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THE SELF AND THE CONDUCT OF THE  
PEOPLE-WORKING PROFESSIONS

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ABSTRACT

This article discusses the evolution of people-working professions through four synchronic eras: 1) the traditional era, 2) the voluntaristic era, 3) the professional era, and 4) the cybernetic era. People-working professions are conceptually distinguished from traditional (craft) professions which serve as the model for most sociological analyses of the professions. In addition to differences in the nature of the knowledge used and the context of the service rendered, a distinction is drawn regarding the focus of the work done. People-workers give service to other selves (egos) while craft professions work with objects or parts of the person. The historical evolution of people-workers, as well as current issues and future prospects for the people-working professions, are considered within the context of this separate identity.

This paper is premised on the existence of a clear and intrinsic difference between the people-working professions (more commonly, but often misleadingly, called the helping professions) and what can best be called the craft professions<sup>1</sup> (Bennett and Hokenstad, 1974; and Bennett and Dorsey, 1977). Primarily, this means that people-working professions deal with selves (not objects) in the pursuance of their day-to-day work. Secondly, the above makes the people-working professions inherently political--in many senses of the

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<sup>1</sup>The notions of people-working professions and craft professions are, of course, ideal types. Any person providing service to another person in the course of a day's work may often "be" one or the other at various times or in various settings. But some services (social work, applied psychology, and education) tend toward one type, while other service fields (architecture and medicine) tend toward the other. The balance struck during a day's work seems critical to any sociological analysis of the professions.

word. This major conceptual distinction will be briefly reviewed in the next section. It then will be applied to the social history of the people-working professions to help explain major changes in their development and especially to elucidate their uncertain future.

The evolution of people-working occupations will be explored as a unique phenomenon in its own right, not as part of a general occupational trend. To this end, a somewhat arbitrary division of the history of full-time people-work will be made, dividing it into four empirically overlapping eras with special regard to the extent "selves" get involved and the concomitant political implications. These are not meant to be hard-and-fast time frames in a diachronic sense; but are structural, or synchronic, in nature. The four synchronic eras will be referred to as: 1) the traditional era, 2) the voluntaristic era, 3) the professional era, and 4) the cybernetic era.

This typology is used with two provisos. First, it is not relevant to the development of the craft professions. For example, was there ever a voluntaristic era in medicine or law? Or, in modern times, did these fields show any self-doubt that they were high status occupations--or "professions?" On the other hand, both of the above questions have been major foci of debate in the social work, education, and mental health fields. Secondly, the term radical era, or radicalization, has been avoided in referring to recent developments in people-working professions, although it has become popular to do so. The future of radicalism in these fields will remain problematic throughout this paper, although it is recognized as an important question to be explored.

#### A FURTHER WORD ON PROFESSIONS

As noted, the authors have elsewhere distinguished between craft professions and people-working professions. A brief review seems appropriate here, as at least the terminology is profoundly unfamiliar.

The craft professions in their work seem most succinctly described in a definition intended to apply to all "professions." Wilensky (1964) refers to a profession as "... (an occupation) which emphasizes autonomous expertise and a service ideal." The coordinates referred to are: 1) degree of autonomy, 2) expert knowledge, and 3) service. This tripart definition has achieved widespread acceptance, at least among those who use the term "professional" at all as a sociological concept, or in sociological theory (Barber, 1963; Moore, 1970; Etzioni, 1969; Goode, 1970; etc.).

The concept of the people-working professions (from here on p-w-p's) is conceived as a polar-opposite ideal type (Berger and Bendix, 1959) juxtaposed to the craft professions. They can be contrasted in important ways on all three dimensions. First, p-w-p's are seen as involving anthropogogical knowledge (or methods) as opposed to expert knowledge (Benne, 1970). In brief, anthropogogical methods imply the sharing of knowledge, values, etc., so that the client becomes more like the worker. Benne used the analogy of the medical school professor as practitioner (a craft professional doing heart surgery) and as a teacher (a people-worker helping to create future heart surgeons). Secondly, the p-w-p's are not politically autonomous. Their jobs as educational gatekeepers, dispensers of welfare, parole officers, psychiatric diagnosticians, counselors, etc., always involve them in activities of deep political and social significance. This is true in terms of the nature of the interpersonal relationship, as well as the social context of the service provided. Politics is woven into their daily round of work, even if some of their tasks are strictly "objective" or craft-like in nature. Society is concerned with medical prescriptions or architectural designs, but these are only marginally political subjects. Daily work with them does not primarily involve political action or efforts at interpersonal influence.

Thirdly, and most critical to this paper, is the fact that p-w-p's give service to other selves (egos, life spaces, or other related internal or subjective entities<sup>2</sup>) very much like their own. Craft professions, in turn, work with non-thinking, self-less objects like kidneys or blueprints. The object of people-working is the self or ego of the client. If the core of the self is not always involved, important extensions of self, such as social status (Becker, 1971) or some cathected part of ego (Freud, 1927; Berne, 1964), are the foci of attention or "treatment." Indeed, this paper will continually return to a concern for social status or valued roles. While poorly defined constructs, they are important to just about everyone in western society. Teachers, social workers, psychologists, etc., work most of their time in ways that affect the social status of others. This work often has dramatic effects on clients. Although some are routine or expected (granting a high school diploma), others are difficult or controversial (restoring child custody in a welfare case). Using anthropogogical methods, this usually implies bringing the client closer to the social level or competence of the worker himself.

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<sup>2</sup>The purist would want us to use the term "construct"; but the position here is that the mental life is real, even if directly observable by a single person, in this case the client of a p-w-p.

## THE TRADITIONAL ERA

In the traditional era there were no formalized p-w-p's, per se. E.C. Hughes (1959) has pointed out that the very term "professional" derives from "professing" of religion by priests, pastors, or rabbis. Today, ministers are involved in people-working activities; but, in earlier days, a religious calling was akin to a craft pursuit in which someone prescribed action based on expert knowledge of some thing—the Bible, the lives of Saints, or the Talmud.<sup>3</sup> This approach to working with people is remindful of the prescribing of medicine by modern doctors (with all its mystique). Remnants of the traditional era also remain in the direct provision of benefits in welfare departments or city missions. These are a useful, even critical, part of social welfare; but peripheral to the interpersonal exchange which is the core of modern people-work.

The mode for the traditional era is paternalistic; and, ironically, bears resemblance to current descriptions of the "professional" (Wilensky, et al., 1963). But, historically and synchronically, it precedes the beginning of full-time people-working, whatever the actual dates. It is the relationship of priest to parishioner; of gentry to peasant; of sheriff to "fellow." If human behavior is changed, it is through unmediated social control, albeit within a shared culture. Interpersonal relations and ego changes are peripheral concerns.

## THE VOLUNTARY ERA

The term "voluntary" conjures up images of charity and benevolence--of non-paid, do-gooderism by ladies of the parish or businessmen/philanthropists. Such voluntarism exists today in the spirit of some private charities and widespread volunteer work (e.g., Big Brothers). But, in historical fact, beginning in the aftermath of the Elizabethan Poor Laws, people-working in this long period<sup>4</sup> was in no way essentially benevolent. It was associated with the rise of the nation-state and merchant capitalism (Scull, 1977) and with the attending dispersion of social elements and a growing uncertainty in social relations. As Scull (1975, 1977) points out, the first full-time people-workers emerged as agents of institutional or state control. Sometimes these "institutions" were of brick and mortar, e.g., poorhouses, and

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<sup>3</sup> Scripture was not debated. It was used much like a tool or "instrument."

<sup>4</sup> Roughly 1600 to the second half of the 19th century.

sometimes symbolic, e.g., a written set of laws and regulations governing those who deviated. It is here, though, that we get the first notion of deviant selves, as opposed to "mere" deviant behaviors. Ideas develop, even theories (Bentham, 1791; Malthus, 1798; or MacFarlan, 1782), that there is something fundamentally wrong with some people; something that might be treated and "cured."

Likewise, the individual deviant of this period is now often an outsider or stranger to those in control. Some effort is made to understand or engage the self of the deviant; but this is mainly to create a stereotype, e.g., the "lunatic" or "savage." Indeed, most people-working of the voluntary era uses stereotypes to communicate about "clients" and the selves of clients. Among the most generous, and dramatic, of the early p-w-p's were missionaries among the North American Indians. The goal of this work was clearly to save souls (selves), and it brought almost unbelievable hardship on the priests. Certainly, this work was extraordinary to the usual priestly profession. The Indians were truly strangers who might be made more like the missionary in the latter's devotion, his view of the world, and eventually his customs. Considering the barriers, early missionaries were successful in a surprising number of cases. They also, often unwittingly, functioned as agents of social control.

Even if not far outside the system like the savage, the deviant was increasingly defined as an outsider, e.g., as "mad" or "insane" or a "street arab" (Cremin, 1959). People entrusted with control often benefited by societal laws or grants, but could rarely assume a shared culture or even a shared language with the mass of clients. Thus, dialectically, the very depersonalization of much people-working forced increased efforts to understand the self of the deviant, whether to convert or coerce him.

Finally, for some workers people-working became a full-time enterprise. For most, it still did not imply a change in status relations. The people-worker was still of the upper classes and still received rewards in the manner of self-congratulation, community recognition, relief of guilt or some other intrinsic reward. This was the case with early reformers as diverse as James Mills and Dorothea Dix.

Exceptions to this altruistic mode can be found in the "entrepreneurs" of the era--the managers of alms houses, indoor relief or asylums. These, too, were forerunners of full-time, paid people-workers of the coming Professional Era. One characteristic they shared (perhaps more consciously) with the upper strata volunteers was serving the social control needs of the new merchant capitalists. In fact, the manager of an "asylum" was often a petite bourgeois capitalist himself (Rothman, 1971; Scull, 1977), making a profit from his operation.

## THE PROFESSIONAL ERA<sup>5</sup>

The Professional Era generally coincides with the rise of more sophisticated forms of capitalism and economic monopoly (Scull, 1977; Ardant, 1975). Correlatively, bureaucratic principles of organization developed; and this trend added another aspect of social control (Wallerstein, 1974: 133).

At a more self-conscious level, the era is identified with an effort to approximate the vaguely understood model of the traditional professions—medicine, law, and the ministry. Emphasis on formal education, unique knowledge and skills, and organization developed in the late 1800's and early 1900's. The emergence of people-working as a series of related occupations, and the organizational efforts of the occupational group, helped to solidify the status position of the worker. The Professional Era also was marked by a primary focus on working with people full-time as a paid occupation. Remuneration for service was increasingly the main means of income for the worker and, thus, the basis for a full-time career.

Paradoxically, this era was marked by alteration of one dimension of the social stratification of worker and deviant (now patient or client). The emergence of people-workers into discernable occupational groups solidified only the status position, whereas income differentials between worker and client were declining. In social work, especially, the paid worker often was not earning more than his clients and certainly less than his "blue stocking" predecessors. The teacher-college graduate also exemplified the decline of a major p-w-p to lower middle class economic conditions and origins (Cremin, 1959). College instructors (lacking outside income from inheritance or publication) were not much better off (Osteroff, 1962).

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<sup>5</sup>So much has been written on this broad social phenomenon, that the authors will only highlight a few theoretical points.

## THE CYBERNETIC ERA<sup>6</sup>

Use of the somewhat worn term "cybernetic" to denote the fourth, or current, era is quite intentional and tends to make more explicit what has been implicit in this paper. The synchronic ordering of the "eras" relies heavily on the assumption that underlying economic and social factors have played a major role in defining modes of p-w-p work, as well as forms of their political/social control functions. There is a fairly obvious association of "professionalism" with the development of urban industrialization (especially early automation innovations) and the sophisticated ways of ordering capital associated with it. However, the introduction of cybernation and its economic correlates has just begun; and, thus, seems destined to bring its own profound changes to nearly all forms of work. Few will be immune. Marie Haug (1974) has argued that even the physician may someday become obsolete, at least as he is known today, due to the introduction of computers to medicine.

Several major changes in the work force and the nature of work already have resulted from cybernation and its correlates. The continuation and likely acceleration of these trends have major implications for the people-working professions. First, as fewer workers are involved in the direct production of goods, there will be a continued rapid growth of the service professions, whether of the craft or people-working varieties. Secondly, increasing attention will be given to problems of personal adjustment. Thirdly, there will be a continuing reduction in the status differential between professional and client. The first of these observations is self-evident, but the latter two need further elaboration.

Self-fulfillment and related self-adjustment problems will increasingly become a focal point of the human services in the post-industrial society.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Cybernation is, of course, the precise term. Cybernetics is the study of any use of feedback mechanisms, while cybernation is the application of this knowledge, especially utilizing computers to monitor and regulate productive and/or bureaucratic processes. The implications for employment are profound, as cybernation accelerates the decline and reduction of blue collar work and begins to impact on many white collar workers as well.

<sup>7</sup>This is not to discount grave economic issues, as well as matters of individual and group equality, which will continue to be of major concern to some p-w-p's.



This will result from less need to focus on basic economic needs and increased time to spend thinking about one's self and others. R.D. Laing has already indicated the clinical and political implications of emerging self/other complexities and uncertainties (Laing, 1968; and Laing and Cooper, 1973). But the "radicalism" of Laing and others aside, increased free time and education imply rapidly expanding needs for the attention of people-workers.

For the professions generally, one important implication of the Cybernetic Era will be a heightening of the contrast between people-working and craft professions. As those services not directly involving selves or their extensions (status, roles, etc.) follow industry in becoming more dependent on computers or other electronic media, the inherently impersonal nature of craft professions as modes of work will become more evident. In the past, whenever a craft professional (e.g., an architect or dermatologist) has dealt with a client, considerable informal people-working has been an important part of the process. As computers increasingly enter into the diagnosis of skin ailments or the generating of construction blueprints, the necessity for face-to-face interaction between craft professional and client becomes markedly less important. The use of any individualistic mode of offering what is essentially an exact, or craft, service (with a definitive right or wrong solution) will retreat before the necessity for a clear computer printout.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, it seems that the importance of p-w-p's and their use of idiosyncratic methods and idiographic knowledge (both implicit in the anthropogical approach) will increase. The many ways in which rapid social change makes the nature of "self" problematic will call for greater attention to people's selves and an infinity of unique problems. It is unlikely that a computer can supplant the people-worker's own self as a tool in doing this work, any more than it can replace the poet's intuition or the baseball pitcher's arm (to note two other likely growth occupations).

An example from a mixed profession further supports this observation. Currently, the proliferation of psychotropic drugs has reached astonishing proportions. There are roughly 50-60 generic tranquilizers, anti-depressants, and stimulants on the market. This expansion will almost certainly continue with increasing inductive use of the computer, altering a molecule here or a chemical bond there, with the idea of rearranging existing compounds for

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<sup>8</sup> Obviously, we are a long way from unambiguous computer printouts, or easy access to data banks; but rapid progress is being made.

slightly different effects (Deuber, 1979). Eventually, psychiatrists may prescribe by computer. As the drugs proliferate, physicians will find it necessary to ask centralized computers what psychotropic drug has been effective with this set of symptoms or that stubborn behavior pattern. Although it sounds like Huxley, this is not science fiction, but a very real likelihood (Haug, 1973) that will further reduce personal contact between medication-oriented psychiatrists and their clients.

The third significant aspect of the Cybernetic Era--a reduction in status differential between professional and client--is similar to the earlier narrowing of class distinctions. The paternalistic model will "wither away," replaced by a more egalitarian relation between a worker and someone who needs a service. It is interesting to note that craft professionals have never assumed a status difference, per se, in favor of the professional. The president of the United States has a personal physician, and so does the mine worker at his prepaid clinic.<sup>9</sup> In any case, it is lower status groups which have been the traditional clients of people-workers. Now the typical teacher is confronted with much better educated parents more likely to challenge the system. In fact, many may look down on the teacher for his working class behavior of unionizing and even walking a picket line. Social workers and psychologists, likewise, increasingly face status equals as the counseling component of their jobs increases relative to welfare screening or psychological testing. More and more counselors are going into private practice or working in specialized agencies dealing with a predominantly middle class clientele.

One possible source of status change involving p-w-p's and clients is the very elimination of many low status occupations. Due to cybernation, we may someday all be white collar workers or unemployed.<sup>10</sup> Welfare work will likely remain one part of the core identity of social work. However, even here, educational levels and social sophistication will increase among

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<sup>9</sup>To the writers' knowledge, no president has sought out a social worker or psychologist, although a few may have consulted psychiatrists in a secretive fashion much in contrast with the media event that is the chief executive's annual physical examination.

<sup>10</sup>Vonnegut's hauntingly prophetic fictional work on cybernation and social class (Player Piano, 1951) vividly portrays this possibility.

the "poor." (An extreme example is the case of a Ph.D. visiting an employment counselor or seeking food stamps, a situation that is more and more common in an unsettled professional job market.) The "poor" of the Cybernetic Era will include social castoffs from skilled fields, both industrial and clerical, that differ little in social prestige from social work.

If dress is a traditional key to status, an observation by one researcher is relevant. Roper (1977) reports that while doing research on welfare programs, he could not easily distinguish between the professional staff and the "poor" clients on the basis of attire. That would have seemed ludicrous in 1930, and unlikely as recently as 1960. The casual dress of many psychotherapists (even psychiatrists) seems to reflect the notion that p-w-p's shouldn't create status differences through dress.

A different aspect of this trend is found in the expanding field of alcohol and drug counseling. That is the growing tendency to hire former abusers regardless of their prior jobs or status. An informal survey (Bennett, 1979) of twenty substance abuse counselors in two cities found that 16 were former abusers and that 12 described themselves as downwardly mobile. The other side of the coin is the increase in the abuse of drugs in the middle and upper classes and by clients of all ages and occupations.

#### PROSPECTS FOR THE PEOPLE-WORKING PROFESSIONS

The above observations, of course, need further testing. A longitudinal study would be needed to determine if, over time, intergroup status perceptions are becoming increasingly uncertain and if fewer significant status differences (education, occupation, race, residence, diet and dress) are found between p-w-p's and their various clients. If our hypothesis proves accurate, workers and clients will increasingly identify with the same social worlds and, consequently, perceive each other as equals.

It is the slowly converging status and class conditions of worker and client that has the most profound implications for the political dimensions of p-w-p roles. People-working has always included a political dimension and its social control function has long been recognized implicitly or explicitly (Scull, 1974). Yet, the recent sharpening of such concerns and its potential for social conflict in even the most routine p-w-p settings is not widely recognized. It is largely ignored both in practice and in the professional schools. Psychiatric commitment, child custody decisions, patient rights and student power to mention only a few micro-political matters, are increasingly problematic for many workers. Many are unprepared

for increasingly important professional strategies, such as negotiation, brokerage, advocacy, alliance, and compromise, as major tools for their work. The lack of skills to use such tools and even the lack of understanding about the social context in which they are needed will lead to increased worker "burn out" as well as increasingly ineffective practice.

The ways in which these and related aspects of the worker/client interaction are addressed will help to shape the nature of people-working in the emerging Cybernetic Era. The extent to which they are dealt with or avoided will have major implications for the security and role certainty of full-time people-workers. They will impact on the selves of both worker and client. They will require new methods and by implication new uses of self.

These trends and the resulting theoretical, methodological, and even ethical issues currently are of tangential concern to many, if not most, p-w-p training programs. Yet, they are becoming critically important in the practice of people-work. From a normative standpoint, they should be basic to the socialization and education of all varieties of people-workers. The underlying changes that are affecting the human service fields and the way in which they are addressed will have a profound impact on the coming generation of p-w-p's in both their career patterns and their everyday work.

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