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Does Saul Alinsky Belong in Jesuit Education?

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Abstract

How do we help our students acquire academic knowledge as well as develop public skills to address and solve problems in the world? Additionally, how do we give students hope that their skills and talents can be used to make the world and their communities safer, more sustainable and productive? These are central questions of Jesuit education. The American community organizer Saul Alinsky and the community organizing tradition that he founded have some things to offer us in our attempts to provide academic and public skills as well as hope to our students. Through a brief examination of Alinsky's career and an explanation of the world view of community organizing as articulated in his most famous book, *Rules for Radicals*, this paper demonstrates that Alinsky and his ideas can enhance our project as Jesuit educators.

Hope and Change

One of the challenges of teaching young people in the early twenty-first century is helping them see through the deep despair and troubles of the world. This is especially the case at a Jesuit institution, where many of our students are naturally attracted to the process of making the world a better place. The question all of us have to face, whether we are in History, Chemistry, Education, or Physics is: how do we give hope to our students? For instance, it is easy to tell them about climate change, poverty, war, or any other given political problem. It is much more challenging, though, to give them tools, strategies, and methods to address and solve those problems.

There is an abiding concern within Jesuit higher education to help students open up to the world in all its messiness and joy, and to develop a critical consciousness that allows them to examine the world as it is and, *hopefully*, do something about the injustices that surround them. I emphasize "hopefully" here because I think that is exactly where we as Ignatian educators are lacking. We hope too much that our students are getting what we are putting down and that they will carry Ignatian values into the world. Some of them will and some of them won't. Some of them will do so with or without us, and some of them won't, in spite of everything we could possibly do. Our challenge is to firm up hope and begin to take seriously our responsibility to give our students

strategies and methods to stand for justice in their public and professional lives.

Saul Alinsky and the Community Organizing Tradition

The American community organizer, Saul Alinsky, has something to offer us in this regard, although that might not seem the case at first blush. Alinsky was known for his aggressive verbal style, polarizing politics, and Machiavelli-like political strategizing. He dedicated his most famous book, *Rules for Radicals*, to Lucifer, his methods for fighting injustice were antagonistic, and he bragged about learning his tactics from Chicago gangsters. He believed the means justified the ends when it came to political fights, he publically humiliated his enemies, and he encouraged his students and readers to do the same. He organized large-scale actions against city, municipal, and corporate organizations. He was obstreperous, arrogant, and publicly, he could be mean spirited. But, as he said to his long-time friend and colleague Monsignor, Jack Egan when Egan asked him why he did his work, "Oh, Jack, I hate to see people get pushed around."¹

Alinsky was a lifelong champion of the disenfranchised and the oppressed. He saw his brand of community organizing as nothing less than a democratizing force in American life. He located his work firmly within the Jeffersonian tradition of freedom of thought, opposition to

corporate and state-sponsored tyranny, and the fundamental belief that individuals had the right and the capacity to solve their own problems. He consistently sided with the poor, the disenfranchised, and people of color; he found novel and successful ways of helping communities of color organize themselves against oppressive systems.

Alinsky was the first person to recognize the power of organizing communities, as opposed to workplaces: the work of labor unions. For instance, in the late 1930s he helped the Back of the Yards community in Chicago (this was the neighborhood of Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*) secure basic services. Alinsky subsequently formed the Industrial Areas Foundation, a Chicago-based organization that is still thriving today and that has trained tens of thousands of ordinary people to stand up to oppression and violence. In the 1960s Alinsky's Industrial Areas Foundation worked with the Woodlawn area, a section of economically disenfranchised neighborhoods threatened by gentrification from the expansion of the University of Chicago. After the 1964 race riots in Rochester, New York, he was summoned by black and white churches to begin an organizing campaign to preclude any more violence from happening. His work in Rochester helped blacks fight Eastman Kodak's racist labor practices. On the other side of the country, one of his lead organizers, Fred Ross, found a politically naïve Cesar Chavez in the barrios of San Jose, California and taught him how to organize farm workers in California's Central Valley. And he kept pretty good company as well: Alinsky was good friends with the Catholic philosopher, Jacques Maritain² and the American popular educator, Myles Horton.

Alinsky played outside the lines of what many Americans considered to be fair and polite. At the same time, one could say that his rule book was written by the great radicals of American culture and politics—Jefferson and Paine, for instance—who set out to establish a politics and culture opposed to tyranny. Given this, Alinsky is probably best understood as a jeremiadic figure in American culture. That is, he is very much a part of mainstream America: an insider who believes the system can work, but that it has gone off the rails of its founding principles. Alinsky's impact is

like Bob Dylan's—circa the 1965 Newport Folk Festival—in the music world, Duchamp's in early twentieth-century art, and Becket's in twentieth-century theatre. He makes us see the world differently, and he does it through shock, provocation, and agitation. Alinsky, like these others, plays slightly off beat: not enough to destroy or entirely pull apart the rhythm and the melody of the piece we are all playing and singing, but enough to force us to pay attention.

Alinsky, a secular Jew, established deep and abiding ties with the Catholic Church, especially in his hometown of Chicago. His work in Chicago neighborhoods was respected and supported by Catholic clergy and parishes. This is evident in his long-term relationship with Bernard Sheil, the progressive, pro-labor and social-justice minded Bishop and then Archbishop of Chicago. Alinsky also enjoyed a long-term professional and personal relationship with Monsignor Jack Egan. Alinsky was enough of an insider within Chicago Catholic political circles to get invited to address the National Catholic Charities Conference in 1942 where he took to task Catholic leaders for their lack of real leadership and the absence of Catholic leaders “who are completely committed to rendering their services, their abilities and their lives for the benefit of their fellow men.”³ Despite those tough words and probably because he was generally trusted in the Chicago Catholic community, he had an audience with Pope Pius XII in 1958.

How, specifically, does Alinsky give students hope and confidence to act in the world? To map this out, I am going to briefly describe a class on Alinsky that I teach and then sketch out the world view of community organizing that Alinsky describes in *Rules for Radicals*. Finally, I will make a case for including Alinsky in Jesuit education.

Community Organizing in the Classroom

I teach a course, “Stand Up and Fight: Saul Alinsky and the Community Organizing Tradition,” at Regis University. I have taught this course in a variety of iterations at three different higher education institutions over the past ten years. Here, though, I am going to focus on the course as I have taught it at Regis.

First, I will offer brief context and explanation of the course. We begin the fifteen week course by reading Alinsky’s writing and mapping out the world view of community organizing. After that, the students choose a campus-based issue on which they want to work for the rest of the semester, and then they try to organize the campus community around their particular issue. Specifically, they each conduct ten one-to-one relational meetings with members of the campus community: students, faculty, administrators, staff; they organize and hold at least one house meeting, which is a meeting with ten to fifteen likeminded people designed to build interest around the issue at hand; and they perform a public action around their issue. I give them extensive classroom training and opportunities to practice the one-to-one and house meetings as well as plan their final public actions.

Table 1 provides a quick overview of the topics on which students have chosen to work at the Regis campus. The first column lists all of the organizing projects students have developed. The “Action” column explains the final public action

students organized and the next column lists the requests the students made at that action. The “Result” column explains the outcome of the group’s request. The students set up all the one-to-one, house, and action meetings. My role is limited to work we do in the classroom. I never get involved in their projects beyond helping them strategize. Staying on the periphery of the projects, that is, not getting involved with the public relationships the students are forming, is an intentional pedagogical choice. Should I get more involved and, for example, attend their house meetings or discuss the projects with administrators with whom the students are working, my presence would get in the way of the students’ work and I would end up compromising their ownership over the projects.

Students generally respond in one of two ways to this course: it either changes their lives and their ways of thinking about people and the world, or they never want to think about community organizing again! This is because the course and the community organizing tradition require students to go beyond the requirements of a

Table 1 Project Topics

Campus-Based Issue	Number of Students	Action	Request	Result
Composting	3	Meeting with food service providers and off-campus compost providers	Compost all food waste from cafeteria	On-going composting in cafeteria
Free Trade Coffee on Campus	3	Meeting with food service providers	Transition to fair trade coffee on campus	Denied
Genocide Awareness in classrooms	6	Six Faculty consultations	Include genocide awareness/history in classrooms	Tacit agreement, but no long-standing action
Sexual Health on campus	6	Meeting with high-level administrators	Expand sexual health workshops and information for students	Ongoing
Prison Education	4	Meeting with Sociology faculty members to create program	Create a prison education program between Regis and local women’s prison	Ongoing
Brand Marketing	6	Meeting with Brand Marketing Executive Officers	Acknowledge Jesuit heritage in external marketing campaigns	Denied
Water usage on campus	4	Meeting with faculty and Physical Plant Staff	Create xeriscape gardens on campus	Ongoing

typical academic class. Yes, students in this course write papers and read and discuss texts, but they also find themselves in new and different relationships with adults and with people who have a certain amount of institutional power. They initiate formal meetings and impromptu conversations with people to whom they would generally never speak: administrators, staff, and students who hold views that conflict with their own. They engage in public conversations about things that really matter to both parties, and they find ways to develop public, working relationships with these people around the campus issue they have chosen to explore. They become knowledgeable experts on campus-based issues by conducting extensive research on the issue, both on and off campus, and they get to a point where they can debate the complexity of the issue with people who hold power and authority around that issue on campus. Through this research and discussion, they form opinions and they make those opinions public. They inspire others to act. As a result they develop a toolbox of methods and strategies to become political agents.

The Worldview of Community Organizing

A worldview is a set of ideas that provides a way of seeing and interpreting the world and, ideally, offers strategies and methods to make our way through human relationships and problems. A world view, in other words, is both a theory and a practice. People often confuse community organizing as simply a practice or a set of strategies and methods divorced from ideas. In Alinsky's case, he forwarded this notion of organizing as a list of "rules" to be followed by subtitling his most famous book, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals*. A careful read of *Rules*, however, will reveal a mind at work, a mind that is attaching ideas to practices.

Let's briefly consider the meaning of "organize" in the community organizing tradition. Generally speaking, when we use the word "organize" we are talking about acting on the physical, tangible world. Organizing in this sense means using our physical energy to bring order to chaos. Quotidian examples would be organizing your closet, desk, or calendar. Organizing, in other words, is a task, and it's safe to say it's a task that most of us dislike. Community organizing, on the other hand,

has to do with the organization of the mind. It is, in a way, what the Wizard of Oz has in mind when he reminds Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tinman, and the Lion that they already possess the things they believe they lack: "You, my friend, are a victim of disorganized thinking," he informs the Lion, "You are under the unfortunate impression that just because you run away you have no courage; you're confusing courage with wisdom." As we will see below, the community organizing tradition helps us untangle some of our thinking, especially as it relates to how we can accomplish work in the world.

Power

One of Alinsky's most interesting and important projects was linguistic in nature. One of his teaching methods was to struggle received language from its common understanding. Take the word "power," for example. Alinsky writes that "power" has become "twisted and warped, viewed as evil."⁴ Alinsky tweaks the Kumbaya-singing, what's-so-funny-'bout-peace-love-and-understanding political left that has come to use power as a negative term, suggestive of an oppressive force that dominates the politically weak and disenfranchised. He writes that "Power . . . has become an evil word, with overtones and undertones that suggest the sinister, the unhealthy, the Machiavellian. . . . It evokes images of cruelty, dishonesty, selfishness, arrogance, dictatorship and abject suffering. . . . Power, in our minds, has become almost synonymous with corruption and immorality."⁵ In contrast to this common understanding of the word, Alinsky reminds us that power is actually the ability to act:

Power is the very essence, the dynamo of life. It is the power of the heart pumping blood and sustaining life in the body. It is the power of active citizen participation pulsing upward, providing a unified strength for a common purpose. Power is an essential life force always in operation, either changing the world or opposing change. Power, or organized energy, may be man-killing explosive or a life-saving drug. The power of a gun may be used to enforce slavery or to achieve freedom."⁶

It's worth noting here that Alinsky wraps the idea of power up in the language of nature and the

body. In other words, power just is. As long as you are alive—and here he is speaking of the individual and the body politic—you have power. It can't be taken away from you. You can choose not to activate it, but it's always there, as we live. Once people, and in the context of this essay, students, get this idea of power and begin to operate from that position, their views about themselves—and I would go so far as to say their views about their academic disciplines and the role they play in the world—begin to change. This idea of power is the bedrock of action in the world and the animation of knowledge in the public sphere; that is, you can't get students to have public conversations around controversial issues with university officials or even their peers if they don't understand and believe in this idea of power. By extension, you can't expect students to develop confident professional lives if they don't have opportunities to act publicly in a university setting. And, frankly, there are very few places in this culture where our students are getting these kinds of ideas, so we can't expect or assume that they bring these ideas with them to the university, and we can't blame them for their apathy if we are not teaching them how to have public lives.

Students in my community organizing class work with power in a variety of real and practical ways. For instance, at the beginning of their project, the group working on water usage on campus ran into roadblocks as they attempted to create a relationship with staff members who oversee the campus' sprinkler systems. In short, the students noticed and documented overwatering of the campus lawns. They did research on other campuses water policies, they talked to representatives at Denver Water, and they researched xeriscape garden initiatives on other campuses. Armed with this information, they started emailing people on campus who had some authority over water usage. When their emails and, later, phone calls were not returned, they were incensed and demoralized and, frankly, why would they not be? They did their homework and were inspired to act, but (at least according to their initial interpretation) there was no one on the receiving end of their calls for change. Of course, it's not that simple. The folks who work with water policy on campus are diligent, thoughtful professionals who also think deeply about conserving water, but they were not any more

used to responding to student requests than the students were normalized to developing working relationships with them. So, initially at least, the students demonized the “water guys” (“They are not returning our phone calls!”) and the “water guys,” understandably, ignored the student requests. It's that gridlock that oftentimes stops political and cultural change. The other side, whoever it is, isn't listening to us, so why should we continue? They have the power, and we don't, so let's just forget about it. Alinsky and the community organizing tradition have something to offer to these responses because when students understand power as an ability to act, as something that they naturally possess, they can more readily and confidently move into these situations. In the case of the water group, they persisted with their requests for a meeting, and through one-to-ones and a series of house meetings that involved Physical Plant staff, faculty and students, they developed a positive working relationship and are currently working together to develop a xeriscape garden on campus.

The World As It Is v. The World As It Should Be

Understanding power as an ability to act frees us to accept, without giving in, to the reality of the injustices of the world that we live in. Yet understanding power as a concept and an ability to act belies a larger question: *How* are we to act? Most of Alinsky's writings are a response to this question and one of the concepts he discusses in *Rules—the world as it is/the world as it should be*—is helpful to students as they engage their campus work. Alinsky argues that understanding *the world as it is/world as it should be* is a “basic requirement for the understanding of the politics of change,” explaining that “we must work with it on its terms if we are to change it to the kind of world we would like it to be.”⁷

As Alinsky sets it up, *the world as it is* is made up of Realists who see the world as “an arena of power politics moved primarily by perceived immediate self-interests, where morality is a rhetorical rationale for expedient action and self-interests.”⁸ Alinsky's Realists are of the same mold as Plato's Thrasymachus in *The Republic*—they see justice as the will of the strong over the weak. They want to maintain the status quo because they may benefit

from injustice and corruption, or they may be comfortable enough to not care, or their perceived powerlessness renders them inert to caring about social change.

On the other hand, *the world as it should be* is made up of Idealists who are incensed with injustice and corruption. They are the ones protesting on the street corners. Idealists look at the world as it is and see where institutions and humans fall short of their own ideals of justice, compassion, and love. They want to change institutions and human behavior so that they reflect their own ideals.

This is, of course, an oversimplified classification of human behavior; we are complicated creatures and none of us are entirely Idealists or Realists. However, this binary paradigm is useful. It is not dissimilar from the way Isaiah Berlin classifies humans into hedgehogs and foxes in his famous essay, “The Hedgehog and the Fox.” For Berlin (who is using the classification to examine the thought of Tolstoy), hedgehog thinkers are single-minded and narrowly focused on a single issue or problem. Fox-thinkers take wider views and try to consider competing ideas and larger contexts.

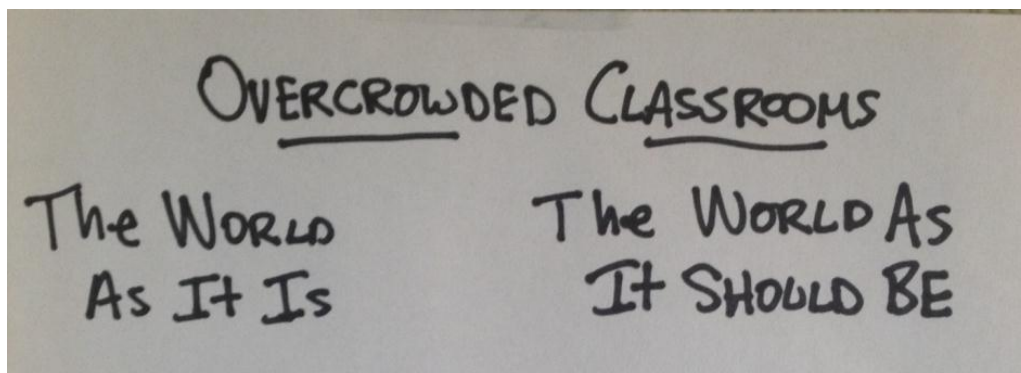
Alinsky’s point in sketching out this classification is that neither *the world as it is* nor *the world as it should be* are useful places to dwell if you really care about social change. Edward Chambers, an Alinsky *protégé* who took over leadership of the IAF after Alinsky’s death, carries forward Alinsky’s formula and explains that people who want to be involved in social change live on the *tension line* between these two worlds; that is, they have not given in to the hopelessness and cynicism that each of the two worlds breed. Rather, they are

constantly and painfully aware of the gap between our so-called values and the facts of life in the everyday world within which we operate. When these two worlds collide hard enough and often enough, a fire in the belly is sometimes ignited. The tension between the two worlds is the root of radical action for justice and democracy—not radical as in looting or trashing, but as in going to the root of things.⁹

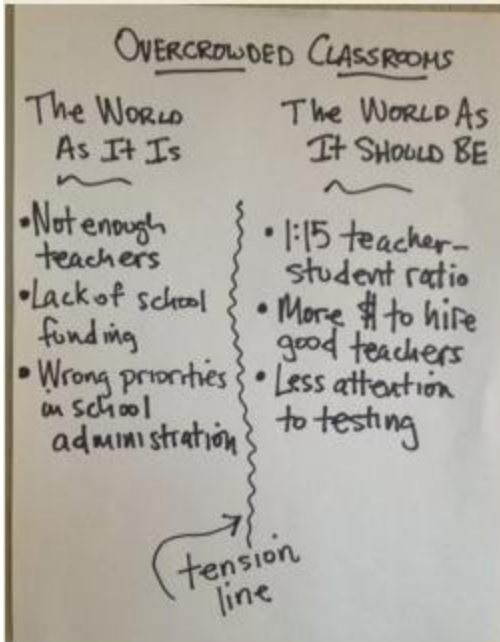
Students respond positively to *the world as it is/world as it should be* concept and the idea of living on the tension line between the two worlds. I think this is because they understand the hopelessness that occupies both *the world as it is* and *the world as it should be*. They know people who rest comfortably in both arenas and for most of our students, neither of those paradigms is particularly appealing. That is, they know the unreconstructed 1960s radical types who are forever railing against systems and they know the gated community dwellers who ingest Fox News and try to barricade themselves from the rest of the world. Many of them are looking for a way out of both those worlds.

When we discuss *the world as it is/the world as it should be* in the organizing class, I ask students to think of a broadly-defined issue, e.g. education, climate change, poverty, racism—and then I ask them to narrow that problem down to a more digestible and local issue, for instance, overcrowded classrooms in Denver public schools, hydraulic fracturing in Colorado communities, homelessness or tensions between police and people of color in Denver.

I draw this on the board:



And then we choose an issue - let's say it's overcrowding in public school classrooms, and we discuss. At the end of our conversation, the board will look something like this:



This exercise raises important questions: What exactly is the tension and line and how does one live on it?

One way to address these questions is to refer back to Isaiah Berlin's essay and explain to students that generally speaking, living on that tension line means thinking and acting like a fox, rather than a hedgehog. Fox-thinking involves considering the perspectives and realities on either side of the tension line and it means crossing that line multiple times in order to mediate a place in the middle where the problem can get discussed and solved.

In the community organizing world view, part of living on the tension line between *the world as it is* and *the world as it should be* involves knowing what you want and asking for it. It is easy to walk around feeling angry and upset by the world and its multitude of injustices. It is much more difficult to understand the complexity of any given social or institutional problem and to be able to

clearly articulate to others what you think needs to be done to solve that problem.

In the community organizing class I emphasize this point by staging a set of experiences that help students think about and experience what it means to live on the tension line between the two worlds. The first thing we do is read "The Melian Dialogue" from Thucydides' *The History of the Peloponnesian War*. In this short piece, the powerful Athenian army has set upon the tiny island of Melos and demanded the island people declare their allegiance to Athens and be spared or refuse to declare allegiance to Athens and face certain extinction. The Melians, allies of the Spartans, attempt to bargain with the Athenians, arguing that the Spartans and then, eventually, the gods will save them. The Athenians refuse to bargain on the grounds that they are more powerful than the Melians. Invested with a great deal of false confidence, the Melians refuse to submit to the Athenians and declare "And if we surrender, then all our hope is lost at once, whereas, so long as we remain in action, there is still a hope that we may yet stand upright."¹⁰ The Athenians walk away from the negotiations and while the Melians are able to hold out for a short time, the Athenians eventually overpower the island. Thucydides ends the dialogue with this chilling sentence: "... the Melians surrendered unconditionally to the Athenians, who put to death all the men of military age whom they took, and sold the women and children as slaves"¹¹

Initially, students generally side with the Melians arguing that the Athenians were imperial bullies and had no right to invade the peaceful island. This is Idealist thinking, of course, and it doesn't take long before the conversation shifts to the fact that the Athenians were offering a middle ground, a compromise—your life for your allegiance to Athens. But the hedgehog-thinking Melians who are fatefully settled in *the world as it should be* cannot see wisdom of compromise and are annihilated.

After our discussion of "The Melian Dialogue" I give the students an opportunity to experience *world as it is/world as it should be* thinking when I set up a mock meeting between the students and one of our Associate Deans. The meeting hinges around the (fictional) controversy brewing on

campus as a result of the U.S. military requesting to establish a military studies department on campus. In exchange, the military will provide 10 full-scholarships each year. The students have a class period to prepare an agenda and specific requests to the Associate Dean. Invariably, when the Dean arrives and the meeting begins, the students devolve into protest mode, complaining and expressing personal resentment toward the proposal. And given that they rarely get around to making specific requests (because they don't really know what they want), the meeting devolves to back and forth bickering with the students inadvertently taking on the Idealist role and the Associate Dean (intentionally, for the sake of the exercise) taking on the role of the Realist. As a result of these bifurcated worlds and the reality that none of the students at that point in the semester can work on that tension line between the two worlds the position of the person with power and authority (in this case, the Dean) is solidified rather than undermined. Toward the end of the semester when the students are organizing public meetings with university officials to work on this tension line, to know what they want and clearly articulate it becomes the most valuable skill they have learned.

Conflict

Living on that tension line between the two worlds, however, is demanding. In particular, it requires an understanding of and a level of comfort with conflict. Most of us, but especially students, due to power dynamics, are conflict averse. Conflict makes us uncomfortable. We worry about hurting someone's feelings, we worry about getting our own feelings hurt, and we worry about the price we might pay for our honesty or anger. In the community organizing world view, though, "Conflict is the essential core of a free and open society. If one were to project the democratic way of life in the form of a musical score, its major theme would be the harmony of dissonance."¹² Alinsky gives students permission to move into conflict and, additionally, he and the organizing tradition provide strategies for working with conflict in their public lives.

In the community organizing tradition, conflict ceases to be something to flee from and becomes

an opportunity for growth, confidence building and, ultimately, leverage to get things accomplished. For instance, students in the organizing class are not always treated politely by adults. Many people are overwhelmingly kind and generous with their time and knowledge, others are abrupt, dismissive, and sometimes even rude. Students' initial reaction to this sort of behavior is to retreat, become angry and calcified, and demonize the person or people who are treating them with disdain. This is understandable, especially given that few students are taught to think about conflict in social and public situations, so it is natural for them to withdraw when they are rebuffed. However, since conflict is built into the very fabric of their community organizing projects, withdrawing is not an option. In fact, it is safe to say that a project cannot be successful if it does not involve conflict of some sort at some time over the course of the project. I do not do a lot to prepare students for this, but I do work with them rather extensively as the conflict arises because I think it is more useful for them to experience conflict firsthand.

Jesuit Education

There is no record of Alinsky working directly with Jesuits, and it is safe to say that the operating terms of Jesuit language and practice—*cura personalis, magis*, discernment, contemplatives in action—were not ideas that Alinsky would have thought very much about. There are many places where Alinsky's world view clearly does not synch up with Jesuit values, but there is one place where Alinsky's way of operating in the world is familiar to Jesuit educators, and that's around issues of social justice and the ways that "faith serves the common good." The traditions of community organizing and Ignatian pedagogy meet in their commitment to social justice and their concern for the poor. Both the Jesuits and Alinsky have something to say about the practice of and the commitment to social justice. More importantly, they have something to say about education *for* social justice. Each tradition has different means and, to a degree, different ends: the teleology of Alinsky's project is political power for the poor, and for the Jesuits project, salvation. Despite these differences, though, both traditions are interested in supporting the dignity and capacities of disenfranchised peoples. That is, they turn their

gaze, along with their feet and shoulders, to projects and educational strategies that help the poor and the disenfranchised to live meaningful lives.

Reading and teaching Alinsky and community organizing can challenge some of our core sensibilities as both academics and Jesuit educators. For instance, I tend to see higher education and my role as an intellectual in society as relatively counter cultural; that is, I feel like I am teaching students to think critically about systems and to realize and uncover the injustices (racial, gender, class) that are built into those systems. It's easy to feel good about myself and my work when I'm in that mode, but Alinsky forces me out of that and makes me confront a harder reality and that is the possibility that what I am really doing is subtly and passively playing into the very hands of systems that I am asking my students to question. Students, after all, graduate and then move into professional positions that are complicit with rather than oppositional to oppressive and rights-denying systems.

Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, SJ gets at this issue in his important address, "The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in Jesuit Higher Education." Reflecting on the political turn to the left that the Jesuits embarked on during Father Arrupe's leadership, Kolvenbach wrote, "As Father Arrupe rightly perceived, his Jesuits were collectively entering upon a more severe way of the cross, which would surely entail misunderstandings and even opposition on the part of civil and ecclesiastical authorities, many good friends, and some of our own members."¹³ Father Kolvenbach went on to say, "This does not make the university a training camp for social activists, rather, the students need close involvement with the poor and the marginal now, in order to learn about reality and become adults of solidarity in the future."¹⁴ Maybe, however, we should go back and revisit that bifurcation we have created between academics and activists. If you think of academics as purely objective and activists as purely subjective then this bifurcation works. But if you re-define those boundaries and understand that we are all, in varying degrees, both academics and activists, and that those two things can live together in harmony in one being, or professional, then it's a false choice that we are forcing upon

ourselves. "All of life is partisan," Alinsky wrote, "There is no dispassionate objectivity."¹⁵ Climate scientist James Hansen is a good example of a public figure who is both a world-renowned scientist and a boots-on-the-ground activist. If it's true that "The real measure of our Jesuit universities lies in who our students become,"¹⁶ then don't we, as Jesuit educators, want to produce more James Hansens, and shouldn't we be preparing our students to live courageous public lives? And, frankly, isn't that sort of what we are doing anyway, even if we are reluctant to admit it?

Our Jesuit heritage seeks to cultivate interiority alongside action in the world. The beauty and the uniqueness of our shared educational mission is that we believe in the strong relationship between the internal, spiritual life and our call to heal the world. One does not exist without the other and each needs the other in order to reach its fulfillment. The Spiritual Exercises, for instance, are about helping individuals discover their purpose in life through deep personal reflection. Through the Spiritual Exercises we learn how one makes meaning and how one discerns God's calling. This internal focus is coupled with an abiding commitment to act in the world, to be, as Ignatius said, "the help of souls" and engage "the pilgrimage of service." As Father Kolvenbach wrote, "[t]rue education, education really worthy of the name, is an organized effort to help people use their hearts, heads, and hands to contribute to the well-being of all of human society."¹⁷ And it is these two things—the life of the spirit and our lives in the world—working together that are the bedrock and the defining characteristics of Jesuit education. Meditating on this relationship between interiors and externals, Father Kolvenbach wrote, "Students, in the course of their formation, must let the gritty reality of this world into their lives, so they can learn to feel it, think about it critically, respond to its suffering, and engage it constructively. They should learn to perceive, think, judge, choose, and act for the rights of others, especially the disadvantaged and the oppressed."¹⁸

This is a statement that Saul Alinsky would surely have given a ringing endorsement. 

Notes

- ¹ Sanford Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel: Saul Alinsky, His Life and Legacy* (New York: Vintage, 1992), 270.
- ² Bernard Doering, ed., *The Philosopher and the Provocateur: The Correspondence of Jacques Maritain and Saul Alinsky* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).
- ³ Horwitt, *Let Them Call Me Rebel*, 133.
- ⁴ Saul Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals: A Pragmatic Primer for Realistic Radicals* (New York: Vintage, 1971), 48.
- ⁵ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁶ *Ibid.*, 51.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, 12.
- ⁹ Edward Chambers, *Roots for Radicals: Organizing for Power, Action and Justice* (New York: Continuum, 2004), 22.
- ¹⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, trans. Rex Warner (New York: Penguin Books, 1954), 404.
- ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 420.
- ¹² Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 62.
- ¹³ Peter-Hans Kolvenbach, S.J., “The Service of Faith and the Promotion of Justice in American Jesuit Higher Education,” in *A Jesuit Education Reader*, ed., George W. Traub, S.J., (Chicago: Loyola Press, 2008), 147.
- ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 156.
- ¹⁵ Alinsky, *Rules for Radicals*, 10.
- ¹⁶ Kolvenbach, “The Service of Faith,” 155.
- ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 166.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 155.