Puzzles, Problems and Provention:
Burton and Beyond

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Abstract

The following provides a brief overview of one of the founders of conflict studies, John Burton, and his Basic Human Needs theory. Since Burton is seldomly cited in contemporary scholarship[1] the following relies heavily on the reflections of David Dunn, published in 2004 and on a collection of writings written by Burton's colleagues in 1990. While a set of questions remain incredibly important — are needs universal, how do they differ from interests and desires, do they exist in a hierarchy of importance, and, what is the relation between needs and culture? — the following concentrates primarily on two features that deserve re-examination and further reflection: first, what is the significance of the difference between Burton's understanding of "puzzle-solving" and "problem-solving" and, second, how does Burton envision the term his created term of "proventing" conflict. Finally, does Human Needs Theory provide an emancipatory agenda for action or does it simply offer a critique of existing institutions and systems? Do we need to go beyond Burton?

Introduction

The starting point for John Burton's understanding of destructive conflict and a critique of social institutions is a basic orientation — a sociology of knowledge — that can be critical of received and accepted frames of reference and understanding. Said another way, the sociology of knowledge examines the ways different set if given variables are understood and utilized and are then placed within a given context, rather than simply being accepted as Truth. Burton's project, discussed below, follows this reasoning and is based on the premise that human needs theory provides a way to overhaul the numerous shortcomings Burton perceived in international relations theory and other fields that deal with human conflict. For Burton, unmet human needs are the engine that drive conflict, especially seemingly intractable conflict: for those with unmet human needs no amount of coercion and deterrence will bring compliance (in the longer run) to oppression. The following concludes with a discussion of Burton's vision for dealing with conflict: the implications of problem-solving workshops and *provention.*

David Dunn recently reassessed Burton's work and human needs theory in *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution* (2004). A general search of the conflict and peace literature in the 1990's reveals that while the promise of human needs for theory development has never fully materialized, the promise of human needs for developing strategies of resolving conflict has been developed and has been fruitful (Druckman and Mitchell, 1995; Dukes, 1996; Fisher, 1997; Jabri, 1996; Jeong, 2018; Mitchell and Banks, 1996). The latest book on Burton and human needs does not suggest that Burton's influence reached into other fields or contemporary ideas outside of conflict resolution and peace studies (See Dunn, 2004, Chp 8). While conflict

resolution practitioners have been applying human needs in variations of the problem-solving workshop (Kelman, 2008; Lundy and Darkwah, 2018), it is less evident that scholarship in other fields has been influenced directly by Burton (Caballero-Anthony, 2016). Also, despite the tremendous influence of John Burton and human needs theory for the fields of conflict and peace studies (Jeong, 2008), Burton and needs theory specifically are rarely mentioned in the most recent conflict and peace studies literature. Furthermore, even though some claim the field of international relations to be in a crisis, Burton and needs theory is rarely mentioned nor are the insights of needs theory further developed in the emerging fields, each with their own journals, of security studies and transitional justice. However, the general insights of Burton are included in the focus on human security, conflict prevention, and transitional justice (see Barash, 2010; Caballero-Anthony, 2016; Cardone, 2011; Daase and Friesendorf, 2010; Howard, 2008; Jeong, 2016; Richmond, 2007; Rubenstein, 2017; Wood, 2018).

Conflict resolution scholar-practitioners have recognized that John Burton's Basic Human Needs theory is controversial and that opposing claims are made in connection with all the basic issues (Burton, 1990a). Nonetheless, conflict and peace practitioners and scholars acknowledge the way forward resonates within the dynamics and parameters of much of what Burton was exploring and pursuing. While this new research does not cite Burton and many of his associates, much of it complements and articulates the continuing ideas of Basic Human Needs. Burton (and his associates) were correct in identifying the problems—unmet human needs cannot be contained by coercion (for very long). Unmet human needs are at the root of conflict.

Burton offers a critique of human society — institutions are controlled by elites and serve elites, and individuals are expected to conform to the institutions controlled by elites. If individuals do not conform, they will be coerced. However, no amount of coercion will bring long-term stable order if basic needs are unmet. Also, Burton does suggest a method for moving forward—problem solving workshops. First, the situation must be assessed as to whether a *puzzle-solving* or a *problem-solving* approach is best, and second, that the *provention* of conflict by looking to the future and creating a new frame of reference with people (not institutions controlled by elites) at the center of analysis and policy. Bringing people to the center of analysis and problem-solving means that individuals are taken seriously and that individuals are essential for resolving conflict. Much has been written on Burton's Basic Human Needs—for example, a multi-volume work explores many facets and details of human needs theory (see Burton and Dukes, 1990a and 1990b).

"The primary level of analysis is the individual not the society or state. Following from this, need fulfillment is essential to the proper functioning of the human individual…not subservient or compliant…" (Dunn, 2004, p. 102). The organization of society is means to an end, not an end in itself. Individuals are neither innately good or bad but are profoundly social. It is authorities, seeking to maintain the functioning system that make wrong assumptions and often make a situation worse. Rather, society should serve the needs of the members; therefore, social systems need to be dynamic and malleable. The existence of conflict is central as it signals that needs are unmet. Systems commonly respond the symptoms of conflict—noncompliance to rules and norms—rather than the cause of conflict—unmet needs. Therefore, need to separate causes and symptoms, which requires understanding the needs of others and being responsive to them.

The following provides a very brief overview of needs theory by exploring writings of those who knew John Burton and therefore had direct connections to Basic Human Needs. While a set of questions are incredibly important — are needs universal, how do they differ from

interests and desires, do they exist in a hierarchy of importance, and, what is the relation between needs and culture? [2] — the following concentrates primarily on two features: first, what is the significance of the difference between Burton's understanding of "puzzle-solving" and, second, does need "problem-solving" and how does Burton envision the term his created term of "proventing" conflict. The starting point is a basic orientation — a sociology of knowledge — that can be critical of received and accepted frames of reference and understanding. Said another way, the sociology of knowledge examines the ways different set if given variables are understood and utilized and are then placed within a given context, rather than simply accepted as Truth. Additionally, the question is raised whether needs theory simply offers a critique of existing social arrangements and recognizes unmet human needs or if human needs does offer an emancipatory agenda for action. For Burton, unmet human needs are the engine that drives conflict, especially seemingly intractable conflict: for those with unmet human needs no amount of coercion and deterrence will bring compliance (in the longer run) to oppression. The following concludes with a discussion of the implications of problem-solving and *provention.*

John Burton discusses "the important topic of the relationship between theorist and practitioner" because the "theorist has a practical role to play" (1990, p. 154). While commonly separated analytically, the two are intimately connected if and when conflict resolution processes are applied because successful resolution requires an accurate definition of the situation (Burton 1979). Burton continues, an accurate definition of the conflict situation requires an appropriate theory of human behavior because "this is the starting point of any analysis of any situations of conflict" (1990, p. 155). For Burton, the starting point for conflict analysis is needs theory and "must be regarded as the core of the study of conflict, its analysis and resolution" (1990, p. 155). To state again, Burton insists that analysis and attempted resolution of conflict without the ontological assumptions of needs theory is faulty and perhaps dangerous. Burton follows that conflict "resolution depends on a thorough analysis of the needs to be satisfied, and the failings of societies to satisfy them" (1990, p. 150). Burton directs special attention to assumptions that underlie conflict analysis and the possible means of resolving conflict. The following briefly explores the assumptions of needs theory, the assessment of needs theory from the perspectives of various conflict scholar-practitioners, and finally begins to examine needs theory from Burton's problem-solving approach.

In defense of Basic Human Needs, Burton cautions that two orientations towards conflict can be inadequate and even detrimental to its resolution: conflict management and pragmatism. For Burton, neither approach is properly informed by the reflective nature of theoretical concerns. First, a "management" approach is "restricted and limited" because the training of the intervener is limited — they work within the current system. Therefore, deep sources of conflict may remain implicit, and, finally, if the deep issues are made explicit, they will frequently be mishandled by the management techniques.[3] In this way, management techniques, while adequate for negotiations, are not adequate for conflicts that involve core "nonnegotiable" human needs.

Puzzle-solving

The first approach is taken by Joe Scimecca: "I will argue that the field of conflict resolution is best served via an emphasis upon a parsimonious modification of Basic Human Needs theory as a best available starting point for a prescriptive theory of conflict resolution" (1990, p. 205). Scimecca takes this position because, he continues, "I still believe that this human need theory

represents the most sophisticated and fully developed theory of conflict resolution available today" (1990, p. 207).

Scimecca attempts to shift attention away from biologically based needs to sociologically based needs by showing that ontological human needs can be derived from a non-genetically determined basis (1990, 207). Scimecca identifies freedom and self-consciousness as basic ontological needs. He recognized both positive and negative freedom as two basic types of freedom. Negative freedom is freedom in the existential sense, such as Jean-Paul Sartre's curse of freedom as a burden for the modern individual (1992). Positive freedom exists as two subsets, the first is freedom from restraint and the second is the "freedom to develop" (Scimecca 1990, p. 212). This study is most concerned with freedom in the sense of the development of the individual's capabilities, since "freedom to develop is more important than freedom from restraint." Freedom in the positive sense is "Freedom to develop in consort with others, to learn skills, to accumulate knowledge, to develop self-reflexivity" (Scimecca, 1990, p. 213). This view is more in line with that of contemporary sociologists who stress the interaction of the individual and society for the fullest possible human development (Scimecca, 1981).

The second fundamental human need, Scimecca explains, self-consciousness, is based in reflexivity and predicated on choice and awareness. Drawing from sociological insights, choice and awareness are never totally free from social influence and are deeply embedded in social reality. Rather, all choices are made within a context.[4] Freedom then is both individual and social, as is self-reflexivity; neither is genetically or culturally determined (Scimecca 1990, p. 214). Scimecca continues to draw upon development as crucial to freedom: "without freedom to develop, the mind is restricted and we become less than human beings" (1990, p. 214). Therefore, he suggests using self-reflexivity and the freedom to develop to judge whether or not societies fulfill basic human needs. Aside from stating that "authoritarian and totalitarian cultures" hinder self-reflexivity and freedom, Scimecca had little to say about the specific details of how to recognize self-reflection and development in the social world, and how to recognize if societies are fulfilling this basic human need. He does stress that societies are to meet these needs. Scimecca does not elaborate on exactly what society is and how society should determine and meet needs.

Karen Gillwald acknowledges that needs theory is capable of guiding clarification and creativity for conflict mitigation (1990, p. 115-124). However, Gillwald cautions that "the resolution of deep-rooted conflict goes beyond the capacity of needs theory and methodology" (115). She continues, while empirical research on "needs" focuses on specific satisfiers and can "help increase rationality in conflicts in two extreme cases — unconscious or repressed denials and counter-productive satisfiers" (1990, p. 121). The shortcoming of needs theory is that it fails to offer "instruments with which to regulate competing, conflicting, or mutually exclusive terms" (1990, p. 122). Gillwald's complaint is that needs theory inadequately addresses, first, situations in which the different needs of one individual may be incompatible within the particular individual and, second, situations in which the needs of two or more individuals may be incompatible with others. Might we consider taking a problem-solving approach to examining Basic Human Needs?

Problem-solving

Richard Rubenstein begins the discussion of the problem-solving approach by acknowledging that human needs is a latent version of natural law approach to human social relations (1990, p.

340) and is therefore subject to the criticism of natural law thinking — universal, permanent, supreme, and abstract (1990, p. 338) — and must advance beyond the level of truism (1990, p. 343). Therefore, he continues, "if human needs theory is to escape the impact of this critique, reconstruction will be necessary" (1990, p. 340). For Rubenstein, "Unless [human needs] can be used to generate *new* insights, however, the utility of the approach for conflict analysis and resolution will be severely limited" (1990, p. 344). Can a new theory be built that avoids the pitfalls and limitations, can "historicity and concreteness" (1990, p. 344) be included in a theory for conflict resolution? Although not mentioned by Rubenstein, complementing basic human needs with basic human responsibilities is a way to keep the insights of human needs and to include history and locality. Rubenstein starts to move in this direction when he says that the human needs theory should move away from natural law by recognizing that structures are only "partial satisfiers of human needs" (1990, p. 347).[5] The direction of inquiry is to explore what is implied in the self-reflective and development components of human needs.

At this point, Rubenstein cautions: "needs theory (like natural law theory) frequently seems to have this 'additive' character — one uses it to restate or to confirm conclusions already arrived at by some other method" (1990, p. 344*).* It is a foundation of human needs theory that social arrangements that obstruct the discovery or development of human nature should be changed (for the better). Human needs theory thus has transformative implications—change oppressive social structures and humans will live harmoniously. However, Rubenstein raises a complex and subtle point: "it is only through liberating struggle that humans discover what their true needs are, and how they may be truly satisfied" (1990, p. 349). This raises a complexity in evaluating the legitimacy of human action and hints at the positive aspects of tension for human development. Jack Donnelly[6] writing on the positive role of struggle for human rights and the host of writers in the conflict tradition of sociology[7] raise similar points. Rubenstein summarizes this position: "if needs theory is to be founded on human nature, it must transcend the purely subjective, egoistic, non-developmental view of humanity…" (1990, p. 351). He continues:

> [Human needs] are watered fitfully by 'satisfiers' which, under present circumstances, do not and cannot satisfy fully and whose partiality continuously creates false stopping points in the development of human nature. They can flower only in a future which permits men and women to become masters of production, of the state, and of themselves… (1990, p. 352)

What Rubenstein seems to be implying is that human nature, to be fully realized, involves addressing the responsibility component of self-governing, both governing individual egoistic wants and desires and governing the state. The idea of self-governing is pursued in the following chapters. What remains to be explored is the developmental view of humanity and the possible role that conflict and tension can play in this positive maturation of the human being.

Mary Clark, agreeing with proponents of human needs theory that the problem of conflict does not lie in biological deficiency such as innate aggression of the individual, says the problem lies rather in "having become blind to the *kind* of society that satisfies our deepest human needs and having constructed, through a series of deficient social visions, institutions that deny rather than satisfy those needs" (1990, p. 37). Clark is especially critical of the institutions of modern civilization. For Clark, humans were first "social animals…wholly dependent on a supportive social structure, and it is in the *absence* of such a support system" that destructive behavior

occurs. Clark continues that "civilized" societies since the dawn of recorded history is largely a record of frustrated members of those societies:

> It is perhaps not surprising that Hobbes misread the problem, for in his time the West was still largely ignorant of the evidence that would show that social institutions were failing to meet human needs, rather than that humankind suffers from some intrinsic behavioral maladaption. (Clark, 1990, p. 37)

For Clark, humans are uniquely social beings and the problems of maladaptive, or anti-social, behavior of individuals stems from a maladaptive environment of civilization itself, not from the individual.

Clark emphasizes that social bondings are not merely temporary contracts merely for the convenience of individuals but are absolute requirements for human existence: "social embeddedness *is* the essence of our nature" (1990, p. 49). This is especially evident, in Clark's analysis, because the Western attitude of logical and rational decision-making (rather than including emotions) are constructed from the point of view of an "isolated individual who ought to be as *free as possible from* social constraints…" (1990, p. 49). Therefore, social discussions "almost totally fail to ask why institutions of society are in fact acting against or even actively preventing social bonding" (Clark 1990, p. 49). The problem with contemporary Western institutions, for Clark, is a lack of the promotion of social bonding.[8] Correlating with the decline in social bonding are the increasing costs of managing social *anomie*: increases in social welfare programs, more police, courtrooms and prisons, and more social workers and psychiatrists (Clark 1990, p. 54). For Clark, the large-scale institutional changes in the West bring more problems than they solve.

Mary Clark begins her exploration of human needs by cautioning that "human needs theory must carefully avoid becoming merely a description of the self-perceived 'needs' of the particular group that is developing the theory" (1990, p. 34). Referring to the development of human needs theory in the Western intellectual tradition, Clark warns that this "narrowness could have unfortunate consequences globally", therefore, what is needed is "conscientiously to identify and critique as many of the assumptions underlying our own thinking" (1990, p. 34). Clark's observations is that the western tradition is concerned primarily with the individual and that the "current fission of the concepts of 'the individual' and 'society' into separate, often warring, compartments blinds us to the fact that these are *one* thing" (1990, p. 37).[9] Whether or not the concept of social bonding is best to describe "social embeddedness," Clark is pointing in the direction that assumptions about needs and social relations need to be re-examined.

In summary, for Scimecca, Rubenstein, and Clark, needs theory provides a useful critique of contemporary society and contemporary thinking, yet is still incomplete and inadequate. Whether to proceed in a puzzle-solving mode or a problem-solving mode depends on ontological assumptions. All three scholars provide hints as to where to proceed from here: examine assumptions and explore the developmental view and reflectivity. For Oscar Nudler, needs — both "fundamental" and "derived" — are not easily compartmentalized because they "cut across the whole person and achieve a multi-dimensional inner resonance."[10] Nudler eschews the more common isolation of biological/psychological/social needs and rather views needs as making a system whereby fundamental universal needs are patterned around cultural and individual circumstances because basic (universal) needs are mediated by culture. These insights on the increased complexity of isolating human needs and a focus on human development lead in the

direction of human responsibilities and self-governing. Can we glean some insights in moving forward from Burton's discussion of conflict *prevention*?

Provention

For Burton conflict *provention* — anticipating the peaceful future — comes directly out of a focus on opportunities for human development rather than on institutional constraints (1990, p. 253). For Burton:

> We have a language of democracy, freedoms, rights and justice, and we sometimes fail to place these concepts in the context of their origins—that is, a reaction against repressive systems, the essential structures of which we have inherited. (1990, p. 73)

Burton mentions development as a human need several times and frames his analysis in terms of reactions to systems that oppress individuals. However, he did not explore what development means beyond the freedom for an individual to choose and the elimination of repressive structures that limit those choices. What he did not explore further are the dimensions of human development that also include individual responsibilities. What is required is a robust sociology of knowledge that applies a statement such as "The models, terms and concepts that we have inherited lurk in the back of our minds, frustrate the development of alternative theories, and distort our perceptions of the present" (Burton 1990, 74) to be directed back at a human needs approach to begin to explore what is involved in human development.

The importance of an adequate theory of conflict is restated when Burton addresses pragmatism, the second common approach in dealing with conflict. Burton cautions that a "pragmatic" approach to conflict is potentially problematic because pragmatism implies "and absence of knowledge…and theory" (Burton 1990, pp. 19-20). In this approach to conflict, a pragmatist, according to Burton, simply employs intuition and unconsciously held theories on a trial and error basis. While the intervener may happen to help resolve a conflict (or not), the risk in using this "method" is that the structural and institutional sources of the conflict may remain unexamined, and thus they are "likely to lead in the longer term to even more costly disputes and planning mistakes…and perhaps to [greater] social disruption" (Burton 1990, p. 21). Burton wants to be clear that while pragmatism may at times be necessary, pragmatism should still be understood as a "phase in knowledge development" (Burton 1990, p. 22). While pragmatism is a natural and inevitable phase in the development of a practice it should be recognized that it is a "phase in a paradigm shift…but not yet a switch to a new paradigm" (Burton 1990, p. 22). The problem arises when pragmatism moves from an intuitive trial and error attempt to being defined as a positive 'science'" (Burton 1990, p. 22). For Burton, this is "dangerous" because it is not connected to a theoretical base. Burton's assessment of the field of conflict studies is that, while making progress, "is still a field in which theorists and practitioners assert their preferences and make claims in the absence of any widespread understanding" (Burton 1990, p. 10). Burton is convinced that the framework of *Realpolitik* and deterrence are inadequate to the current socio-political conditions, yet he cautions about being overly confident at present with the current state of conflict resolution which is located primarily in pragmatism and "devoid of any theoretical base on which they can be assessed" (Burton 1990, p. 10).

In contrast to pragmatism, John Burton describes the "general thesis" of conflict resolution as resting on complete analysis of conflict and "underlying this general thesis is a theoretical assumption that parties to a conflict have shared goals — that is, the pursuit of human needs common to all" (1990, p. 328). Burton goes on to state that these "problems" are "located in relationships" such as "identity and recognition" and that these need not be in short supply, unlike physical resources (1990, p. 328). Burton does little to expand upon the relational aspect, except that it involves perceiving accurately the "depths of feelings and the frustrations experienced by the other" (1990, p. 328). It is the (empathic) relational social dynamic that remains the least explored by Burton. He reverts to a liberal social ontology — freedom from coercion — when he emphasizes that accurate analysis is located in "the extent to which apparently hostile behaviors are the consequence of environmental constraints" (1990, p. 328). His analysis is directed at those with power, force and control of resources, and not to *all* members of social community. To what extent, and how, are the oppressed to be involved in self-governing? This is an important point since we may ask to what extent are we all complicit? For example, Franz Fanon, writing on (and supporting) the revolution for independence in Algeria, cautioned that the oppressed must always be vigilant against simply reversing the terms and groups oppressed in their fight for emancipation (1964).

How is a conflict practitioner to approach Fanon's concern? The following briefly explores some of John Burton's insights concerning the role of the conflict resolution scholar-practitioner, especially towards "problem-solving" connected as a general orientation for conflict scholars. This leads directly to incorporating Burton's own insights in reflecting upon the implications of his insights towards examining his own writings.

To review, Burton also changed the focus from states to people. Burton also explored deviance not as a threat to a system but rather as how deviance was defined, who defined it, and to illuminate the nature of the system or society that was classifying the behavior as "deviant", or "deviant in relation to what exactly?" (Dunn, 2004, p. 97). People in conflict attempt to gain the same thing: security and certainty (Dunn, 2004, p. 97). Once the concept of needs was at the center of the conceptual map "other things were made possible" (Dunn, 2004, p. 98). Parson's classical functionalist sociology emphasis society as self-equilibrating systems and tend to a condition of stability. Deviance therefore evokes conditions of control to counter and contain it. Functionalism emphasizes adaptation to the system rather than conflict with and within the system. Burton problematizes what is ignored in functionalism: why and to what extent should the individual adapt to the system and promote the system? (98). Borrowing from Sites, Burton posits needs at the socio-biological level. In this way, needs are ontological—they form a base and basis of individual human behavior. Socialization and conformity and the contrasting behaviors of resistance and deviance are conventions and norms held by collectives and groups. Those who are deviant can be marginalized, criminalized, incarcerated, and even executed.

John Burton (1979, pp. xi-xiv & 3-38) makes a deliberate distinction between "puzzles" and "problems", between "closed systems" and "open systems", and between "normal" or "applied" science and "pure science." For Burton, the conflict scholar-practitioner is dealing with unsolved problems located in open systems that require pure science. A puzzle implies that a final solution exists in a closed system and can be solved by the application of available theories or techniques. However, problems, for Burton, are qualitatively distinct — "having the opposite characteristics" (1979, p. 5) — from puzzles because they exist in open systems and cannot be solved with the application of "current" theories or techniques (1979, p. 3-4). As open systems, problems lack final solutions because the solution is itself a set of relationships that

(potentially) contain a new set of problems and also interact in a larger changing environment. Finally, problems "frequently require a new synthesis or a change in theoretical structure" (1979, p. 5). Burton presents two different elements of problems related to complications in attempts at "solving" them. The first is the ontological condition of problems — they are embedded in social relationships that are not static but dynamic — and change themselves during investigation: "While the problem is being analyzed its nature is altering and the behaviour of the parts being analyzed is altering" (1979, p. 5). The second involves reflection and critique of the "dominant theories" of applied and normal science "to question all the implied assumptions, attitudes and theories, to put forward alternatives hypotheses…" (1979, p. 6). The first element of problems relates, again, to the dynamism in the ontological condition of human social being. The second element relates to the cognitive framework(s) by which human social beings understand (and are shaped by and shape) the social world.

Many conflict scholar-practitioners have focused on the first element of problems that Burton described, discussed above. Burton's critique is against those, especially from the field of international relations and related fields, who have directed less attention at the second feature of addressing problems — a critique of the assumptions of dominant theories themselves. Burton outlines his "methodology" of problem-solving in the first chapter of *Deviance, Terrorism and War (1979)* by emphasizing the extent to which features of analysis are socially constructed and the role of a critical posture towards those social constructions, including theories of order, change and conflict.

The range of the indeterminate nature of the social world for Burton is evident in the methodological steps he prescribes. The malleability of investigation of social science is evident in Burton's understanding of research, ranging from "selection of the problem" and "boundaries of the area of inquiry" to the demarcation of "relevant source material," "defining the problem" and designing and evaluating interventions (1979, p. 10-38). Burton, in his critique of international relations based in *Realpolitik*, states that "it could be that we are tackling our apparently insoluble problems within a system of thought that…excludes the possibility of solution" (1979, p. 19) and offers the possibility that what may need examination is the "system of thought being employed by the investigator" (1979, p. 26). The remainder of *Deviance, Terrorism and War* is engaged in critical analysis that questions the underlying assumptions of current policies, for example, of conventional theories of deviant behavior. Burton's diagnosis is to reexamine the frameworks of the analysts themselves "whenever policies are seen to fail to achieve objectives" (1979, p. 41). He states bluntly that part of the problem may reside in "conventional wisdom" and rather than pursuing more knowledge based and interpreted within this framework, the task is now to "ask 'what are the assumptions on which 'facts' are selected and interpreted?" (1979, p. 41). Burton is clear that his project is informed both by the flawed outcomes of intervention strategies and the policies which guide them. But his project is deeper: it is to question the assumptions on which strategies and policies are based, which include "prevailing value systems, definitions of problem behavior, conceptions of morality, notions of law and order and ideas about the role of authority" (1979, p. 41).

How does an analyst-researcher go about this task of questioning the underlying assumptions of conventional wisdom? For Burton, this requires "imagination", "an ability to question conventional wisdom", and "a willingness to be a dissident" (1979, p. 9) by not simply accepting "the ruling dogma of the day" and instead taking an approach that leads to an alternative set of assumptions" (1979, p. 6).

John Burton begins "The Two Paradigms," by stating "When societies tackle their social problems there is a set of givens, a paradigm, that together form a generally agreed approach" (1979, p. 159) and acknowledges that shifts in values, norms, attitudes, behaviors and conditions do occur, but overall, they are understood within a given framework. For Burton, these frameworks represent fairly stable ontological frameworks and shifts represent only minor adjustments because "these shifts occur within an essentially unchanged set of givens or conventional assumptions about the nature of human behavior, of society and of the norms observed" (1979, p. 159). Therefore, Burton calls for a more radical examination of common assumptions (1979), to examine and escape from the restraints of these frameworks. Burton is asking for a change in thinking, away from the "assumptions inherent in conventional thinking" for two reasons: they do not explain observed behavior and they do not provide adequate long-term solutions to ongoing problems (1979, p. 161).[11]

The question here is whether the framework of human needs and liberalism is best suited to address these concerns. Rather, as will become clearer, moving from a narrow framework of "needs" and "freedom from…" to include a broader framework of human responsibilities and liberty points in the direction of finding an "appropriate means" (1990, p. 328) to address the relational dynamic of conflict. For example, Burton describes security as need for everyone, and argues that increased security for one party of a conflict increases security for all parties. The problem is that usual means to security limit the possibility of it being shared.[12] A human needs approach, focusing upon what individuals require for themselves, alludes or pushes to the background, the possible necessity of including basic responsibilities that follow (possible) emancipation, or said another way, what comes after the revolution? The fundamental question, unaddressed by a human needs approach, is what is required to sustain self-governing — what is required to sustain a movement from violence to politics? A human responsibilities approach (that does not remove human needs) that expands social ontology to include ongoing participation in self-governing relationships is one answer. The freedom required in "human development" is crucial, but is it enough to sustain polities of participation? The following study will argue that human responsibilities are needed to complement human needs.

Burton adds another variable to his consideration of conflict — the future — and invents a new term to address it — *provention* (1990, p. 161). Burton explains: provention is a "more fundamental study and exercise…it is a decision-making process in which the future is analyzed and anticipated" (1990, p. 161). For Burton, the problem with different forms of governing, even representative political systems, is that no current political system has yet been discovered that gives adequate priority to the future. Such a system, accordingly, would be conflict avoidant in the positive sense. The move for conflict resolution as a discipline is to configure a political governing future as an "extension of analytical conflict resolution…because there emerges a whole new political approach to decision-making" (1990, p. 162). Burton shows no hesitation when he states it is "clear that provention must rest heavily on the theory and practice of conflict resolution" as the means by which insights are obtained into the nature of political problems (1990, p. 162) However, Burton restates that political philosophies must be oriented towards the future and "must rest on reliable theories of human behaviors" (1990, p. 163). Here Burton is combining two dimensions of social life, the moral philosophy of politics and the virtues of intersubjective decision-making, what could also be described as the responsibility of self-governing (1990, p. 164).

For Burton, human knowledge is part of a cultural evolutionary process, with the human needs approach contributing to the progression of knowledge. However, he allows that further

developments are necessary (1990, p. 177). Burton is committed to a human needs theoretical framework that defines more precisely what these needs actually are and therein developing "more understanding of the structural sources of conflict[13] and the need to seek institutional policy options that cater to human requirements" (1990, p. 177). Rather than humans adjusting to institutional requirements, Burton sees this as a transitional period in which governing is no longer catering to "power-elite interests" and to "the nature of which is far from clear" (1990, p. 178). Burton rightly acknowledges that this transition is a confusing and difficult one, raising questions of "ethics, relevance, justice, constitutional rights, human rights, human needs and a host of others" (1990, p. 178). He ends assessing the current situation in human socio-political evolution declaring that system-preserving approaches are inadequate to address the fundamental issues of the future and the problems associated with ongoing and systemic oppression and suggests that problem-solving conflict-resolution leading to provention is going in the right direction.

Burton belongs to a counter-tradition in International Relations that, said one way, endorses Rousseau and dismisses Hobbes. For Hobbes, the primary human condition is that humans are self-interested and inherently aggressive and therefore social order and security requires a coercion and obedience to prevent a "war of all against all". In contrast, for Rousseau, the civilization process itself has led to the accentuation of self-interest, emergence and protection of private property, and the development of laws that claim to serve all but actually serve elites and propertied and this has caused oppression and the civilization process has obscured social empathy. Therefore, Rousseau endorses the possibility and promise of large-scale social change since the oppressed have "nothing to lose but their chains." Said another way, Hobbes promote the status quo through deterrence and social control to prevent violence while Rousseau promotes the possibility of revolution and the recovery of social empathy.

For example, for some globalization is a threat and for others it is an opportunity—whether the promise of international markets or the peril of cyberwar, and so on. For Dunn, in dealing with the change and uncertainty we do not need to reinvent the wheel, but we do need to be more aware that a number of disciplines are working on these areas of change, such as social theory, cultural studies, political economy, and so on, all informed by postmodernism (2004, p. 159). Postmodernist approaches undermine foundationalism, but do not "define the agenda nor do they exhaust it…[therefore] Burton's stress on needs is a valuable opening to the agenda" (Dunn, 2004, p. 159). For example, for Burton, social and cultural change are central elements, yet significantly underdeveloped and under-theorized in International Relations because IR is state-centric and primarily concerned with short term order and stability.

Beyond Burton

For Burton:

> "the transition that we are experiencing now from social policies based on allocation of values as determined by elites, to social policies that are influenced by the ontological needs of persons and communities is a dramatic and revolutionary one. It is this transition, and the inevitable defenses that are made against it, that best explain the high levels of domestic violence and communal and interstate conflict that are universal in contemporary world society (Burton, 1984, p. 153).

For Dunn, "this passage sums up so much of what Burton has to say, in so many thousands of words: "For Burton, the problem is the selective perception of decision-makers" (2004, pp.125). John Burton's work is a critique of "current policies that are wrong in their assumptions, wrong in their implementations, and wrong in their accumulated consequences" (Dunn 2004, 172. Burton replaced the state as the center of analysis with the human individual as the center of analysis. Importantly, rather than individuals adjusting and conforming to malfunctioning systems, systems should adjust to the needs of individuals.

It is important to be clear that Burton emphasizes the behavior of the actors that ushers us to attend to the causes of the problem/conflict and distinguish them from symptoms. For Burton, individuals are not deviants because they are born 'bad types.' Rather, deviance is an expression, a symptom, of something deeper. For example, Palestinian youth armed with stones do not confront Israeli tanks because they are born that way or predetermined to be bad people. The behaviors emanate from unmet human needs and from the lived experience of the Palestinians. Burton is calling for nothing less than a "paradigm shift" in conventional thinking, drawing explicitly on the work of Thomas Kuhn (1962). For example, deviance is not a result of demoralization, deficiency, or pathology but rather a response to a social context.

John Burton critiqued the dominant theories in various fields that related to dealing with human conflict and he presented an alternative based in human needs. However, did Burton present a robust alternative? For example, Burton states numerous times that problem-solving leads to win-win outcomes. So, what exactly is a win-win situation and how does it proceed? Dunn confirms suspicions that Burton opened the door to a new way, but did not provide every answer when he states:

> "…discussing the nature if win-win situations, is particularly illustrative of the Burton style. It is quick to challenge the existing sets of assumptions…He pithily makes and alternative, indeed at times radically subversive, point that challenges the very fundamentals of the established mode, and then leaves it, almost as if having made the point, then the implications are self-evident, the point made and the case can proceed. The discussion of win-win, so hugely significant in its implications, is here dealt with in fewer than five pages!" (Dunn, 2004, p. 122).

Burton is correct, in many ways, to draw these insights and distinctions; however, as Dunn states accurately "**the discussion needs filling out**" (2004, p. 123). For example, the critique offered by Burton that conventional international relations is not the reality of lived experience of humanity, but a game, similar to other sports, played among elites. So where do we go from here?

We should proceed with the notion that we might be wrong and how we might go about getting it right. However, Burton is first and foremost a classical liberal with an approach that is best designed to deconstruct and promote revolution. The terms he coined, provention, is part of another project, a constructive project—the problem-solving workshop. Burton's project is to clear the debris and landscape to prepare the ground to support fertile growth. As Dunn recognizes, we cannot be definitive about provention since much remains to be done in relation to the development of the details and criteria of provention. Most of what constitutes provention is either implied or undetermined. The key to the indeterminacy is that in proventing conflict Burton introduces the uncertainty of the open-system problem-solving workshop.

As David Dunn summarizes: "So often, 'conventional wisdom' is incapable of solving problems of human relationships, since it is informed by the wrong ontologies and epistemologies. So often, people are made to fit into norms, structures and processes that are said to serve the goals of good, order, justice, stability, normality, community, and conformity. We can understand clearly the goal of order as this is understood in International Relations, where the alternative is assumed to be war and chaos…Yet order comes to be the dominant goal in itself: challenges to certain conceptions of order or coerced, change is prevented, and certain interests are served. The problem is defined as one of system maintenance rather than system adaptation (Dunn, 2004, p. 171). In contrast, from a provention perspective, people are primary, change is constant, and structures (such as states) are the means to human betterment. From the viewpoint of prevention, we are dealing with novelties that do not fit with conventional assumptions and we should stop trying to make them fit; we should change our assumptions.

Dunn offers a way forward. Following Banks (1985a), Dunn suggests that teaching the next generation is paramount to understanding the challenges and promises of different approaches to conceptual innovation. Research is also important to develop conceptual innovation. But Dunn is limited in his description of prevention. The central component is the human being and a turn to focus on the causes and not simply the symptoms of social conflict. Burton's focus is primarily on excavating the wrong assumptions, wrong definitions of the problem, and wrong policies. Said another way, Burton recognized the irony that explained peace as based on the threat to kill millions and render continents vulnerable to complete devastation. For Burton, the world is so only because we have constructed it that way. We can construct it in another way.

Next Steps

John Burton critiques "conventional wisdom" because it is not only wrong but ultimately harmful; at the same time, Burton hesitates that his human needs framework "is still at an immature stage" (1990, p. 179). Burton, with human needs theory, does provide a legitimate and convincing critique of dominant and traditional understandings of elite dominated social systems that thwart meeting human needs of numerous persons. However, does he offer a positive or constructive project? While looking to the future, Burton overlooks the promise of nonviolence in building a just social order in the process of revolution, of building the type of society that satisfies human needs in the connection between means and ends in nonviolent social relations and participation (Vahabzadeh 2019). The ends — a non-oppressive social order — must be connected to the means in which that governing order is achieved (Beitzel, 2010). What is required then, in the next of applying the insights of Basic Human Needs theory is to explore the complications and complexities of ethics and justice, not by abandoning a human needs approach completely, but by expanding Burton's basic human needs ontology by adding human responsibilities as a complement to needs that lead finally towards self-governing and nonviolent problem-solving conflict resolution approach to maintain self-governance (Beitzel 2019, Marin et al, 2019). Nonviolence is implicit in Burton's writings, but not explicit. For example, Burton cautions that the misapplication of a technique for dealing with conflict or a failure to properly understand the needs-basis of a deep-rooted conflict may only momentarily suppress a conflict and actually lead to further violence (1990, p. 8-9).

Therefore, the way forward is not abandoning human needs, but complementing human needs with something like human responsibilities (Zartman, 2019). To do so is to examine and

acknowledge the responsibilities persons have toward other persons needs in terms of the responsibility that individuals have both to themselves and towards others. Said another way, one way to transcend the egoistic view of humanity with an exclusive focus on needs is to include basic human responsibilities — responsibilities to oneself and to others. For the problem-solving workshops to function and deliver positive outcomes, needs of others be recognized and respected (O'Toole et al, 2019). The fundamental insight form Burton is that basic human needs are ontological and cannot be coerced out of existence (they can only be momentarily suppressed). To deal with unmet human needs, Burton develops the problem-solving workshop which is based in human relationships and this is a very large step toward examining and including responsibility in conjunction with needs. The problem-solving workshop in some variation or form, now utilized by those successfully working in conflict transformation, humanitarian intervention, transitional justice, and so on, is where to find and also nurture and build Burton's insight for a way that is both positive and emancipatory (Marin et al, 2019; O'Toole, et al, 2019; Zartman, 2019). The challenging and liberating aspect is that this freedom to construct a different world brings with it uncertainty that accompanies indeterminacy.

Notes

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[1] This is not necessarily alarming, nor does it suggest that Burton's Human Needs Theory is irrelevant. For example, the argument, used by Burton, that elites control institutions and those institutions serve the self-interests of elites was developed by Jean Rousseau centuries earlier. It could be that Human Needs Theory became generally accepted at the level of normal science within the paradigm of conflict and peace studies.

[2] Similar questions are also raised by Oscar Nudler, "On Conflicts and Metaphors" *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, ed. John Burton, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1990, pp. 186.

[3] In John Burton and Frank Dukes, *Conflict*, St. Martin's Press, New York, 1990, pp.18-19. Burton explains: "It has to be noted that in many cases perhaps most cases, mediation processes do more harm than good…They provide an answer to the particular case and, if successful, help to preserve that system or set of circumstances that give rise to the cases treated" (Burton and Dukes 1990, p. 160).

[4] See Fritjof Bergmann, *On Being Free,* Notre Dame, IN: Notre Dame University Press, 1977. Of course, sociologists have long made this contention.

[5] In the section "Trends in Thinking about A Human Dimension", Burton states that the reference point for understanding conflict is no longer in accord with the "Natural Law notion" of justice based on mysterious divine social order, but rather on "estrangement"[5] due to "an absence of participation and social control" (1990, pp. 91). For Burton, the new reference point is based on psychological and physical needs of individuals. The social developments of modernization and the problems of legitimacy draw attention, for Burton, to the social problems and the impacts on individuals and point to analytical problem-solving processes to better address the social conditions that have led to estrangement of the non-elite individual — to increase the participation and control of all individuals (1990, pp. 91).

[6] See Jack Donnelly, *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice* (2nd Edition), Ithaca, NY, Cornell University Press, 2003, for an extended discussion.

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[7] See Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science*, New York, Academic Press, 1978, for a discussion of both the creative and destructive possibilities of social conflict.

[8] Clark mentions three changes in Western civilization: the rise of the nuclear family, the "institution of competitive individualism" and "efficiency," and the disappearance of sacred meaning (Clark 1990, pp. 49-51).

[9] The idea of "bonding" is critiqued in a later section on civility and responsibility.

[10] Oscar Nudler, "On Conflicts and Metaphors" *Conflict: Human Needs Theory,* ed. John Burton St. Martin's Press, New York, 1990, pp. 186.

[11] Burton lists influences for solving widespread social problems

[12] Burton here implies, but does make explicit, that the means typically pursued by the party with power and resources is that of (military, police, policy, or legal) force.

[13] When discussing needs, Burton moves from his critical posture of "problem solving" when dealing with the field of international relations to a "puzzle solving" approach when seeking to explore needs within conflict studies.

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