

Consider the sufferers from the 'material possessions disease'. At first one car, a black-and-white television and a weatherboard house seem to be a family's 'basic requirements' for happiness. But, encouraged by neighbours, advertising and the general consumer ethos, the same family will soon pursue the next set of goals - two cars, a colour television, a brick house, a swimming pool and just around the corner is the desire for a caravan, a house in the country, and so on and so on. In any other than a consumer society, this kind of obsession would be regarded as neurotic, and yet for many people in our society there are no more worthwhile topics of conversation than money, buying and owning. Another example showing the insatiability of false needs can be seen in the world arms race. It can be argued that the genuine need for peace and security is twisted and reappears as the need for more and more armaments. The build-up of arms makes people feel more insecure and threatened which accelerates the arms race and so on. The genuine need remains unfulfilled and the false need created is insatiable.

Apart from recognising that false needs can be distinguished by their lack of relation to moral goods, by the fact that they prevent the fulfilment of real needs and that they are insatiable, there is not much which can be done to ensure that false needs are always recognised. All we can do is admit, as I have argued, that a certain amount of social channelling of individual needs is legitimate so long as the individual is still free to seek the fulfilment of his needs in alternative ways. If, for instance, society fails to recognise man's need for

creative work and the only way in which the bare essentials of life can be obtained is by boring and senseless drudgery, then this 'need' is no genuine need but a false need imposed by the employer, corporation, government or business concern. When the social organization provides as many avenues as possible for the fulfilment of human needs, for the creative development of men, then these new needs can be seen as development, not retrogression. Progress will always bring new forms of need fulfilment. But when these new forms become distorted and contribute towards the exploitation rather than the help of men, they are not real needs. We can only stop and consider whether the activities in which we are engaged or are forced to engage, are really contributing towards a freer, more fulfilling life for man, or whether they are contributing to man's suppression and exploitation. We can never be sure that we reach the correct conclusion. Perhaps the best we can hope for is to separate the black from the white and make some reasonable attempts at distinguishing shades of grey:

We are not always sure which food is healthy and which is not, yet we do not conclude that we have no way whatsoever of recognising poison. ⁹

Having attempted to 'narrow down' the concept of genuine human needs, I should like to look more closely at the claims that human needs are related to moral goods, that needs are social and that human beings share certain basic needs.

⁹ Erich Fromm, Fear of Freedom, p. 229

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Human Needs and Moral Goods

The accounts of needs given by Marx and Fromm, as does my own, depend on a shared belief in the values of society and in moral goods such as happiness, sanity, creative activity, individuality, and so on.

I wish now to look more closely at the ways in which need fulfilment is related to social values. There is, first of all, an historical link between the fulfilment of needs and the setting up of groups:

Individuals have always and in all circumstances 'started out from themselves,' but since they were not unique in the sense of not needing any connections with one another, and since their needs, consequently their nature and the method of satisfying their needs, connected them with one another ... they had to enter into relations with one another. 10

In fact the idea of a community or society established to work against all the needs of all of its members is contradictory since a large part of our conception of 'community' or 'society' is of a group structure set up for the mutual benefit of individual members. If a society ceased to fulfil sufficient of the needs of its members, if the internal contradictions became too strong, it would disintegrate.

Marx claimed that in an ideal society the needs of the individual

¹⁰ K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, pp. 493-494.

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would be identified with the needs of the group.¹¹ Certainly, a society which does take account of needs is the best sort of society. A social situation provides opportunities for the diversification and fulfilment of needs which do not exist for an individual in isolation. By living with others, the individual is not limited to his own resources available in the group situation. In community with others, the individual has the means "of cultivating his gifts in all directions."¹² For instance, there will be many diverse resources available for satisfying the need for intellectual development in a social setting - books, films, discussions, lectures, libraries, and so on.

Now it might be objected that there are individuals who choose to live in isolation. What of the monk or hermit who lives a life of solitude and meditation, having almost no contact with other human beings? I would not want to argue that a person like this must be insane (as Fromm's thesis seems to entail) nor that he is even unhappy. Rather, it seems to me, his development as a person is one-sided. He may indeed be fulfilling his need for a frame of orientation and devotion (c/f Fromm). But by not mixing with or attempting to relate to other people he is not 'cultivating his gifts in all directions'. There is part of his nature, associated with the need to relate to other people, which is not developing.

¹¹ There are problems with this. As I suggested in Chapter One, Marx does not pay enough attention to the question of social 'deviants'.

¹² K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 93.



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We might compare the solitary monk or hermit to a blind man. The latter may develop some senses - hearing and touch, for example - to a high degree, but be unable to use or develop his sense of sight. The individual who lives a life of solitude is likewise limited in respect of fulfilling his needs and developing his abilities to relate to others. Complete development and fulfilment of an ever developing complex of needs is not possible in isolation. (Later, I shall briefly look at the argument that man is anti-social in that he has needs to behave aggressively towards his fellows.)

A situation where relationships are determined by real needs will be mutually beneficial to society as a whole and to the individuals who comprise it.

The society itself will run more efficiently when the individuals who comprise it identify its aims and its activities as their own. I do not mean by this anything like what Hegel meant when he talked of the individual recognising the State's aims as his own. A society in which alienation is at least limited will be more progressive and will function better than one which exists by exploitation. A society which exploits the individual and suppresses or ignores or wrongly channels his needs constantly runs the risk of breaking down. This is a pragmatic consideration. For the simple smooth and progressive functioning of a society to be realised, the society must be one in which the basic needs of its individual members are fulfilled.

Given that I have argued that needs are social, to what extent does the society in which individuals live determine the kinds of



needs they have? If needs do differ from social group to social group, how can it be argued that there are basic needs shared by the New Guinea head-hunter and the American bank manager?

It seems to me that Fromm's list of basic needs is general enough to be a description of the needs of all men. However, this does not mean that individuals in a particular society do not have particular needs which are determined by the form of social organization under which they live. What, then, is the relationship between basic needs and the various social needs?

As we have seen, Fromm argues that there are five needs basic to man's existence:

- (i) the necessity to relate to other human beings
- (ii) the need to transcend existence
- (iii) the need to have roots
- (iv) the need for self-identity
- (v) the need for a frame of orientation

These needs are manifested in human behaviour and activity irrespective of historical or social factors. In the normally functioning (sane) human being, basic needs, like physical needs, result in constantly repeated patterns of behaviour. This pattern consists in 'seeking' or 'avoiding' behaviour. Failure to fulfil these needs will lead him to seek to restore the balance. If this constant chain of imbalance → balance → imbalance, is broken then the individual will

be drastically altered.¹³

Any human being who is coping, in even a minimal sense, with his relatedness to his environment and to other human beings would be subject to these needs. I am not prepared to say that Fromm's description of man's basic needs is final and exhaustive but rather that there seems to be no reason why any species should not exhibit characteristics which it shares in common and which distinguish it from other animals. The degree of accuracy or sharpness one can achieve in making generalizations about human nature is of course low, but it seems to me that Fromm's description of human needs forms a plausible and workable basis for an analysis of human nature. Until examples can be adduced which show human behaviour at a particular time or place as irrelevant¹⁴ to one or more of the basic needs, it seems reasonable to use his account as a working model. Any counter example would have to show that the need in question did not exist, not that it was unfulfilled, since Fromm would argue that not only does the individual become insane if these needs are not fulfilled but that a society which begins to hinder the fulfilment of basic needs can tend towards insanity.

¹³ The foregoing point is taken largely from Rubin Gotesky, Personality: The Need for Liberty and Rights, (New York: Libra, 1937), p. 54, although the author makes the point regarding all needs.

¹⁴ 'Irrelevant', since situations where needs would still be relevant to an analysis of behaviour can be different. We may find acknowledgement of these needs and a conscious striving to fulfil the needs although they are not consciously felt, acknowledgement and a conscious fighting against and suppression of needs or an unconscious suppression of them.

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But as well as these basic needs, there are particular social needs shaped by particular economic, political, social and religious factors. All genuine social needs refer back to basic needs. For instance, all men may share the need for a frame of orientation and yet this might be manifested in the need to participate in ceremonies of worship of the sun or in the search to find the answer to problems of existence in terms of human potential (which plays a large part in the writings of Marx and Marxists).

Each of us may have a different set of particular needs depending on which social factors affect us most. Social rebels may find fulfilment of their basic needs through rejection of the more common socially patterned needs and the acceptance of a different set. The social needs of each of us may differ but we all have needs, which come from basic needs. We may, for instance, ignore or suppress the need to relate to a particular person but in almost every case disastrous consequences would follow from a failure to relate to any other person. ¹⁵

Social needs will change as the social factors which shape them change. Depressions, wars, revolutions will drastically alter almost all of the determining factors, and basic needs will be channelled into different sets of particular needs.

¹⁵ Although as I have pointed out (Chapter Two, page 89), voluntary lack of fulfilment of a need should be distinguished from imposed lack of fulfilment.

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Perhaps what I mean by animal needs, basic needs and socially dependent needs could best be explained by an analogy. Deprive a tree of one of its life requirements, for example - water, and it will die. Cut off a large and substantial branch and this will severely affect its functioning. But cut off a small branch, one of the many growing from a main branch and the tree will not be affected since it can soon produce others.

In the foregoing, I have stressed the point that needs are social and relate to moral goods. This idea is central to the accounts of needs given by Marx and Fromm. I now wish to look briefly at a view which contradicts this idea.

Needs and Aggression

It has been claimed that man has needs connected with innate drives which are fulfilled by aggressive, competitive and territorial behaviour. The strongest arguments in support of this view have been put by Robert Ardrey and Konrad Lorenz. Both writers attempt to explain modern man's behaviour by reference to evolutionary drives and both argue that man, like other members of the animal kingdom, is innately aggressive. Ardrey links this aggression with another part of man's nature - his territorial drive.

Since it is Ardrey who links his theories on aggression and territory with a theory of needs, let us look in further detail at what he has to say.

According to Ardrey man's aggressive and territorial drives

make war inevitable. War is in fact the best way of satisfying man's "basic needs of a psychological order"¹⁶ which he has in common with all higher and many lower animals. These are the needs for identity, stimulation and security. Fromm would agree that these are basic needs. They are also compatible with Marx's account of needs. But that's as far as the agreement would go. Ardrey's description of the way in which these needs are fulfilled is extraordinary:

As far as the need for identity goes:

War provides the ultimate identity in the eyes of a maximum number Rank satisfies identity for all . . . a thousand satisfying pigeon-holes. All are identifications which the anonymity of civilian life can less successfully provide. ¹⁷

And stimulation?

The stimulation of warfare is the most powerful produced ever in the history of the species. The flight from boredom has never been presented with such maximum satisfactions for maximum numbers. No philosopher, viewing the horrors of war through the astigmatic lenses of the pleasure-pain principle, can grasp the attraction which war presents to civilized men . . . In all the rich catalogue of human hypocrisy it is difficult to find anything to compare with . . . the belief that people do not like war.

Finally there is the need for security. The rewards are equivalent. The predator fights for a net gain in security, whether in loot, land, slaves, or the confusion of enemies. The defender, on the other hand, fights to conserve security . . . ¹⁸

¹⁶ Robert Ardrey, The Territorial Imperative, (London: Collins, reprinted 1967), p. 170.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 335.

¹⁸ Robert Ardrey, Op. cit., pp. 335-336.

Let us look at the basis and assumptions on which the accounts rest:

Homo sapiens and other animals

Firstly there is the whole question of whether or not it is legitimate for Lorenz and Ardrey to draw the conclusions they do on the basis of analogies between animal and human behaviour. Some of the comparisons made are incredible:

All the culturally evolved norms of 'fair fighting' from primitive chivalry to the Geneva Convention, are functionally analogous to phylogenetically ritualised combat in animals. 19

Confronted with present-day China, the United States and the Soviet Union occasionally seem to feel as 'we'. The same phenomenon, which incidentally has some of the earmarks of war, can be studied in the roll-cackle ceremony of greylag geese. 20

Even the impossibility of socialism can be easily demonstrated:

After almost half a century the experiment with scientific socialism ... finds itself today at the mercy of an evolutionary fact of life: that man is a territorial animal. 21

But aside from noting the sweeping and often unsubstantiated comparisons, there are two important points to be noted. Firstly, unlike other animal watchers (Jane Van Lawick-Goodall, for example), Lorenz and Ardrey spent much time observing animals in captivity.

¹⁹ Konrad Lorenz, On Aggression, (London: Methuen, reprinted, 1974), p. 241.

²⁰ Konrad Lorenz, Op. cit., p. 162.

²¹ Robert Ardrey, Op. cit., p. 116.



It is not at all clear that animals kept under these conditions behave in the same way as animals in their natural state. Secondly, the territorial drives attributed to animals and man by Ardrey are found in only some animals:

... territoriality occurs only in higher animals such as the vertebrates and arthropods and even then in a very spotty fashion. 22

Also, in moving on to his claim that man is a territorial animal, Ardrey's arguments are of a typically poor standard:

... it may come to us as the strangest of thoughts that the bond between a man and the soil he walks on should be more powerful than his bond with the woman he sleeps with. Even so, in a rough, preliminary way (!) we may test the supposition with a single question: How many men have you known of, in your lifetime, who died for their country? And how many for a woman? 23

As Erich Fromm points out,²⁴ neither Lorenz nor Ardrey is a student of man in a scientific sense. Ardrey is a playwright whose colourful, emotive language may be well suited to the stage but not to a scientific work requiring caution and precision. The view of human beings' Ardrey presents is both unsophisticated and uninformed. Compare what he has to say about love with what others from Freud to Fromm have said:

²² J. P. Scott, "That Old-Time Aggression", in Man and Aggression, ed. M. F. Ashley Montagu, (New York: OUP, 1958), p. 56.

²³ Robert Ardrey, Op. cit., pp. 6-7. Women do not really figure as part of mankind in Ardrey's book. Their function is to stay on the sidelines, occasionally breeding, whilst man, the real actors on life's stage, fight to protect them and their other territorial possessions.

²⁴ See Erich Fromm, The Anatomy of Human Destruct-

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In its ideal form, love also satisfies all three needs. It provides identity, that intense recognition in the eyes of a loved one that there is no one quite like oneself. It provides stimulation, in the love of adults through the slam of the heart, the tensions of desire and the consummations of the bed. And it provides security to varying degrees in the varying probabilities that the satisfactions of today will be the satisfactions of tomorrow. 25

Lorenz is given to sentiment and to anthropomorphising about animals. Generalising about human behaviour, Lorenz draws on anecdotes concerning his family and friends. From observations of the behaviour of East Indian yellow cichlids, Brazilian mother-of-pearl fish, of Lorenz's maiden aunt and of Lorenz's fellow prisoners of war, he concludes:

From this it will be clear that the damming up of aggression will be more dangerous, the better the members of the group know, understand and like each other. 26

Lorenz and Ardrey ignore the possibility of there being distinct human qualities which differentiate man from other animals. It was these qualities which Marx was at pains to point out in distinguishing human from animal labour. The same distinction is important to Fromm's account of basic needs which shows the specifically human qualities of reason, self-awareness and imagination. Lorenz and Ardrey also ignore any contribution made by Freud, and psycho-analytic theories in general, in providing alternate or additional explanation for human behaviour.

²⁵ Robert Ardrey, *Op. cit.*, pp. 337-338.

²⁶ Konrad Lorenz, *Op. cit.*, p. 45.

Innate Aggression

Even if the method of argument leaves a lot to be desired, even if the moves from fish and birds to human beings are assumed instead of shown, might not Lorenz and Ardrey be basically correct in claiming that man is an innately aggressive animal?

Ardrey claims that war is both the ultimate manifestation of man's aggression and the most complete method of satisfaction of man's basic needs. Even if he were correct, the number of people actually participating (in a fighting capacity) in wars is very small and in the era of 'push-button' wars will no doubt decrease even further. In a nuclear war there would be very few fighting participants. Ardrey does consider the effect of wars on non-fighters whose needs presumably remain unsatisfied but since these non-fighters are traditionally women their reaction hardly matters:

A certain local anxiety may be generated, the anxiety of mothers and wives. But it is a small force as compared to the anxiety of losing the war itself. 27

In any case, as well as the frequent necessity for conscription and extensive propaganda to drum up support for wars, there appears to be a deal of evidence that a large proportion of men do not enjoy

²⁷ Robert Ardrey, Op. cit., p. 336.



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fighting.²⁸ Neither Lorenz nor Ardrey successfully shows that in countries where war is not regularly 'enjoyed' other alternative outlets exist.

It is hard to argue against the claim that man is an aggressive animal. What is at issue is whether or not this aggression is innate, inevitable. Lorenz and Ardrey both argue that aggression is predominantly interspecific -- apart from predatory species, other species behave aggressively to members of their own kind. But as Erich Fromm points out there is some doubt about this being helpful in explaining human fighting. Human beings seem to be able to convince themselves that the enemy is not only 'different', 'foreign' but almost a different species. This is true not only of the attitude of the Nazis but also of Americans in Vietnam and even of Irish Protestants and Irish Catholics fighting each other.

Lorenz and Ardrey both try to show that fighting in animals is normal, natural and beneficial, but enlarged to encompass human aggression the argument won't work. Lorenz maintains that:

a state of equilibrium ... endurable by both species²⁹

²⁸ This is illustrated in the techniques which are often used to whip up hatred before a soldier goes in to battle and in the fact that numbers of soldiers flatly refuse to do battle or go in to fight under the influence of drugs or alcohol. (The Vietnam war provided many examples of these)

²⁹ Konrad Lorenz, Op. cit., p. 18

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will always exist between predator and prey ...
the whaling industry would go bankrupt before the
last whales became extinct. 30

But unfortunately, man and his technology can completely upset
natural balances. The koala bear had to be re-introduced into
South Australia after it had become extinct due to large-scale hunting
and killing. Far from being beneficial, human aggression is more
often disruptive and destructive. Man:

... is, among the thousands of species that fight,
the only one in which fighting is disruptive ...
Man is the only species that is a mass murderer,
the only misfit in his own society. 31

Lorenz's historical evidence for the claims of innate human
aggression do not stand up to examination either. Fromm presents
much collected evidence incompatible with Lorenz's claims about
primitive man and concludes:

Lorenz's assumption of forty thousand years of
organized warfare is nothing but the old Hobbesian
cliché of war as the natural state of man, presented
as an argument to prove the innateness of human
aggressiveness. The logic of Lorenz's assumption is
that man is aggressive because he was aggressive and
he was aggressive because he is aggressive. 32

30 Konrad Lorenz, Op. cit., p. 18

31 N. Tinbergen, "On War and Peace in Animals
and Man", Science, Vol. 130, 1968, p. 1412.

32 Erich Fromm, The Anatomy of Human
Destructiveness, p. 45.

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It is the whole concept of aggression which Lorenz and Ardrey confuse. For the sake of argument, let us say that aggressive behaviour in humans has three elements - anger, interference with others and an attempt to impose the will of an individual or group on other individuals or groups. Now consider the three following cases:

A is always angrily interfering with others. He is enraged at the sight of a smoker in a Non-Smoking compartment and insists that the cigarette be put out immediately. He will physically intervene if someone is ill-treating a child or an animal. He angrily sends back cold soup in restaurants.

B is pugnacious. He frequently gets into fights with people by interpreting harmless remarks as insults. He always wants his own way and will behave violently to get it.

C enjoys the suffering of others. He is both spiteful and physically cruel to anyone weaker than he. His behaviour can only be described as sadistic.

Now we might be willing to describe A, B, and C as aggressive and yet the aggression in each case is very different. It would be especially hard to argue of A that his aggression was due to an innate aggressive drive shared with animals or that his aggression was connected with defence of territory. On the contrary, his aggressive behaviour seems to derive from a highly developed social sense of right and wrong.

Fromm's idea that there is more than one sort of human aggression is more plausible than the instinctivist account given by Ardrey and Lorenz. Fromm claims that:

We must distinguish in man two entirely different kinds of aggression. The first he shares with all animals, is a phylogenetically programmed impulse to attack (or to flee) when vital interests are threatened. This defensive, "benign" aggression is in the service of the survival of the individual and the species, is biologically adaptive and ceases when the threat has ceased to exist. The other type "malignant" aggression i. e. cruelty and destructiveness, is specific to the human species and virtually absent in most mammals; it is not phylogenetically programmed and not biologically adaptive; it has no purpose, and its satisfaction is lustful. 33

Ardrey's and Lorenz's views have met with great popular success.³⁴ Perhaps, as Fromm suggests, the popular appeal of the arguments comes from the consequent feeling of finally being absolved from guilt and from the urgent necessity of changing the world, of stopping wars. If man cannot help himself, what is the point?

The fact that there can be no meeting point between Marx and Fromm, on the one hand, and Ardrey and Lorenz, on the other, can be seen from Ardrey's remark, in The Territorial Imperative :

We need not brood at the moment about our human innovations, for we are merely tracing the evolution of a biological institution, speculating as to its selective value, and striving to recognise that it is not something thought up by man. (pp. 199-200)

³³ Erich Fromm, Op. cit., p. 25.

³⁴ It is not true, however, that the ideas have been readily accepted by scientists. Man and Aggression, (op. cit.) is a collection of essays by academics who criticise Lorenz's and Ardrey's views in no uncertain terms.

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I have been arguing that needs are normative but have also endorsed Marx's view that needs can be discovered by empirical means. Is there a contradiction here? Am I attempting to cross the 'is-ought' gap?

Firstly, there are only a small number of needs that we can talk about in a value free way. If we were to discuss human beings simply as living organisms, we could draw up a list of nutrients necessary to keep someone alive. But even here, once we begin to elaborate and set goals beyond simply staying alive, we are involved in all sorts of normative claims in deciding, for example, what is needed to keep someone in good health.

For any account of basic needs, or indeed for any account of needs beyond a small restricted area of physical needs, we are involved in normative moves from the beginning. Only someone who accepts the value of happiness, self-development, sanity, will accept Fromm's list of basic needs. To someone who believed that destructiveness, cruelty and pain were the aims of human existence, neither Marx's nor Fromm's account would have any appeal. In formulating any account of needs, some expectation of others sharing similar normative beliefs is there from the start.

If what I have said is true what sense is there in talking of the importance and relevance of empirical investigation in need talk? Surely needs, then, are solely the concern of the philosopher?

Human needs are not talked about only by philosophers. True, the way in which needs as such are discussed by scientists is often

quite different. McCloskey suggests that there are two quite separate concepts of needs:

... the concept of needs with which I am concerned here is not that from which most needs talk in social philosophy and the social sciences is derived, that of the biological sciences, where we can talk in a value free way about the needs of the influenza virus, a cancer cell, or of a person's tape worm, but of needs as they arise and are discussed in normative sciences such as sociology, political science, and to a significant degree, psychology, as well as in moral and political philosophy. 35

Firstly, it is not clear what McCloskey means by 'social philosophy' and the 'social sciences' as distinct from sociology, political science and political and moral philosophy. In any case, I would have thought that very few cases of human needs would be comparable to the needs of a tape worm. Once we begin talking of human beings in any way other than as organic entities with certain minimal survival needs, we are involved in normative considerations. McCloskey's distinction is not of much use when we consider that the areas of pure fact or pure value in need talk are very small, most needs falling in to the 'grey' area where both empirical and normative considerations are relevant.

It seems to me that in psychology this inability to categorize needs as empirical or normative is most marked. The psychologist

³⁵ H. J. McCloskey, "Human Needs, Rights and Political Values," Op. cit., p. 12. [my emphasis]

observes and reports on the way people behave, talk, think and often probes beyond external signs attempting to discover what the subconscious has to reveal. In some cases it is extremely difficult to tell where the dividing line between organic and psychosomatic explanations for either organic symptoms or neurotic behaviour comes. Although there are some needs which are physical and some which are solely psychological, in the effects of their non-fulfilment, it is not always easy to separate them. There are very few cases where a human being can be assessed as a simple organism lacking a simple chemical the addition of which will satisfy a need.

Paul Taylor claims that social scientists and psychologists make need statements as "confirmable matters of fact".³⁶

But many writers are aware of the normative judgements which are constantly involved in psychology and the social sciences. Consider the following quotations:

The educational psychologist behaves as if he knows what is good for the child. The psychotherapist behaves as if he knows what is good for the patient. The occupational psychologist conducts himself as though he knows what is good for the workers. and so in fact they do. When they say, as they often do when challenged on the point, that their science is not concerned with values, they are, it would seem merely being inconsistent. This inconsistency is not peculiar to applied psychology.

³³ Paul V. Taylor, "'Need' Statements,"
Op. cit., p. 111

Many of the most general of the theoretical concepts of psychology are evaluative. 'adjusted' is covertly evaluative. So is 'integration'. So, too, is 'co-ordination'. So, even, is the concept of a 'learned response'. All these concepts require to be defined in terms of adaptation to an end, or of fitness for a purpose. Each of these concepts involves a reference to a 'goal' or purpose; and in most cases the purpose is one which the psychologist implicitly endorses. 37

What is now at stake are the needs themselves. At this stage, the question is no longer: how can the individual satisfy his own needs without hurting others, but rather: how can he satisfy his needs without hurting himself, without reproducing, through his aspirations and satisfactions, his dependence on an exploitative apparatus which, in satisfying his needs, perpetuates his servitude? 38

The proletarian, for example, who like every other person is called upon to satisfy his needs and who is not in a position to satisfy even the needs that he has in common with other people, whom the necessity to work a 14-hour day debases to the level of a beast of burden, whom competition degrades to a mere thing ... this proletarian if only for these reasons is confronted with the real task of revolutionizing his conditions. 39

The task for the socialist theoreticians is to study the nature of human needs; to find criteria for the distinction between genuine human needs, the satisfaction of which makes man more alive and sensitive, and synthetic needs created by capitalism, which tend to weaken man, to make him more passive and bored, a slave to his greed for things. 40

37 C. A. Mace, "Homeostasis, Needs and Values," British Journal of Psychology, p. 201.

38 Herbert Marcuse, An Essay on Liberation, p. 4.

39 K. Marx and F. Engels, The German Ideology, p. 319.

40 Erich Fromm, "Human Psycho-analysis and Marx's Theory," Socialist Humanism, edited by Erich Fromm, p. 238.



There are at least some social scientists and psychologists, who, when they make need statements would be concerned to prescribe or recommend courses of action; they are not making the statements as 'confirmable matter of fact'. Marx uses facts as the basis for his theories but he, nevertheless, recommends courses of action to bring about a more humane society which takes account of men's needs. Fromm, who holds that insanity is related to non-fulfilment of needs, and neuroses to unsatisfactory need fulfilment,⁴¹ would agree that part of the therapist's task is to create conditions where needs can be satisfied or can be seen to be satisfied.

It is in fact difficult to conceive of a critical analysis (philosophical, psychological or political) based on, or at least partly concerned with an analysis of needs, which made no reference to alternatives or change. Most psychiatrists, psycho-analysts and social scientists are concerned with some sort of change on either an individual or a social level and they believe that the state of affairs they advocate or attempt to bring about is better than the existing one and that hopefully others will see this if they are put in possession of the facts and arguments.

What the psychologist, philosopher or social scientist is doing

⁴¹ I have pointed out that Fromm is, however, open to the objection that at times he makes this connection one of definition - that is, insanity can be defined in terms of non-fulfilment of needs. See Chapter Two, p. 34.

when he makes a statement about human needs is prescribing the fulfilment of such needs. Therapy (be it mental, moral or social) involves change and the therapist believes the changes he advocates are an improvement on a situation which he believes to be wrong.

Whilst empirical investigations, including patient case-histories, surveys and so on, are a necessary part of discovering human needs, it must be remembered that there is also a normative element in need talk. Needs bridge the gap between empirical and normative issues. (Later I shall look at what sort of logical bridge this is.)

Obligations for need fulfilment

I wish now to look at the claim that needs involve obligations for fulfilment on the part of other individuals and governments.

When we assert that someone has a need, there is a general expectation that the need should be fulfilled. There is something very odd about claiming that a need exists but denying that it should be fulfilled:

It is indeed true that 'children need to be loved but they ought not to have this need fulfilled' is not self-contradictory, but it is logically odd. We balk at such a sentence. We do not understand without some special context what it means to say 'Though they need love, they ought not to have it.' It's too much like saying 'It's wrong, but I don't think it's wrong.' No doubt a use could be supplied, as a use could be supplied for 'He has an unconscious toothache', but as it stands it doesn't have one. In other words, we do not understand what it means to assert that

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such an utterance is a moral utterance. We can't, in such a context, assert that someone needs something and still assert that he ought not to have it, unless we can show that contrary to our usual expectations his having it would harm him or others or stunt his development or clash with some more fundamental moral claim. 42

We can, however, imagine cases where a need could be said to exist but where the need should not be fulfilled. If someone said "He needs an aspirin, but we ought not to give it to him" it would be natural to ask "Why not?" An acceptable answer would be "Because he has a kidney disease which would be made worse by taking of aspirin. It is better for him to suffer some temporary pain than to risk his chances of recovery by taking aspirin." Cases like this can be explained in terms of a conflict of needs. They are resolved by not fulfilling one need in favour of a more important need. If the patient is to recover, then he may have to endure some pain.

Normally, we accept that statements of needs do indicate needs which should be fulfilled. There is nothing particularly odd about most need statements such that we should ask "Yes, but why should the need be fulfilled?"

⁴² Kai Nielsen, "Morality and Needs", in The Business of Reason, ed. J. J. MacIntosh and S. Coval (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 193.



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I have already suggested that needs relate to human goods. This implicit appeal to values like happiness, sanity, self-development is understood in most need statements and they go unchallenged. But what sort of logical connection exists between a statement asserting the existence of a need and a statement advocating its fulfilment? Nielsen makes a point frequently ignored by the upholders of the is/ought barrier when he says:

there are stronger than contingent connections between statements which still are weaker than entailments. 43

Nielsen's description of the relationship between 'need' and 'ought' statements fits in with my claim that there is a normative element in most need statements. In the arguments I have put, no attempt has been made to cross the is/ought barrier. As need statements are not 100% descriptive but have both factual and normative elements, anyone who accepts the initial relating of need fulfilment to human goods will accept the conclusion. In other words, so long as someone accepts that the fulfilment of human needs relates to the attainment of moral goods such as happiness, sanity and intellectual development, the conclusion that needs ought to be fulfilled will be accepted.

Supposing someone were to say I'm still not convinced. You tell me that children need education, but why ought we to provide

⁴³ Kai Nielsen, Op. cit., p. 194.



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them with it?" To this we might answer "Well, in our society some sort of formal education is necessary for happiness, self-development, social relationships and creative work."

Our questioner might reply, "Yes, but why are happiness, self-development, social relationships and creative work needed?"

There must be some limit to this chain of questioning. Somewhere along the line we can go no further back, there are no higher values to which we may appeal. When we reach the question "Why be moral?" we cannot find an answer which is not question-begging.

Any answer will attach moral worth or value to something else (rationality for example) which shows why being moral is valuable.

There must come a point where we realise that we are no longer even interpreting the world, in any meaningful way, let alone trying to change it.

Conclusion

If it is true, as I have argued, that in normal circumstances the assertion of a need involves the claim that it should be fulfilled, then certain obligations follow for individuals and for governments. Since human needs are at the heart of all important human concerns, they should be noted and where possible fulfilled by people as individuals and as 'specialists', (teachers, psychologists, employers and so on).

Even stronger claims can be made on governments:

... the only acceptable justification of government, which also determines the limits to its legitimate authority, is its task of serving human needs -

serving them better than would be done without any government. The only acceptable justification of a particular form of government, which again also determines the limits on its legitimate demands on the individual's obedience and loyalty, is that it serves to meet human needs better than other forms of government. 44

Since it is within the structure of a group living together that human needs can be most easily fulfilled, concern with human needs should be at the heart of all forms of social organization.

Although I have accepted Marx's and Fromm's arguments that a socialist society will better fulfil human needs than does capitalism, the question of human needs is not automatically settled, by the advent of socialism.

As Marx claimed, no stage will ever be reached when all needs are fulfilled. The satisfaction of physical and basic needs will bring with it more complex and sophisticated needs to be fulfilled. It is clear that a precondition for a better society is recognition of men's needs: "Une révolution radicale ne peut être que la révolution de besoins radicaux".⁴⁵ The most one can hope and work for is the nearest approximation to a rational society - that is one in which the problems of alienation and need-fulfilment are constantly noted

⁴⁴ Christian Bay, "Needs, Wants and Political Legitimacy", Canadian Journal of Political Science, 1965, p. 241.

⁴⁵ From Contribution à la critique de la philosophie du droit de Hegel, in 'La Pensée de Karl Marx, Sixième Edition, (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1955), quoted by Jean-Yves Calvez, p. 389.

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and tackled: "the problem of alienation is the central problem of socialism"⁴⁵ and one of the main tasks of a socialist society is to continually meet this problem.

Marx and Fromm rightly stress the importance of human needs in discussing man and society. Both have contributed greatly to the empirical discussion of human needs. Both believe that capitalism has been found lacking largely due to its failure to fulfil human needs. Both argue for a humane society which will take account of human needs. But before arriving at a consistent and rational programme of action, a complete account of human needs must be given. For this the skills and techniques of the political scientist, economist, psychologist and philosopher are all necessary. Only then can a full account of human needs based on a concept which is both normative and empirical be given. Only then can the programme for action on human needs be drawn up.

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Pedrag Vranicki, "On Alienation," Socialist Humanism, ed. Erich Fromm, p. 304.



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