
BOOK REVIEWS

HUMAN BEHAVIOR AND THE SOCIAL ENVIRONMENT: MODELS, METAPHORS, AND MAPS FOR APPLYING THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES TO PRACTICE. James A. Forte. *Belmont, CA: Thomson Brooks/Cole, 2007, 634 pages, \$73.95, paper.*

This well-organized textbook consists of three parts. Part I is titled "Understanding Theories and Tools for Translation." The first chapter is "An Introduction to Theory and Practical Theorizing." The important issue of "what is a theory" is handled in the first chapter. It is followed by two chapters on tools for translating and practical theorizing. Chapter 2 is on "Models and Metaphors," and chapter 3 is on "Theoretical Maps and Ecosystem Maps." Part I provides the reader with a sophisticated view of and toolkit for approaching and working with theories.

Part II is "Models, Metaphors, and Maps Applied." Ten separate chapters are devoted to applied theories: ecological, systems, biology, cognitive science, psychodynamic, behaviorism, symbolic interactionism, social role theory, economic theory, and critical theory. Each theory chapter considers related dialects and associated schools of thought, exemplary models, root metaphors, core assumptions, a model of human development, mapping, limits, an application, and learning activities. To its credit, the same 11 mapping questions are asked and answered for each theory. Although some may question the choice of particular theories that are included, one cannot help be impressed by the range that is covered.

Part III is "Theoretical Integration." It consists of one chapter: "Afterword: Multitheory Practice and Routes to Integration." It works well as a necessary accompaniment to Part I.

The scope of this textbook is broad. Although, by design, this textbook is not exclusively devoted to the applications of human behavior theory to group work, there is much in it to interest the group worker. The readers of this journal will be interested in the applications of human behavior

theory to group phenomena. The most explicit of such discussions appear in Chapter 5 on applied systems theory, Chapter 10 on applied symbolic interactionism, Chapter 11 on applied social role theory, and Chapter 13 on applied critical theory. The author of this textbook, Dr. James Forte, is an expert on the applications of symbolic interactionism to social work.

This book considers many classic theories undergirding social work. Applied ecological and systems theories are the subject of separate chapters in the text, 4 and 5, respectively, although they are often combined in an ecosystems approach theoretically and in practice. Curiously, the work of some of the major theorists is misplaced. Bronfenbrenner appears in the chapter on ecological theory and Gordon is mentioned (albeit too briefly) in the chapter on systems theory. To its credit, this book presents material, such as Olson's circumplex typology of family functioning in Chapter 5, which has the potential to enrich an elementary view of systems theory.

The limitations of the theories are clearly stated. For instance, "psychodynamic theorists have made insufficient progress, critics contend, in testing their ideas or in showing how to establish the effectiveness of psychodynamic practice." (p. 321) Nevertheless, given its importance and influence, psychodynamic theory should be more extensively critiqued. Ideally, how its tenets should be addressed given recent advances in neuroscience knowledge could be addressed in this textbook. This book places psychodynamic theory within its historical context. It must be acknowledged that psychoanalysis and its derivatives, though perhaps having once been the source of the best and most widely known and available knowledge for clinical social work practice, and likely having been of some benefit to some clients and their families, has also been an unwitting source of grievous harm.

Whether social work should be based upon theory is still debated today. In its history, social work in general and social work with groups have presented and used various models of accepted practice. The author of this textbook clearly takes the side of theory in the debate. Traditionally, social work theory is taught in the human behavior and social environment sequence, as well as appearing in other courses.

Another issue is that of the relative merits of micro- and macro approaches to social work. This book presents a broad array of theories that are applicable to a range of situations. To some extent the theories based upon microassumptions are inconsistent with and under some circumstances can be in conflict with those based upon macro assumptions.

Stylistically, the book approaches human behavior in social environment from a distance. Like a reference work, the book appears to present

the landscape. This book provides added value, particularly to those persons with interests in virtually any aspect of social work theory. It is not for the theoretically weak at heart. This is an enormous yet limited work. It encompasses perspectives about theories and uses them in actual applications. As such, given its breadth of subject matter, this textbook will inevitably be seen as being short on depth. To do the application topics justice, the book would have to be much longer. Because this book is limited in length, its chapters should best be seen as basic introductions to the theories and issues that are presented. As such, they will need to be supplemented by further readings.

This work asks more of the reader than the typical textbook on human behavior in the social environment. The book challenges the reader to actively grapple with theory. It is my hope that this fine book will receive wide attention to reinvigorate the debate about the proper place of theory in social work. If this book stimulates a new generation of social workers to take theory seriously then it has succeeded.

Steven Rose
Professor
George Mason University