

NATURAL v. SOCIAL NEEDS

(A lecture and group exercise compiled by James Elder-Woodward, at Jordanhill College of Further Education, 1994; based on the book, "THE NEEDS OF STRANGERS", by Michael Ignatieff, Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, London, 1984)

Michael Ignatieff, in this book, **"THE NEEDS OF STRANGERS"**, considers what is meant by needs. His main interest is in how society has translated such considerations into the development of the Welfare State. In particular, he looks at how such a state institution has buffeted the needy stranger from the relatively rich taxpayers.

Ignatieff points out that the Welfare State is not generous, but it does set out to satisfy a broad range of needs; food, shelter, health. But what about our 'social' needs? Is there a difference between our needs of basic survival and our needs to develop our full potential, our 'self-actualisation', as Maslow calls it; and what about our need to flourish?

Ignatieff rightly looks at needs in terms of our language. We have no real difficulty in describing, and thereby defining, hunger, or warmth, but what about the concept of 'self-actualisation', or 'flourishment'?

Not only are we unsure what such needs mean, both in terms of their generality and specificity, but, we do not have the concept of 'a unit' of 'self-actualisation', or 'a unit' of 'flourishment'. Therefore we may find it impossible to measure these concepts, as we can for weight, heat and other aspects of bodily functions. If we are not able to measure such concepts of need, we may have some difficulty monitoring them, or legislating for them. All of which suggests that our capacity to satisfy other people's higher order of needs is heavily handicapped by our own limited language and thought processes.

Ignatieff ponders the question, do we, as individuals, know what we truly need? Would it not be best to leave it to others to assess our needs? Now, here we enter the realm of professional arrogance which doctors, social workers and other para-medics

tend to have in decreeing that they can "objectively" define what others in their care need.

Later on Ignatieff argues that the claim of need highlights the relationship between the powerful and powerless human. Ignatieff says a claim of need should be taken on trust, because without trust the world would be a murderous and pitiless place. Therefore, the powerful, e.g. politicians and professionals, should accept the value of self-defining need, or 'felt' need; for, "without trust, there is mere oppression",

But first, Ignatieff, discusses the political arguments over the language of needs versus the language of rights; the debate between personal freedom and the collective good. This, he reflects, is the contradiction at the heart of the welfare state. Rights to services do not equal needs for individual dignity, respect, or love.

Treat people as individuals, thereby giving each their place and respecting their distinct characteristics; and you treat people unequally. Treat people as members of the same genre, homo sapiens, without recognising their individual differences and unique place in the family, or society at large; you, thereby, treat them equally.

However, treating everyone the same, often ends in treating them like things. This may be why disabled people feel nurses and residential care workers, generally, make such poor personal support workers. There may be several factors leading to such opinions among disabled people -

1. Their training and institutional work experience tend to lead them to take control of, not just the doing, but the thinking of those 'in their care'. The training of personal support workers reinforces the understanding that the function of decision-making in any activity is the sole responsibility of the disabled person.
2. They are accountable to their own employers and professional bodies, not directly to the person in their care. Personal support workers are solely accountable to the disabled person

3. They are often pressurised by management to care for too many 'patients', due to under-resourcing of services. They are forced into trying to make sure each one gets the same proportion of their limited time and skills. This, in turn, restricts their ability to take into account the higher order needs of people. They can barely satisfy the more basic ones. On the other hand, personal support workers work mainly to one disabled person.

In the end, whereas personal support workers can treat people as people, traditional nurses and care workers, treat 'the cared for', more often than not, as 'things'. 'The cared for' are frequently being stripped of their dignity and individuality as rational and respected members of a social group, in a frantic effort to satisfy their basic physical needs.

When, over thirty years ago, Sweden began decanting disabled people from institutions and developing their community care support systems not only was this problem recognised, but so was another -

"In the systems of nursing and integration the disabled person has to play several different roles. In the customary institution he is a passive receiver of help and assistance. When living freely and independently, the disabled person - like all others - has to ask for service. Our investigations show that many disabled people starting their integrated lives find it difficult to exchange the passive role of receiver for the active one of ordering service. We found that nurses and service assistants have the same problem although the direction is reversed. A well-educated and well-trained nurse who is familiar with her role of thinking and acting for the disabled (person)¹ will have considerable psychological trouble when she has to take her place as a service assistant to the disabled (person). If we are unable to teach and train the disabled (person) as well as the service staff for these new roles we will lose the possibility of real integration. This training is therefore a very important part of the rehabilitation process."²

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(The noun 'person' has been added after the adjective 'disabled' in this quote to avoid discriminatory language. Undoubtedly, the writer also has difficulty with sexism, as he assumes the carer will be female.)

² Brattgaard, Sven-Olaf, (1974), "Social and psychological aspects of the situation of the disabled", reprinted in Boswell, D. M., and Wingrove, J. N., "The Handicapped Person in the Community", Tavistock Publication in association with the Open University.

Returning to Ignatieff, he continues the political debate over the needs of strangers, either as individuals, or as members of the same genre. The first highlights liberty and personal freedom; whereas the second advocates solidarity and collective social good.

Ignatieff states that liberals (i.e. Conservatives) choose the first, thinking it is right that those with social standing should have more than those without. After all those without have only themselves to blame, because they are inadequate or lazy. However, socialists (as opposed to liberals) argue that liberty and personal freedom can exist alongside solidarity and collective social good. Yet, Ignatieff points to both the British Welfare State and the communist states, as examples where socialists have not yet managed to reconcile personal freedom with collective social good.

Beneath all our differences, there is a common group of natural needs. These needs of all human beings - food, warmth, shelter, etc. - should lead us to believe in our solidarity and collective social good. Yet there is no such thing as 'natural man'. As Ignatieff writes - we "are clothed not just in skin, but class and history".

My needs as a social being are different to my needs as a natural being. My needs as both are likewise different to yours. Our obligations are also based on differences. Our obligations as a parent are different from those of a spouse or friend or even to organisations, such as work, club, or church. Our obligations are also confined to this culture, and this period of time. Social differences rule obligations, or duties, not natural identity.

Even natural needs are confined to a social context. My hunger is not the same as that of a refugee in Ethiopia. In addition, if we all had the same natural identity, the life of starving refugee would mean the same to me as the life of my mother, or child. Social differences do mean more than natural identity. Such feelings of solidarity and collective social good, in the vast majority of cases, just do not exist.

In the chapter dealing with people's natural versus social needs, Ignatieff takes, as an illustration, Shakespeare's play "King Lear". As a king Lear could demand the fulfilment of every whim or

desire, but as a pauper he is made to justify his plea for help to satisfy his needs for survival.

All his life he had been addressed in the supplicating language of need from his subjects. Now, as a pauper, he has to use the same language and reason for his need. As a king he had no claim that needed an argument; as a subject he is forced to give reasons and account for himself

**"O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs.
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady,
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need -
You heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. "**

Why should he beg like this? He is asking his daughter for help. Should he reason with his daughter? Has the daughter not got an obligation to her father?

What Lear is asking for is a retinue of knights - not something all human beings need. Yet, as Lear says, if we were all judged by the standards of our natural need, no-one would have their social needs satisfied - we would be like animals. The social world, he argues, is a place of differences, where each person's needs depends on their rank, position and history. Lear also argues as a man. To question anyone's need, he says, is to presume they lack the capacity to know their own minds.

His daughter had just done that -

**O sir, you are old
Nature in you stands on the very verge
Of her confine. You should be ruled and led
By some discretion that discerns your state
Better than you yourself**

Fathers often tell daughters whom they should marry. Then daughters rake revenge and dictate terms when fathers are old. The fulcrum of family relations seems to be based on power, not obligation

Lear's daughters saw his cry of need as a cry for power. To give Lear his knights would be to give him power. Similarly, to give those in the welfare state adequate resources would be to give them power. To give power to the powerless - is this not the stuff of revolution; are we not in danger of overthrowing the establishment? This depends on whether you look upon 'the needy' in terms of an equal fellow, who should have the same opportunities to exercise power over their own lives; or as a lesser person, who should have less opportunity and remain in a state of dependency.

Many professionals and so-called 'liberals' say that people do not know what they really need. There must be some objectivity - but objectivity never exists. Assessment of needs happens within a set of parameters and within the confinements of finite resources - both determined by powerful people.

Ignatieff states -

".... Human beings must be trusted to know themselves, however imperfect we admit self-knowledge to be, for without trust, there is no limit to oppression. If the powerful do not trust the reasons of the poor, these reasons will never be reason enough. A rich man never lacks for arguments to deny the poor his charity.

..... The demand to give reasons for need is the demand that the poor person, show themselves as deserving.

..... The claim of need has nothing to do with deserving; it rests on people's necessity, not on their merit; on their poor common humanity, not on their pathos.

..... Once the rich begin to demand reasons, once they cease to take claims on trust, Lear asks, what obligations will survive? Will the utterance of starvation be enough for the hardhearted? Why stop there? 'Man's life is cheap as beasts.'"

Need, within the welfare state is mainly based on an assessment of personal income. Most services for disabled people are means tested; and this has become more so since the implementation of community care.

Disabled people have long argued that services and provision should be designed to promote independent living and based on an assessment of what is needed to overcome the physical, social

and organisational barriers, which have been erected against them by able-bodied society.

One basic precept of community care was to support people to live independently within the community and to empower them to participate equally within society. Before its implementation, the government had already conceded the need for severely disabled people to receive direct cash to pay for their own care at home and maintain their independence.

Under coercion, the government drew up criteria for this provision in the expectation that only 2,000 people would be eligible. A **charity**, "Independent Living Fund", was therefore established. When, some five years later, the Fund was supporting over 22,000 people at over 20 times the cost, changes were made in the criteria to limit the eligibility.

Disabled people's needs were the same, but resources were denied to them, because the criteria for eligibility were restricted by those in powerful positions: those whom liberals say are more deserving because of their social standing.

Eventually, the government changed the entire system, to bring it in line with community care. Now it is extremely difficult to get funding from the Independent Living Fund: "A rich man never lacks for arguments to deny the poor his charity"; nor, for that matter, does the powerful lack the argument to deny resources to uphold the rights of the powerless.

In his discussion on natural versus social needs, Ignatieff does not consider the most contemporary argument, which predominates present day community care thinking; and upon which its champions draw when they voice its merits. This is **monetary theory** in the management of resources. The government, both local and national, and now its opposition (Labour), says the country can only pay for what it can afford. Their professionals and administrators are now confined to finite budgets and are told to work flexibly and imaginatively within them.

Monetary theory may have general approval. However, there is still an argument about how much the rich taxpayer can afford, 20% or 30% of total income? Also, in which form - either, direct, e.g. income tax, or indirect, e.g. VAT on fuel - should s/he pay it?

There is yet another argument about how the taxpayer's cake of money should be divided up, both between budgets, e.g. between defence and health; and within budgets, e.g. between mentally ill people and disabled people.

Ignatieff does contrast between what a person needs and what they are due. What one needs, he says, one does not earn or deserve. Therefore, one should not have to justify need. Entitlement inheres to one's person, or humanity, not one's status. The bottom line should be each one of us in need should be entitled to the basic necessities of life from others superfluity.

What one is due is what one deserves. These are other claims, due to their station, rank, merit or contribution to society. This is the basis of the social security system.

If I am disabled as a child, or without making any contribution to national insurance I receive less than someone who becomes disabled after working for a while. Only my basic needs as an individual are met. I have no social standing within society. If I become disabled after working a while, and thereby contribute both to society's wealth and the national insurance system, I still get less than someone who becomes disabled whilst in the armed forces. Therefore, my social standing in society is related to my 'worth' and is duly recompensed; but my 'worth' to society, as a worker, is not as much as my 'worth' as a defender and killer.

This system operates irrespective of the degree of impairment. As a youth, I may have multiple impairments, mental, sensory and physical; whilst as a worker, I may have an amputated leg. It is also irrespective of the cause. As a worker I may have contracted an industrial disease, or had an industrial injury; whilst as an army officer I could have an injured back after a road accident, caused by my own drunkenness.

Ignatieff states:

"If basic need is what is necessary to man as a natural being; these additional claims are due to him as a social being. If a man's need is what is necessary to his survival, his due is what is essential to his honour - to his self-regard, and to the regard in which he is held by others."

However, these two are really one. What a person needs is their due, and what is their due, they need. To give a person only what they need, is to dishonour them as social beings, as Lear says:

**"Thou art the thing itself;
Unaccommodated man is no more
But such a poor, bare forked animal",**

The welfare state in the time of Lear was non-existent. Mad people, disabled people, criminals, the poor, all were excommunicated into the barren heath around the villages, even 'physicks' - people we now call 'doctors' were driven out when their potions did not work.

There, in the barren heath, only the needs of 'natural man', or 'unaccommodated man' could be met, if at all. They were met, either by individuals, themselves, through self-preservation, or from those others likewise excommunicated, through exchange or empathy.

In the days of Lear, a hotchpotch of Barons, Burghers, or even the masses of common folk, could exile people from the rest of the community. From the Poor Laws in the early 1700's, through the development of institutions in the Victorian era, to the post-war welfare state and on to today's community care, society has empowered sheriffs, doctors and social workers to excommunicate those who are deemed to be deviant, from the rest of society.

As Ignatieff writes -

"There is one thing more to say. The heath of Shakespeare's time is gone. The landlords fenced it, put it down in furrows and grass and set the masterless men to work upon it for wages. Lighted highways were pushed through its darkness, and the King's peace was spread like a seamless cover on the land. At night, the police patrol its wastes. The vagrants are in shelters or the unemployment roll. Old men whom their daughters abandon now get their pensions and a home visitor.

But there is still a heath; it is the vast grey space of state confinement. On the wards of psychiatric hospitals, the attendants shovel gruel into the mouths of vacant or unwilling patients; in the dispensaries, the drug trays are prepared; on the catwalks of the prisons, dinner is slopped into trays and thrust into cells. Needs are met, but souls are dishonoured. Natural

man - the 'poor, bare forked animal' - is maintained; the social man wastes away."

In the new heath of today's society; 'unaccommodated man' does not need to rely on the empathy of his fellows, or on the exchange mechanisms of mutual survival. He does need to rely on the new army of professionals upon whom society has conferred the power to either rehabilitate him to fit into the status quo, or failing that care for him in the heath lands outside.

The struggle now is not only to redress the power between the 'unaccommodated man' and the professional, but to stop people being 'unaccommodated' in the first place. This must be done by making society itself more accommodating to 'needy', or to use a more accurate term, '**non-resourced**', people's specific situation. Society must acknowledge that their needs are the same as others who have resources. It is only the resource, which is difference, either in amount or kind.

By looking at needs, both natural and social, as a dynamic process of resource transfer and ownership of power, we may see more clearly how the fear, hatred and discrimination within society maintains its heath lands and forces those upon whom fear, hatred and discrimination is heaped to remain therein. Perhaps, it may even motivate some to do something about it.

The following exercises may stimulate thought and discussion.

Group Exercise

WHAT IS NEED?

Michael Ignatieff's book on natural and social needs, "The needs of strangers", took Shakespeare's play, 'King Lear', as an illustration for his discussion.

As king, his merest whim or desire would be granted. As a pauper, his needs have to be argued and justified:

**Lear: "O, reason not the need! Our basest beggars
Are in the poorest thing superfluous.
Allow not nature more than nature needs.
Man's life is cheap as beast's. Thou art a lady,
If only to go warm were gorgeous,
Why, nature needs not what thou gorgeous wear'st,
Which scarcely keeps thee warm. But for true need - You
heavens, give me that patience, patience I need. "**

Patience may be what most clients of the welfare state need as they deal with providers, their bureaucracies, assessments and timeless delays in supplying resources.

However, that aside, this discourse on natural and social need might profitably lead to a discussion of 'need' in terms of resource transfer and ownership of power.

Look at the following framework, within small groups.

RESOURCE TRANSFER

DEMAND	SUPPLY	METHOD	POWER BASE	STATUS
Desire	Obligation	Gift	Recipient	Intrinsic
Needs	Charity (1)	Assessment	Provider	Intrinsic
Needs	State Welfare (2)	Assessment	Provider	Extrinsic
Rights	Civil Rights Legislation	Purchase*	Recipient	Extrinsic

(* 'to get in any way, other than inheritance' (legal term))

This table describes a method of looking at the different ways resources may be transferred from one to another within society.

The process starts from the type of 'Demand' from the recipient of the resource - whether it is a feeling of desire, or an expressed need, or a civil right.

The table then describes the type of 'Supply', or the basis from which the provider of the resource acts. This may be

- ◆ a feeling of obligation on the part of an individual, because of some emotional tie;
- ◆ an act of charity on the part of an individual or body;
- ◆ or through the enablement of some provision of the welfare state legislation - based on a professional assessment of need;
- ◆ or the outcome of some convention, or law of society, following civil rights legislation.

It goes on to illustrate the method of transferring the resource - whether it is given as a selfless gift from the provider; or after a process of assessment and consideration, by the provider; or purchased by, or on behalf of, the recipient.

Then the table suggests where the 'Power Base' lies - whether within the recipient, or the provider of the resource.

Finally, the table indicates the 'Status' of that power base - whether it is intrinsic, because of its inheritable or historical status; or extrinsic, because of an external factor, such as a professional assessment, or some legal status within society.

Of course, this table only gives a framework of the types of processes within resource transfer. Illustrations of each process do not guarantee the outcome of a resource transfer. There needs to be "a resource" somewhere in the system to transfer; and either the recipient or the provider has to have some actual "power" to facilitate that transfer.

Take a child's desire to have a toy. The child may, or may not have intrinsic power over the mother, depending upon how obligated the mother is to the child. In addition, the mother may or may not have the resource to give the child a toy.

Similarly, a disabled person may have a right to be assessed for personal assistance, but if the local authority gives assessments a low priority in its budget, or just has no-one to do the assessment, that person still has to wait.

Group Exercise

Consider the table and discuss the relative outcomes of each situation in terms of power in both recipient and provider; and the values of equity, independence and civil participation

FIRESIDE THOUGHTS

(Extract from: "The needs of strangers", Michael Ignatieff, Chatto & Windus, The Hogarth Press, 1984)

"If need is a tragic idea, if King Lear is a tragedy of need, it is because those feelings we call needs have a necessity which can drive us even to our own destruction. Desire does not have the force of tragedy; it has the cunning to bend around reality, to send its shoots and tendrils over the wall of the real. But need cannot bend, cannot defer, cannot wait. It has no patience. It is tragic because it submits neither to the will, nor to the real. We are not animals to sit out the storm, to adjust our means to our realities. We are the only creatures who rage at the injustice of our fate, who struggle against our needs and the fates that prescribe for us.

There is one thing more to say. The heath of Shakespeare's time is gone. The landlords fenced it, put it down in furrows and grass and set the masterless men to work upon it for wages. Lighted highways were pushed through its darkness, and the King's peace was spread like a seamless cover on the land. At night, the police patrol its wastes. The vagrants are in shelters or the unemployment roll. Old men whom their daughters abandon now get their pensions and a home visitor.

But there is still a heath; it is the vast grey space of state confinement. On the wards of psychiatric hospitals, the attendants shovel gruel into the mouths of vacant or unwilling patients; in the dispensaries, the drug trays are prepared; on the catwalks of the prisons, dinner is slopped into trays and thrust into cells. Needs are met, but souls are dishonoured. Natural man - the `poor, bare forked animal` - is maintained; the social man wastes away."

At home, consider Michael Ignatieff's distinction between natural and social man; especially in the light of today's "New Right"³ thinking on society and its welfare state: and reflect on the ways in which such thinking affects, both positively and negatively the maintenance, and nurturing of both natural and social man.

The poor and destitute are seen to deserve their fate either because they lack abilities to compete or because they are lazy. Friedman goes on to say, "One recourse (for those left destitute), and in many ways the most desirable, is private charity." Failing that, the state should provide "a floor" or safety net; but this should be kept to a minimum to reduce the possibility of increased taxes and bureaucracy, with a corresponding decrease in the industry of the people.

³ Milton Friedman is the greatest guru of the New Right, which he calls "liberals". He states, in his book "Capitalism and Freedom", "the individual (is) the ultimate entity in society". Inequality is to be welcomed because it is the prospect of personal gain and the fear of poverty which drive people to work hard now and save for the future: "equality comes sharply into conflict with freedom; one must choose. One cannot be both an egalitarian, in this sense, and a liberal."