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ETHICS IN AN AGE OF AUSTERITY: SOCIAL WORK AND THE EVOLVING NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

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ABSTRACT

Ethics in an age of austerity: Social work and the evolving New Public Management
This article examines the growth of interest in social work ethics in the context of neo-liberal
policies and the growth of managerialism in public service professions. Taking the United Kingdom
as an example, while drawing links with trends across Europe and other countries in the global
North, the article traces the development of the "New Public Management" (NPM) since the
1990s. NPM is characterized as stressing the importance of measurable outputs, targets and cost
effectiveness in the provision of public services. The article considers the extent to which the
growth of interest in ethics in social work is part of a progressive movement to offer a critique
of NPM through emphasizing professional agency and social justice. Alternatively, the growth

of interest in ethics can be viewed as part of the NPM, with a focus on ethics as regulation of professional conduct. The article concludes by emphasizing the importance of reclaiming professional ethics for social work, outlining a preliminary framework for a situated ethics of social justice.

Keywords

Social work ethics, new public management, austerity, social justice

Ethiek in een tijd van schaarste: sociaal werk en opkomend New Public Management
In dit artikel wordt de groeiende belangstelling voor ethiek in het sociaal werk onder de loep genomen, en in de context geplaatst van het huidige neo-liberaal beleid en het groeiende *managerialism* in de publieke sector. De ontwikkeling van New Public Management (NPM) vanaf de jaren negentig wordt beschreven, waarbij de situatie in Groot-Brittanie als uitgangspunt wordt genomen, maar eveneens verbindingen worden gelegd met tendensen die elders in Europa waarneembaar zijn. Kenmerkend voor NPM is de nadruk die deze stroming legt op meetbare output, meetbare doelen en efficiëntie bij de levering van publieke diensten. In het artikel vraagt de auteur zich af of de groeiende belangstelling voor ethiek in het sociaal werk onderdeel is van een progressieve beweging die kritiek op NPM geeft, onder andere door nadruk te leggen op professionele autonomie en sociale rechtvaardigheid. Een alternatief is dat ethiek vooral als regulerings- en sturingsmechanisme voor professionals wordt gezien, waarmee de groeiende belangstelling voor ethiek juist als onderdeel gezien kan worden van NPM. Tot besluit wordt benadrukt dat het van belang is om aandacht te besteden aan ethiek in de sociale sector, waarbij de auteur een eerste kader voor een situationele ethiek van sociale rechtvaardigheid schetst, die daarbij bruikbaar kan zijn.

Trefwoorden

Beroepsethiek, sociaal werk, schaarste, sociale rechtvaardigheid

INTRODUCTION

In Europe, and in the global North generally, there has been a significant growth of interest in social work ethics over the last two decades. This is manifested in the increasing volume of specialist literature on ethics in social work and in the development of longer and more detailed

codes of ethics and practice (see Banks, 2008). In this paper I will explore how the so-called "ethics boom" relates to neo-liberal social welfare policies and new managerialist approaches to social work practice. Is the growth of literature and guidelines on ethics a reaction against the New Public Management in social work, or part of the same trend? What are the dangers and opportunities of the turn to ethics? What are the characteristics of a progressive ethics for social work? Illustrations of the growth of the New Public Management and its impact on social work will be given from the UK.

ETHICS

I am using the term "ethics" in a broad sense to refer to a subject area that covers all or some of the following themes:

- *Conduct* – what actions are regarded as right and wrong? (e.g. promise-keeping and lying).
- *The good society* – in what kind of society do we want to live? (e.g. a society in which all living beings flourish in harmony with the natural environment).
- *Character* – what moral qualities are regarded as good and bad? (e.g. trustworthiness and deceitfulness).
- *Relationships* – what responsibilities attach to people's relationships with each other, individually and in groups? (e.g. the responsibility of a parent towards a child).

This is a deliberately broad description of ethics. It encompasses a range of theoretical approaches, including principle-based ethics (deontology, or duty-based ethics and consequentialism) and character and relationship-based ethics (virtue ethics, the ethics of care and communitarian ethics). It is also inclusive of various religious and cultural approaches to ethics (for example, Buddhist ethics, Christian ethics, "African ethics" and "Asian ethics").

In the global North and Western world, the main focus of modern ethics is frequently on principles of conduct or right action (for example, respecting the rights of individuals to make their own choices; promoting the welfare of the greatest number of people). In the global South and Eastern countries, the emphasis may be more often on good and bad qualities of character (such as being respectful, fair or compassionate) and on responsibilities attached to relationships (solidarity with kin or community, respect owed to elders). However, national codes of professional ethics for all countries tend to pay more attention to principles of conduct, because this is the international language of professional ethics.

"THE ETHICS BOOM"

The number of specialist textbooks on ethics in social work published in Europe and the English-speaking world is very rapidly growing (for example, Rouzel, 1997; Timmer, 1998; Lingås, 1999; Linzer, 1999; Beckett & Maynard, 2005; Banks, 2006; Bowles, Collingridge, Curry & Valentine, 2006; Joseph & Fernandes, 2006; Reamer, 2006; Charleton, 2007; Congress, Black & Strom-Gottfried, 2009; Dolgoff, Loewenberg & Harrington, 2009). These texts generally cover ethical theories, codes of ethics, practice-related dilemmas and ethical decision-making. Principle-based theories of what counts as right and wrong are often invoked, although increasingly attention is being paid to character and relationship-based ethics (virtue ethics and the ethics of care).

There is also a growth of interest in codes of ethics published by professional associations and regulatory bodies. These usually provide statements about the core purpose of social work, the values and principles upon which it is based and some standards or rules to guide social workers' conduct. Many countries that did not have codes of ethics for social work developed them in the 1990s and 2000s, and in many instances, but not all, codes are getting longer each time they are revised, as the examples given in Table 1 show. The results of a survey of codes of ethics of professional associations for social work in 2005 (Banks, 2006, pp. 74–102) suggest that the longer codes tend to be in the global North, in countries where social work is well-established and where codes may be used to discipline social workers for misconduct.[2]

Codes of ethics tend to be action-focused (outlining ethical principles and rules of conduct), although, of course, they are framed in terms of the professional roles and relationships of social workers. The nature of the good society is not explicitly outlined in most codes of ethics, although a vision of certain features of a good society is implicit in the mission statements often included at the start of codes. Many of the national codes of ethics include the international definition of social work, which states that social work adheres to principles of human rights and social justice. Modern codes of ethics for social work tend to include few statements about the character of the social worker, although many do have one or two references to professional integrity and honesty – for example, the recently revised Australian code has professional integrity as one of the three core values. The expansion in size of codes of ethics is in the area of "standards" or "rules", which explicitly guide social workers' behaviour in a variety of contexts. The proliferation of more prescriptive standards and rules in codes of ethics mirrors the trend in practice for more detailed and standardized systems of monitoring and assessment in social

Table 1: Some examples of lengthening professional codes of ethics.

Code	Date 1980s/90s	Length	Date 2000s	Length
Australian Association of Social Workers	1989	7 pages	2010	33 pages (in a booklet of 54 pages)
British Association of Social Workers	1996	6 pages	2002	15 pages
National Association of Social Workers (USA)	1990	9 pages	2008	27 pages
Nederlandse Vereniging van Maatschappelijk Werkers (Netherlands)	1999	12 pages	2010	22 pages

work, which is one of the features of what has been termed "the New Public Management" (NPM).

THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

Before exploring the relationship between ethics in social work and the New Public Management, I will first discuss the characteristics of NPM and the changing emphases over time, taking the UK as an example. In the UK, NPM has developed more quickly than in many other countries and has made a significant impact in the field of social work.

Markets, measurement and competition

The term "New Public Management" covers a number of features of the organizational management of public services, which have varied over time and between countries. The term came into frequent use in the UK in the 1990s, when a marketized approach to public services began to take hold under a Conservative government (1979–1997). This involved the creation of actual or quasi-markets through separating purchasers and providers of services, introducing competition, measuring outputs and outcomes rather than inputs, working to targets, and the generation of procedures and regulations to maximize the effectiveness and efficiency of employees. Some of the key characteristics of NPM can be summarized as follows (Dunleavy & Hood, 1994; Clarke, Gewirtz & McLaughlin, 2000):

- attention to outputs and performance rather than inputs;
- organizations being viewed as chains of low-trust relationships, linked by contracts or contractual type processes;
- the separation of purchaser and provider or client and contractor roles within formerly integrated processes or organizations;
- breaking down large scale organizations and using competition to enable "exit" or "choice" by service users;
- decentralisation of budgetary and personal authority to line managers.

These trends are exemplified by the following quotations from two senior social workers in the UK, whom I interviewed as part of a research project in 2001 (for further details see Banks, 2004):

> More than ever before, because I've been in social work for a long time, it seems like accountability is very hot on the agenda – demonstrating outcomes and having to have almost number crunching type pieces of information that you can give. (Social work team manager, child protection)

> […] overbearing procedures equate sometimes to, yes, it gives a checklist as to what processes should be followed every time and that can be quite useful in a number of settings, but, it also can be used as a stick to beat up social workers with if a particular procedure hasn't been followed to the letter […]. (Social work team manager, child care)

Modernization, outcomes and achievement

The focus on procedures, measurement and centrally defined targets intensified under the New Labour regime in the UK (1997–2010), although the language moved from "New Public Management" to "modernizing" public services. The focus also shifted from cutting back on public welfare to a concern to achieve improved outcomes for people and communities in terms of social inclusion, educational attainment and neighbourhood regeneration, for example. This entailed policies that promoted "joined up" government, inter-professional working and highly managed partnerships between politicians, professionals, communities and service users (Newman, 2000, 2005). These policies also reflected a concern with identifying and targeting the individuals and neighbourhoods regarded as most problematic, and focusing intense interventions and surveillance on these people and areas.

The following comment comes from a youth worker employed in an interprofessional youth offending team (YOT) (for more details of this case, see Banks, 2009). He was working with young people who had committed a first criminal offence and who had been given a "final warning". He was supposed to work with them for 12 weeks, but he was spending longer. This was problematic for his manager because the interventions were being monitored nationally, and by not closing cases he was compromising the success rate of his team:

> So the intervention package is supposed to be for 12 weeks. I'm in very big trouble at the YOT, because I've got cases that are nearly a year old now. And I keep trying to explain, this is about *the youth work dilemma* […] I'm about the process of trying to get this young person from here to somewhere. Going in rattling at them for 12 weeks is going just to produce nothing, because when I shut the case and walk away in 12 weeks' time, they will […] get themselves in trouble […].

Austerity, economy and efficiency

Following the economic crisis in 2008, and the election of a new Conservative-led Coalition government in 2010, a major programme of public sector cuts is being implemented in the UK, with many non-statutory welfare services being closed by local authorities, or taken over by third sector (non-governmental organizations) or private organizations. Although one of the themes of this coalition government is removal of bureaucracy and centralized targets, the cuts in local government funding mean that for public services to survive in local authorities, they need to demonstrate efficiency and effectiveness. And in the case of those welfare services and facilities that are contracted out or sold off to third sector and private organizations, the demand for performance measures, including value for money and social return on investment, is as important as ever. So the requirement to be able to provide evidence of performance outputs and outcomes will intensify, although some of the centrally imposed targets, systems of regulation, audit and inspection, and the management posts required to implement these systems, are disappearing,

In the UK there is evidence of a turn against excessively procedure-driven practice in public welfare services, especially in the field of child protection where this approach has been very dominant. At the time of writing a major review is being conducted by Professor Eileen Munroe, an academic from the London School of Economics and Political Science. At the start of her first report she comments:

> A dominant theme in the criticisms of current practice is the skew in priorities that has developed between the demands of the management and inspection processes and

> professionals' ability to exercise their professional judgment and act in the best interests of the child. This has led to an over-standardized system that cannot respond adequately to the varied range of children's needs.
>
> […] For some, following rules and being compliant can appear less risky than carrying the personal responsibility for exercising judgement. (Munro, 2011, p. 5)

Clear evidence for Munro's comments can be found in a recently conducted research project that graphically exposed the ineffectiveness and demoralizing effect on social workers of the implementation of a national computerized system for micro-managing and recording child care social work (White, Wastell, Broadhurst & Hall, 2010).

There has also been a government-sponsored "Social Work Task Force", followed by a "Social Work Reform Board", that has been reviewing the state of social work during 2009–2011, with the aim of improving effectiveness and increasing its professional credibility and status. Proposals have been made for new national standards of practice, continuing education and professional development, supervision, changes to professional education and the introduction of a national College of Social Work – a high profile professional body (Department for Education, 2010). It is noteworthy that the role of social workers frequently tends to be described in the report of the Reform Board as "support", and the emphasis is on "safe" practice, professionalism, standards and status. A retreat to a position where the aspiration of social work is to become and be regarded as safe and professional is, of course, not surprising in a government-sponsored report written during a period of economic crisis and a Conservative-dominated government.

How these reviews will change social work practice remains to be seen, especially in these times of economic austerity. However, it is certainly the case in the UK that the public service cuts are giving added weight to demands for reductions in bureaucracy, national target-setting, audit and inspection. In 2010, the newly elected coalition government abandoned proposals for an ambitious national database for recording details of all children and young people, showing which agencies were working with them (Barr, 2010). Similarly in February 2011, a complex new national system for vetting all volunteers working with children and other vulnerable people has been significantly scaled back (Department for Education, Department of Health and Home Office, 2011). So the time is certainly right for those practitioners and academics who have been advocating a rolling back of state bureaucracy, but unfortunately it is also being accompanied by a drastic reduction in state-sponsored welfare services for the poorest sections of society.

While recognizing that the various components of the "NPM" have shifted over time, and are still shifting, I will use this term to refer to continuing trends towards marketization, the measurement of outcomes of welfare services and the regulation of welfare professionals. However, as time goes by in the UK and elsewhere, this concept may prove less useful in describing what is becoming a "New Public Austerity" ("NPA").[3]

ETHICS AND THE NEW PUBLIC MANAGEMENT

I will now explore two ways of looking at the relationship between ethics and the New Public Management in social work. The first sees the growth of interest in ethics as a reaction against the worst excesses of the New Public Management; while the second sees the growth of interest in ethics as part of the trend towards New Public Management approaches.

The growth of interest in ethics as progressive and critical of NPM

1. *Reclaiming professional autonomy.* Ethics has a focus on human agency – on individual moral agents making considered choices and taking right actions. In social work, this relates to social workers' professional autonomy and discretion in making judgements and decisions in accordance with their professional knowledge, experience and the values of social work. Social workers are not mere technicians or bureaucrats following rules. They have professional expertise and are committed to ethical practice. Social workers have the right, power and duty to promote what they regard as good and ethical practice and to challenge and resist inhumane, degrading and unjust practices and policies.

2. *Claiming the rights of service users.* Ethics in social work is about promoting and respecting the rights of service users to make their own decisions and/or to work in partnership with social workers. Core ethical values in social work include respecting the dignity of service users and respecting their rights and choices – as opposed to viewing them as problems to be solved, targets to be reached or consumers to be satisfied.

3. *Reasserting the social justice mission of social work – bringing the political to the heart of ethics.* Social justice is a core ethical value at the heart of social work. This includes a commitment to distributing welfare services fairly in accordance with need; the recognition of diversity and difference (e.g. in terms of gender, ethnicity or ability); and challenging oppressive power structures. It also entails questioning the power and interests of

governments, public service employers, private corporations and social workers themselves that cause them to ignore or accept inequalities and oppression. These values may sometimes be branded as "political", but I would see them as "ethico-political".

4. *Reconfiguring professional ethics – bringing the personal back into social work ethics.* Ethics is about the person (moral agent) and inter-personal relationships, as well as actions and abstract principles. Much of the recent literature on social work ethics includes reference to virtue ethics and the ethics of care. Some theorists argue for a reframing of professional ethics to focus on the moral qualities, commitments and motivations of social workers, or on the nature of the caring relationship between worker and service users. These approaches highlight the importance of empathy, compassion and care, and build on the traditional concern of social work with valuing each individual person in the context of their particular lives, hopes and aspirations.

The growth of interest in ethics as regressive and compliant with NPM

1. *Developing more regulatory codes of ethics.* Professional ethics is often strongly associated with codes of ethics. As already noted, codes of ethics are getting longer and offering more detailed guidance about what to do in particular circumstances. They are sometimes – but not always – used for disciplinary purposes (in cases of misconduct by social workers). This can be seen as a response to the low public esteem in which social workers are held and as a way of attempting to ensure social workers do not bring the profession into disrepute. It also suggests that social workers need guidance in relation to small details of their work and hence raises doubts about the degree to which they can and should exercise professional discretion. For example, the newly revised Australian Association of Social Workers' code has a special section called "Responsibilities in particular contexts". This runs to five pages, with four sub-sections, the last of which covers "remote service delivery". One of the five responsibilities listed in this section is: "Social workers will maintain up to date anti-virus, anti-spyware and firewall programs" (Australian Association of Social Workers, 2010, p. 39). Other duties include password protection and storage, and backing up computers. The responsibilities or standards listed in the professional codes of ethics are sometimes presented in the introductions to the codes as "guidance" (National Association of Social Workers, 2008). However, the way they are framed ("social workers should …") suggests a strong expectation that these guiding standards should be followed. In the Australian code they are actually referred to as "ethical

duties" and would be taken into account in any disciplinary proceedings against social workers.

2. *Highlighting the responsibilities of social workers and service users ("responsibilization").* Ethics, with its focus on agency and choice, can result in drawing attention to the responsibilities of individual social workers for making good or bad decisions and taking right or wrong actions and on service users for the causes of social problems. This links to the tendency to blame individual social workers, rather than, or as well as, their employing institutions or government if there is a bad outcome of a particular case, or if the quality of service is poor. The focus on the individual service user or family can also make it easier to locate blame and responsibility for the causes of problems with individuals, rather than with structural inequalities.

3. *Placing the focus of attention on the relationship between the individual social worker and service user or family.* The way ethical issues are framed can serve to focus social workers' attention at the level of the individual service user and family, and away from offering critiques of social policy and taking political action. This occurs through a discourse that highlights ethical issues as being about individual social workers making decisions in difficult circumstances, divorced from the broader policy or political context. A significant feature of many ethics textbooks is discussion of ethical dilemmas based on short, decontextualized cases. At the end of the case, a question is asked about what the social worker should do in this case – for example, break or preserve confidentiality; recommend a child is removed from its parents, or leave the child with the family. This results in a framing of ethical issues as dilemmas for individuals.

4. *Depersonalizing and depoliticising of ethics.* The growing trend to link ethics with regulation, conformity to pre-defined standards and contract-type relationships is resulting in a de-personalized ethics. It leads to a model of the ethical relationship as one of a contract between several parties (specified and agreed in advance, when each follows the rules) rather than one based on mutual trust. If the emphasis is on conformity to externally defined standards and rules, which are to be applied in a standard way, in every case, this results in an ethics that focuses on impartiality, objectivity and impersonal treatment. This leads to a focus on equity at the expense of empathy, achieving good economic outcomes for society (effectiveness and efficiency) at the expense of meeting the needs of oppressed and impoverished individual people and groups (equality). It encourages a narrow vision of the role of social work divorced from people with personalities and from political debates about what counts as fairness or equality.

This discussion suggests that there may be a variety of different and contradictory reasons for the growing interest in ethics at the present time; and the "ethics boom" may have a variety of different and contradictory effects. For example, the focus of ethics on individual moral agency can be positive in that it encourages social workers to see themselves as moral agents who can and should resist unjust and inhumane practices. Yet this inevitably also places the burden of responsibility on them when things go wrong. Social workers need both to take power and responsibility where they can in order to achieve good and just outcomes for or with service users, and also to challenge the general public, media and politicians when social workers are specifically blamed for a bad outcome (the death of a child, the injury of an older person). We also need to be aware that excessive concern with professional autonomy can result in parentalism on the part of social workers (meaning that the social worker is the expert who knows what is best or right) – marginalizing or ignoring the views of service users. Similarly, a concern with personal relationships is positive in that it mitigates against treating people as cases, consumers or numbers. Yet excessive concern with the individual person and the social worker-service user relationship can lead to the ignoring of the bigger picture – the structural and social problems.

This discussion clearly shows how the ethics agenda can be co-opted into the service of NPM. It also gives us some pointers as to how features of the traditional model of professional ethics (particularly the tendency to focus on the professional autonomy of the social worker and the individual relationship between the service user and the social worker) may need to be modified or strengthened to resist this co-option. This is especially important given that NPM has developed alongside deprofessionalizing trends (suspicion of professionals as elitist and excessively powerful), a concern with measuring and managing risk and a severe crisis of welfare-capitalism.

RECLAIMING AND REFRAMING ETHICS IN SOCIAL WORK

I will end this article with some suggestions for reclaiming a progressive and radical ethics for social work.

Ethics as personal and political: towards a situated ethics of social justice

• *Situated ethics* – it is important to see ethical issues as embedded in everyday practice and in people's lives. Ethics is not just about dilemmas and making difficult decisions about rights and resources by rational deduction from abstract principles. All facets of life have ethical dimensions.

Ethical being and ethical action require sensitivity to the particularities of situations and human relationships, and encompass emotion (empathy, care and compassion) as well as reason. A good example of a situated approach to ethics relevant to social work is the ethics of care, which takes human relationships as its starting point.

• *Politicized ethics* – if we regard social work as a social movement as much as a profession or job, then we need to relate social work ethics explicitly to movements that promote practice that is variously categorized as anti-oppressive, critical, structural and radical. In the process of reclaiming the social work profession as an occupational group in alliance/struggle alongside service users, people in poverty and victims of injustice, social workers need to keep hold of a radical account of social justice, a sense of solidarity and willingness to speak out and take action.

One approach to ethics that encompasses both these features is what the American feminist philosopher Joan Tronto (1993, 2010) terms a *political ethics of care*, which focuses on human relationships in the context of structures of power and oppression. Such an approach has been taken forward very compellingly by the Dutch political theorist Selma Sevenhuijsen (1996, 1998) and is beginning to be discussed in some of the literature for the social professions in Holland (Lohman & Raaf, 2001, quoted in Philippart, 2011; Wilken, 2010) and other countries (Clifford & Burke, 2009). This is very useful for theorizing the relationships that are at the heart of social work in both personal and political terms. It can respond to accusations laid against early versions of radical (particularly Marxist) approaches to social work in the 1970s that they adopted utilitarian value perspectives, using service users for political ends.

However, I have chosen to speak of a *situated ethics of social justice* rather than a *political ethics of care*. In practice this may be hardly distinguishable from a political ethics of care. However, at a conceptual level it takes social justice as its starting point, qualified by the term "situated", rather than starting with "care", qualified by "political". It is an attempt to develop further an ethics for "the new radical social work" that Iain Ferguson, Michael Lavalette, Rona Woodward, Mark Baldwin and many others are promoting through the Social Work Action Network (SWAN) and their inspiring writings (Ferguson, 2008; Ferguson & Woodward, 2009; Lavalette, 2011). The list below can be regarded as a tentative starting point for developing the SWAN manifesto (www.socialworkfuture.org).

Preliminary values for a situated ethics of social justice in social work

1. *Radical social justice* – social workers need to take seriously the social justice agenda contained within international and other definitions and descriptions of social work as being about working for equality of outcomes and challenging unjust policies and practices. We need to be alert to the variety of formulations of social justice (such as the more liberal reformist focus on equal opportunities) and hold onto a conception that embraces a call to challenge the five faces of oppression as identified by Iris Marion Young (1990, p. 41): exploitation, marginalization, powerlessness, cultural imperialism and violence.

2. *Empathic solidarity* – Part of the role of social workers is to situate themselves in relation to the hopes, fears, pains and pleasures of other people, specifically service users. Empathy on its own, however, is not enough. It needs to lead to the development of a sense of solidarity and commitment to collective action for social change. This empathic solidarity requires abilities of critical analysis and an aspirational or hopeful attitude – this involves seeing the bigger picture, questioning received ideas and seeing the possibility for another kind of world.

3. *Relational autonomy* – it is important that social workers claim power as moral agents to work for progressive micro-level and macro-level social change. However we need to reframe individual professional autonomy as "relational autonomy". This involves recognizing that autonomy is both defined and pursued in a social context (including structures of oppression) and this influences the opportunities an individual has to develop and exercise autonomy (McLeod & Sherwin, 2000). In social work the exercise of professional autonomy is also based on "power with" others, including service users.

4. *Collective responsibility for resistance* – social workers should take responsibility for good and just practice, and for resisting bad and unjust practice and policies. This is the counterpart to claiming autonomy. But in seeing their autonomy as relational (that is, in the context of oppressive and constraining structures and institutions), it is important that they resist the responsibilization of social workers, service users and people in poverty. This means social workers should actively resist, with service users and other allies, the placing of responsibility for the causes and solutions of social problems with individuals, families and communities. This responsibility is shared with all fellow citizens and the responsibility for taking action is also collective as well as individual. This could also be termed "relational responsibility".

5. *Moral courage.* Moral courage is a quality or disposition to act in situations where such actions are difficult, uncomfortable or fear-inducing. Many aspects of social work require moral courage – to knock on the door of the house of a family whose child is under threat of removal or to challenge a racist comment by a service user. Moral courage is also required to speak out about inadequate resources and policies that impact disproportionately on people who are in need or difficulty. Courage is one of the moral qualities or virtues that is vital for social work and is further elaborated in Banks and Gallagher (2009), along with several other important virtues in professional life.

6. *Working in and with complexity and contradictions.* In social work, complexity, uncertainty, ambivalence and contradictions need to be acknowledged and used, along with the recognition that ethics is not about simple dilemmas, that is choices between two courses of action. Ethical being and action require hard work on the part of social workers – a process of constantly negotiating and working out what roles to take, questioning what we are doing and why and being alert to the dominance of the managerialist and neo-liberal agendas. It entails working in the spaces between the contradictions of care and control, prevention and enforcement, empathy and equity, ethics is definitely not about simply following rules – it is about questioning and challenging, feeling and acting.

These values are a mixture of principles of action and moral qualities, premised on a relational worldview. This list is a preliminary statement, which is not designed to replace existing sets of values articulated in codes of ethics. Indeed, these values are not new – they are old values that need to be constantly restated and reworked in order to remind us of their importance and to reclaim them from dilution or co-option by NPM or other negative trends in society. Versions of these values can be found in the international statement on ethics in social work, and in many national codes of ethics and other literature. But in the midst of a crowd of other exhortations and injunctions in documents of 30–50 pages, their significance can be lost, or they can be regarded as another example of social work's radical rhetoric that means little in practice, or is untranslatable into practice. However, it is up to us to ensure that these values can be translated into practice and to show how this can be done, and is being done, by many social workers around the world.

This "progressive model" of a situated ethics of social justice would see ethics as essential to justifying and enabling resistance in professional life – whether that resistance be the "quiet challenges" of the youth worker in the youth offending team refusing to close his cases after

12 weeks, or the more noisy challenges that accompany a campaign to save a youth service, to challenge laws on asylum seekers rights or to expose the inequities of high interest loans to people in poverty.

I will end with a comment made by a social worker during a Socratic dialogue I facilitated about the place of passion in social welfare work in Durham, UK, in 2009. She spoke about:

> Caring enough to become frustrated and angry, and believing enough to continue in your work to allow change.

NOTE

1   The material in this lecture was also presented at a joint Japan-UK seminar in Tokyo, at the Japanese Women's University in March 2011. Some of the ideas will also be used in publications developed from the seminar in Tokyo and for the Social Work Action Network.

2   It should be noted that in Britain the role of registering and disciplining professionally qualified social workers was taken on by statutory regulatory bodies (one for each of the four countries of the UK) from the mid-2000s. These bodies have their own code of practice, which is used in misconduct hearings (General Social Care Council 2002).

3   While I have invented the term "New Public Austerity", the term "new austerity" is in common usage.

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