



Chapter 4: Human needs and behaviour

This chapter and the remaining chapters present a theory of human nature and the human condition which underpins the discussion of issues in the first three chapters.

A. Physical needs

The human being has needs, related to the structure and processes of the physical organism, for food, drink, sex, sleep, warmth and shelter, activity, sensory stimulation. For all practical purposes, there is virtually no genetic programming of behaviour to meet these needs, apart from minimal reflexes such as a sucking reflex in the neonate. Behaviour that satisfies physical needs is almost entirely learned through the process of socialisation: social norms prescribe the relevant behaviour.

B. Personal needs

These appear to be *sui generis*, discontinuous with physical needs and not reducible to them in any way, however inter-related the respective satisfactions of human and physical needs may be. By their very nature they would seem to belong to a different order of reality. Their satisfaction cannot be defined in purely physical terms, and any culturally determined and defined limit of their satisfaction begs basic questions: Why suppose that this culture more than any other has arrived at valid defining limits? But in any case can any defining limit rationally be given? Personal needs, on this model, are needs to fulfil, realise distinctively human capacities or potentialities; and the depth, range, variety, form and intensity of such fulfilment is virtually unlimited.

1. **The need to love and be loved.** The capacity here is the capacity to care and be cared for, to be concerned for the other for the other's sake and to be the conscious recipient of such concern, to wish the flourishing of another and to flourish in response to a reciprocal wish. The need is satisfied in mutual loving - a shared celebration of individual strengths and differences; and in all those situations in which persons seek co-operatively to provide conditions in which they and others can in liberty determine and fulfil their true needs and interests. It seems logically odd to suppose there can be any final limit to the fulfilment of a person's capacity for loving. If love can be regarded, in part at any rate, as concern for the other *qua* other, then the only (variable) limit put upon loving would seem to be the number of others known to exist and expected to exist.
2. **The need to understand and be understood.** This presupposes the capacity of intelligence - to entertain sets of concepts that render experience intelligible and to be an intelligible experience for others. The need is satisfied in mutual communication - giving and receiving sets of symbols that give meaning to or find meaning in the world/others/self. The symbols may be discursive as in language or non-discursive as in all forms of non-verbal art and non-

verbal interaction. Again it is logically odd to argue that there are absolute limits to knowledge, to fulfilment of our capacity for understanding, for we are then faced with a strange assertion that we know there is an unknowable. There appear to be no logically discernible limits to this fulfilment.

3. **The need to be self-directing and to be freely engaged with the directions of a greater whole.** This need presupposes the capacity for choice and for being chosen. To be self-directing is to make autonomous choices - choices rationally made on the basis of relevant factual considerations and in the light of values of one's own. It means taking charge of one's life, bringing more and more (and potentially unlimited) areas of it under the direction of explicit intention, of conscious experimentation and risk-taking. The need is satisfied in associations in which individual autonomy is exercised in the context of those with shared beliefs and aspirations who also exercise their autonomy. The person takes responsibility and engages with a social system for significant parts of which others have taken responsibility. She is self-directing while being voluntarily subject to the directions which others have taken on her behalf.

Some general conjectural points may now be made about these supposed three basic personal needs:

1. The behaviour that satisfies them would seem to be entirely learned. But there are at least three overlapping phases in the learning process:
 - Spontaneous exploration and play.
 - Uncritical adaptation to prevailing norms of behaviour.
 - Autonomous growth in which the person revises all norms and values unreflectively acquired in the socialisation process and seeks an authentic personal way of meeting these needs.
2. Each of the three needs was expressed above in both an active and a passive form. It seems reasonable to argue, from considerable evidence now available, that adequate fulfilment of the passive form of the need is a necessary precondition of, or at any rate greatly facilitates, effective fulfilment of the active form of the need. To be loved enables loving, to be understood enables understanding, to be subject to facilitating directions of others enables self-direction. Humans need to receive before they can impart, to be nourished before they can exercise.
3. The three needs are interdependent and mutually supporting. Effective communication presupposes mutual concern and co-operative exercise of autonomy. Fulfilment of any one presupposes some measure of fulfilment of each of the other two.
4. As suggested above, they are distinct in kind from physical needs, potentially unlimited in the extent of their fulfilment, and yet the physical organism with its needs is their primary medium.
5. When dealing with the effects of psychological and social oppression or deprivation, then satisfying personal needs can be seen as meeting a lack, making up a deficit, even healing a psychological wound. But in social circumstances where human beings enable and facilitate each other, satisfying these needs can better be seen as the pursuit of human flourishing, of

abundant living, of variety, novelty and challenge. They are concerned with the innovative, not merely the conservative, side of life. And when they subsume and include the satisfactions of physical need, then the latter too take on this quality of flourishing above and beyond purely homeostatic maintenance.

6. A further suggestion can be tentatively made. These needs seem to seek fulfilment in two polar but complementary modes. On the one hand, there is the tendency to self-expression, to greater distinctness, differentiation and richness of individual being. On the other hand, there is the tendency to self-transcendence, to greater unity, fusion and identity of being. In both the active and passive modes, personal needs, it is conjectured, complement the thrust of diversity with the thrust of unity, and vice versa.

The basic residual question is whether the full range of human behaviour - from the distorted and perverse to the loving and enlightened - can be explained in terms of relations between the total environment of human beings, the organism and two sets of needs, physical and personal, the behaviour to satisfy which has to be acquired through experience and is not innately programmed in the organism.

C. Human behaviour

The range of behaviour to be explained is something like the following:

1. **Distinctively human behaviour.** When personal needs are fulfilled in a relatively unimpaired way, then we have the three phases or types of behaviour indicated earlier:

- **Playful:** spontaneous, improvisatory, joyful, fun-filled, creative
- **Conventional:** accepting prevailing rational norms and values
- **Autonomous:** aware of, in charge of and not run by, social and psychological processes. The sort of epithets that cluster round the notion of autonomous behaviour are: purposive, intentional, decisive, responsible, resourceful, innovative, risk-taking, adventurous, challenging, confronting, responsive, attuned, accepting, flowing, going with, co-operative, conciliatory, affiliative, communicative, corporate, political, organisational, intimate, caring, sharing, nurturing, protective, delighted, passionate, knowing, believing, enquiring, reflecting, problem-solving, imaginative, inventive, creative, contemplative, insightful, expressive, elegant, rhythmic, harmonious, humorous ...

Autonomous behaviour is not other-directed but self-directed and self-creating, with norms and values rationally adopted.

2. **Distorted human behaviour.** When personal needs have been interfered with or suspended in some way and their proper fulfilment occluded and suppressed, then behaviour is distorted into half-conscious, quasi-mechanical, repetitive and maladaptive forms. Humans become the confused victims of disrupted psychological processes that play themselves out in behaviour in a relatively unaware and uncontrolled way. The point about distorted behaviour is that it is not deliberately malicious, but is blind, repetitive, unproductive, dissatisfying to the person who

is not in charge of it. This is the arena of the defence mechanisms in Freudian analysis, of games and ulterior transactions in transactional analysis, of intermittent and chronic patterns in re-evaluation counselling, of struggle and symbolic behaviour in primal therapy. Distorted behaviour is above all compulsive. It appears to be very widespread throughout the culture. Some common forms are:

- **Invalidation:** compulsive and irrational deprecation of self and/or others, putting self or others down, falsely blaming self or others.
- **Irrational claims:** compulsive behaviour in which, overtly or covertly, there are claims, demands and expectations which bear no rational relation to the human realities of the situation in oneself or in others. Being inappropriately driven in adult situations by the hidden pain, the unfulfilled frozen needs and the imposed programmes of childhood. Emotional manipulation.
- **Rigid belief:** compulsive adherence to beliefs, about oneself or others or anything, that are not supported by the available evidence, that are ill-conceived, incoherent, rationally unjustified. The verbal insistence on such beliefs and the inflexible behaviour that follows from them. Prejudice.

The general theory here, to be developed more thoroughly below, is that this sort of behaviour both contains (is a defence against the release of), and is distorted by, unresolved and undischarged distress resulting from cumulative early interference with personal needs. The person is only an apparent victim of the compulsions, has some awareness of their counter-productive repetitive nature and has the power, with appropriate training, to release the distress, dissolve the distortions and gain insight into their genesis. There appear to be three degrees of such behaviour:

- **The defensive:** the distortions are accommodated within social structures and may in turn distort such structures, such as the three forms given just above
 - **The defensive and the disabling:** the distortions make the person unable to observe normal social behaviour, but she knows the distortion is a distortion, such as chronic phobias.
 - **The defensive, the disabling and the deluded:** the distortions not only disrupt social processes, but the person can have great difficulty in seeing them as distortions, such as paranoid delusions. In this case, the person's own concept of what is distorted needs to be worked with first.
3. **Perverved human behaviour.** This is behaviour that is deliberately malicious, that intentionally seeks the harm of self or others, and seeks that harm primarily for its own sake, as an end in itself, even when rationalised as a means to some spurious good, and even when justified as a means to some genuine good. Such behaviour can include the use of force, threat, torture, duress; giving lies and false information, defaming, slandering; destructive psychological attack; brainwashing and stress-induced change; malicious seduction in the sexual and the wider sense; supporting someone independently bent on destructive

behaviour, persistent self-destruction or self-neglect.

- **Spasmodic:** There is the sudden, impulsive, uncontrolled outburst of destructive behaviour, a breakdown into wife bashing or child battering, into malevolent psychological attack, into smashing of property, and so on.
- **Chronic:** The destructive perversion is repeated regularly and practised regularly, maybe with careful premeditation and planning.
- **Institutionalised:** Armies, Gestapo, the secret police, old-style schools - destructive behaviour is applied as part of routine official procedure. For centuries the family was another example: acceptable child-raising practices included systematically destructive behaviour towards children.

In some instances perverted behaviour may simply be learned, adopted on the basis of instruction by some supposed authority; in other instances it may have the same genesis as distorted behaviour, only more so; or more probably both explanations apply. However, compared to simple defensive distorted behaviour, there appears to be an additional factor: intentionality has taken over the distortions and vice versa. The chronic internal distress is systematically, deliberately being projected onto others by means of malicious intent. Ordinary run-of-the-mill distorted behaviour produces a psychological mess and creates much dissatisfaction and unhappiness, but it is free of this kind of intentional malignity. It often has pseudo-intentionality: the compulsive behaviour is dressed up with spurious legitimating reasons. Perverted behaviour involves a much more far-reaching distortion of intentionality itself: it wills harm.

Another way of restating the whole of this section is to say that human behaviour can degenerate according to an inverted Y shape:

Authentic-intention

Pseudo-intention

Malicious-intention Deluded-intention

There is authentic intention, where personal needs are meaningfully fulfilled; there is pseudo-intention, which rationalises compulsive behaviour rooted in minor distortions of personal needs; then there is either malicious intention or deluded intention, rooted in major distortions of personal needs.

4. **The rigid society.** Distorted and perverted behaviour seems to become systematically congealed in social structures, creating the rigid society. Some of its features are:
 - **Steep status hierarchy** - with power of decision-making vested firmly at the top, with little genuine consultation with lower levels, with poor downward communication about major issues
 - **Rigid rules** - defining lower level responsibilities but with extraneous competition for status, power and influence among different "departments"
 - **Systematic psychological oppression** - of the masses on the lowest levels, combined

with political oppression and economic exploitation.

In many ways such a social system looks like the product of double distress (see following section): distress at the physical level about food, territory, etc., leads to an animal-like dominance hierarchy, but cumulative additional distress at the level of personal needs distorts such a dominance hierarchy into forms of intentional oppression unknown among animals.
