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3 Human Needs Theory

In the light of observations in Chapter 2 which stressed the importance of theory, and suggested the relevance to conflict of a theory that hypothesized certain ontological needs as an explanation of behaviors, let us examine human needs theory from an applied perspective.

It is reasonable to assume that human motivations include some that are required for the development of the human species, some that are culturally specific, and some that are of a transitory nature, even merely wishful-thinking desires. We need a common language that at least differentiates those motivations that are socially and politically significant. Three categories appear to be the main ones from a practical policy viewpoint: those that are universal in the human species, those that are cultural, and those that are transitory.

For our purposes we label these as "needs", "values" and interests." They are separate phenomena, and we should endeavour to define them as such. Even in the scholarly literature these terms do not have precise and agreed meanings. We can deduce that there is no general understanding of any differences between negotiable interests and non-negotiable interests - which we have termed "needs."

NEEDS

Needs, as we have used the term, reflect universal motivations. They are an integral part of the human being. Maslow and many others (and we survey the literature in Chapter 6) have argued that in addition to the more obvious biological needs of food and shelter, there are basic human needs that relate to growth and development. There cannot be learning and development by an infant until there is an identity separate from the mother. Then there must be consistency in response if language and behavior are to be learned. Human needs in individuals and identity groups who are engaged in ethnic and identity struggles are of this fundamental character.

From the perspective of conflict studies, the important observation is that these needs will be pursued by all means available. In ontological terms the individual is conditioned by biology, or by a primordial influence, to pursue them. It follows that unless satisfied

within the norms of society, they will lead to behavior that is outside the legal norms of the society. The issue whether behavior is determined genetically, environmentally, or both, is not a profitable one for us to engage in at this stage of knowledge. The fact that there are behaviors that cannot be controlled to fit the requirements of particular societies is our concern, rather than the evolutionary explanation of this phenomenon (*Conflict: Human Needs Theory* seeks to deal with these issues in depth).

VALUES

Values are those ideas, habits, customs and beliefs that are a characteristic of particular social communities. They are the linguistic, religious, class, ethnic or other features that lead to separate cultures and identity groups. Values, which are acquired, differ from needs in that the latter are universal and primordial, and perhaps genetic.

In conditions of oppression, discrimination, underprivilege and isolation, the defense of values is important to the needs of personal security and identity. In this sense they impinge on needs and can be confused with them. Preservation of values is a reason for defensive and aggressive behaviors. It is the pursuit of individual needs that is the reason for the formation of identity groups through which the individual operates in the pursuit of a wider ego, and of security and cultural identity. It is values that have divided Lebanon, Northern Ireland and many other multi-ethnic and multi-communal societies.

Over periods of time, after a generation or two of social and economic integration and shared education, values may alter. Given conducive environmental circumstances, persons of different cultures can be assimilated into one culture, which is likely to absorb some features of all. However, even in the best of circumstances this is a long process. It requires a sense of security, which in turn depends on an absence of discrimination, and on opportunities for development.

The more usual situation is one where separate customs, life-styles, dress, religion and language are bases for discrimination, and also a means of defensive identity against the consequences of such discrimination. Wars are fought to preserve cultural values and identity. Leaderships emerge to defend them - and also to use them for political purposes.

Values, however, have a connotation wider than ethnic or national

identities. Cultures exist even within such groupings. There are class cultures and social identities associated with the many different groupings to which individuals belong. Values include the preferences and priorities associated with these.

INTERESTS

Interests refer to the occupational, social, political and economic aspirations of the individual, and of identity groups of individuals within a social system. Interests are held in common within groups in a society, but are less likely to be held in common nationally. Typically they are competitive, having a high win-lose component.

Interests are transitory, altering with circumstances. They are not in any way an inherent part of the individual as are needs, and as values might be. They typically relate to material goods or role occupancy. (Role itself may relate to needs when there are identity issues involved.) Interests influence policies and tactics in the pursuit of needs and values.

The assumption has been that this interest motivation – material gain – because it is the driving force of the economy, is the dominant one in social and political life. The term “interests” has, therefore, often been used in a generic sense, to cover all motivations, including needs and values (Pruitt and Rubin, 1986). However, our more restricted meaning of the term gives us an appropriate means of differentiation.

The relationships between interests and needs is an important one in practice. The absence of incentives, some of which can be defined as interests, and of a sense of role, can finally threaten identity and undermine the social cohesion and sense of sharing that are so necessary in a society planned to achieve equalities. There are signs in socialist societies that the need for some market incentives is necessary for initiative. While the pursuit of individual interests must be curbed somewhat in a sharing society, in a society that seeks to solve economic problems through individual initiative and productivity the pursuit of individual interests must not be inhibited. This presents serious problems. The outlook for societies that rest on the pursuit of interests is as dismal as the outlook for societies that restrict them. We have many examples in the developed and the developing world of societies that are in jeopardy just because interest groups are uncontrolled in their promotion of projects that endanger the environ-

ment and security, and in their exploitation of others. Such societies are characterized by gross inequalities and high levels of alienation.

In both cases, therefore, societies are at risk. The promotion of an expanding stable society based exclusively on the social interest, or solely on personal interests, is difficult and perhaps impossible to achieve. These are polar examples of the problem. Such societies tend, in the one case, to lack drive, and in the other, to suffer from excess internal competitive and conflictual relationships.

Clearly, in the continuum from wholly planned and controlled societies to the other extreme of wholly free societies, there will be degrees of control so that individual interests and societal interests are balanced according to the importance attached to law and order, the environment, economic justice and other societal values. Differences in philosophies or political approaches leading to different social organization rest very much on these different balances decided upon to achieve the common (but not necessarily compatible) goals of increased individual welfare and improved social relationships.

All discussion of these issues, and the public policies implied, depend on clear definitions of interests, values and needs: policy disagreements stem to a large extent from lack of precision in the use of these terms.

THE TRADING OF INTERESTS, VALUES AND NEEDS

A feature of interests is that they are negotiable: it is possible to trade an individual interest for a social gain. Taxation is one means by which this is done. All functional laws, such as the rules of the road, involve this trading. In a free-enterprise system, negotiation is an important part of everyday life. It takes the place of many of the detailed decisions that govern trading and social relationships in a centrally planned society.

When we are considering the ways in which social systems differ – for example communism and capitalism – we are concerned mainly with the degree to which individual interests are curbed or given free expression in the promotion of the social good. As interests are negotiable, there can be many variations in types of system, and many changes in systems from time to time.

By contrast, it follows from the definitions given above, that needs and values are not for trading. Needs, in particular, are inherent drives for survival and development, including identity and recognition. It

is not within the free decision making of the individual to trade them. Needs for identity that are frustrated or denied may give rise to behaviors that are inconsistent with the normal behavior, and even with the interests of the individual.

This is the core of contemporary domestic and international problems. Ethnic conflicts are being treated in sixty or so countries, where boundaries have been drawn as a result of colonialism or conquest, as though the individual can be coerced to accept majority rule which denies ethnic or cultural identity. Majority rule and power sharing (which is still majority rule) are legitimized by the label "democracy." This is an ideological misinterpretation of the notion of democracy, and such "democracy" is a source of protracted conflicts in many multi-ethnic societies. (Because the concept is so important, especially in multi-ethnic communities, we discuss it further in Chapter 9.)

In the global society, great powers are still operating on the traditional assumption that other nations can be coerced into behaving in certain ways. This is the approach adopted by greater powers to "terrorism," to competing economic and political systems, and to small states which seek to establish alternative political systems. It is predictable that war is frequently the result, despite the relatively weak position of small states. It should come as no surprise that small states can "win" conflicts with greater powers. Great powers have not yet come to terms with their failures to control by military force, because they have as yet little understanding that there are human needs that are not for trading and cannot be suppressed.

The distinction between interests that are negotiable, on the one hand, and values and needs that are not, on the other, is a recent one. It is an insight gained primarily from facilitated conflict resolution processes. These seek to be analytical and to reveal the underlying sources of conflict, rather than merely to negotiate from fixed positions of relative power. They reveal, therefore, these differences in motivations (Burton, 1979 and 1984, and Azar and Burton (eds), 1986). It is a distinction that was not part of traditional thought, and is not welcome in contemporary times to those who are in a majority or powerful position. It is a distinction, however, that must be made if there is to be an understanding of conflicts, and the formulation of policies calculated to avoid or to resolve them.

The emergence of the three distinct concepts - needs, values and interests - reflects a transition in thought and practice from elite interests in the institutions of government, in property and in control,

to the human needs of peoples who comprise societies. A continuing confusion between needs and values, on the one hand, and interests, on the other, is part of the transition. It is sustained by an unwillingness (based both on inertia and interests) to make the shifts in political, social and economic institutions that social evolution and the pursuit of needs require.

GOALS, TACTICS AND IDEOLOGIES

Still differentiating on the basis of needs theory the terms that are relevant to conflict and its resolution, we move now to clarify the notions of goals and tactics.

Fierce and sometimes violent opposition can result from different responses to conditions experienced in common even by persons and groups who have shared goals. The reason is that different tactics may be employed in the pursuit of common objectives. A "tactic" implies a choice of a satisfier, and this could be conflict making. Satisfiers may include resources that are in short supply, and this scarcity then becomes a source of conflict. For this reason it is important to separate goals and tactics in any analysis of conflict so that negotiable differences over choice of satisfiers can be separated from the issue of non-negotiable goals which, in any event, are likely to be held in common.

Inevitably there is a blurring of goals and tactics. The long-term goal may be national security; the tactic or satisfier may be the occupation of some strategic role or vantage points, which then becomes a pressing immediate "goal."

Sometimes belief systems govern tactics. When the nature of a problem is not understood, an approach is adopted that may not relate to the essence of the problem. The problem may be an increase in terrorism, and the goal to abolish it, but the tactic dictated by a prejudice or a belief system and not by the nature of the problem, may further suppress a minority and thus promote more terrorism. The problem may be a low level of observance of domestic law and order, and the goal to promote it, but the tactic employed - for example, exiling members of a dissident movement - may create, in the longer term, increased resistances to it.

Ideologies are put forward as statements of values and goals. It may be that they are also tactics. How do we differentiate ideologies, goals and tactics?

We have seen that political objectives are comprised of human needs, cultural and related values, and interests. Human needs are universal and, therefore, held in common. Cultural and other values are shared to a large degree in any society. Interests, however, separate members of societies into groupings, frequently in opposition to each other.

Within this framework the fundamental goals of different ideologies would, by definition, be similar. There might be differences in interests, and perhaps in values, but not in needs.

Indeed, this appears to be so. Communism and capitalism are both advocated in the name of an improved quality of life. The one seeks political structures that could make planned egalitarianism possible, the other promotes institutions that reward initiative and, thereby, promote increased living standards. The one controls information and expression to promote cohesion and support for the ideals of the system, the other values freedom of expression and, to some degree, of information, as a means to the same end.

The reality of shared goals and objectives, despite perceived conflictual relationships, becomes clear when parties to disputes are brought together in a face-to-face analytical dialogue, facilitated by a third party. Invariably they soon discover that they have the same ultimate goals. Greek and Turkish Cypriots discovered that neither wanted "Enosis" or "Double Enosis" (that is union with Greece or Turkey) but wished to identify with the island of Cyprus (Burton, 1984). Representatives of different communities in Lebanon discovered that all wished to identify with Lebanon as an independent Arab state if means could be found to preserve their separate identities (Azar and Burton, eds. 1986). Once it is discovered that goals are held in common, the stage is set for a search for means that satisfy all parties to a dispute.

We could conclude that if needs are universal, then philosophies and ideologies may differ only in interests and, to a limited degree, in values. However, it is not interests alone that in practice separate ideologies. Sometimes ideologies cut across interest groups. There tends to be a high correlation between support for, on the one hand, conservatism, fundamentalism, *laissez-faire* capitalism, socialism or communism, and, on the other, certain interest groups. There are, however, property owners, religious leaders, workers, industrialists and members of other interest groups who join in the *same* ideological beliefs. This reflects the mix of interests, values and needs that is unique to individuals, and a feature especially in societies in which

there have been opportunities for individual development. It is this mix that has to be analyzed and clarified in a facilitated conflict resolution setting.

IDEOLOGIES AND SYSTEMS

System preservation is a defensive response that seems to relate far more to role defense than to interests, values and needs. The conflict between the Soviet Union and the US is not primarily a conflict over ultimate goals, or even over immediate interests. It is a conflict over systems, which are means to goals. Conflict between systems becomes acute in a power political relationship when there is any internal dissent within a system that can be exploited by rivals.

From this perspective ideologies share tactics. Socialism can be sought by revolution, or by progressive steps toward a welfare state. Capitalism can be sought by similar means. There are those on both the "left" and the "right" who favor coercive means of defense against change and toward change. They are never explicit about what it is they finally seek. Both seek to substitute one power elite for another, one system for another.

Ideologies do not allow for self-criticism. They become a value to be defended, part of the identity of the person and groups. They are to a large degree tactical, or immediate responses to longer-term problems, while greatly influenced by role defense and affected by much confusion in thought. Being tactical responses – that is, means to ends – they do not define or deal with the source of problems.

It is this combination of interests and tactics that explains why ideologies, having common ultimate goals, are so conflictual. Ideologies are, therefore, an unnecessary source of conflict. The question "what are the goals" is one on which there can be agreement. "How best to achieve a goal" is a question that causes disputes.

CONFUSION OVER TACTICS AND GOALS

The fact that similar goals are sought by different tactics raises basic questions. Can those needs that are commonly sought, such as security, identity and development interpreted widely, be promoted and preserved by authoritative controls and deterrence, by binding constitutions, and by stronger elite control? Or are threats to

consensual values – that is, values held in common within and between societies – the direct result of steps taken to preserve them? Are the problems societies face due to tactics – the tactic of seeking to preserve existing institutions, without their adaptation to altering conditions and to emerging human requirements? Do *tactics* designed to preserve what is, lead to conditions in which the *goals* sought by the tactics may be destroyed?

It will be seen that unless there is clarity in concepts, there cannot be meaningful communication or analysis of the sources of a conflict. So often concepts are not perceived clearly because in practice they seem to merge into one another. But this is not because the concept is unclear. It is because there is a lack of precision in the definition of situations, with tactics and goals often being confused. This, in turn, is due to inadequate theories or an inadequate understanding of behaviors. The initial occupation of the Golan Heights by Israel was a tactic, a means of defense. Continuing to hold those heights came to be seen as a goal in itself. But security is the ultimate goal, and this could be prejudiced in the longer term by confusing it with the tactic.

One of the problems in politics is that this confusion between tactics and goals leads to non-negotiable positions and conflict. In arms control discussions certain proposals are put forward as a tactic in the negotiation. Later any modification of the proposal may be interpreted as a weakness. The proposal is promoted to the status of a goal. Sight of the ultimate goal is lost in the politics of the bargaining process.

IDEOLOGIES – IDEAL TYPES AND THE PRAGMATIC

The relationship between ideologies and human needs is one that deserves more consideration than scholars have so far given it. Ideologies emerge as the justification or rationalization of the decision making response. Fascism was a response in Italy to a set of economic and political conditions during the Great Depression of the 1930s. The response was not a planned one. Rather there emerged a corporate state as dominant interest groups sought to protect themselves in adverse circumstances. Yet it soon was claimed to be, and seen to be, an ideology to be defended in its own right. There are economic theories that lead logically to the corporate state. Other ideologies, such as fundamentalism or a return to the past, and

individualism or disregard for the future, are now emerging in both developed and underdeveloped countries as unsolved problems give rise to frustration and desperation. These extreme responses are characterized by high levels of state and individual violence.

Herein is the tragedy of international conflict such as has already been experienced in the twentieth century in two world wars: those who pursue an ideological mission, whether fascism, nazism or some other, do so because circumstances have led them to respond in this way. They legitimize their often aggressive policies by reference to philosophies and ideologies that are nothing more than *post hoc* rationalizations. Ideologies are the product of circumstances, not deliberate planning. Ideologies do not address the sources of problems. They seek to justify pragmatic responses to desperate situations.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the ideology-type responses to conditions that have been made in the past have not provided the alternative civilizations have desperately sought. They have evolved as means to short-term political ends. As ideologies they have no status to justify the importance that they assume in political life. It is different responses to commonly experienced conditions, different tactics, that lead to fierce and sometimes violent opposition. Wars are fought over tactics; fierce conflict over these failed tactics is a threat to all. This is why it is important to separate tactics and goals in any analysis of public policies. But there can be no such analytical separation in the absence of clear meanings of terms and concepts based on some adequate theory of behaviors.

We should not conclude that the complexities of analysis make policy making an impossible task, and that we must, therefore, revert to the unscientific mode of the “art of the possible” with an emphasis on power as the backstop. On the contrary, it is this perspective of complexity, it is this holistic orientation, that makes possible simplicity without reductionism.

Most people are conscious of the need for clarity in terms and concepts, and the need to be as precise as possible in exposition. In the subject area of conflict resolution, however, we experience special problems of language and exposition. This is particularly noticeable when parties are interacting together, and are more concerned with making their points than hearing what the other side has to say. Facilitators have a special need to be aware of the problem of communication, and to ensure that there are not further misunderstandings brought about by lack of clarity in terms and concepts.

COMMUNICATION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION

This detailed analysis has been made to underline the point that in complex situations such as ideological conflict – and indeed in all conflict situations from the matrimonial to the international – we require a deep analysis that examines core concepts, meaning of terms, underlying motives, shared needs and values and non-shared interests, and the costs of pursuing interests by conflictual means.

When we begin to examine the role of the facilitator it becomes apparent that what is important in any intervention is the degree to which the facilitator can promote in the parties an understanding in depth of the situation in which they are involved. This is an exercise in conceptual thinking as well as in communication.

Traditional power theorists correctly hypothesized inherent human propensities, and conflicts over scarce resources. Where they may have been wrong was in assuming that human behavior was determined mainly or solely by material benefits, and that the source of conflicts was over competition for scarce resources. Human behavior may be equally, and in many circumstances far more, oriented toward deeper concerns of identity and autonomy.

THE COMMON GOOD

Recently, gender issues, independence movements, ethnicity conflicts, employment status problems, and alienation protests, have been drawing our attention to human components that cannot any longer, thanks to conditions of modern communications and means of violent protest, be ignored or submerged by institutional devices. More and more we are being forced to acknowledge that street violence, domestic violence, terrorism and other features of modern societies are symptoms of frustrated human needs of some kind, and must be dealt with at their institutional source. We are becoming aware that this dimension, whether psychological or biological, enters also into great power relations, and regional conflicts such as in the Middle East.

There is also the more positive evidence that given conducive environmental circumstances and opportunities, with resulting valued relationships, human needs may be so satisfied that they may no longer be in evidence, despite the existence even of multi-ethnic conditions, as when economically successful members of ethnic

minorities seem to live contentedly in their host society. Valued relations are themselves a human need, or at least a satisfier of recognition and identity needs. The causes or sources of conflict between individuals and groups cannot be separated from the totality of relationships, and the environmental conditions that promote relationships. Valued relationships are probably the main constraints on so-called anti-social behaviors, and institutional and social circumstances can deprive many people of them.

A focus on a human dimension, with its socially negative aspects that advise against containment, and its socially positive aspects that point to conforming behaviors through valued relationships, raises in sharp relief a core issue that has plagued classical philosophers – that is, the tension between the individual interest and the common good. Conflict resolution and prevention theory throws light on this problem, for it draws attention to norms of behavior that take into account future costs and consequences of behaviors in ways not possible within settlement processes. A conflict is not resolved merely by reaching agreement between those who appear to be the parties to the dispute. There is a wider social dimension to be taken into account: the establishment of an environment that promotes and institutionalizes valued relationships. For example, agreement between some communities within a state, or between unions and management, could lead to adverse consequences for the public at large in the longer term. This important issue is discussed in Chapter 10 where we discuss the relationship between the individual and society.

DECISION MAKING

In addition to inherent drives there is another human component that has been neglected. Human beings are, of course, the product of evolution. Elements of aggression and greed, necessary to competitive survival, are undoubtedly associated with the pursuit of individual development. Human beings, however, possess the ability to make choices, to anticipate events, to cost consequences of actions, and deliberately to alter environments and social structures. Studies of problem-solving, of which conflict resolution and prevention is one type, suggest that this conscious component of human behavior, which makes possible creative responses to new information and situations, may be far more significant, at least potentially, than those

components of behavior that spring directly from primitive stimulus-response reactions to circumstances. We need to remind ourselves constantly of this human ability to make choices, and to control environments and relationships in order to achieve planned goals. Our problem is to find the processes and the institutionalized structures that exploit and promote such abilities. What becomes clear from an examination of trends in decision making and in the handling of conflict, which is the concern of Part III, is that there is an awareness of failure of power-oriented processes. The goal of the study of conflict resolution and its prevention is to ride the wave created by that awareness.

4 The Environment of Conflict

THE DETERMINANTS OF CONFLICT

A human needs framework leads us to conclude that the incidence of conflict is the consequence of altering balances between (1) total despair and apathy due to defeat in the struggle to survive; (2), sufficient resources with which to survive plus an acceptable satisfaction of human needs; and (3), adequate material conditions by which to defeat apathy, but the denial, nevertheless of certain non-material satisfactions. (1) and (2) are conditions in which conflict is not necessarily rife: there is either apathy, or, at the other extreme tolerable satisfaction of material and non-material needs. Condition (3) provides the environment of conflict: the existence of opportunities to pursue human needs that are being denied.

Any increases in living standards that might result from scientific innovation and aid programs could take some people out of (1), the despair category, and place them in (3), the protest category. Any reduction in satisfiers of needs, any reduced standard of living, would necessarily take people out of (2), the satisfied category and throw them also into (3), the protest condition. The future incidence of conflict depends, therefore, on resource and opportunity availabilities and their distribution.

These are not marginal considerations. It requires only slight decreases or increases in living standards and quality of life to have extensive effects. We cannot anticipate increases in living standards sufficient to provide any reserve of physical satisfiers. There is no possibility that the majority of peoples in the global society will ever attain material standards of living that would be regarded by peoples in Western developed states as even tolerable. Projected population increases, along with energy and resource consumption increases, are sufficient to lead to this conclusion, together with the political impossibility of introducing a sharing and equitable global economy. Mere survival is and will remain the important material goal for most people. For many in developed societies, and for the majority of peoples in the undeveloped world, the important struggle is and will continue to be to maintain, regain or acquire certain non-material