forces him to conform to the dictates of others. However, simultaneously it also potentially benefits and greatly expands the scope of choices open to people. National old-age "insurance" programs, public school education, equal opportunity laws and policies, income security programs all limit certain individual freedoms while at the same time providing additional opportunities.

Rousseau's distinction between "natural liberty" and "civil liberty" would perhaps be useful here. The "body politic" forms a "social compact".

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<sup>1</sup> This paper assumes increased social planning. Considerable discussion has occurred regarding the contribution of social science to planning. The advocacy of planning must be tempered with the basic fact that we now have limited knowledge to utilize in the planning process. Evaluation of the results of social provision in this country should make social planners extremely humble. However, planning does exist and is having increasing impact on our society. (See for example; Kahn, 1969: Chapter 1; papers written in response to Moynihan, 1970 in Zurcher and Bonjean, 1970; Haveman and Margolis, 1970.)

This "social compact" creates the state. Rousseau saw this "social compact" as ultimately not taking away from individuals but as an advantageous exchange. The exchange is "natural liberty" for "civil liberty"; the "power to harm others" for "security for ourselves". What a man loses by the social compact is his "natural liberty", and an unlimited right to everything he tries to get and succeeds in getting. What he gains is "civil liberty" which is limited by the "general will" (Rousseau, 1946). By surrendering certain individual privileges, new opportunities are made available and the individual can gain much more in available choices (Olsen, 1968:346). To generate "civil liberty", societies develop laws that limit "natural liberty". Is it therefore good to give up "natural liberty" for "civil liberty"? Is it appropriate to support planning that may be restrictive, yet provides people with additional choices? It depends. It depends on the trade off...what is given up for what pay off. In addition, in a democratic society it depends on who is planning what for whom and with what kind of sanction. Social planning's impact on self-determination is neither positive nor negative in and of itself. Therefore, it may be appropriate to object to some social planning endeavors, while being neutral or supportive of others.

Planning Versus No Planning: The rejection of planning in a contemporary industrialized state would suggest a grim prognosis for its citizens. In the face of the irresistible forces of modern technology and industrialization, bureaucratization, specialization, complexity, sheer growth in size, and interdependence, the dangers of not planning are critical. Not planning implies that individuals accept consequences of these inevitable forces. Robert Heibroner (1976) has recently argued that economic planning is not only necessary, it is the only option we have. While he recognizes the dangers that planning carries such as constriction of freedom as the consequence of a reckless proliferation of controls, he argues that it would be "foolish to ignore the risks associated" with a refusal to plan. These risks include an inability to limit inflation, an absence of energy, dangerous atmospheric pollution, or a rush to political extremism as a consequence of economic frustration or failure. Individual self-determination is greatly hindered by unemployment, chaotic urban public education, racial and sexual discrimination, and being old and poor simultaneously.

Man now has increasing capacity to transform social structures and institutions, rather than accommodate to or merely protest, the social structure he encounters. Amitai Etzioni has argued that earlier barriers that blocked man's quest for self-mastery and social mastery have been tumbling down. New discoveries in the social sciences provide man with new options and freedom to choose his destiny (Etzioni, 1968). As the technology of knowledge increases in power and influence, planning based on this knowledge will increase. Rather than destroying human choice, the use of social science knowledge can be used in planning to create new social structures to maximize the potential for a self directed society. The social work profession can participate in the leadership for this planning through the

further development of planning as a social work method, and the introduction of the concept into all aspects of social work practice.

The Problem of Legitimacy: As planning increases in our society, the problem of legitimacy will also increase in significance. There is minimal literature on appropriate criteria for evaluating legitimate social planning. Criteria implicit in the logic of his paper would be based on the value of a self-directed society. It would include an evaluation of the trade-off of giving up individual rights for additional individual choices. In addition, a particular planning endeavor should be evaluated as to the self-determination cost and benefit in the context of the cost and benefit of planning versus no planning. Legitimate planning is based on issues of who plans what for whom, under what sanction, and with what resources. As dependence on rational thought and empirical evidence increases and as we become more self-conscious of the kind of society we have, we can plan the kind of society we prefer.

Summary: A self-directed society is desirable and can be achieved through the development of social structures supportive of such a society. Not planning may be a more serious threat to self-determination than planning. If the profession of social work does not respond to the planning possibilities before it, someone else will. Non-involvement increases the capacity for contemporary social, economic and technological phenomena to control man. Collaborative involvement can increase the capacity of planning technologies to extend freedom and maximize the capacity of man to control his destiny.

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