

Social Justice Theory and Practice for Social Work

Lynelle Watts · David Hodgson

Social Justice Theory and Practice for Social Work

Critical and Philosophical Perspectives

 Springer

Lynelle Watts
School of Arts and Humanities
Edith Cowan University
Bunbury, WA, Australia

David Hodgson
School of Arts and Humanities
Edith Cowan University
Bunbury, WA, Australia

ISBN 978-981-13-3620-1 ISBN 978-981-13-3621-8 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-13-3621-8>

Library of Congress Control Number: 2018964014

© Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. 2019

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are reserved by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

This Springer imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd. The registered company address is: 152 Beach Road, #21-01/04 Gateway East, Singapore 189721, Singapore

*This book is dedicated to people everywhere
in their struggles for recognition and the
pursuit of social justice.
All monies the authors earn from commission
or sale of this book will be donated to the
Asylum Seeker Resource Centre in Australia
<https://www.asrc.org.au/>.*

Preface

In recent years, social justice has moved to become a central principle and value within social work. As social work educators, we found that many of our conversations with students and our colleagues centred on understanding, explaining and debating different approaches to addressing the many forms of injustice that require attention. We also found this area to be a slippery and difficult terrain to cover with students as it is replete with competing approaches, different conceptions of social justice and different levels of analysis. For example, the view of social justice changes with the level of resolution, depending on whether we are conceptualising justice at the level of individuals or groups and communities. This changes the kinds of questions we can ask about what should be done and why?

To address some of these issues, we turned to the literature to try and bring clarity to our discussions about social justice. We figured that others have experienced similar issues in grappling with the complexity of addressing social justice and engaging students in thinking and acting about it. In doing so, we could see there was an opportunity to initiate a dialogue between social work understandings of social justice—built from long engagement with people experiencing poverty, disadvantage, injustice, oppression, stigma and discrimination—and the critical and philosophical literature concerned with developing concepts and principles of social justice. We found that the philosophical literature can offer significant clarity in terms of tracing concepts such as freedom, democracy, theories of distribution and justice, and that critical theories offer a corpus of resources to theorise the way social structures perpetuate oppression, discrimination and stigma. We also found that many of these theoretical ideas have been tested and given significant expression in social work practices. Hence, we have used a mix of influential classic literature, as well as more contemporary sources.

This book, therefore, represents something of an interchange between social work literature and a range of critical and philosophical literatures that have considered issues of social justice. We see this as an important critical and practical activity intended to extend the conversation about social justice within social work. Thus, in writing this book, we have taken seriously the notion that critical reflection means testing the limits of the present with a view to transforming the conditions of

possibility, and thereby, going beyond them. Doing so means starting where we are, and that means engaging in dialogue about these issues with students and colleagues through writing this book.

Thus, a key aim with the book has been to contribute to the clarity about foundational concepts for illuminating social justice. These will be familiar to our readers: human rights, democracy, dignity, equality and fairness in distribution and outcome—all important values and practices for extending the reach of justice. We have done so in an open-ended fashion recognising the essentially contested nature of many of these values. The book has also offered a description of various problematics that work against these values and practices. Here, we are thinking of economic liberalisation and ongoing imperialisms, forms of structural oppression and discrimination, ramified patterns of poverty and disadvantage—all of which have been described and theorised extensively in critical social work literatures.

The book also has some limits. We have not provided a definitive outline of how social justice *ought* to be thought about, nor do we seek to legislate a single program of action or thought for social work to take. For example, the book is critical to the extent that it interrogates various limits to current theoretical thought but it is not specifying a particular version of critical theory. Rather, we have presented critical theories as important resources that may increase the resolution of specific forms of injustice. For example, Marxism has long been useful for descriptions of alienation but it has limits for helping to illuminate specific issues for peoples experiencing colonisation of land and culture. Other theories may have more explanatory power for this. Our aim has been to demonstrate putting theoretical resources to *work*.

The goal of the book is twofold. First, the book is aimed at students and educators in social work and provides resources to initiate and support discussions about social justice informed by a range of theoretical ideas drawn from the discipline of social work, the social sciences and areas of political and moral philosophy. Second, the book will support the work of practitioners and provide theoretical resources to consider different areas of practice within social work. We hope that with these goals the book will contribute to extending the conversation about social justice practice in social work.

Overview of the Structure and Layout of This Book

This book is organised into three main sections. The first part of this book (Chaps. 1–5) establishes the foundations for later chapters by reviewing the way that social work has developed social justice into its thinking, mission and ethics. We begin with an overview of injustice, outline a social work ethical conception of social justice and describe a history of social work’s methods and forms that have sought to bring about social justice. Part I of this book seeks to address the question: ‘what are we thinking of when we think of social justice in social work?’ Specifically, Chap. 1 explains what injustice is and gives examples of the forms of injustice, and it offers some

explanations as to why injustice persists. Chapter 2 explores the concept of social justice in social work ethics, and our aim here is to explore the way that social work has engaged with and conceptualised social justice; in particular, by looking at the articulation of social justice in social work codes of ethics. Chapter 3 continues this discussion by exploring the development of social work as a discipline and profession, which has always been engaged in the pursuit of social justice. We have done this from a historical vantage point by describing in general terms the different methods and approaches that give social work its form. We surveyed the history and major methodologies of social work, contending that social work has always been engaged in the pursuit of social justice, albeit in different ways. Chapters 4 and 5 broaden the discussion to problematise some macro level forces that create significant challenges for social work in the pursuit of social justice, such as the history and contemporary manifestation of capitalism and neoliberalism, and a critical analysis of power and its intersection with knowledge (especially biopower, risk and the new human sciences). Specifically, Chap. 4 explains liberal, Marxist and Keynesian critiques of capitalism, as well as outlining political economy and governmentality perspectives on neoliberalism. Chapter 5 explores structural and poststructural perspectives of power. Our concern in Chaps. 4 and 5 is to give shape to some enduring and emerging problems that social work must grapple with. These problematic factors are writ large as major challenges for the future of social justice, and deconstructing them is central to critically reflective and socially just social work practice.

Part II of this book draws primarily from political philosophy and we survey four major approaches that offer theoretical frameworks and concepts that can be articulated into a social work response for social justice. These critical and philosophical perspectives include: (1) critical social science and critical theory; (2) distributive theories of justice; (3) human rights and autonomy; and (4) democracy, participation and deep diversity. Specifically, Chap. 6 discusses the place of critical social science and critical theory to a transformative and critical account of social work and social justice. Chapter 6 has a particular emphasis on Marxist, feminist and postcolonial perspectives. Chapter 7 explains distributive theories of justice by outlining in detail the position advocated by John Rawls, and what this means for a focus on distribution and equality of opportunity, particularly in relation to the promotion of fair and just institutions. In Chap. 8, we draw from political and social philosophy, in the critical sense, to examine the role of democracy, participation and deep diversity as important concepts of social justice. Chapter 9 engages with social work's stated commitment to human rights, and then focuses specifically on the concept of autonomy and its relation to both social justice and human rights. We begin with liberal conceptions of autonomy, and then critique and reconstruct autonomy from feminist perspectives.

Part III of this book closes our discussion by bringing together summaries of the extant theory together into two chapters that offer a new synthesis and practical account of social justice theory and praxis for social work, and for social work education for social justice. In this sense, the final two chapters seek to answer the question: 'what should be done for social work to maintain its engagement in social justice thinking, practice and teaching and learning?' Specifically, Chap. 10

presents a reflexive framework for social justice theory by connecting the four critical and philosophical perspectives discussed in Chaps. 6–9, with social work literature on social work theories and practices for social justice. Finally, Chap. 11 describes a social justice oriented curriculum for social work education by introducing 48 learning outcomes that could be used to build a clear focus on social justice teaching and learning for social work. In Chap. 11, we explain curriculum design frameworks that will help social work educators plan and design curricula and teaching and learning processes that reflect a commitment to social justice.

How to Approach This Book

Our approach in this book has been to try to explain the main concepts, theories and arguments in a way that makes them open to discussion, critique and understanding. This is why many of the concepts and key ideas we introduce are discussed at length, and we have tried where possible to include reference to many original sources and key thinkers. Careful reading over these ideas may take some time, and we encourage readers to track down the sources we cite to deepen their engagement in the discussion. We would anticipate that readers should think critically about the ideas presented so as to arrive at their own view of them. As mentioned, we do not present this book as a definitive account of social justice, rather, it should be read as one part in an ongoing dialogue about social justice and what it means for social work. In presenting the main ideas, we have attempted to explain the historical, contextual and philosophical principles that inform them. Engaging with these ideas will help readers develop an understanding not only of the central ideas and what they might offer social work but also of their limits.

Bunbury, Australia

Lynelle Watts
David Hodgson

Acknowledgements

We acknowledge the traditional custodians of the land on which this book was written, the Wardandi people of the Nyungar Nation. We wish to pay our respects to ancestors and Elders of the community, past and present. We extend our recognition and respect to their descendants and other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and acknowledge their continuing culture and the contribution to the life of this place, region and land. We also wish to acknowledge that the issue of Australian Aboriginal sovereignty is an ongoing struggle and that Australia remains territory that was never ceded by its original inhabitants.

Writing a book is not easy and we are grateful for the support of many people in our lives who have offered assistance and encouragement when most needed.

We would like to thank Illaria Walker and Ambrose Berkumans at Springer, who have supported this project from the beginning and assisted with us with advice and direction.

We would like to thank our families who have been with us through the whole journey. David would like to thank Andrea, Xavier and Sienna. Lynelle would like to thank Peter, Kate, Beth, and Megan.

Special thanks to Graham Hodgson for helping with proofreading. Our thanks to Mia and Alan Crookes for the use of their house to get the project underway. Thanks also to Marilyn and Ed Reid for offering their house just in time for the final push—it was a lovely space in which to bring the project to a close.

Thanks to our colleagues at Edith Cowan University (ECU). Collegial spaces are so important to this kind of work and we appreciated the conversations and space to think these topics through. Our thinking has certainly benefited from various discussions with Dr. Hossein Adibi, Prof. Kathy Boxall, Rebecca Burns, Meisha Chalk, Dr. Colleen Carlon, Jeni Henderson, Dr. Lucy Hopkins, Karen McDavitt and Dr. Marilyn Palmer. Special thanks to Dr. Marilyn Palmer for reading and giving feedback on Chap. 4. Our thanks to Dr. Vicki Banham for her support to undertake the project.

We are also very grateful for what could best be described as an ongoing *hallelujah chorus* of supporters (listed here in no particular order): Alicia and Shaun Byatt, Cheryl Beard and the ECU South West Student Central Crew—Gemma Phanupen, Sarah Jones, Beth de Sales, Maddie House and Glenys Grigg—Merle Ann Cochrane, Gayle Hall, Jennifer Alamdar, Mike Groom, Gareth Braid, Prof. Donna Chung, Dr. Vahri McKenzie, Charmaine Lobo, Michael Berry, Sue Tencer, Carol Squire, Ross Litterick, Hovea Wilkes, Darcee Schultz, Sarah Anderson, Amy Warren, Priscilla Vindin and Jacquie Tarrant.

Last but by no means least, we thank our students at ECU—particularly the classes of 2017–2018. These folks often hear what we have been reading and thinking about first and they always offer us critical and important feedback on the ideas and their application to social work. It is these conversations that often push us to keep working at putting the ideas to work.

Contents

1	Injustice and Its Many Forms	1
	Introduction	1
	Injustice and Its Many Forms	2
	Inequality	3
	Refugees, Asylum Seekers and Displaced People	5
	Discrimination and Stigma	5
	Violence, Abuse and Mistreatment	6
	Racism	7
	Poverty	8
	Environmental Injustice	9
	Explaining Injustice: Some Organising Concepts	10
	Prejudice, Discrimination and the Links to Injustice	13
	Privilege	15
	Conclusion	17
	References	18
2	Social Justice as an Ethic of Social Work	23
	Introduction	23
	Defining Social Justice	24
	Some Background to Social Justice	25
	The Structural Analysis in Social Justice	26
	The Therapeutic Turn: Whither Social Justice?	27
	Social Justice and Social Work Ethical Codes	30
	Australia	32
	Canada	33
	International Federation of Social Workers (IFSW) and British Association of Social Workers	33
	Japan	33
	New Zealand	33
	United States	34

Conclusion	34
References	35
3 A Critical History of the Social Work Response to Social Justice	39
Introduction	39
The Problems of Presenting a History of Social Work	39
Knowledge and Social Work	40
Social Work Techniques	43
Visiting	44
Casework	46
Group Work	48
Community Organising	50
Policy and Advocacy	51
Conclusion	53
References	53
4 Capitalism and Neoliberalism	59
Introduction	59
What Is Capitalism?	61
A Mode of Production Concerning Private Property and Profit	61
A Requisite Condition for Democracy and Freedom	63
Marxist and Keynesian Critiques of Capitalism	63
Marxist Critique of Capitalism	64
Keynes' Critique of Unregulated Capitalism	65
Globalisation	66
Neoliberalism	67
Neoliberalism as a Favoured Policy Program	70
Institutional Transformation	70
Neoliberal Subjectivity and Hegemony	72
Contesting Neoliberalism	73
Conclusion	77
References	77
5 Power and Knowledge	81
Introduction	81
Structural and Behavioural Accounts of Power	83
Poststructural Accounts of Power	85
Pastoral Power	87
Risk and Biopolitics	88
Power, Knowledge and the Human Sciences	91
Conclusion	93
References	94

6	Critical Social Science and Critical Theory	97
	Introduction	97
	Critical Social Science or Critical Theory?	98
	Frankfurt School of Critical Theory	101
	Theory of False Consciousness	102
	Theory of Crisis	103
	Theory of Education	104
	Theory of Transformative Action	104
	Feminisms	105
	Theory of False Consciousness	107
	Theory of Crisis	107
	Theory of Education	108
	Theory of Transformative Action	108
	Postcolonialism	109
	Theory of False Consciousness	109
	Theory of Crisis	111
	Theory of Education	111
	Theory of Transformative Action	112
	Conclusion	112
	References	113
7	Distributive Theories of Justice	117
	Introduction	117
	Liberalism, Fairness and Equality	119
	Utilitarianism, Marxism and the Welfare State	120
	John Rawls—“A Theory of Justice”	121
	The Veil of Ignorance, the Original Position and Principles of Justice	122
	Against Utilitarianism	125
	Against Meritocracy	127
	The Primacy of the Individual	128
	Choice and Autonomy	129
	Cooperation	130
	Conclusion	131
	References	131
8	Democracy and Participation	133
	Introduction	133
	Nation-States and Civil Society	133
	Social Justice in the Nation-State	134
	The Nation-State as Coordinating Activities	135
	Civil Society	136

Constitutionalism and the Limits to Democracy	137
Constitutionalism and Popular Sovereignty	140
Freedom and Equality	143
Dependence—Freedom as Non-domination	144
Non-interference	145
Self-realisation	146
Deep Diversity	147
Conclusion	149
References	150
9 Human Rights and Autonomy	153
Introduction	153
Human Rights	155
The Moral Basis for Human Rights	155
Social Work and Human Rights	156
Human Rights and Globalisation	157
The Limitations to Juridical Human Rights	157
Autonomy	159
Preliminary Definitions and Concepts of Autonomy	159
Liberal and Kantian Notions of Autonomy	161
Communication, Speech and Deliberation	162
Autonomy and Practical and Social Identities	163
Feminist Critique and Reconstruction of the Concept of Autonomy	164
First Wave Feminism	164
Second Wave and Radical Feminism	165
Postcolonial Feminism	166
Poststructural Feminism	167
Conclusion	168
References	168
10 Social Justice and Social Work Practice	171
Introduction	171
Summary of the Four Approaches and Indicative Practices	173
Critical Social Science, Critical Theory and Social Work	173
Social Work and Approaches Towards Distributive Justice	175
Social Work Approaches Towards Participation and Democracy	176
Social Work and the Pursuit of Human Rights and Autonomy	177
Conclusion	179
References	182

- 11 Social Justice and Social Work Education** 187
 - Introduction 187
 - Curriculum Frameworks 188
 - Constructive Alignment 188
 - Backward Design 193
 - Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy of Learning 195
 - Concepts in Bloom’s Revised Taxonomy 195
 - The Knowledge Dimension 195
 - The Cognitive Dimension 198
 - Definitions for Learning Outcomes 200
 - Conclusion 204
 - References 204
- Index** 207

List of Figures

Fig. 10.1	An integrated model of social justice theory and practice	173
Fig. 11.1	Conceptual model of learning outcome to teaching and learning processes	202
Fig. 11.2	Worked example of learning outcome to teaching and learning processes	203

List of Tables

Table 2.1	Select attributes of social justice as reflected in social work codes of ethics.	34
Table 8.1	Features of democratic legitimacy.	141
Table 10.1	Summary of philosophical and critical perspectives on social justice and indicative social work practices.	180
Table 11.1	A learning outcome map for social justice curricula.	189