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1

The social professions and the calling to care

Introduction

This book is about ethics in relation to a particular group of related occupations. I have called these occupations the 'social professions', which includes those occupations described in the UK as social work, youth and community work. Already we have introduced two problematic concepts. The first is 'profession' and the second is the 'social professions'. There has been much debate over the meaning of the term 'profession', and, indeed, whether it makes sense to define it at all. For those that have defined it, there is further debate about which occupations can be categorised as professions, with the list I have just given as belonging to the 'social professions' being particularly contested and sometimes referred to as 'emergent', 'new', 'semi' or 'quasi' professions.

Used in a loose sense, the term 'profession' is often used synonymously with 'occupation' to refer to the job someone does, or a recognised type of work. In which case, the social welfare occupations mentioned above, along with others such as bricklayers, farmers, accountants or cleaners, would all quite easily fall into the category of 'profession'. However, used more narrowly, the term has additional connotations, relating to high levels of social status, education, expertise, occupational control over membership, identity as an occupational group and a certain kind of self-consciousness about ethics. Whether the occupations of social work, community work and youth work can legitimately be regarded as professions or not depends on what view is taken of the nature of a profession. In one sense it does not matter what they are called, as our interest is in the nature of these occupations and the ethical challenges they face. On the other hand, there is a body of thinking about 'professional ethics', and if we want to build on and use this, then it would seem to make sense to locate these occupations in relation to 'the professions'. We will now consider the nature of the professions, before moving on to consider the nature of those occupations that I have described as the social professions.

Approaches to the study of professions

'Profession' is a contested concept, in that there is no agreement over its meaning. Some theorists have defined 'profession' as an occupation that possesses certain characteristics or traits. These may include the fact that its members have specialised education and qualifications, a high degree of control over their work, and a code of ethics, and do work that is for the public good. However, there is no agreement over precisely which characteristics are the essential features of a profession. Another approach is to define a profession as an occupation that has successfully gained status or power in relation to other occupational groups. Johnson (1972), for example, regards professionalism as a form of occupational control. However, more recent theorists have noted the unsatisfactory nature of these approaches, and argued that what counts as a 'profession', how professions develop, define themselves and lay claim to status, has changed over time, and is continually shifting (see, for example, Freidson, 1983; Torstendahl, 1990). Moreover, the concept of 'profession' is a peculiarly Anglo-American one, and does not have an exact equivalent in many other European countries. This leads Freidson (1983, p. 22) to comment:

> The problem . . . is created by attempting to treat profession as if it were a generic concept rather than a changing historic concept, with particular roots in an industrial nation strongly influenced by Anglo-American institutions.

These different definitions of 'profession' are related to different approaches to the study of the professions, which are in turn based on different sociological and ideological theories. In recent years these different approaches have become a topic of study in themselves (see, for example, Burrage, 1990; Freidson, 1983; Siegrist, 1994). Torstendahl (1990) outlines three approaches to theories of professionalism, which embrace the different definitions given above. These approaches are outlined briefly below as the essentialist, strategic and historical/developmental.

The essentialist approach

This approach is concerned to identify the properties that characterise professionalism and professionals, based on the assumption that professionals have a specific place in society and professionalisation is taking place in a specific way (Parsons, 1939; Wilensky, 1964). This approach is often linked to a functionalist view of society, associated with the work of sociologist Talcott Parsons, and is concerned to identify elements of professionalism that have functional roles for society. Developing from this, what has been called the 'trait theory' of professionalism attempts to produce a comprehensive list of the traits or characteristics essential for an occupation to be regarded as a profession, and hence to determine which occupations are professions. Many different lists of essential characteristics of professions have been produced and they vary as to what they include. Koehn (1994, p. 56), in offering an overview, usefully summarises five frequently cited traits of professionals as:

1. they are licensed by the state to perform a certain act;
2. they belong to an organisation of similarly enfranchised agents who promulgate standards and/or ideals of behaviour and who discipline one another for breaching these standards;
3. they possess so-called 'esoteric' knowledge or skills not shared by other members of the community;
4. they exercise autonomy over their work, which is work that is not well-understood by the wider community;
5. they publicly pledge themselves to render assistance to those in need and as a consequence have special responsibilities or duties not incumbent upon others who have not made this pledge.

The items included in such lists by different theorists vary. For example, Koehn argues that the only defensible trait of professionalism is the public pledge, which, from the description she gives, would seem in many cases to take the form of a written code of ethics. Millerson

(1964, p. 9) on the other hand, argues that the presence or absence of a professional code of ethics does not signify professionalism or non-professionalism, demonstrating how some types of professions have more need for codes than others. He also includes professional education and qualifications in the list of traits, but not licensing by the state. Greenwood (1957) explicitly includes a code of ethics and instead of 'esoteric knowledge', speaks of 'systematic theory'. Whatever traits are included, this approach encourages the categorisation of occupations according to the extent to which they possess, or are in the process of achieving, all or some of these characteristics. So, for example, Carr-Saunders (1955) lists four types of profession: the established professions (such as law, medicine, the clergy); the new professions (such as engineering, chemistry, and the natural and social sciences); the semi-professions (such as nursing, pharmacy and social work); and 'would be' professions (such as hospital managers).

There have been numerous critiques of this approach in recent years, in addition to the fact that no one definitive list of characteristics can be agreed. As Torstendahl himself points out, in order to study the essential characteristics of professions, we first need a definition of 'profession'. So the whole process is rather circular. Indeed, analyses of professionalism commonly start from considering the social relations of doctors and lawyers, and this is because we already know which people are properly categorised by this concept by everyday English speakers. Yet while the term 'profession' is used widely in the English language, it does not always have an equivalent in other European languages. If the same properties are not essential to the corresponding groups in other societies, this approach to professionalism cannot be generalised.

The strategic approach

This approach to the study of professionalism focuses on the types of collective action on which groups of professionals rely, and the identification of the relationships or conflicts between a (professional) occupational group and other groups. Several theorists have developed Weber's concept of 'closure' – the keeping of other people away from the advantages someone has got in society by means of an exclusionary strategy (Collins, 1990; Parkin, 1974, 1979). Collins develops a theory of the professions based on Weberian conflict theory – the idea that we can explain social behaviour and social structure in terms of the interests of individuals in maximising their power, wealth and status. He uses the concept of 'market closure' to describe the process by which occupations attempt to control market conditions, suggesting that those occupational groups that are especially successful are the ones we have come to call 'the professions'. These groups could therefore be described as monopolising certain activities. At the same time, he argues, they also transform their work into 'status honour'. Collins (1990, p. 26) sees these occupational groups as Weberian status groups, that direct attention away from the work they do, towards the 'style, the honour, the moral standards displayed by [their] members'. He suggests that the strong professions are those that have surrounded their work by social rituals, and identifies education as a modern form of ritual and as particularly important in forming the professions (p. 26).

Torstendahl (1990, p. 50) criticises the focus on exclusionary closure as the strategy used by professions, arguing that it is used by other groups, and also that other tactics can be used to enhance collective status and power, including politicisation, cartelisation and maintaining the status quo. Other theorists offer different variations on the strategic approach, but what they have in common is in theorising about how occupational groups gain power and status as part of a professionalizing strategy (see also, Johnson, 1972; Larson, 1977). For example, having initially defined professionalism as a type of occupational control, in his later work Johnson (1984, p. 19) argues that as it has become increasingly difficult for occupational groups to control their own work practices, and professionalism has become more of an occupational ideology than a form of occupational control of work by a collegiate network:

> The term profession has been extended to an increasingly large and diverse group of occupations such that our identification of an occupation as professional has less to do with the reality of a division of labour in which an association of colleagues effectively controls its own work practices, than with a recognition of the strategy of professionalism: a political strategy for occupational advancement.

The historical/developmental approach

This approach looks at how professional groups change over time. According to Torstendahl, the focus is on examining the changes in relationships between occupational groups (taken to be professional) and other groups over a long time period. Here the concern is not with the properties or actions of professionals, but on professionals as forming social groups with patterns that are interesting in themselves. This approach, however, does not assume that all professions go through a series of fixed developmental stages, as, for example, described by Wilensky (1964), based largely on conditions in the USA. Rather, it acknowledges that some societies go through developments that have no real counterparts in other societies (for example, industrialisation in Europe and the USA during the nineteenth century) and this influences the development of the standing of professionals and their activities (Torstendahl and Burrage, 1990).

Siegrist (1994, p. 8) argues that it is important to look at all significant actors influencing the formation and practice of the professions, which may vary according to time and place, and include educational institutions, the state or government, members of professions and their organisations, clients and client organisations, the media and public opinion. He suggests that the issue of state and political intervention has been neglected in research on professions, as this was thought to be more relevant to continental Europe than to the UK and the USA, on which much of the work was based. He identifies three models of professionalisation, differentiated according to the role of the state, government and legislation:

(a) The traditional corporative professions and the weak state – This describes the model in England, whereby the professional corporations established in early modern times by a royal charter (a guild or a college) maintained sole responsibility for the education and entry into the profession of its members. This situation persisted into the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, with the professions themselves playing a key role in their regulation, in cooperation with the government, with little threat to their autonomy.

(b) Professionalisation from above in a bureaucratic authoritarian state in the nineteenth century – While conditions in continental Europe were similar to those in England up to the end of the eighteenth century, the revolutions in government in those countries also transformed the professions, introducing ‘top down’ unified systems of education, qualifications, state licensing and 'reorienting the "professional sector" towards the goal of common welfare defined by the state' (Siegrist, 1994, p. 11). The old professional corporations were generally disbanded, and in some countries compulsory professional associations were introduced. In the later nineteenth century, the hold of the state relaxed somewhat, and professions were given some more autonomy, particularly in relation to ethical standards, but not over education and examinations. The tradition of state control is still noticeable in these countries.

(c) Professionalisation in the post-revolutionary liberal-democratic societies – This model applies particularly to the USA, but can also be seen in other liberal-democratic societies with weak bureaucracy and few government institutions, such as Switzerland. In the USA, the institutions imported from England were swept away in the 1830s, and professions were allowed to develop and take shape, with the state only introducing legislation when the profession has established itself and won public acceptance. Wilensky's stages of professionalisation chart the process whereby a function of a profession becomes a full-time occupation; the occupational group then lays claims to certain functions; the educational process begins to become regulated; a professional association is established; the association requires examinations and gains monopoly rights over the profession and its services; regulations concerning conduct and ethics are more precisely formulated and supervised by the professional association.

These models are generalisations and during the twentieth century there were some convergences, as elements of formalisation and institutionalisation appeared in the USA and UK, and liberalisation occurred in continental European countries, with voluntary professional organisations emerging in some.

The ideal-typical profession

So what, then, is a 'profession' and does it make sense to continue to use the term? It is clear that a 'profession' is generally regarded as a special category of occupational groups. But precisely how it is defined depends upon what theory of professionalism is adopted, as well as the time period and country. Freidson (1983, p. 32) suggests that:

> the future of profession lies in embracing the concept as an intrinsically ambiguous, multi-faceted folk concept, of which no single definition and no attempt at isolating its essence will ever be generally persuasive.

Different concepts of profession will be advanced by occupations seeking professional status from those advanced by employers or clients seeking to control the jobs they want done, or by government agencies or the general public. Freidson argues (1983, p. 27) that the appropriate research strategy for such a folk concept is 'phenomenological' in character:

> One does not attempt to determine what profession is in an absolute sense, so much as how people in a society determine who is a professional and who is not, how they 'make' or 'accomplish' professions by their activities, and what the consequences are for the way in which they see themselves and their work.

Freidson suggests that the theoretical programme that takes us beyond the folk concept is to look to develop a more general and abstract theory of occupations, according to which the historic professions can be analysed in the same conceptual terms as the other occupations, but without assuming that those professions necessarily represent a single, generic type of occupation. This he does in some of his later work, where he develops, as an intellectual tool, an ideal-typical professionalism in contrast with the ideal-typical market and bureaucracy. Although Freidson produces a list of characteristics of his 'ideal-typical' professionalism, his approach is quite different from that of the trait theorists. He is not claiming to describe any real occupation, but rather to develop 'a standard by which to appraise and analyse historic occupations whose characteristics vary in time and place' (Freidson, 2001, pp. 127–8). The interdependent elements of Freidson's (2001, pp. 127, 180) ideal type are enumerated as:

1. a body of knowledge and skill officially recognised as based on abstract concepts and theories and requiring the exercise of considerable discretion;
2. an occupationally controlled division of labour;
3. an occupationally controlled labour market requiring training credentials for entry and career mobility;

4. an occupationally controlled training programme which produces those credentials, schooling that is associated with 'higher learning', segregated from the ordinary labour market and provides an opportunity for the development of new knowledge;
5. an ideology serving some transcendent value and asserting greater devotion to doing good work than to economic reward.

According to Freidson, certain occupations may undergo a process of professionalisation, coming closer to this ideal at some points in time and in some countries, while others in different places and times may move away from the ideal and undergo 'deprofessionalisation'. He identifies key factors influencing the process of professionalisation as: the organisation and policy position of state agencies; the organisation of occupations themselves; and the varying institutional circumstances required for successful practice of different bodies of knowledge and skill. As Freidson points out, many of the classic studies of professions have analysed the process of professionalisation during the nineteenth century and early twentieth (for example, Carr-Saunders and Wilson, 1933; Larson, 1977; Perkin, 1969). Recent work, however, has focused more on the process of deprofessionalisation in the context of the economic and social changes happening in western countries during the later part of the twentieth century (for example, Dominelli, 1996; Harrison and Pollitt, 1994). Freidson's analysis of professionalism will be used later, when examining the nature of the social professions.

The social professions

We have already suggested that this term embraces those occupations in the caring and welfare field, which according to the trait or essentialist theory of professions, have often been regarded as 'semi' or 'quasi' or 'bureau' professions, to denote the fact that these newer occupations (compared with the traditional professions of law, medicine and the clergy) lack some of the 'essential qualities' in relation to autonomy over work, public credibility or status (Etzioni, 1969). However, as has been suggested above, it is less important to establish whether or not these occupations are 'professions' in any essentialist sense of the term, and more useful to look at how they grew and developed over time, what claims to expertise, autonomy and status they have made and how they compare to other occupations at the present time. But we will first discuss the use of the term ‘social professions’, before outlining the details of the occupations it covers.

The term ‘social professions’ is little used as yet in English, although its usage has developed as part of the European project to develop transferability of qualifications and greater understandings between those involved in work in the social welfare field, where there is often no exact equivalence in the way the work of different occupational groups is divided up. So we find the term being used by organisations and groups set up at a European-wide level to promote the development of knowledge, mutual understanding and recognition of occupations concerned with the care, control, informal education and empowerment of individuals and groups (see Lorenz and Seibel, 1998, 1999). The term appears in the sub-title of the recently established *European Journal of Social Work* as ‘The Forum for the Social Professions’. However, the role of these occupational groups varies from country to country. What is called ‘youth work’ in the UK may be done by pedagogues in the Scandinavian countries, who also do what we would describe as ‘social care work’ in the UK. The role of the educator in France somewhat resembles the pedagogue in Scandinavia and Germany, but has many specialisations. Although most countries have an occupational group that translates as social work, the actual configuration of tasks and roles can be different, with social workers in Scandinavian countries, for example, embracing those who take on the role of assessing and distributing welfare benefits, as well as field social workers. Community work may be practised in some countries, such as Holland and Sweden, but it is on a smaller scale than in the UK or USA. Whether these occupations are regulated by the state, have protected titles, prescribed national examinations, professional associations or codes of ethics again varies from country to country and occupation to occupation. In this sense the term ‘social’ in ‘social professions’ describes a set of occupations that are diverse in the same way as ‘professions’ in general.

The development of the social professions

For the purpose of this book, we will focus largely on three occupational groups recognised in the UK as social work, community work and youth work. Descriptions of the history of these groups, their current structures and practices and the ethical issues arising in their work will be located in a UK context. However, many of the features of changing policy and practice that are happening in the UK are also happening elsewhere in Europe, North America and Australasia and impacting on the occupational groups that work in the broad field of social, community and youth work (see Lorenz, 2001).

These occupational groups in the UK have common origins in the philanthropic organisations established in the mid to late nineteenth century. Their histories are often intertwined, and although they developed into separate occupations by the mid to late twentieth century, there have been periods of overlap and certainly even now the boundaries are not always clear. Before we look at the history of these occupations, it may be helpful, therefore, to outline recent definitions of the nature of social work, community work and youth work in order that their changing structure and organisation can be better understood. Of course, there is a plethora of different and changing definitions of these occupations, often at a very general level. Nevertheless, I will simply offer three relatively recent examples of statements of purpose, to highlight the differences and similarities between these occupational groups:

> The purpose of social work is to enable children, adults, families, groups and communities to function, participate and develop in society. (Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work, 1995, p. 16)
>
> The key purpose of community work is to work with communities experiencing disadvantage, enabling them collectively to identify needs and rights, clarify objectives and take action to meet them within a democratic framework which respects the needs and rights of others. (Harris, 2001, p. 1)
>
> The purpose of youth work is to facilitate and support young people's growth through dependence to interdependence, by encouraging their personal and social development and enabling them to have a voice, influence and place in their communities and society. (National Youth Agency, 2001, p. 1)

These brief statements describe differences in client groups and the broad focus of the work. Social work focuses on a range of individuals and groups to enable them to 'function' better in society; whereas community work focuses on communities taking action collectively to meet needs; and youth work covers young people's growth and development, encouraging their participation in society. In these particular definitions for social work and youth work, their role in enabling the people they work with *to fit into society* is evident.

The idea of people *developing in society* is mentioned, including enabling them to participate (social work) or have a voice and influence (youth work). The social work definition also refers to people's *functioning in society* and the youth work definition mentions enabling people to have *a place in society*. The community work statement has a different tone, not mentioning 'society', but instead talking of a *democratic framework*, within which to enable people's own collective action. A more emancipatory strand is evident in community work, even in these brief statements.

If we elaborate the differences in actual practice a little further, social work has statutory functions laid down by law (for example, in relation to child protection and mental health), although not all social workers have statutory responsibilities. Social workers tend to work more frequently with individuals and families experiencing difficulties. Community work and youth work have no statutory basis, and usually (but not always) participants engage voluntarily and work is done much more frequently in groups. All three of these occupations could be characterised as having the broad aim of the promotion of social welfare, which includes both individual well-being in a social context, and the notion of a common or communal good. This idea will be further elaborated in the next chapter, so we will now move on to look briefly at the historical development of these occupations.

Nineteenth-century philanthropy

The work that developed into social work, community work and youth work grew up in the mid to late nineteenth century. This came about as the voluntary and charitable bodies with a mission to distribute financial and material resources, encourage self-help and provide moral education to those in poverty became more widespread and organised. Historians of both social work and community work identify the origins of this work particularly in the settlement houses that developed in the late nineteenth century (the first being set up in 1884), and Charity Organisation Society, established in 1869 (see, for example, Baldock, 1974, pp. 3–5; Younghusband, 1981, pp. 11–17). The settlements were established, generally by universities, in the poorer parts of cities, with the aim of providing meeting rooms, space for activities and living accommodation for graduates who would work amongst the poor – the first being Oxford House and Toynbee Hall in the East End of London (Ashworth, 1984; Johnson, 2001;

Picht, 1914). The Charity Organisation Society was set up to coordinate charitable giving and ensure that resources were well targeted to the 'deserving poor'. Those who worked for these organisations began to keep systematic records, to discuss their experiences, propose ideas about the causes of people's difficulties and how these could be ameliorated and develop methods of working. According to Younghusband (1981, p. 12), the Charity Organisation Society was 'undoubtedly the originator of casework' in so far as it developed systematic processes of assessing individual circumstances, planning action, allocating resources and following up the cases. Yet, as Baldock (1974, p. 4) points out, in its attempts to organise charity and coordinate the work of many people, it was also reminiscent of community work. The work that went on in the settlements, and in other settings, such as Octavia Hill's pioneering work with tenants or Dr Barnardo's workshops for unemployed boys, involved work with individuals, families, groups and communities. As Younghusband comments, the interweaving of casework, group work and community work was taken for granted.

Furthermore, most of the settlements also involved work with young people (Jeffs, 2001). Indeed the first activity listed as available at the newly opened Oxford House (*The Oxford House*, 1948, p. 10) in 1884 was 'Boys' Club'. However, youth work has its origins independently of the settlement movement, starting with the Sunday Schools in the mid eighteenth century and developing in earnest with the myriad of clubs and associations set up in the mid to late nineteenth century, from the YMCA and Boys' Brigade to the Scouts and Guides (Jeffs, 1979; Smith, 1988). A desire to control and educate young people, to instil moral values and prepare them for the responsibilities of employment and parenthood were key motivators in the work of many of these organisations and the volunteers who worked in them. Many of these early organisations working in neighbourhoods and with young people had explicitly religious commitments, with an aim to convert their users, or at least to promote character building and 'rescue', alongside the more neutral welfare work (Smith, 1988, pp. 55–7; Younghusband, 1981).

The caseworkers

The linkages and divergences between social work, community work and youth work that developed over time are complex and fascinating.

The 'casework' element, which involved working with individuals and families and eventually became the core of social work, developed more systematic methods and theories. Formal training began in the early twentieth century, with the School of Sociology started in London in 1903, which later amalgamated with the Social Science Department at the London School of Economics (Smith, 1965). In the early twentieth century, social workers were attached to assist people using many of the agencies set up to deal with social problems, including hospitals and courts, but significant growth in the state sector did not develop until the 1940s. However, during the inter-war period, knowledge for social work practice developed, influenced by psychoanalytical theories and approaches from the USA. During the Second World War, the demand for qualified social workers began to develop as problems were experienced with organising and supporting evacuated families. Trained staff was sought, from almoners in hospitals to psychiatric social workers and those working with children and families. By the end of the war, social workers had been appointed in 70 local authorities (Younghusband, 1981, p. 24) and their employment continued to rise after the establishment of the welfare state in 1948. The Children Act, passed in that year, developed out of two reports on child care, which recommended a personal service for children and recruitment of more social workers, who should be graduates (Parrott, 1999, pp. 28–9). The services provided by local authority social workers at this time were specialised and fragmented, overseen by separate committees relating to children, health and welfare.

Early forms of community work

In the meantime, embryonic forms of 'community work' were developing, boosted by the development of community centres and associations following the First World War. In 1928 the New Estates Committee of the National Council of Social Service (which later became the National Federation of Community Associations) was established (Baldock, 1974, p. 6), and workers began to be employed to run the newly-built community centres and encourage community activity and cohesion. The settlements and other neighbourhood-based centres and projects continued to exist, although priorities and structures changed, especially with the pressures of the Second World War (Matthews and Kimmis, 2001, pp. 61–3). Theories and approaches to community work were developed in the 1950s and 1960s, particularly by those workers who had gone abroad to work in what were then British colonies to encourage self-sufficiency and independence – for example Batten's (1967) theories of non-directive work. Baldock (1974, p. 6) comments on the stress in the middle 1960s on what he calls the 'professional consensus approach' to community work, exemplified in texts such as those by Thomason (1969) and Goetschius (1969).

Community work as the third method of social work

Although forms of community work existed independently of social work, the Younghusband report (1959) on local authority social workers identified community work as one of the three methods of social work, alongside casework and group work. These views were reinforced by powerful thinking from the USA, and despite moves by Batten and others to see community work as having a strong educational focus, the social work interests dominated (Thomas, 1983, p. 30). The Gulbenkian report (Gulbenkian Study Group, 1968), recommending the expansion and development of community work, came out in the same year as the report of the Seebohm Committee (Seebohm Report, 1968), set up to review the fragmented state of social work. This latter report reflected some of the developments in community work, and the unified social services departments set up in local authorities following this report in the early 1970s often comprised community development officers or community workers. Many social work education programmes in universities included community work within the curriculum and for a brief period there were several specialist community work programmes on offer.

The emergence of youth and community work

At the same time, youth work, which had grown in local authority education departments following the 1944 Education Act, also began to link more closely with community work. Following the Milson-Fairbairn Report (1969), local authority youth services became 'youth and community services' and embraced work with adults and communities, often with a focus on community centres, but also developing more broadly. Training courses had been set up for youth workers at several universities and colleges, with the National College for the Training of Youth Leaders opening in Leicester in 1961, and in the 1970s further programmes developed with a focus on youth and community work (Davies, 1999a, pp. 179–94). The identity of community work hence remained somewhat divided between social work, youth work, and an occupational group in its own right. Certainly in terms of values, theories and methods, community work developed its own literature and a radical and political strand, exemplified by the publications stemming from the action research projects of the late 1960s and early 1970s associated with the large area-based national Community Development Programme sponsored by the Home Office (Green and Chapman, 1992).

The ambivalence towards professionalisation

Thomas (1983, p. 47) sees this period as the point where community work, which could have developed as a professional occupation with an identifiable set of skills, lost its way and chose instead the path of political action. It did develop its own association, the Association of Community Workers, in 1968, but this has never been strong, with a low membership, no code of ethics or any of the other trappings of a traditional professional association. Social work and youth and community work have also demonstrated an identifiable strand of reluctance towards moves to professionalise, seeing the development of exclusive professional bodies and requirements for training and expertise as creating a distance between the workers and those with whom they work. Yet at the same time there has been a strong voice within these occupations arguing for the importance of a coherent occupational identity and status, in order to maintain credibility with the public and other more powerful professions, and recently to resist deprofessionalising tendencies.

Although social work also had a ‘radical phase’, with groups of academics and practitioners advocating Marxist approaches to social work through alliances with welfare claimants, clients’ rights groups and trade unions (Bailey and Brake, 1975; Corrigan and Leonard, 1978), this was perhaps less influential in the occupation as a whole. In spite of the arguments against professionalisation put forward in the manifesto of the radical social workers’ organisation, ‘Case Con’ (reprinted in Bailey and Brake, 1975, pp. 144–7), which criticised the main method of social work (casework) for blaming the individual for poverty and diverting attention from the real social and economic causes, social work nevertheless set out on a slow course towards attempted professionalisation. National regulation of professional education programmes came in 1971 with the founding of the Central Council for Education and Training in Social Work. The British Association of Social Workers, founded in 1970, from the previously separate social work associations, developed a code of ethics in 1975.

Youth and community work was a much smaller and more disparate occupational group with a strong anti-professional element within it too. In 1971 the Community and Youth Service Association was formed from the merger of the Youth Service and Community Service Associations. Despite several attempts to develop codes of ethics for youth and community work in the 1970s and 1980s, these were unsuccessful (see Banks, 1996, pp. 15–16). In 1983, the Community and Youth Service Association became the Community and Youth Workers' Union, which represented a conscious decision to opt for trade unionism as opposed to professionalisation (Davies, 1988, 1999b). In 1982 the Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work was established to provide nationally recognised endorsement for education and training programmes. No such nationally recognised educational body existed for community work, which again found itself split between attempting to promote community work education within both social work and youth and community work programmes.

Threats to the professions: the mixed economy of welfare and increasing state control

In the early 1970s the social professions looked set to expand in the public sector, with the development of the new unified social services departments employing both social workers and community workers, and youth and community workers largely based in education departments working in youth and community centres and beginning to develop forms of outreach and detached youth work. However, the promised expansion in the local authorities slowed down from the mid-1970s, with the monetary crisis in Britain. From 1979, with the Conservative government of Margaret Thatcher in power, there came a whole series of changes impacting on the professions associated with the welfare state. These included the growth of private and voluntary sector provision, attempts to control and undermine the power and status of all professional groups, the introduction of market principles and a growing concern with economy and efficiency, resulting in a focus on outputs and outcomes, targeting of resources and specialisation of work. Moves were made to encompass professional education and training within the remit of competency-based vocational qualifications, with a stress on work-based learning (see Banks, 1996; Dominelli, 1996). These moves were successful in relation to the social professions, all of which have now developed national occupational standards, which specify the competencies required for qualified workers in relatively specific and mechanistic terms.

Dissatisfaction with the lack of priority given to community work by social work and youth and community work education programmes, finally led to a group of community workers in the 1990s taking advantage of the government resources available to map occupational groups and develop standards for vocational training. This has resulted in a separate set of occupational standards for community work (Federation of Community Work Training Groups, 2002), and the promotion of workplace training, although as yet this has not resulted in the development of more than a handful of separate education programmes in higher education. The National Youth Agency, which took over the endorsement and validation functions from the Council for Education and Training in Youth and Community Work in 1991, has re-emphasised the importance of youth work, and published a statement of ethical principles for youth work (National Youth Agency, 2001). At the same time as attempts are being made to affirm the occupational identity of youth work, local authority youth services are also being required to work in partnership with careers services and other agencies in an interprofessional Connexions Service for young people (Department for Education and Employment, 2000; 2001). This requires training (for a personal adviser role) over and above youth and community work qualifications, leading in some cases to an interchangeability of roles with careers advisers. Social work is similarly engaged in health and social care partnerships, with multi-disciplinary teams often developing interchangeable roles (for example between nurses and social workers in the community mental health field). Furthermore, after many years of argument, central government has established General Councils (regulatory bodies) covering the social care occupations in the countries of the UK, which are now developing codes of conduct, disciplinary and regulatory systems (see General Social Care Council, http://www. gscc.org.uk).

On the one hand these moves towards standardising practice can be seen as advancing the 'professional project,' insofar as they have resulted in clear definitions of the purpose and nature of the work of the occupations and, in the case of the General Councils in the social care field, regulation of entry and standards of conduct. This could be seen to advance the credibility, status and public trust in the occupational groups. On the other hand, the standards and controls have been initiated by the state, and although practitioners have had a role in their development, their room for manoeuvre has been somewhat limited (see Smith, 2003, for a discussion of the narrowness of vision of the 'transforming youth work' agenda).

Key themes in the development and work of the social professions

The brief account of aspects of the history of social work, youth work and community work given above can do no more than hint at the complexity of the relationships between these groups, and at the social, political, economic and ideological influences on their development. However, for the purposes of this book, it is sufficient to enable some of the key features of the social professions to be drawn out as follows:

(1) *The calling to care*. The origins of the social professions lie in the philanthropic and charitable work initiated and carried out by volunteers in the nineteenth century, often within explicitly religious organisations. Some of those who led the work have become well-known figures, such as the Barnetts who founded Toynbee Hall, Octavia Hill who developed housing associations, Dr Barnardo who established children's homes. Their motivations are described as stemming from a profound sense of outrage at levels of poverty, poor housing and lack of education seen in inner-city areas. They, and the numerous other pioneers whose stories are not told in the history books, along with the volunteers who carried out the work, are portrayed as having a commitment to improve individual lives and social conditions, moved perhaps by a 'calling' or 'vocation' to devote their lives to working for change. According to Younghusband (1981, p. 13):

> These pioneers all believed in treating people as individuals; the Barnetts' motto was 'one by one', Octavia Hill thought 'knowledge of the passions,

> hopes and history of people' was crucial. They all spoke of treating people as equals, of friendship and the power of love.

Some of the early writings explicitly describe the role of the volunteer workers as to act as 'friends' to the people they were working with. The settlers in the settlement houses were regarded as serving as role models, but the importance of personal relationships was also stressed. According to Picht (1914, p. 2), writing of Toynbee Hall:

> He [the settler] mistrusts dead organisations, and would replace them by personal relationships. *Not as an official but as a friend does he approach the poor*, and he knows that he is thereby not only the giver but the receiver. (my emphasis)

(2) *The cooption to welfare and control*. Whilst for many of the early volunteers the motivation to care for individuals and serve as a friend may have been dominant, the agenda for some of the organisations was also one of 'control'. The fear that the poor would get out of hand, that young people would be corrupted, that moral standards were declining was also present in some of the early religious organisations. As the welfare state emerged, the work of the volunteers and voluntary organisations began to be subsumed within it, and became part of a welfare bureaucracy – a system for delivering redistributive measures to those in need, as well as controlling unruly or anti-social behaviour (from child abusers to child criminals).

(3) *The commitment to change*. Whether from a position of reformist or radical, alongside the 'do-gooding' philanthropists working with individuals and families in need, there has also existed a vocal group within the social professions who have advocated the need for changes in policies, structures and attitudes. This approach was perhaps most noticeable in the late in 1960s and early 1970s with the emergence of 'radical' work and a rather nihilistic view of the role of the social professions as agents of a repressive state – part of the system of maintaining the status quo of fundamental inequalities in society. This developed in the 1980s and 1990s into a concern with anti-oppressive practice, and a commitment on the part of social professionals to challenge racism, sexism, disablism, and so on.

(4) *An ambivalence towards professionalisation*. Partly because of their origins in voluntary organisations and volunteer work, with the

desire to work close to those in need or poverty, as well as the radical aim to form alliances with the poor and working class, the social professions have had an uneasy relationship with the idea of professionalisation. Professionals have been characterised as elitist, self-serving and distant from the people with whom they work. Hence there have always been arguments within the occupational groups about the need for codes of ethics, registration of practitioners or the value of university-level education. These debates, coupled with societal ambivalence towards the role of these occupational groups (how necessary are they? what expertise do they have? are they supporting the feckless and idle? are they interfering excessively in family life?) has resulted in a slow and often agonising move towards some of the trappings of the ideal-typical profession.

(5) *The effects of 'deprofessionalising' trends*. Just as the social professions were expanding and becoming established, there came a questioning and restructuring of the welfare state, within which they had become embedded. Although moves have been made in recent years to clarify roles, purposes and standards of work for all professional groups, this has also resulted in greater specification and prescription, which appears to challenge the scope of professional discretion and 'autonomy', often thought to be at the heart of professional work and professional ethics. This may be viewed as a process of 'deprofessionalisation', although it can also be seen as contributing to an emerging 'new professionalism' or simply a reflection of the constantly changing state of professions. Before proceeding to consider the 'deprofessionalisation' debate, it is important to place it in the context of the broader changes in the welfare state alluded to earlier in this chapter, and in particular the challenge to professionalism from managerialism.

Managerialism and professionalism in public services

Since the late 1970s, the welfare state has undergone a profound restructuring process based on economic demands to cut costs, ideological antipathy towards its bureaucratic and paternalistic structures and processes, and an imperative to improve the quality of the services provided. A restructuring of welfare services has taken place in many countries, albeit in different ways, at different paces and often for different types of reasons (see Flynn, 2000). In the UK, the attack on the welfare state, and the professionals and administrators who worked within it, gathered momentum after the election of the Conservative government under Margaret Thatcher in 1979. During the 1980s and 1990s the 'New Right' government introduced a whole series of reforms based around the theme of 'markets' and 'managers' as 'guarantors of efficiency, choice, dynamism and responsiveness' (Clarke, 1998, p. 238). The idea of the state as provider of services was challenged, with the introduction of competition, voluntary and private sector provision and contracting out, as well as internal markets and purchaser–provider splits within the public sector. The dominance of bureaucrats and professionals within the public services was challenged and what has been called 'the new managerialism' or 'new public management' (NPM) developed, based on the view, according to Clark (1998, p. 238) that managers 'inhabited the world of market action, and were thus the natural bearers of its entrepreneurialism, its dynamism and the full gamut of "good business practices" from which organisations in the public sector needed to learn'.

There are many accounts of the development and characteristics of the new public management. As Clarke *et al.* (2000, p. 7) point out, there is no one model and it is a mistake to regard NPM as a unified form of managerial coordination of public services. However, they do offer a list of features (adapted from Dunleavy and Hood, 1994) typically ascribed to the NPM, as follows (Clarke *et al.*, 2000, p. 6):

- attention to outputs and performance rather than inputs;
- organisations 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 organisations;
- breaking down large-scale organisations and using competition to enable 'exit' or 'choice' by service users;
- decentralisation of budgetary and personal authority to line managers.

Clarke (1998, p. 239), in his analysis of managerialism as a new mode of coordination for social welfare organisations, suggests that it has three dimensions: an ideology focused on extending the right to manage in pursuit of greater efficiency; a calculative framework which orders knowledge, typically around efficiency and competitive positioning; and a series of overlapping discourses articulating conceptions of how and what to manage. He sees managerialisation as a process of establishing managerial authority over resources and decisions; establishing calculative frameworks defining the terms of decision-making; and creating forms of managing and types of managers (including hybrid professional-managers and a general managerial consciousness within organisations). A central issue in the managerialisation of public services has been the 'concerted effort to displace or subordinate the claims of professionalism' (Clarke *et al.*, 2000, p. 9).

The election of the New Labour government in the UK in 1997 brought with it a new discourse of 'modernising' public services, which sought to use the language and methods of the NPM in pursuit of its own political agenda (with a particular focus on reforms in the fields of social services, health, crime and local government). There are many continuities between the NPM of the New Right and New Labour's 'modern management' agenda – most notably the continuing emphasis on efficiency and performance. Indeed, Clarke *et al.* (2000, p. 23) note the enhanced role of practices designed to 'monitor, assess and regulate' the performance of organisations delivering public services. Measures to impose centrally defined performance standards on organisations have been strengthened, along with rewards and threats for 'beacon' or failing organisations. The focus on accountability to service users and other stakeholders has also been sharpened, along with a continued attack on monopoly provision of services and a search for business solutions to social problems (Newman, 2000).

However, as Newman (2000, p. 47) points out, the discourse of modern public management involves subtle shifts from the NPM. It can be seen as a fundamentally political project, linking New Labour's elusive 'Third Way' in politics with a process of public sector reform. She identifies several features of modern management, which distinguish it from the 'cut and thrust' and 'lean and mean' discourses of business turnaround and downsizing of the 1980s, as follows:

- it is presented as a set of tools to achieve policy outcomes on improved education, social exclusion and welfare reform;
- it claims to have a focus not just on short-term efficiency, but also on longer-term effectiveness;
- it places more emphasis on collaboration (rather than competition) and stresses the need for 'joined up' government and managerial techniques of building partnerships.

Newman draws out several emergent themes in the modernising agenda, which provide useful insights into the climate in which the social professions are currently operating. These are:

1. *Innovation*. Many policy documents stress the need for change and innovation – in order to break free from old traditions and vested interests and to achieve better outcomes for citizens and the nation in a changing and competitive global economy (see, for example, Department of Trade and Industry, 1998). This is linked with an entrepreneurial business spirit that needs to be applied to transform the role and shape of the public sector. In the field of youth work, for example, the National Youth Agency has hosted a specific project to research and promote innovation in youth work (see Merton, 2001).

2. *Performance*. Newman (2000) also notes the move away from compulsory competition and the rigid boundaries between purchasers and providers in public services, towards a more pragmatic approach to the use of the market. More scope is being offered to managers to make decentralised purchasing and contracting decisions. Yet at the same time, as already mentioned, there has been a strengthening of central government controls over the setting of targets and standards of performance for particular services or organisations (for example, local authority social services departments, health trusts, schools or youth services) and powers to intervene if standards are not achieved. In the case of social services, new regional Commissions for Care Standards have been established to regulate residential and home care services, along with the national General Councils previously mentioned to regulate professional training and standards of work (Department of Health, 1998a; Hudson, 2000). These moves can be seen as part of a trend to control and standardise activities previously within the sphere of professional judgement. This focus on centrally defined performance contrasts with the language of decentralisation, flexibility and innovation.

3. *'Joined-up' government*. The need for reform at the level of policy (not just management) to make it more strategic at both central and local government level is another key theme of the modernising agenda. The tendency of the NPM to result in fragmentation, with organisations judged in terms of their individual achievements, has been recognised, and the collaboration between

different government departments, local authorities, private, voluntary and community sector organisations in tackling issues of health, crime, education, social exclusion and regeneration is encouraged. There is an increased emphasis on partnership working in most fields, with a particularly notable example being policies for neighbourhood renewal (see Mayo and Taylor, 2001; Social Exclusion Unit, 2001).

4. *Participation*. Central to many of the New Labour policies is the theme of public participation in decision-making and service delivery. This forms part of its drive to renew social democracy, revive community spirit and ensure that the decisions made and services delivered are meeting the needs of service users and citizens (Department of the Environment, Transport and the Regions, 1998; Rao, 2000). Whereas the NPM focused attention on the consumers of services, the modernising agenda has a focus on active citizens and communities. In many areas of public services there is a requirement for local people or services users to be members of boards or decision-making bodies. This not only challenges the supremacy of professionals, but also managers and politicians.

The extent to which the modernising agenda can actually be realised is debatable. Newman (2000, p. 58) refers to ‘modernisation’ as a ‘discourse’, suggesting it provides a vocabulary within which politicians, managers and professionals can legitimate their actions:

> the paraphernalia of participation, the ritual of efficiency plans, the celebration of partnership and so on can all be adopted as ceremonial forms of action which remain loosely coupled to the realities of organisational action and the delivery of services.

There are also inevitable contradictions within this agenda for change. There are tensions between the requirements for annual efficiency gains and longer-term effectiveness; between centralised control and decentralised decision-making, flexibility and innovation; between systems of regulation and audit that focus on individual organisations and the demand for contributions to cross-cutting strategic partnership working; between citizen control and managerial control. Aspects of the new discourse of modernisation may be more acceptable to staff working in public services than the New Right focus on privatisation and the strong antipathy to the public sector. But the continued focus on efficiency and performance, with strong central control and a tendency towards standardisation of work practices, continues to exert pressure on the public service organisations and the staff who work in them, including the professionals. As one youth worker was reported as commenting, in response to a recent national policy document on 'transforming youth work' which stresses targets, outcomes and curriculum: 'The government has given us what we wanted [extra resources] but also completely taken away what we are and what we do' (quoted in Smith, 2003, p. 15). Later chapters will explore these themes further in practice-based contexts.

Deprofessionalisation, the 'new professionalism' and the evolving social professions

In assessing the impact of the growth of managerialism on the social professions, it may be useful to refer back to Freidson's (2001) ideal type of professionalism as summarised below:

1. *A body of knowledge and skill officially recognised as based on abstract concepts and theories and requiring the exercise of considerable discretion*. Although bodies of knowledge and skill have been defined for social work, youth and community work, it is arguable as to whether these are recognised as based on abstract concepts and theories. Discretion of practitioners appears to have been curtailed, as more and more tasks and procedures are prescribed, targets set and general standards applied. However, in the day-to-day encounters with service users, there is still a great deal of unpredictability and a need for discretion in how people are treated and how rules or procedures are applied.

2. *An occupationally controlled division of labour*. The division of labour between occupational groups is blurring, as interprofessional working is increasingly required. Occupational control of the division of labour appears to be declining, as the state or the 'market' appears to be more influential.

3. *An occupationally controlled labour market requiring training credentials for entry and career mobility*. The labour markets are increasingly requiring educational credentials for entry and career progression, although this is less so in community work. But the

extent to which the labour market is occupationally controlled is limited.

4. *An occupationally controlled training programme associated with 'higher learning', providing an opportunity for the development of new knowledge*. Training programmes for the social professions are both in higher education and the workplace. Insofar as there is a research agenda in higher education, then 'new knowledge' is being created and this has grown rapidly, particularly in the social work field, in recent decades. The extent to which the occupation controls the training programmes is, however, debatable.

5. *An ideology serving some transcendent value*. There is no doubt that the occupations themselves claim to some extent a 'transcendent value' and a greater devotion to doing good work than to economic reward, as can be seen in all their statements of values and principles (or codes of ethics, in the case of social work and youth work). But the extent to which this ideology has widespread public or government credibility is questionable.

Many commentators have regarded the trends mentioned above as signalling a process of 'deprofessionalisation' in relation to professions in general. In respect of the social professions, there has been most discussion in the literature in relation to social work, both because social work has developed further with and perhaps is more committed to the so-called 'professional project' and because there is much less literature on youth work and community work generally. Commentators have noted as part of this trend: the increasing control over professional work by managers (managerialism); the introduction of competency-based training, with a focus on discrete technical skills, driven by employer needs (a technicist and reductionist approach to professional work); and the development of markets in the field of social care, including the contracting relationship between purchasers and providers (a market- and contract-based approach). The introduction of community care in the social work field is seen as particularly significant in this respect (see Hadley and Clough, 1997; Lymbery, 2000). Deprofessionalisation is variously associated with: decline in the status of an occupation; increasing external controls (from managers, employing agencies, government) along with declining professional autonomy and discretion; a threat to the core values of the work (in particular, anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory values); and a diminishing of the importance of relationships and processes in the work, with greater weight being placed on outputs, outcomes and value for money (see, for example: Dominelli, 1996; Hugman, 1998a, b; Langan, 2000; Payne, 1996).

Some of the commentators who highlight the deprofessionalising trends nevertheless suggest that there may be scope to move towards what Lymbery (2000, p. 133), following Larson (1977), calls a 'reprofessionalisation' process. In the social work field the term 'new professionalism' was introduced as long ago as the 1980s to encapsulate the potential for rising to the challenge of the radical critique of the professions as elitist, distant and parentalist, signifying a move towards a more equal and empowering relationship with users of services. The term is still being used, although with slightly differently nuanced meanings, to refer to a form of professionalism that works with collectivities, is participatory and acknowledges a primary responsibility to users (Hadley and Clough, 1997, p. 210; Hugman, 1998a, pp. 194–7). Bottery (1998, p. 173), in concluding his research on professionals and policy, calls for a redefinition of the role of the professional, suggesting that this should involve being 'more prepared to communicate with, educate and learn from the client', in order to secure a firmer foundation for professional practice and public trust. However, although professional education and training, revised codes of ethics, and academic and practice-based literature reflect anti-discriminatory and participatory approaches to the work of the social professions, the realities of everyday practice make such approaches hard to implement. Lymbery (2000, p. 133) suggests that whilst this may be the preferred paradigm for professional practice (compared with traditional professionalism and deprofessionalisation), it does not have 'significant purchase' at the present time, since a range of factors mediate the professional–service user relationship, restricting the capacity of workers to make creative responses to need. However, the increased emphasis in the modernising management agenda on active citizen and community participation, suggests this could be an area for professional practitioners to hold on to, build on and promote. Indeed, according to some commentators, they have a moral duty to do so. According to Tronto (2001, pp. 189, 195), professionals now face a 'fateful choice in thinking about their status in society' and she is in no doubt that they need to become 'more democratic, less elitist, and more relational'.

If we view the development of occupations and the professionalisation process over the long term (in the light of our earlier discussions in this chapter), whilst the trends mentioned above represent major shifts in policy and practice, they could also be seen as demonstrating how what counts as being a 'profession' shifts over time. We have already presented the argument that there are no essential features of professionalism, but rather a set of variables, the content and balance of which changes over time. On this view, it would not necessarily be impossible to regard an occupation that exercises limited autonomy over its work and performs largely technical tasks as a 'profession'. The notion of professionalism as constantly evolving takes account of the shifts towards technical competencies, increasing market influence and managerial control (often characterised as deprofessionalising trends), as well as more equal and participatory relationships with service users (sometimes characterised as part of a move towards a new professionalism), but does not necessarily see them as signifying a radical break with the past.

Concluding comments

In reviewing various approaches to the study of professionalism, the historical/developmental approach seems to be the most useful. It allows the occupations comprising the social professions to be viewed in relation to other occupations, and sees the process of professionalisation as relative to time, place and other social, economic and political circumstances. Consideration of the historical development of the occupations of social, youth and community work in the UK suggests that the notion of 'vocation' is an important aspect of the tradition of the social professions, as is a concern for social welfare (with overtones of social control) and a strong strand of anti-professionalism (in the sense of anti-elitism). A move towards a 'new professionalism' (with a focus on participatory relationships with service users) may not save them from the 'de-professionalising' trends affecting all occupations. However, these trends may also be viewed as part of the ever-changing concept of professionalism, rather than signifying the end of the professions, or, more specifically, the 'end of social work', or the 'end of youth work' as some commentators have predicted (Clarke, 1995; Payne, 1995; Smith, 2003).

This discussion of the nature of professions and professionalism is important in that it sheds light on the nature of the social professions (the main area of focus of this book), and paves the way for the more specific discussion of the ethics of professional groups. The rest of this book will explore the theme of professional ethics in relation to the ever-changing social professions, with the next chapter debating the extent to which the idea of professional ethics, as distinct from the ethics of ordinary life, makes sense at all.

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