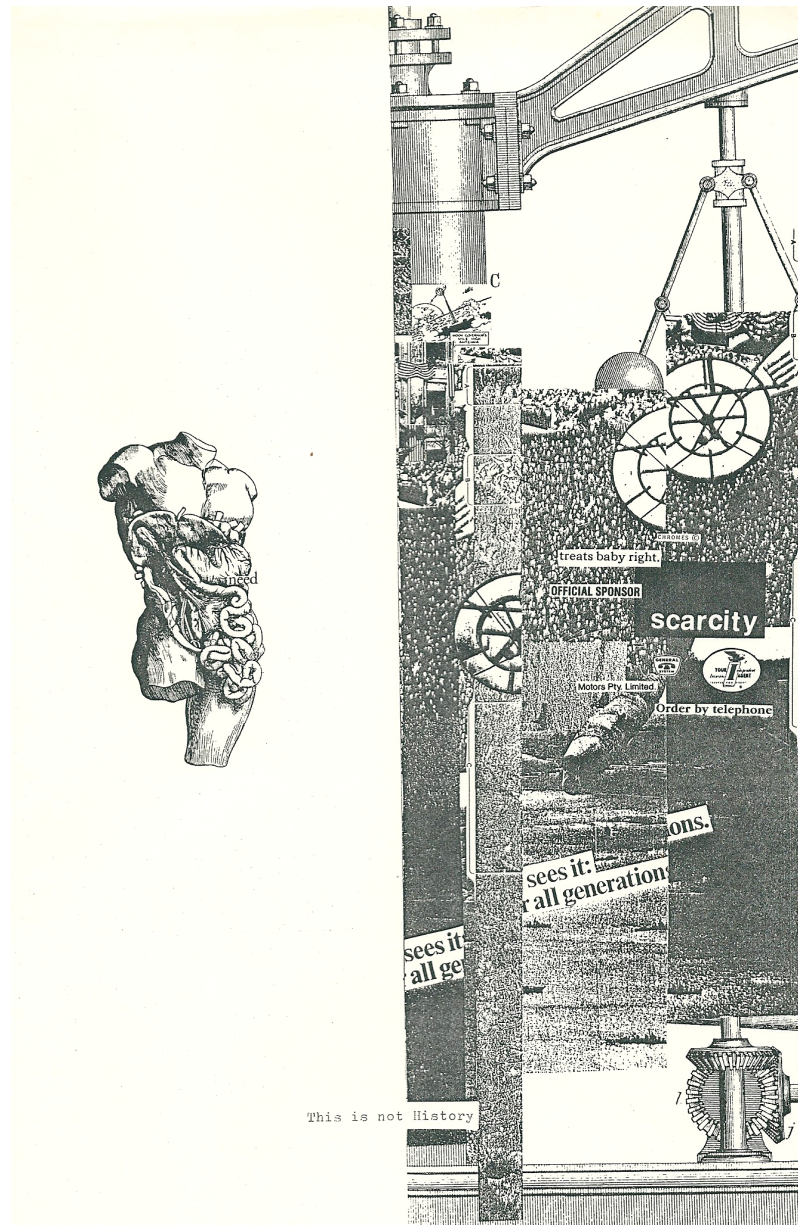


Theorising Empowerment Practice from the Pacific and Indigenous Australia

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Part 2

Theoretical Synthesis

Chapter 5

Universal Human Need

“One can intuitively distinguish between the objectivity of external nature, the normative character of society, the intersubjectivity of language, and the subjectivity of internal nature.”

Jurgen Habermas, *Theory and Society*, 3 (1976:155)

5.1 Introduction

As the previous chapters have shown, the subject matter of empowerment appears across a range of disciplines, from international development and political theory to management, education, gender studies, organizing, community psychology and public health. Based on the actual experience of practising organisations, these fields have been explored for the applicability of their theoretical perspectives to real life. In this process, some tools and general characteristics have emerged with which to consider the process of empowerment. In sum, these are: Galtung's vocabulary of equity, participation and autonomy, actors and structures; Habermas's theory of communicative action; Lash's definition of a modern community through hermeneutic reflexivity, including dissent and risk as part of that community; voluntarism; Rappaport's perspective on narrative; basic human need; and finally the action research perspective that empowerment obviously and necessarily implies a disparity of power that must be addressed. In the next three chapters, these tools and general characteristics will be placed in a framework of personal, community and social empowerment.

First, a quick review. It is clear that beginning with Lewin in the Northern tradition, and Freire in the Southern, empowerment is about people improving their situation by themselves making change to their external circumstances. So it is that empowerment is seen as being a process that spans the range from individual to society. As has been seen, in the *Handbook of Community Psychology* (2000) Marc Zimmerman defines empowerment as having three levels of analysis: personal, organizational and community (Zimmerman 2000). Julian Rappaport in his 1987 paper *Terms of Empowerment/Exemplars of Prevention: Toward a Theory for Community Psychology* identifies

empowerment as “a multilevel construct applicable to individual citizens as well as to organizations and neighborhoods” (Rappaport 1987:121). In spite of Rappaport urging the need for research on “organizational processes, citizen participation, change in general and social change in particular, networks, social skills, and the psychological sense of community” (Rappaport 1987:135), from a theoretical viewpoint, community psychology and the related area of action research has had difficulty in moving beyond individual perspectives. While Zimmerman probes criteria such as “resource mobilization” and “citizen participation” in his “nomological network” for psychological empowerment, his perspective remains focused on individual psychology (Zimmerman 1995).⁷⁵ Also as referred to earlier, Boyd and Angelique (Boyd & Angelique 2007) point out that this has been a persistent problem in the field.

Sociology is a field that has long considered this issue. Framed variously as a “micro-macro”, “agency-structure” or “subject-object” problem, it is expressed in the struggle between functionalist, structuralist and hermeneutic traditions. Georg Simmel, Talcott Parsons, Peter Berger, Thomas Luckmann, Anthony Giddens and others all produced important works on just this problem. The problem can be simply stated as the paradox that, on the one hand, individuals are apparently able to act autonomously as freely-choosing actors, possessing the quality of “agency”, and on the other, society is ordered in patterns and hierarchies, “structures” to which individuals adhere in ways that conserve those patterns. In sociology, the problem is generally dealt with either by making it by definition a non-problem, as does Giddens’s theory of “structuration”, which is concerned with “neither the experience of the individual actor, nor the existence of any societal totality, but social practices ordered across space and time” in a “duality of structure” (Giddens 1984:2), or by seeing the relationship between actor and structure as a dialectical one whereby “the product acts back upon the producer” through the processes of externalisation and objectification on the one hand, and internalisation “by which the objectivated social world is retrojected into consciousness” on the other (Berger & Luckmann 1966:78). From what has been observed in this study regarding empowering praxis, it is this latter, dialectical approach that stands out as the preferred framework, because it is clear that a

⁷⁵ N. Petersen and M. Zimmerman make some progress on this in a 2004 article, “Beyond the Individual: Toward a Nomological Network of Organisational Empowerment”, to be discussed in Chapter 6.

conception of the individual is required simultaneously with an interactional, group-oriented component. It was this group “subject-subject” interaction that in the present study first drew attention to the potential usefulness of Habermas’s theory of communicative action.

Finding a position that can encompass both the individual and his or her social environment is further complicated by the fact that, as has been observed in quantum physics, the “act of observation is itself a part of the phenomena being observed and therefore needs to be explained” (Goldspink & Kay 2004:598). This creates the further problem that a theory of society becomes stranded as a critical enterprise, unable to formulate criteria upon which it can base critique, as seen in Foucault’s conception of power. If, as Rappaport suggests, empowerment really is a “multi-level construct” able to span individual and social phenomena, then an understanding of what constitutes empowerment and the processes that drive it must incorporate approaches that overcome this problem. Again, it is Habermas who sought to restore critical perspective through his initial focus on how linguistic meaning is arrived at, and “the idea of participants in communication coming to an understanding about something in the world” (Habermas 1984:397).

It is apparent from the case studies that a certain consistency has emerged in the practical methodologies and actions upon which the process of empowerment rests. It follows from this that it is incumbent upon the present study to take a stance independent of culture and society in order to fully comprehend the phenomena that are observable in the case studies. In other words, to consider the nature of empowerment, it is necessary to consider what is universal to humanity and the human condition. This task begins with an exploration of what it is to be human, and that most quintessentially human quality, human values, the “basis upon which to choose one course rather than another, judged as better or worse, right or wrong” (Lee 1959:165).

5.2 The Search for a Theory of Value

On 4 October 1957, a remarkable group of 14 men and one woman came together at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. The group included members of German, Polish, Japanese and American extraction. They were the leaders in their disciplines, and their fields of enquiry ranged across psychology, psychoanalysis, creative arts, anthropology, mathematics, biology, economics and theology. Many had first come to prominence in the 1920s, and all had witnessed the human holocaust that began in

1914 and ended with the birth of nuclear war. One, Dr Jacob Bronowski, a mathematician, spent World War I in Germany, had served in 1945 as the Scientific Deputy to the British Chiefs of Staff Mission to Japan, and wrote the mission's report *The Effects of the Atomic Bombs at Hiroshima and Nagasaki*. Another, Pitirim Sorokin, the first chair of sociology at St Petersburg University, was imprisoned by both czarist and communist regimes, condemned to death and then pardoned by Lenin, and finally exiled by the Soviet government in 1922. He later became Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Harvard, and was also the Director of the Harvard Research Centre for Creative Altruism, the organisation which initiated the conference (Maslow 1959).

The group came together in the belief that knowledge of human values was central to the future of humankind; for them, “moral transformation” was “the most important item on today's agenda of history” (Sorokin 1959:3). Their collective experience of war, death, destruction and oppression underlay a sense of urgency about their task. The chairperson of the conference was Dr Abraham Maslow. Maslow was a clinical research psychologist who rose to be elected as a fellow of the American Psychological Association in the divisions of Abnormal and Clinical Psychology, Esthetics, and the Division of Personality and Social Psychology, of which he was president. He believed that traditional value systems had failed humankind, and that:

Wealth and prosperity, technological advance, widespread education, democratic political reforms, even honestly good intentions and avowals of good will have, by their failure to produce peace, brotherhood, serenity and happiness, confronted us nakedly and unavoidably with the profundities that mankind has been avoiding by its busy-ness with the superficial (Maslow 1959:vii).

The participants hoped to begin the work of developing a system of values “based squarely upon valid knowledge of the nature of man, of his society, and of his works” (Maslow 1959:viii). The papers presented fell into one of three categories of scientific (called “naturalistic” in the conference commentaries), psychological (called “humanistic”), and “ontological”. The three approaches, described below, typify the overall consensus of the conference in terms of these classifications.

As regards the scientific, the conference was not without substantial conflict and disagreement. Dr Bronowski launched an attack on what he saw as a fundamental error in the approach of many of his colleagues, who denied the efficacy of scientific

method to achieve an appreciation of values. His attack was motivated by claims that science was bereft of values, and subject only to the “tyranny of facts”, providing no guide to human aspirations. It is wrong, he said, to assume that because the scientific method seeks to objectively describe the world in terms of neutral facts, that scientists themselves “have no spiritual urges and no human scruples” (Bronowski 1959:53). The ultimate value of science is its search for truth, as judged by the criterion of being empirically true to the facts. Bronowski argued that this scientific search for truth is an evolutionary process, in contrast to societies that accept that revealed truth, whether it be political or religious, is a dogma to be imposed. These, he says, are authoritarian societies. Further, if a society believes that the truth has been found, it resists all change, for there is no reason to change. When, as a society, we say that we seek truth through a process of discovery, we also accept that society itself will change and evolve with the growth of our knowledge of facts and the frameworks of truth that sustain that knowledge. If the search for truth is regarded as an ultimate value, it follows that no belief will survive if it conflicts with factual truth. We can no longer accept that the earth is flat, or that it is the centre of the universe, because the facts do not bear this out. As a scientific society, we necessarily accept the possibility of change, and acknowledge that social values are, “at bottom, a mechanism by which society arranges that it shall evolve” (Bronowski 1959:58). In Bronowski’s view, as necessary conditions of that process we must value individual independence above simple reference to authority, as well as valuing originality as the tool of discovery. It follows that dissent, and therefore tolerance, are also necessary to the progress of the age of reason.

What Bronowski’s argument alerts us to is the significance of the use of words like “independence” and “freedom” as at least potentially being the language only of the scientific society. By starting from a position of being an individual scientist searching for truth, he constructs a value system unique to his place in a society of scientists and in a society at large that recognises the utility of science. His construction of values does not touch the human person, but is built as a set of necessary conditions for a particular society to have stability and also to evolve. From Bronowski’s reasoning, it is not possible to suggest that independence or freedom have any special status as universal values, nor would he suggest so. As he says, such a suggestion is “not science”. The consequence of this view – that values must be dealt with as facts – is that values come to be regarded as “relative and culture-bound” (Weisskopf 1959:107).

Others at the conference, Maslow among them, adopted the second, psychological or “humanistic” perspective. In his enthusiasm for a defence of science, Bronowski had found himself out of step with the majority of the conference participants. Maslow and others were focused on discovering values that are absolute human values – common values that can be asserted with confidence for all people. Their experience in psychology and psychoanalysis gave Maslow, Fromm and others at the conference the understanding that human health requires certain physiological and psychological needs of the individual to be satisfied. Their approach was first and foremost human-centred. The fundamental importance of Maslow’s contribution, discussed in Chapter 4, was the recognition that there are definitely basic human needs common to all persons, beyond simple physiological needs, and that these needs are concerned with human growth defined as increasing self-actualisation. He sees needs and values as related through the spectrum of illness to health. Basic needs are persistently yearned for; deficiency in meeting basic needs leads to illness or stunted growth; gratifying basic need is therapeutic; healthy people are gratified and do not have these deficiencies. “We shall call people who are satisfied in these needs, basically satisfied people, and it is from these that we may expect the fullest (and healthiest) creativeness” (Maslow 1943:383). The question is not what *should* or *ought to* be ultimate values, but rather, what are the values of the healthy human being? Good values like transcendence of self, altruism, the fusion of truth and beauty with goodness, wisdom, honesty, and spontaneity are the traits of the psychologically healthy person, and are the result of conscious striving for self-actualisation. According to Maslow, all basic needs refer to this ultimate value-end of achieving authentic being.

All of this is in stark contrast to Bronowski’s argument. The two perspectives lay bare the contrast between structure on the one hand, and agency on the other. Values seemingly cannot be both culturally determined and intrinsic to human nature. Each can be viewed separately as a realistic scheme, but they are themselves incongruent, and lead to different conclusions. Objectively, values are the set of conditions required for societies to function productively. Their derivation is in social structures that provide enough stability to have at least internal peace, if not external war, and enough dynamism to avoid stagnation and to evolve. On the other hand, the subjective person appears to have no static, discoverable, factual truth in relation to basic values. The needy subject is a constantly shifting profile, dependent upon the degree of need

satisfaction. The estimate of value is the extent to which that profile meets the end of self-actualisation.

Another conference participant, Walter Weisskopf, addressed himself to this problem of the irreconcilability of subject and object by adopting an ontological position. Weisskopf had been a lawyer in Vienna until 1938, when he moved to the United States. At the time of the conference he was Professor of Economics at Roosevelt University, Chicago. He drew attention to the existential structure of being. He proposed that the contradictions between the two conclusions could be accepted when the subject and object were regarded in a dialectical relationship, a relationship where one conditioned the other. Experience always contains a dichotomy between the subject that experiences and an object that is experienced, he maintained. To this he added the image of polarity between subject and object, implying that they are interdependent, that one cannot be without the other. In this sense, subject and object become ontologically one. Weisskopf compares this existential image of dichotomy, polarity and unity with the familiar sign of the Tao. This characterisation of being is a function of consciousness. The person both is, and is conscious of being, and so “is able to *transcend* any given situation because he is aware of it”.

By transcending the given situation through his consciousness man frees himself within certain limits from the necessities of the situation. This opens up alternatives; the dimension of actuality is left behind and the realm of potentiality is entered, creating the possibility of choice and the necessity of decision based on guiding values. (Weisskopf 1959:109)

For Weisskopf, “transcendence through consciousness is the basis of human freedom.” Weisskopf’s argument suggests that transcendence and union can be seen as basic human needs, being forms of self-actualisation, and that these require freedom to be satisfied. Values are a concomitant of freedom, a freedom that arises from the nature of consciousness and the necessity of choice. This trinitarian existential dialectic of dichotomy, polarity and unity is the “ground of being”. So while values themselves are determined by historical conditions, society and culture, the necessity to have values is rooted in the ultimate ground of being. Universal values are represented by symbols for the ground of being: God, nature, the universe. Union with the ground of being is the basis of values. Values disintegrate when the relationship with the ground of being is lost. Alienation is the absence of integration and union. Weisskopf uses this platform from which to mount his attack on the “competitive acquisitiveness” of the

marketplace, which “permeates social and human relations”. Economic theory that equated freedom and choice with the free market in fact eliminated real freedom and “all spontaneous, emotional, nonutilitarian behaviour” (Weisskopf 1959:116). The prototype of alienated man is “economic man”. Since the goals of the needs of consciousness cannot be unequivocally given, and so in this economic sense, “no calculable relationship exists between means and ends which could serve as a guide for action” (Weisskopf 1959:117). For Weisskopf, friendship, love, charity, creative activity and aesthetic and religious experiences have become valueless because they cannot be calculated on economic principles. According to Weisskopf, the dominance of the values of economic calculation alienates us from the ground of being, and reduces human action to a small part of its potential. Weisskopf’s argument, while intuitively attractive, suffers from a reliance on mysticism as its basis, and mysticism by definition is not open to criticism.⁷⁶

What is visible in each of these three different perspectives of the scientific, humanistic and mystical is the effort to develop a rational framework for talking about values. None of these perspectives can be necessarily labelled as wrong or false. Each has its own kind of rightness. The fact is, they simply take up different aspects of human experience.

5.3 Habermas and the “Rationalisation of the Lifeworld”

Jurgen Habermas identifies the way to bring these different facets of experience together. He argues that the problem lies in the paradigm of the philosophy of consciousness, which dictates that there shall be a conscious subject who experiences, and a real object that is experienced. For Habermas, what is central is the “intersubjective relation that speaking and acting subjects take up”, to together create shared meaning that can lead to action (Habermas 1984:392).

If we assume that the human species maintains itself through the socially coordinated activities of its members and that this coordination has to be established through communication – and in certain central spheres through communication aimed at reaching agreement – then the reproduction of the species *also* requires satisfying the conditions of a rationality that is inherent in communicative action (Habermas 1984:397).

⁷⁶ Habermas describes this as the undifferentiated lifeworld, to be discussed below.

Where Habermas would take issue with Bronowski is exactly the same ground upon which the other conference participants disagreed with him. That is, science is only one kind of rationality, not *the* kind, and it is of a type that prohibits the introduction of other kinds of rationality that are necessary for theory's "claim of providing orientation in right action" (Habermas 1974:330). As the 1959 conference participants recognised, it is important to grasp the moral dimension of action. According to Habermas, subjects in communication establish their own sense, developing a "communicative rationality" of shared meaning able to coordinate social action. Coming to an understanding in this way is "a process of mutually convincing one another in which the actions of participants are coordinated on the basis of [uncoerced] motivation by reasons" (Habermas 1984:392). This process of convincing draws on the "worlds", discussed in Chapter 2 – the usually unspoken, everyday, commonsense notions which correspond to the three types of arguments put at Maslow's 1957 conference: the utilitarian, the normative and the subjective.

Further, Habermas sees social change as occurring through "the linguistification of the sacred", meaning the demystification of the lifeworld as its contents are progressively differentiated and made explicit as the basis for increasingly rational social action. He writes, "the further the structural components of the lifeworld and the processes that contribute to them get differentiated, the more interaction contexts come under conditions of rationally motivated mutual understanding (Habermas 1987:145). Remember, of course, that "rational" must be understood here in wider terms than just scientific rationality. Normative correctness and subjective sincerity are also, necessarily, discursively redeemable validity claims that must be recognised in constructing what is ultimately considered to be the better argument. It is beautifully, sometimes tragically human that we are swayed as much by strong feelings or a sense of duty as by cold hard facts. "[C]ognitive-instrumental rationality" (Habermas 1984:392) does not always win. This multiple view of rationality allows Habermas to propose this as a universal structure that is not culture bound.

This universality of the validity claims which are embedded in the structure of speech can now be explained by means of the systematic locus of language. In speech there is consistent reference to all four domains – external nature, society, internal nature, and speech itself (Habermas 1976:160).

There is evidence for this in the frequent misunderstandings that occur when communicating between cultures. In foreign climes, what is everyday and accepted by participants in communication must sometimes be made explicit to achieve mutual understanding. As will be recalled, this universality of application is one criterion for theorising empowerment.

However, as with Giddens's "duality of structure", what is found in Habermas can be regarded as a duality of agency, where the subject-subject relation is made central. While emphasising the space between subjects, where communication is made meaningful and actionable, at the level of the individual (the actor), the scope for a psychological understanding of empowerment has been restricted. This can be rectified by reference to Habermas's types of social action referred to in Chapter 3, which draw on progressively more complex presuppositions. Teleological action presupposes solely "relations between an actor and a world of existing states of affairs" (Habermas 1984:I,87). Normative action presupposes relations between an actor, an objective world and a social world. Here members of a group expect that each "will orient his action to values normatively prescribed for all concerned". These values, says Habermas, contribute to "action motivating force" to the extent that they have become norms and "represent the standards according to which, in the circle of addressees, needs are interpreted and developed [...] into need dispositions (Habermas 1984:89). Finally, in dramaturgical action, subjective desires and feelings are "rooted in needs", the same needs that inform values and the norms from which they are derived (Habermas 1984:92).

Woven through these categories of action, coupled with values and norms through communicative action, is a further category of human need. It is this category of need that can be experienced as having real existence in the individual person. Habermas leaves this notion of need unaddressed as he pursues the phenomenology of actors in motion. Yet, since a theory of empowerment is required to operate at the levels of the individual, organisation and community, it follows that an ontologically justifiable image of what it is to be human must also be part of this approach. This image must fulfil the previous criteria of both universality and a dialectical relationship with the world outside one's skin. This image is to be found in an explication of human need.

5.4 Existential Need

In *The Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Jean-Paul Sartre takes the view that the existential human condition is defined by need. The nature of being human is

constructed by the experience of need. Need is the fundamental relationship between what is inside one's skin and everything else:

everything is to be explained by *need*; need is the first totalizing relation between the material being, man, and the material ensemble of which he is a part. This relation is *univocal*, and *of interiority*. (Sartre 1983:80, italics in original).

The image of the growing human in relation to a changing world is one of a developing totalisation, a dialectical process that is always evolving and never complete. That need is singular (*le besoin*) expresses its being unified in the person. All kinds of need are always present, and are continuously emergent as they are progressively satisfied. As Nussbaum observes, “we cannot satisfy the need for one [basic human capability] by giving a larger amount of another. All are of central importance, and all are distinct in quality” (Nussbaum 1995:76). All need that is basic matters all the time. This is one meaning of “basic”.

In contrast to the way in which need is of the individual, it has also been said that, being basic, a need will be universally shared by all individuals. Taken together these contrasting definitions validate the view that reflecting on one's own experience of need and satisfaction is a legitimate field of enquiry in understanding the total human experience. This supports Habermas's analysis of the rationalisation of the lifeworld. Sartre expresses it this way:

Critical investigation [...] is a real moment of the developing totalisation in so far as this is embodied in all its parts and is realized as synthetic knowledge of itself through the mediation of certain of those parts [...] In practice, this means that the critical investigation can and must be anyone's reflexive experience (Sartre 1983:48).

Another way in which need can be said to be basic is that it is necessary to being human, “something that has to be satisfied to some extent for the need-subject to function as a human being” (Galtung 1976). In other words, the lack of satisfaction of a basic need will result in decline of the human organism. Like Sartre, Galtung also visualises need and satisfaction in a dialectical relationship. Individual need requires a social context to be satisfied, and the social context conditions the definition of need in “the image of what is necessary to be human” (Galtung 1976). It follows that even if there are types of basic need that can be known to be universal, the social conditions required to meet need are not universal. There is obviously no single recipe for

defining the satisfiers that will meet universal need at the level of an individual life or at the level of a society. Human history in each generation constantly produces and reproduces a multiplicity of ways of meeting people's needs.

This philosophical underpinning presents us with an image of human need that is on the one hand internal and subjective, unified in the person, and on the other hand satisfied by factors that are external, objective and culturally and historically variant. By definition, failure to satisfy basic need at the individual level will appear as, for example, increased mortality and morbidity. Also, since the social context is a major source of need satisfaction, failure to meet basic need may show up first as social disintegration – for example, decay of values and traditions. The fact that some aspects of basic need are met through social organisation means that a failure to satisfy the social conditions for fulfilling need will result in overall decline, and will contribute to undermining the individual's capacity to meet his or her basic need. Note, however, that not all decay is necessarily bad. Some forms of conflict and disintegration may herald the necessary emergence of something new.

Need is of the person, and there is no assumption that people are conscious of their needs. Needs do not have to be conscious and articulated in order to exist. In fact, it is the case that basic needs are generally unconscious motivators of behaviour, an example of the way in which physiological or "somatic" need is atypical. This can be one thing that differentiates needs from wishes or wants. The latter are experienced and articulated: they may express needs, but there may be other needs that are not expressed, both conscious and unconscious. We are not normally aware of our need for love, and may only become aware of it when the lack of being loved, and of loving oneself, takes on the form of a physical or mental condition. Based on these outline requirements for need, it is now possible to proceed to consider the specific content of need.

5.5 Need in Human Development

As will be recalled from Chapter 1, and the use of Galtung above, need has made an appearance in the field of international development. In this context, human development paradigms, broadly classified as needs, rights and capabilities approaches, began as a response to the domination of development policy by economic incentives and measures. From Paul Streeten in 1977 (*The Distinctive Features of a Basic Needs Approach to Development*) to Amartya Sen in 1995 (*Inequality Re-examined*, an extension of work begun in 1973), the motivations of proponents of human

development have changed little. Human-centred approaches to development share the view that measures such as per capita income, employment and GDP fail to take account of the potential human cost of economic growth, and that development policy must focus on what people themselves value, taking account of the quality of human life.

The International Labor Organisation (ILO) World Employment Conference of 1976 is seen as a turning point for a human-centred approach to development, one that put the actual circumstances of people as a first priority. Published as *Employment, Growth and Basic Needs: A One-World Problem*, the ILO conference called for a basic needs strategy in development policy. In 1977, Paul Streeten defined the basic needs approach as one that “starts from the objective of providing the opportunities for the full physical, mental and social development of the human personality and then derives the ways of achieving this objective” (Streeten 1997:50). At the time, Streeten was quite clear that the spectrum of basic human needs embraced both material needs for nutrition, sanitation and shelter, and non-material needs for self-determination, including mobilisation of social and political power (Streeten 1997:50). Streeten warns us about the problem of choosing to reduce the needs basket to embrace only minimum physiological and security needs for survival. It is, he said, morally easy and politically expedient as a way to get people on board with the program, but it is not an adequate response. As Streeten observes, a well-run prison delivers the basic needs basket efficiently to target groups, but basic *human* needs are not met (Streeten 1981:34).

Nevertheless, this reduction to minimum needs appears to be exactly what happened as basic need development theory was translated into practice. For the purpose of policy implementation, basic human need became defined in the development aid arena as a set of *minimum* and particular needs capable of being delivered by the State to particular groups, and included nutrition, water and sanitation, housing, health services and education. As economic and political narratives shifted in the 1980s, the original intent of the basic needs approach as inclusive of non-material needs was misinterpreted and misrepresented in a way that focused on these “commodity bundles”, and excluded more abstract and non-material needs for love, personal worth, choice and power (Deneulin 2009). This narrow focus left the basic needs approach open to the criticism that it was primarily a critique of the distributive capability of the free market and that from a theoretical point of view it failed to establish quantifiable limits to individual need that could form the basis for policy decisions about

distribution of resources. Although a later Kantian theoretical formulation of basic need by Len Doyal and Ian Gough (Doyal & Gough 1991) reintroduced the non-material concept of autonomy as central, the liberal view continued to focus on the requirement to define “the empirical content of basic need-satisfaction” (Wetherly 1996:49).

Paul Wetherly, in his critique of Doyal and Gough, acknowledges that “the specification of survival and autonomy as basic needs is virtually a commonplace truth”. However, he believes that the analysis founders on the problem of these universal human characteristics having socially derived and therefore culturally relativistic satisfiers. In Wetherly’s view, it therefore becomes “difficult to understand what perfect physical health and unrestricted autonomy would mean in practice” (Wetherly 1996:50).

Basic needs have been represented in human rights analysis in a similar way: first, as primarily an economic issue, and secondly as being unbounded. According to Rolf Kunneman, a basic need analysis of economic, social and cultural rights defines every situation of deprivation as a breach of economic rights upon which States should be required to act. His critique of a basic need analysis quite rightly points out that this leads to a discussion of rights whereby “economic rights are reduced in effect to mere aspirational statements” about potentially unlimited needs, which cannot be operationalised and which confuse needs and rights in an unhelpful way (Kunneman 1995:334).⁷⁷ In being operationalised, the original concept of basic human need as it was employed in an international development context has been done a disservice over the years. The goal of the “full physical, mental and social development of the human personality” was lost, just as Streeten had warned it might be.

This problem of how to operationalise the actual circumstances of people in ways that provide a means of comparative assessment and evaluation has been taken up by Amartya Sen. Sen acknowledges that approaches that focus on people’s “actual living” are not new, and refers in particular to the work of Pakistani economist Mahbub ul Haq, a co-author with Streeten on human development and basic need (Sen 1999:73). Sen draws particular attention to the “substantive freedoms” or capabilities “to choose a life that one has reason to value”. His concept of “functionings” reflects the “various things a person may value doing or being” (Sen 1999:75) and, through his emphasis on

⁷⁷ Habermas would cover the area of rights under his approach to system rather than lifeworld. Called “juridification”, this will be discussed in the next chapter.

freedom, acknowledges that these *valued* functions may differ from the elementary ones usually considered as the commodity packages that constitute minimum needs.

Sen states that his capabilities perspective is “inescapably pluralist”. Different functionings will be valued in different ways by different individuals and societies. Individual freedom itself is “quintessentially a social product” dependent upon “the interactive formation of public perceptions and on collaborative comprehension of problems and remedies” (Sen 1999:31). Individuals or groups of individuals acting as agents must be able to define the priorities they value, as well as choose and act on the best means to achieve them. Sen’s freedom is premised on the proposition that there is a “basic value that the people must be allowed to decide freely” (Sen 1999:32), and admits also that we are unable to rely on the edicts of cultural guardians, experts or rulers to help resolve cultural boundaries.

There is no doubt that Sen argues for empowerment and participation – these are essential functionings that contribute to agency – but in spite of devoting a chapter of *Development as Freedom* to the agency of women in particular, Sen gives few hints as to what specific actions might be appropriate to actually expand the individual’s opportunities to achieve these functionings. Sen is locked in passivity by his requirement to respect what others might value, for fear of breaching their freedom. Sen’s pluralism works against engagement. His primary concern is with assessment, not intervention. Yet Sen’s call for democratic and participatory resolution of cultural barriers to “the advantages of modernity” (Sen 1999:32) claims, as a basic value, the desirability of democratic freedoms. He believes these freedoms must be the basis for conscious reflection to define what is valued, to set priorities, to choose and to act.

Furthermore, democratic freedom is a structure that does not of itself bring about change. Change must be driven by actors, since people are, after all, the only actors we know of in human affairs. Basic human need begins with the actor that is the driver of change; it begins with the person or “agent”. This is what Martha Nussbaum calls Aristotelian “essentialism”, the necessity to “begin with the human being: with the capacities and needs that join all humans, across barriers of gender and class and race and nation” (Nussbaum 1995:61).

5.6 Universal Human Need

A conception of universal need must provide a framework for making sense of the chaos of daily life and the vagaries of human behaviour – the rationalisation of the lifeworld. As has been seen, this type of critical scrutiny by people, based on their own

perceptions and values, constitutes the form of communication that engenders empowerment. It has frequently been the author's experience that, when speaking of "basic human need", this is most often understood as meaning the minimum needs for survival, as explained by Streeten. Yet across the many boundaries of culture and race, each of us can recognise another as being human. A universalist approach asks us to focus more broadly on what is common to all, rather than on differences "and to see some capabilities and functions as more central, more at the core of human life, than others" (Nussbaum 1995:63). In order to avoid any suggestion that "basic" can be equated with "minimum" needs, the present study has adopted the term universal human need to refer to the complete spectrum of material and non-material basic need.

Opponents of a universalist view argue, like Sen, that any attempt to pick out some elements of human life as more fundamental than others is bound to be insufficiently respectful of historical and cultural differences. People appear to understand human life in widely different ways. Any attempt to produce a list of the most fundamental human qualities is bound to promote particular values over others. Usually, this takes the form of "enshrining the understanding of a dominant group at the expense of minority understandings" (Nussbaum 1995:70). Yet right action in intervention implies external actors exercising their agency in the interests of creating what they judge to be a more just and equitable society. It is not just what a given actor has reason to value that is significant. Being in possession of an abundance of freedom, function and capability, Sen's position implies that an individual is complicit in the unfreedom of others if he or she does not use those benefits to contribute to "collaborative comprehension of problems and remedies". If, as Sen says, the expansion of substantive freedom is dependent on using individual freedoms to make social arrangements more amenable to expanding all freedom in a two-way relation between the individual and society, then an individual is indeed obliged to use his or her agency in this way. Any intervention which cannot be justified on the basis of a defensible universal conception is necessarily value-laden, and assumes the preference of one set of values – those of agent – over the values of the other, reinforcing his or her status as patient. A just intervention to relieve the plight of another must rely on reference to a universalist understanding of the human condition.

Universalism is not incompatible with freedom of choice. There is nothing wrong with proposing that values can be questioned, provided this is done within a framework that is committed to respecting people's autonomy. Cultures and societies are dynamic, and

values are tested and contested every day, and in every generation. By proposing that there are universal qualities that are *sui generis* valued by humans encourages everyone to ask, “whose interests are served by proposing particular values, and whose resistance and misery are being effaced” (Nussbaum 2000:38).

5.7 Needs Lists and Need Classes

In order to establish what needs might be regarded as universal, the next task is to start to fill in some specific needs. What is immediately evident is that each and every individual could, with reflection, compile a list of needs, and the variety of lists would be potentially as large as a population. This matter of making lists has been debated extensively (Robeyns 2005). Based on the framework we have already covered, each list would aim to encompass what the person regards as basic to being human – not just at the level of survival, but also in terms of what is required to discover and express his or her highest potential. Of the lists people might generate, no list would itself be definitive as a universal list, but as more and more lists were generated, what was common to all would become more evident. In this sense it is at least theoretically possible to define the universal list, given enough sample lists from sample populations. Practically, however, this is not going to happen, so we need another approach.

Galtung suggests three possible approaches to reducing needs-lists: exclusion, amalgamation and abstraction (Galtung 1976). First, each individual has a personal list, and all being human, it is certain that individuals will share many of the items on this list. The particular needs-list of the person will vary between cultural, racial and geographic domains, and as the number of lists grows, greater diversity becomes the norm. It follows that as the number of individual lists increases, the number of needs common to each list will shrink. By excluding all items not common to all lists, we arrive at a minimum set of needs for human functioning.

Secondly, lists can be reduced by amalgamation. Assuming all persons will have some common items on their needs-lists, then there will also be many that similar social groups share. As new domains are added, whenever a new need can be identified it is added to the list. As the number of domains increases, the likelihood of there being further additions to the list gets less. In this way it is possible to see that the amalgamated list, while it may grow and change, is finite, defining a potential maxima for need. This kind of list reduction assists us to see where areas of conflict will occur. People of the capitalist West may need growth and expansion in the sense that if this need is not

fulfilled, disintegration will occur. But this cannot be the last word. This need may conflict with others meeting their need to maintain a particular culture or tradition. It becomes debatable which items can be legitimately added to the amalgamated list. This is where the meanings of need become contested, and need is differentiated from want.

Finally, a single list can be compiled from many by abstraction. Some items on different needs-lists will be of like kind – for example, the need to be able to exercise some kinds of choice. This gives us the opportunity to narrow the search for a comprehensive understanding of need to that set of categories for which none will be empty – every category will have at least some needs in it. The question now becomes how we might arrive at an agreed set of categories to guide the task of assisting the individual to affirm the satisfiers of basic need particular to the domain he or she occupies, and to use these as a challenge to contested conceptions and values.

It is certainly possible to consider these processes as a practical workshop exercise for a group. The next section identifies some sample lists to undertake such an exercise, with the intention of reaching certain conclusions about the dimensions of universal human need.

5.8 Universal Need Lists

In order to identify some sample lists, I turn to the various authors cited above: Abraham Maslow (clinical psychology), Johan Galtung (international development and peace studies), Paul Sites (sociology), Paul Streeten (international development), Len Doyal and Ian Gough (political economy), and Martha Nussbaum (international development and philosophy). All have major works devoted to exploring the scope of common humanity and universal need, and all develop lists that they regard as being comprehensive enough to capture the definition they seek. In addition, each author contributes conceptually to our understanding of the nature of need.

5.8.1 Maslow

Abraham Maslow proposed that needs could be represented in the classes of physiological, safety, belongingness/love, esteem, and self-actualisation (Maslow 1943). He organised these classes into a hierarchy, with the class of physiological need at the base, and the class of self-actualisation (and later self-transcendence) at the top. Once a lower need is satisfied, it ceases to be significant in terms of motivation and

exists in potential only, “prepotent” and lying in wait as the organism moves on. The human organism is dominated, and its behaviour organised, only by unsatisfied need.

Much is made of “Maslow’s Hierarchy” of need. Recalling Streeten’s warning about restricting basic need to minimum needs for survival, a drawback of Maslow’s hierarchy as a way to think about need is that some types of need can be seen as more basic than others. However, Maslow was clear that his hierarchy was “not nearly as rigid as we have implied”, and asserted that the hierarchy was not a step function whereby a lower class of need must be fully met before a higher class asserts itself. “In actual fact,” he said, “most members of our society who are normal, are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time” (Maslow 1943:338).

Maslow’s comment suggests that rather than a hierarchy, needs are fluid and variable, and for each individual there will be times when minimum needs take priority and other times when satisfying needs like self-esteem will be central to motivated behaviour and to maintaining health. To focus on one at the expense of another is to deny Malsow’s holistic vision of human growth as being like the progression “from acorn to oak”.

5.8.2 Galtung

Johan Galtung (Galtung 1976) identified that basic need is material and non-material, like Maslow’s somatic and psychological need. Further, Galtung proposed that there are individual needs-lists, and a social context for need satisfaction. In his view, it follows that need is both actor-and structure-dependent. Table 1 shows how Galtung represents these dimensions in a matrix to arrive at four classes of need.

Table 1: Galtung’s Basic Human Need Classes

	Actor-dependent	Structure-dependent
Material	SECURITY (survival – freedom from)	WELFARE (wellbeing)
Non-material	FREEDOM (to)	IDENTITY

By way of clarification, Galtung links these needs with their opposites: security needs are to avoid violence, welfare needs are to avoid misery, identity needs are to avoid alienation, and freedom needs are to avoid repression.

5.8.3 Sites

Behavioural sociologist Paul Sites describes the emergence of need within the socialisation process. As discussed in the previous chapter, he emphasises the importance of control in adaptive behaviour. For Sites, need is the socialised expression of four dynamics that are necessary to the socialisation process. These four essential dynamics are consistency in the response of the adult towards the child, stimulation of the senses, security, and recognition. Thus, in terms of the needs that develop as a consequence of these processes, he says,

we find emerging a need for response, a need for stimulation or new experience, a need for security and belongingness and love, and a need for recognition which should be interpreted to include a need for esteem and, in Maslow's terms, self-actualisation (Sites 1973:40).

5.8.4 Doyal and Gough

Len Doyal and Ian Gough introduce basic need to political economy. In their 1990 work *A Theory of Human Need*, they reconstruct the entire approach to understanding basic human need. Uncomfortable with an existential view of the world, they opt instead for Kant's minimum requirements of physical and mental capacity: "at the very least *a body which is alive* and which is governed by all the relevant causal processes and the *mental competence to deliberate and choose*" (Doyal 1990:52, italics in original). Doyal and Gough identify this capacity for choice with "the existence of the most basic level of personal autonomy". Thus, for them, basic need consists of physical health and autonomy of agency. Needs for food, water and shelter are seen as intermediate need satisfiers that only have to be optimised as inputs to the outputs of physical health and autonomy. It is the intermediate "needs" that then sit in a set of social preconditions. In common with Maslow and Sites, Doyal and Gough take an evolutionary view of the goal of need as the avoidance of serious harm, so that culturally specific satisfiers can be regarded as the reification of the individual preferences of effective choosers – a process that allows for both universal, objective need and subjective, experientially grounded knowledge. In common with Galtung, Streeten and Sen, they agree that both subjective preference and bureaucratic dictate are suspect in determining particular needs-lists, and that the answer lies in effective participation based on dialogue, experience and praxis.

5.8.5 Nussbaum

Martha Nussbaum is a more recent author to argue in favour of an approach that sees naming some basic human characteristics as essential to gaining a systematic critical understanding of each person and his or her situation (Nussbaum 2000). Akin to these other authors seeking a common basis for understanding humanity, Nussbaum proposes a list of 10 items that aim to “evaluate components of lives, asking which ones are so important that we would not call a life human without them” (Nussbaum 1995:81).

In her 1995 formulation, Nussbaum uses a two-step process to develop her list. The first step names a set of features that are “experiential and historical”, drawing on cross-cultural conversations and reflection as the means to develop the list. In the second step she translates these features of “the shape of the human form of life” into sets of capabilities that this “shape” requires. While Nussbaum applies her list within the context of Sen’s capabilities approach, it is apparent that her first list is neither a list of functionings, nor capabilities, but something else – a set of features that are human needs. Indeed, she begins from “the intuitive idea of a creature who is both capable and needy” to develop “a story about what seems to be part of any life we will count as a human life” (Nussbaum 1995:75). These 10 items, along with the basic needs identified by preceding authors, are shown in Table 2.

5.9 Universal Need Classes

Consider the lists provided by these authors as shown in Table 2. The next task is to sort these lists using Galtung’s process of abstraction, and arrive at a set of classes of universal need. In order to sort the lists it is necessary to consider the heading for each class group. These classes of need must meet the following criteria:

- They are universal, and can be subject to verification through individual reflection.
- Each is discrete, and no category will be empty when we consider a well-functioning human being.
- The lack of adequate satisfaction in any one class will affect the ability of the individual to satisfy need in other classes, either through dysfunction and maladjustment of the individual, or disintegration of social structures.

5.9.1 Physical

Starting with Maslow's view that somatic needs are atypical in as much as the needs and their satisfiers are localisable and specific, these are therefore in a separate class. The person who lacks sufficient food experiences hunger as a localised and specific response, whereas the person who lacks identity or choice may not experience such a lack in any specific, controllable way.

Table 2: Summary of Needs Lists

Author	Characterisation of basic human need
Maslow	Physiological Safety Belongingness/Love Esteem Self-actualisation
Galtung	Welfare Security (freedom from) Identity Freedom (to)
Sites	Consistency of response Stimulation Security Recognition Meaning Rationality Control
Streeten	Minimum (shelter, nutrition, health, education) Opportunity for a full life
Doyal and Gough	Physical health Autonomy
Nussbaum	Life Bodily health Bodily integrity (security) Senses, imagination and thought Emotions Practical reason Affiliation Concern for other species Play and humour Control of one's environment

It is this that underlies Sites's exclusion of physiological needs from his analysis, as he focuses exclusively on social satisfiers. Although at first glance it might appear that Galtung also does not consider somatic needs, for him these are embraced under the more general heading of "welfare" or sufficiency needs, and include nutrition, protection against the elements, protection against disease, and education to build self-expression and dialogue. This broader category includes all of Streeten's minimum, health and education needs. Galtung's use of education in this context is perhaps better explained by Sites, who discusses the importance of stimulation in development. Stimulation is more easily understood as a physiological need of the senses than education, which carries with it the meaning of structured learning. This leaves us with a subset list of needs classed as physiological. These are: nutrition, protection from environmental hazards, and stimulation.

5.9.2 Security

Secondly, every author considers security to be a basic category. Streeten considers security in terms of enforcement of law and order – another service, along with health and education, capable of being delivered by the State on his basic needs formula. Galtung, who defines security largely in terms of freedom from violence and aggression, agrees that police and military can be relevant satisfiers in some societies.

On the other hand, Sites believes that security is founded in maternal love and is necessary to the socialisation process in providing a safe context for setting limits to behaviour through consistent reward and punishment. This consistency is necessary for the world to become reasonable and rational for the developing person. Maslow's view of "safety" needs is also largely based on infant studies, although he is emphatic that security needs are basic to adult behaviour. In terms of a progression from physiological needs, it can be seen that security needs grow in the intimate relationships that are part of meeting physiological needs.

5.9.3 Identity

A third class of need can be defined as identity. Maslow does not use the language of identity at all. Instead, he uses two concepts: love, or a sense of belongingness, and esteem. The first is based in family and close relationships, including sexuality, and is similar to Sites's definition of security. However, Maslow uses the same sense of belongingness to mean "a place in his group", and also refers to the extensive social mores that surround love and its practice. In this way, Maslow gives a social dimension to belongingness that is viewed by Sites as a component of identity, which

is dependent on socially derived satisfiers. On the other hand, Maslow's notion of esteem is clearly in accord with the definition of identity used by these other authors. He uses expressions such as "self-esteem" and "self-respect" based on "real capacity, achievement and respect from others" (Maslow 1943:381). These, says Maslow, are the basis for confidence, independence and freedom.

Sites does not use the term identity as a descriptor, drawing directly on Maslow's second aspect of esteem, recognition. While punishment and reward operate in the context of security, recognition is only positive and is necessary to give the individual direction for growth. The person lacking esteem is beset with helplessness and basic discouragement. This negative definition concurs with Galtung's use of identity. Both use Durkheim's terminology of alienation and anomie to describe the consequences of failure to meet identity needs.

5.9.4 *Autonomy*

Beyond identity, these authors claim a need for purpose in life, variously called personal development, self-actualisation, freedom to, and opportunity for a full life. The difficulty is in framing a goal-directed activity, "the image of what it is to be human", without using language that specifies the goal. To overcome this difficulty, it is reasonable go back to the existential view that choice is a necessary consequence of consciousness. Awareness of our situation enables our abstraction from it, and we enter the realm of potentialities and Weiskopf's "necessity for decision based on guiding values". Political discourse often draws on the self-evident fact of choice to frame choices in quite specific ways. This is one definition used by Streeten, the choice exercised by the informed and consensual party. But what is the choice that is defined by others, or by the necessity of circumstances? "Sophie's Choice" (Styron 1979) is no choice at all because what is lacking is personal autonomy in dealing with the fact of choice. A life choice is only a choice when based on conscious reflection, and when violence is not done to other classes of need. This "positive liberty" derives, according to Isaiah Berlin, from "the wish on the part of the individual to be his own master" (Berlin 1969:131).

William Connolly, in *The Terms of Political Discourse* (1974), also places autonomy as fundamental to conscious choice. Connolly advances the following formulation that connects agents (X) and their acts (z) to autonomy:

X is free with respect to z if (or to the extent that) he is unconstrained from conceiving or choosing z and if (to the extent that), were he to *choose* z, he would not be constrained from doing or becoming z.

X acts freely in doing z when (or to the extent that) he acts without constraint upon his unconstrained and reflective *choice* with respect to z (Connolly 1974:157, italics in original).

Says Connolly, a person is autonomous “to the extent that his conduct is informed by his own reflective assessment of his situation”. Constraints on freedom operate on one’s ability to conceive or formulate a life project, as well as the opportunity to carry out that project. Along with basic need theorists like Galtung, Connolly sees the necessity of acknowledging the “actual desires of concrete individuals” in order to prevent political elites from including as part of freedom the very forms of coercion and manipulation the idea is supposed to expose. Reflection and dialogue are essential processes to achieve this. Consequently, processes of reflection, dialogue and personal growth are grouped as contributing to the need to become autonomous. A framework of values is essential to this process as a source of satisfiers. Aware of choice, we must make a decision based on guiding values. Autonomy is the basic need class that defines whether freedom or other significant values exist in practice.

The needs-lists from Table 2 can now be sorted into four classes:

- Physical – to maintain the life and health of the body, and have awareness through the senses
- Security – to maintain the integrity of the body in a physically and psychologically safe environment
- Identity – to know who one is, and have a sense of one’s place in the world
- Autonomy – to make the choices and decisions that arise from self-consciousness; to have purpose

These classes of basic need represent a continuum from left to right of most material to most non-material. Satisfiers and consequences of deficiency follow the same pattern. The processes of need satisfaction are dialectic: the individual subject and the external object each condition the other. As a consequence, there is also a continuum from need dependent on the individual for satisfaction, called “actor dependent”, and need met through social structures, called “structure dependent”. This is shown in Table 3.

5.10 Need and Lifeworld

The intent of the above analysis is to provide an image of the self – what it is to be human. Returning now to the rationalisation of the lifeworld, this representation of universal human need coincides with Habermas's categorisation of the segments of the lifeworld.

Table 3: Universal Human Need

	Material Non-Material 			
Universal needs classes • internal • unified • the self	Physical	Security	Identity	Autonomy
Basic needs lists Actor dependent  Structure dependent	Life, health Localised and specific (hunger, cold, illness) Stimulation, senses, imagination, play (learning)	Love, emotions Consistency of response (reward and discipline) Rationality Freedom from	Personal worth Affiliation Group identification Esteem Recognition Connection (other species, sense of place, land)	Practical reason Personal growth, consciousness, self-actualisation Reflection based on symbolic representation (spirituality) Exercise of self-judgment in choice Control (political and material) Freedom to
Source of primary satisfiers (lifeworld segments)	Existential 'material ensemble' Physical, objectified world	Interactive capabilities Kinships, friendships, intimate relationships and other bilateral social encounters	Society	Values
Consequences of deficiency • to avoid	Mortality, morbidity	Uncontrolled conflict, violence Psychopathology	Alienation, anomie	Fatalism, apathy, submission Loss of meaning
Indicators of development	Physical and psychological health	Personal responsibility	Solidarity of members	Triple rationality of knowledge

Excluding the category of physical need because it is atypical, the remaining three categories of satisfiers for these classes of need, ontologically located in the self, reflect the structural components of the lifeworld required for reproduction: “cultural values”, society and personality (Habermas 1987:137). Habermas is of the view that with respect to these components, communicative action serves:

- to transmit and renew culturally valid knowledge;
- to facilitate social integration and the establishment of solidarity;
- to enhance the interactive capabilities of the individual (Habermas 1987:142).

Habermas concurs with the above analysis of need with respect to the consequences of deficiency, characterising these as “psychopathologies” (person), “anomie” (society) and “loss of meaning” (values) (Habermas 1987:143). Thus it can be seen that, to employ Berger and Luckmann’s terminology of “introjection”, the person, society and values are in a dialectical relationship with these universal needs of security, identity and autonomy respectively. This implies that the requirement for individual empowerment as part of an intervention is determined by the individual’s ability to meet basic need in these classes.

Usefully, Habermas also provides an evaluative component to each aspect of the lifeworld dialectic, as in communicative action each source of validation plays its measured part, “according to the degree of structural differentiation in the lifeworld” – in other words, according to the degree to which each “unthought category” is made part of conscious discourse. According to Habermas, the “reproduction processes can be evaluated according to standards of the *rationality of knowledge*, the *solidarity of members* and the *responsibility of the adult personality*” (Habermas 1987:141, italics in original). What is more, in line with Maslow’s conception of need as “prepotent” and ever present in its various forms, this degree of differentiation of the lifeworld “also determines how great the need for consensual knowledge, legitimate orders, and personal autonomy is at any given time” (Habermas 1987:142).

This image of being human that is based in these four classes of need is limited in two related ways. First, it deals with need as a subject-object relation, and secondly, as a consequence, it lacks a clear relational component. To rectify this, and to further extend the development of a model of empowerment into the sphere of the group, the next chapter applies communicative action to develop a view of empowerment in organised groups.