

Conflict Resolution and Human Needs

Linking theory and practice

**Edited by Kevin Avruch and
Christopher Mitchell**

 **Routledge**
Taylor & Francis Group
LONDON AND NEW YORK

First published 2013
by Routledge
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

Simultaneously published in the USA and Canada
by Routledge
711 Third Avenue, New York, NY 10017

Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business

© 2013 selection and editorial material, Kevin Avruch and
Christopher Mitchell; individual chapters, the contributors

The right of the editors to be identified as the authors of the
editorial material, and of the authors for their individual chapters,
has been asserted in accordance with sections 77 and 78 of the
Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reprinted or
reproduced or utilized in any form or by any electronic, mechanical,
or other means, now known or hereafter invented, including
photocopying and recording, or in any information storage or
retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publishers.

Trademark notice: Product or corporate names may be trademarks or
registered trademarks, and are used only for identification and
explanation without intent to infringe.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Conflict resolution and human needs : linking theory and practice /
edited by Kevin Avruch and Christopher Mitchell

pages cm. – (Routledge studies in peace and conflict resolution)

I. Conflict management. 2. Basic needs. I. Avruch, Kevin.

II. Mitchell, C. R. (Christopher Roger), 1934–

HM1126.C653 2013

303.6'9–dc23

2012042466

ISBN: 978-0-415-62990-4 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-203-09821-9 (ebk)

Typeset in Baskerville
by Wearset Ltd, Boldon, Tyne and Wear

2 Basic Human Needs and the dilemma of power in conflict resolution

Kevin Avruch

Introduction

Over the last several decades, as “conflict resolution” began to define itself as a distinct field of research and practice, that is, a *discipline*, certain gaps were discovered and addressed. Some were straightforward and arose from similar lacunae in the older disciplines that dominated conflict resolution at first, International Relations (IR) particularly. Attention had to be paid to culture and gender, for example. Other developments entailed broadening the field from an exclusive foundation in positivism to admit other epistemologies, such as phenomenology or Critical Theory. Yet another involved conceptualizing conflict as concerned with something more, and “deeper,” than clashes of *interests*, and therefore conflict resolution as a practice requiring more than negotiation or mediation as modeled on the utilitarian heuristic of the buyer-seller (Avruch 2006, 2012). What lies beneath interests, something perhaps less amenable to rational bargaining? Some in the new field responded: think about *values*, or *identity*, or something called *basic human needs*.

There was one lacuna that the field long recognized but failed adequately to address (Scimecca 1991), “the dilemma of power.” The dilemma presents itself at two levels. The first is conceptual and foundational and the second is manifest at the level of practice and ethics. Conceptually, power is a dilemma for the field because there already exists a dominant and dominating “theory” (what some of us, seeking to de-authorize, would instead call a *narrative*) of power and conflict with roots in Thucydides, Hobbes and Machiavelli, thence to Morgenthau and the entire edifice of realist and neorealist IR. In an important sense power is a dilemma for conflict resolution in direct proportion to the extent that it is *not* a dilemma for those “realist” thinkers for whom it is a self-evident social and political fact. Peace and conflict studies seeks to establish its foundations in a conceptualization of the world that is alternative to *Machtpolitik* thinking (and practice!). At the level of practice, the dilemma presents itself to the individual mediator or other sort of third party who intervenes in a conflict between parties with obvious and undeniable differences of

power, and seeks a solution that is not predicated on Thucydides' prescription for the people of Melos "negotiating" with the powerful Athenians: "The strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept that they have to accept."¹ Here is our dilemma: How to conceive of a "non-Melian" theory of power and conflict and having done so, how to design a conflict resolution practice that embodies it?

In this chapter, while touching briefly on how others in the field have responded both conceptually and practically to the dilemma of power (cf. Avruch 2012), I want to focus on a particular response and practice: John Burton's idea of *basic human needs* (BHN) as the drivers of deep-rooted conflict, and his original *problem-solving workshop* (PSW) as the practice that achieves their resolution.

As Dunn's (2004) portrayal of Burton's career in the academy, after his meteoric rise and fall in Australian politics and public service, makes clear, from very early on he opposed most of the key tenets of traditional IR thinking, exemplified in his heated debates with British colleagues in the early 1960s (Sandole 2006). In those days a central point of contention was Burton's challenge to the privileged position accorded to the state as the sole and autonomous "actor" in international politics, as well as the doctrinaire segregation, based on the presumed normless and amoral nature of the international system, of international from domestic politics. Burton was not alone in this critique of state-centric IR. But his challenge went deeper, to the whole structure of "power politics," and the hegemony of power in neorealist international relations. He also proposed a conflict resolution methodology (from early "controlled communication" to the later "analytical problem-solving workshop") to demonstrate why the power politics paradigm was the wrong way to understand, much less resolve, deep-rooted conflicts.

While the critique of power politics and neorealist international relations came very early to Burton, it was not until his "discovery" of basic human needs (BHN) – what Dunn (2004: 95) called the "ontological break" – that all the pieces necessary for the formulation of a conflict resolution practice fell for him into place. Postulating basic human needs, Burton argued, obviated the problem of power imbalance between parties, while the problem-solving workshop functioned to neutralize whatever imbalance remained. He claimed, in short, to offer a solution to the dilemma of power. This chapter seeks critically to examine this claim.

Basic Human Needs as a theory of conflict

Long a critic of state-centric IR and of power as its main explanatory variable (e.g. Burton 1962, 1965, 1972), Burton was challenged to offer an alternative practice to power-based diplomatic negotiation, and in late 1965 he crafted what he called "the controlled communication workshop," later to become the analytical problem-solving workshop (cf. Burton 1969,

1987). Although genealogically connected, what separated “controlled communication” from analytical problem solving was that the earlier form found Burton improvising as he went along, aiming for an improved version of negotiation divorced from power-plays. Controlled communication began as mainly a reformatory *process*, involving a rejection of *Macht* but otherwise unanchored in an articulated *theory of conflict*. In contrast, analytical problem solving was not at all improvisatory. Warranting a *Handbook* (1987), it featured exacting and prescriptive rules and was explicitly based on a theory of conflict as originating in the suppression by authorities of basic human needs. In basic human needs Burton believed he had found the compelling alternative explanatory variable to power as exercised by states or their elites.

Burton built on a long tradition positing some set of needs or requirements essential for personal and social growth and stability – some point to such an argument by Aristotle in the *Nicomachean Ethics* – but he was especially drawn to Maslow’s (1954) influential work. Rather than conceiving of needs in terms of an individual’s developmental stages, however, Burton understood them as simultaneous, and took his list from the work of the sociologist Paul Sites (1973). Sites named eight needs: consistency of response; stimulation; security; recognition; justice; meaning; rationality; and control. Burton added a ninth need, which he called role defense, “the protection of needs once they had been acquired” (1979: 73). Sites’s argument was that these needs are both invariant and universal in their distribution and, crucially, that they cannot be “erased” through socialization. Not everyone can be molded to conformity. The exercise of raw power, brute force, can try to suppress needs and repress individuals, but resistance ensues, resulting in various “antisocial” behaviors. For Sites this was a causal explanation for criminality and social deviance. Burton applied Sites’s theory far more broadly (Burton 1979). As these needs cannot be “socialized away” or permanently suppressed, concerted suppression by rulers or coercive authorities deploying power will only generate resistance, sometimes violent resistance. This is the source of *all* deep-rooted, protracted or intractable, social conflicts: the suppression of basic human needs by the application of dominating power. Logically, then, conflict resolution consists of finding ways toward the satisfaction of these needs.

At least four corollaries followed from these axioms. First, Burton claimed that because all applications of power (brute force or coercion) were directed against implacable and unalterable – *non-negotiable* – basic needs, power was always only contingently (temporarily) successful. Second, as he developed his ideas about deep-rooted conflicts and basic human needs he came to draw a bright line between the *management* of a conflict and its *resolution*. Conflict management implied bargaining and negotiation over interests. Being non-negotiable, basic human needs resisted negotiation, even the “principled” sort of interest-based and integrative solution-seeking

championed by Fisher and Ury in their influential *Getting to Yes* (1981). The non-negotiability of basic human needs – they cannot be traded or bargained away even if “the individual” wanted to – was a key part of their essential character, and remained so for Burton in all his writings after *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (e.g. Burton 1997). In this way Burton differentiated “dispute” (over negotiable interests) from “conflict” (susceptible only to analysis and satisfaction of hitherto suppressed basic human needs). A corollary effect was to separate so-called dispute resolution from conflict resolution. This distinguished Burton’s conception of conflict resolution from what was rapidly and simultaneously developing in the field as “alternative dispute resolution,” ADR. Third, since “identity” was a key basic human need, the turn from management to resolution (from interests to needs) directed Burtonian resolutionists toward deep-rooted conflicts around identity – ethnicity, religion, race or nationalism – a move influenced by Burton’s collaboration with Edward Azar.

Fourth, and finally, Burton argued that the need to conceive of true conflict resolution as the satisfaction of basic human needs implied an entirely new and different “political philosophy” from power politics and neorealism and, in practice, a radically different political system, one committed a priori to the individual’s needs satisfaction, a commitment to what Burton termed “provention.”

Although the theory was first elucidated at length in *Deviance, Terrorism and War* (1979), a particularly clear and forceful and summary, as well as a bold extension of the theory’s “reach,” was published in *Negotiation Journal* (Burton and Sandole 1986). The article was titled “Generic Theory: The Basis of Conflict Resolution.” In it the authors confidently proclaimed nothing less than:

- 1 a revolutionary “paradigm shift” (à la Thomas Kuhn) in thinking about conflict, from a “levels” to a level- and discipline-spanning “generic” approach (in a flash undermining the rationale for an independent discipline called IR), thus;
- 2 a new “adiscipline” and *science* of Conflict Resolution, founded methodologically upon the replacement of “Popperian falsification” and empirical canons of induction and deduction (earlier Burton (1979: 198) had called BHN a “deduced hypothesis”), with C.S. Peirce’s *abduction*, arriving at one’s “hypothesis” through insight or a sort of common sense: “problem solving not by trial and error but by thoughtful and questioning analysis” (Burton and Sandole 1986: 335);
- 3 the rejection of conflict settlement or management as key goals of the new science’s practice, to be replaced by the goals of resolution or prevention, abjuring traditional approaches to understanding conflict based upon such “normal science” ideas as: “the state system, power rivalries ... cultural differences, the struggle for scarce resources” (Burton and Sandole 1986: 338).

Underlying all of this was the fundamental and axiomatic notion of basic human needs, described as not only a “generic theory but also a genetic one” (Burton and Sandole 1986: 338). In the genome, they are invariant and universal. They cannot be permanently suppressed. However, crucially related to practice, Burton asserted that BHNs were not scarce resources, trapping contestants in zero-sum contests. To increase, for example, the security of one is to increase the security of all. In this way Burton claimed to arrive at the ultimate positive-sum, Pareto-optimal solution. On the one hand, needs resisted mere political or social power because they were themselves all-powerful. On the other, they transcended scarcity and thus obviated destructive zero-sum conflict thinking – if only contestants could be made aware of this fact. This is what the problem-solving workshop was for.

Burton and Azar: linking individuals to structures

For others in IR who were critical of the state-centric assumptions of neo-realism Burton’s idea of basic human needs resonated strongly. A collection titled *The Power of Human Needs in World Society* (Coate and Rosati 1988) featured essays (several by Burton himself) that explored the idea as an alternative to orthodox thinking about state power. But even his admirers could see problems stemming from the methodological individualism that undergirded the theory. For one thing, Burton was rather vague on what “structures” intervened between the level of the individual, his or her relentless basic needs, and society or the state. Burton leapt from the individual to the level of coercive, ruling elites. In their introductory chapter to *The Power of Human Needs in World Society* Coate and Rosati recognized this weakness. They wrote: “A human needs approach, however, must confront a major problem – the link between the micro (that is, individual) level and the macro (that is, societal – world and national) level” (Coate and Rosati 1988: 9). They suggested that focusing on “groups, social networks, and values” can address this weakness, but rather than specifying how, they went on in their concluding chapter (Coate and Rosati 1988: 269) to argue, rather unhelpfully, that

Theorizing about the nature of social networks and relationships based on a human needs approach does not require explicit and definitively empirical linkages. The development of theory and a research agenda is not dependent solely on inductive, empirical analysis, but is also heavily dependent on deduction.

The first remark, abjuring explicitness and empiricism, seems contrary to some essential social scientific sensibility, and also contrary to the way Burton himself thought of his project – as “science.” Meanwhile, by their subsequent remark, on induction versus deduction, Coate and Rosati

merely placed themselves in the awkward and methodologically incoherent position that formed one of the bases of Avruch and Black's (1987) critique of Burton (see below), and one that Burton later claimed to transcend by doing away with Aristotle entirely in favor of Charles Sanders Peirce: by rejecting both induction and deduction in favor of abduction.

Something more productive in the matter of micro to macro linkages was achieved by Burton's brief collaboration with Edward Azar (Azar and Burton 1986). Like Burton, Azar was a critic of traditional IR thinking. Unlike Burton who came to academic IR after a career in diplomacy and became a vocal critic of orthodoxy almost as soon as he encountered it, Azar was educated and socialized in the discipline. Nevertheless, he moved away from dominant IR analysis with its assumptions of state "actors" rationally pursuing interests in power-based settings. Instead, he began to look "inside" states for signs of conflict and instability that had the potential of overflowing state borders into the international arena or, alternatively, of international forces piercing borders, and destabilizing states in turn. Doubtless it was his own experience as a Lebanese citizen from a multi-communal society governed by a state reliant on fragile "confessional" alliances and the thin fiction of shared national interests rationally arrived at and pursued, and as a scholar studying conflict in the Middle East more generally, that sowed whatever reservations he came to have about orthodox neorealist theory. He was also interested from early on in the relationship between development and social conflict, particularly uneven development and (perhaps thinking of the Shi'a Lebanese in those days) the state-sanctioned misdistribution of valued resources (Ramsbotham 2005).

Azar's theory of "protracted social conflicts" (PSC) focused on what he called the "disarticulation between state and society" (Azar 1990: 10). Structural disarticulation, dysfunctional governance and potentially destabilizing international linkages provided the initial conditions for protracted conflict. But whence the final *motivation* for action by individuals and groups? Where is the "engine" that puts this fraught state-society structure in motion and drives the conflict? Collaborating with Burton, Azar fixed on the power of basic human needs: "The source of protracted social conflicts is the denial of those elements required in the development of all people, and whose pursuit is a compelling need of all." He went on to name the elements: "These are security, distinctive identity, social recognition of identity, and effective participation..." and concludes: "The real source of conflict is the denial of those human needs that are common to all and whose pursuit is an ontological drive in all" (Azar 1985; see also Azar 1990).

The suppression of basic human needs provided Azar with the motivational "engine" driving protracted social conflicts. Balancing this, what Burton found in Azar were the explicit and empirical linkages, the groups, social networks and values that bridged micro and macro levels. Azar's

theory was also structural in the sense that he stressed the linkage between conflict and systematic inequality, poverty and under-development. Burton's theory of deep-rooted conflict benefited from his collaboration with Azar. But conceptual problems with the very idea of basic human needs remained unaddressed.

The critics respond

The bold agenda-setting article Burton published with Dennis Sandole (Burton and Sandole 1986) directly occasioned the so-called Avruch–Black critique, which came out in *Negotiation Journal* the following year (Avruch and Black 1987).² As cultural anthropologists it is not surprising that we found the geneticism of Burton's conception of basic human needs, as well as their universality and invariance, matters for debate. But we criticized the Burton–Sandole piece as well on methodological grounds, for its scientism and for their claim (invoking Kuhn) to BHN as “paradigm busting.” Ours was, admittedly, a rather pugnacious piece.

We rejected claims to Kuhnian revolution. We pointed out that needs-theory has a long history, in philosophy, theology, as well as the social sciences, and an equally long history of critique. In anthropology, for example, there was Bronislaw Malinowski's “scientific theory of culture” (Malinowski 1944). Malinowski asserted seven needs and even, going beyond Burton, listed the precise cultural institutions by which they were satisfied.³ Malinowski's theory was dismissed by many in anthropology as banal functionalism. In Burton's usage of BHN theory we saw a functionalism “in reverse”: how sociocultural institutions worked mainly to suppress needs and how this resulted in the opposite of functionalism's epitome, social equilibrium, producing instead deep-rooted social conflict.

Other questions put forth by needs critics were raised: why those needs? Why not others? Harold Isaacs (1975) wrote of two basic human needs, belonging and self-esteem. Joseph Scimecca (1990), coming from humanistic sociology, citing Fromm and Rollo May and influenced by Ernest Becker, asserted self-reflexivity and freedom. Somewhere Galtung had his list, Etzioni his, and almost everyone cited Maslow at least once. Burton had added a ninth need to Sites's canonical eight, role defense or the need to protect other needs once acquired. We pointed out that this need rendered all the others logically irrelevant. One can have eight needs or 800: all one must do is claim role defense as a basic human need and every other need is guaranteed. “Role defense” disappeared from Burton's later writing, and Sites's original eight alone remained.

It was Burton's claim to have found *the* generic theory in establishing “the *science* of conflict resolution” that had us critically engage BHN theory on his chosen ground of positivist science (e.g. Hempel 1965). How were the needs derived? Are they deduced, and if so, from what covering law or theory? How might they be operationalized so as to be empirically tested?

Burton and Sandole (1986) had done away with “Popperian falsification” in a sentence. Fair enough, but if one is claiming “science” what takes its place? Although in earlier writing Burton claimed that BHN were deductively discovered, he too saw the problem with this and thereafter invoked Peirce’s idea of “abduction” as a way to get around deduction/induction methodology entirely. The problem with this is that for Peirce abduction refers to how a scientist might insightfully or creatively formulate an *hypothesis* on the basis of informed conjecture or “educated guess.” While in formal logic abduction may indeed constitute a fallacy of “affirming the consequent,” what makes it, Peirce argues, a valid method in scientific investigation is that having formulated a plausible explanation (the hypothesis) on the basis of insight or knowledge of the phenomenon under study, one can then proceed to evaluate or test the hypothesis. Abduction is, to put it differently, something that may well occur in the *context of discovery* in science, but there still remains to be satisfied the canonical (positivist) standards involved in the *context of verification*. Hypotheses abductively adduced still need to be validated before they “count” as a scientific explanation. This is what Burton never did, nor could he ever do while claiming “scientific” status for BHN. For Peirce, one might adduce basic human needs as an hypothesis in support of a theory, but Burton was intent on “abducting” the existence of basic human needs in support of the theory of Basic Human Needs: precisely the fallacy logicians call *post hoc ergo propter hoc*. According to Dunn (2004), Burton solved this in that he moved away from the language of sociobiology or genetics and wrote instead of the “ontological” status of basic human needs. In so far as he still laid claim to a science of conflict resolution, it is hard to see the gain here. Indeed, to replace “biology” with “ontology” is to substitute metaphysics for physics, and Kant for Galileo or Francis Bacon. Building conflict resolution on Kantian principles may not be, in the end, such a bad strategy, a point I shall return to in the chapter’s conclusion. But it probably wasn’t what Burton had in mind, the sort of scientific authority he sought.⁴

Hempelian logical positivism was not the only basis for our critique. Closer to their own sensibilities as cultural theorists, we cited A.R. Louch (1966) who stood in for a range of post-Wittgenstein, natural language philosophers. Not only did Burton’s geneticism occlude culture, but in doing so he was unable to realize that he hid as well the potentially culturally constructed nature of such “basic” needs as security, identity and so on. This, indeed, is the tack Tarja Väyrynen (2001) took in critiquing BHN with a social constructionist framework derived from the phenomenological sociology of Alfred Schutz. One could also say, in the spirit of Louch and others, that the particular language game of science that Burton relied upon was not the only such game possible – or even the most desirable.

Our cultural critique was not the only one. Essays by Burton’s close colleagues, Richard Rubenstein and Christopher Mitchell, published in the

1990 collection on Human Needs theory (one of the four in the Conflict Series Burton produced in his year as a visiting fellow at the United States Institute of Peace) were in some ways more pointed than ours. Rubenstein averred that BHN theory flies very close to the sun of Natural Law theory. "One uses it to restate or confirm conclusions already arrived at." Rubenstein went on to call for a theory of BHN that "avoids the pitfalls and limitations of a Natural Law perspective: that is, it restores the qualities of historicity, concreteness, and theoretical unity to a doctrine that often seems vague, abstract, and conclusory" (Rubenstein 1990: 344). Rubenstein looked mainly to Marx and class as the source, at least of "historicity." Mitchell went further. After posing the usual questions (how many? why these needs? how do we know?) and one or two not usually considered (to avoid conflict must all needs be satisfied at once? a few? which few? must they be wholly or can they be partially satisfied?), he wrote (Mitchell 1990: 159–160) that even if one can actually produce a "complete list" of needs one must ask

whether such a list will lead (1) to a revelation of the underlying causes of the conflict under review and (2) to a solution.... If there is no such list, then efforts to develop a theory of conflict resolution based on removing the factors frustrating BHNs seems doomed to failure – or, at least, to a hit and miss strategy that can hardly be said to be based on sound theory.

Mitchell also questioned the relative inattention Burton gives to satisfiers (where "cultural" variability may be more significant than previously assumed) and, most telling, he raised the possibility that some basic human needs may be *malign*. What if "security" is actually best satisfied through dominance? Or "identity" necessarily implies ethnocentrism?

As one the authors of the 1987 "cultural" critique there is nothing I would retract. Yet, more than 25 years later, I can also say that in some essential way the article also reflected our ignorance of the totality of Burton's work and his place in the contemporary controversies in IR theory. Black and I mentioned, but passed over, his claims about bursting the paradigm of power politics in neorealist IR. In this case the blinders of our own disciplinary socialization picked up "culture" but passed over "power" almost entirely. Burton's "ontological break" was from traditional IR theory and its basis in power, to a conception of conflict resolution and problem solving based on the significance of irrepressible BHN. It was in his opposition to the "normal science" of realist power politics that Burton claimed revolutionary status. And indeed, in the UK at least, he was very much treated by some colleagues as a dangerous revolutionary (Dunn 2004; Sandole 2006). Basic human needs, ontologically rooted in the individual and *all-powerful* in their demand for satisfaction, was Burton's Jacobin retort to the putative primacy of the all-powerful state.

The dilemma of power and conflict resolution

Alongside the primacy of the state as realist IR's fundamental idea, *power* is understood as axiomatic. In a world where power among states is self-evidently maldistributed the explanation of inter-state conflict is also self-evident. Strong states seek to dominate one another, weaker ones succumb or seek power-balancing alliances. Therefore IR is naturally much better at explaining the causes of war than outbreaks of peace (but see Vasquez 1993). Conflict management (hardly ever "resolution," except perhaps following a total victory of one side) is a matter of deterrence, stable balances of power or, around the edges, striving to reduce the dangers inherent in perceived security dilemmas by enhancing some measure of information-sharing through communication (e.g. "hotlines") among rivals. In any case, as axiomatic, power is essentially uncontested, never the object of critical inquiry.

Such is not the case for conflict resolution, even for sub-state domains. We agree that in "the real world" power is unevenly distributed. We disagree that the world must be governed under Melian rules, or that *management* is our only option. How then are we to deal with power? Kenneth Boulding's response, for example, was to expand the idea of power by deconstructing it into three "faces," maintaining that the Melian, coercive and destructive face was not the only one possible (Boulding 1989).

One problem is that much conflict resolution theory and practice have been built on assumptions of power symmetry. The prototypical example comes from our most elegant and mathematically "powerful" template, game theory, where the very parameter that specifies perfect (equal) knowledge of the game for each player is so obviously unreflective of conditions in the real world. Beyond formal game theory, we can find similar assumption of essential symmetry carried forward to much negotiation theory and practice. In contrast, a serious engagement with problems of power can be found in the literature on third-party involvement in conflict resolution, particularly in mediation. The common response is some variation on the notion of mediator "empowerment" of the weaker party (Birkhoff 2002).

Empowerment is a complicated idea, not without its critics (e.g. Groom and Webb 1987), and means different things to different practitioners. In ADR-based mediation empowerment is usually achieved through assuming strict neutrality or impartiality toward the parties and imposing standards of "process equality" (turn-taking and so on) within the mediation itself. The assumption here is that "processual equality" maps seamlessly onto "processual justice." For other practitioners, whose conception of justice and its requirements are more comprehensive and rigorous, empowerment implies something quite a bit more, something that extends far beyond the mediation setting. Beyond specifying formal rules of process, Mitchell (1993, 2003) has written about different sorts of third-party roles

with respect to the skills or resources they can bring, some of them capacity-building, aiming to improve the negotiating position of the weaker party.⁵ Meanwhile, when Adam Curle (1971) wrote about *conscientization* he had in mind a much broader enterprise on the part of the third party in relation to the weaker contestant. In common with Paulo Freire's (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* – or, indeed, the disequilibrating outside agitator activities of Saul Alinsky's (1971) *Rules for Radicals* – Curle meant for empowerment to entail making the weaker party fully aware of their position and their options. Not surprisingly, if successful, the first result of this sometimes was increased conflict. Curle understood this could be serious, even violent conflict. This pointed us (or should have, anyway) to some of the ethical concerns that this sort of empowerment entailed.

The larger point is that the field of conflict resolution cannot evade the realities of power asymmetry since we reject from the outset the Machiavelian calculus of *Machtpolitik* as our only choice. I have mentioned a few responses here; there are others (Avruch 2012: Ch. 9). Against all of these, however, there remain consistent critics of our enterprise, even from within the field, who argue we have not in fact adequately addressed the problem, and until we do conflict resolution as a normative discipline and practice is doomed to *moral* failure (Rouhana 2004, 2010).

Burton's resolution of the dilemma of power?

What was John Burton's response? Recall that from the beginning he was a vocal critic not only of state-centricity in traditional IR, but of its very foundations in conceptions of the primacy of coercive power. By the late 1970s Burton read Sites and, "discovering" basic human needs, had the final piece in managing his break with IR and forging an entirely new (conflict resolution) discipline and methodology. This is what justified his claims to paradigm change. Clearly, we ought then to expect that Burton's "solution" to the dilemma of power be equally far-reaching both in the realm of conflict theory and also crucially for the practice of conflict resolution. I argue it was not.

On the side of theory it can be said that the vigor of Burton's argument that deep-rooted conflict stems from the suppression of basic human needs is only as strong as the arguments (including methodological ones) that can be made for the specific needs he adduces, and here we cite the several critics (of needs theory generally and Burton's in particular) to question this. The best that can be said is that Burton's encounter with Azar's PSC took BHN theory from being a simple variant of the frustration-aggression hypothesis (which bears its own critical literature), focused on individuals, to a more comprehensive theory positing social groups and collective "actors," thus spanning micro to macro levels of analysis. The radical idea that Burton proposed was that ultimately power resided in basic human needs that demanded satisfaction at all costs, not in the overarching cultural-social

systems within which individuals were “socialized” to conform, nor in the state or governmental structures that sought coercively to compel conformance. What is the effect here? It is to *displace the locus of power* from agents of the social system (including the state) to residence “inside” the individual. It would be a serious mistake to say this has conferred “agency” on the individual, however. To the contrary, BHNs here function much like the “selfish” genes of sociobiology. The individual is merely the vessel through which the irrepressible and imperious needs are expressed. Individuals have no choice. This is about as far from the liberatory sense of individual “agency” as critical theorists understand it, as one can get.

Burton’s is admittedly a very different conception of power from that of the realists. Power here derives from ontological needs inexorably seeking satisfaction. In contrast, power in the realist’s sense is hardly “ontological.” It is constructed, not given. A state may be blessed in having deep water harbors, vast deposits of valuable resources, plentiful water, a temperate climate and much arable land, but even such “givens” of realist power must be exploitable (*turned into state power*) through public policy and government action, industry or the efficient organization of capital and labor. Other sources of realist state power, such as military and technological capacity, are self-evidently “made” and not given. Boulding (1989) would argue that the realist’s conception of power is monodimensional or lacks nuance. Nevertheless, “power” for the realists *is* a variable along some kind (or multiple kinds, from “hard to “soft”) of continuum. Variation is its essence. For Burton, “power” appears monolithic, or at best in a sort of binary variation: it is “on” when BHN are suppressed and conflict ensues, or it is “off” if and when needs are satisfied.

Assuming some conceptual connection between theory and practice, what does all this look like from the practice side? I think it is entirely plausible to argue that Burton’s greatest contribution to conflict resolution was not in the area of theory but in practice, from the early idea of “controlled communication” to the facilitated conflict resolution in the form of the analytical problem-solving workshop (Burton 1969, 1987). The origins of the first workshop in December 1965 have been described by several of Burton’s colleagues (Fisher 1997; Dunn 2004; Mitchell 2004; Sandole 2006). It was held in response to a challenge by Burton’s IR opponents that he do something to “prove” the worth of his ideas. The first workshop was the result, and its success led to others and more importantly to attempts on Burton’s part, as well as colleagues who had participated in some of them, including Kelman and Mitchell, to systematize their thoughts and try to *theorize* what, in fact, was going on (see Kelman 1990; Mitchell 2004). Burton did not “come to” the workshop idea with anything close to an articulated theory. He came instead from his earlier life with a strong sense of what was wrong with the traditional practices of state diplomacy and power-based foreign affairs. For Burton, practice preceded theory.

Burton's most explicit and programmatic description of the workshop format is to be found in *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook* (1987). It is written around 56 rules of procedure, with accompanying explanation. The workshop is not to be confused with ADR-type mediation or any sort of facilitated negotiation. Indeed, Burton argues against final texts arising from it. Rather, the goal is *analytical*: to enable "parties in conflict to ascertain the hidden data of motivations and intentions and to explore means by which common human-societal needs can be achieved" (1987: 16). It is a sort of "archeological" enterprise, aiming to excavate beyond the surface of issues and positions to deeper (and motivating) strata (Avruch and Black 1990). In this sense it is similar to the Fisher and Ury model of interest-based negotiation, but for the crucial difference that Burton sees interests as variable and negotiable, while BHN, ontological and buried much deeper, are neither.

Given this, what is most disappointing is that power asymmetry as a problem for practice is not discussed in the *Handbook*. This is surprising given how much attention to it is given in much mediation literature on practice, usually linked to strategies of processual fairness, neutrality and empowerment. Burton certainly writes about neutrality and rules of workshop process but these are never linked to power asymmetry because asymmetry is *ab initio* not at all problematic. Of course, Burton sees power at work in the conflict: the application of power to suppress BHN is after all at the root cause of it. But it is *not* a factor requiring attention in the workshop itself. Burton (1987: 46) writes:

[I]t may appear that there is a clear struggle between two factions for political power for its own sake. The power struggle could be a sufficient explanation for the conflict, suggesting the need for some third party intervention to control violence [or empower the weaker party – KA].

But this would be an incorrect explanation. Not power, but BHN is the sufficient explanation. And the more powerful party must be brought through analysis to see the real "costs and consequences" of their actions. This what the workshop aims to accomplish.

The idea of bringing parties to rationally *cost* their continued course of action is the central problem-solving mechanism that Burton proposes. *Analysis* is entirely cognitive and educatory, leading parties to realistic *costing of the consequences of their actions*. Learning of the cost, parties (stronger parties as well) will *rationally* come to decide that it is better to resolve the conflict than to continue it. Avruch and Black (1990) briefly described this conception of the parties as sorts of rational decision-making *Homo economicus*, but it is Tarja Väyrynen (2001) who has more completely explored the consequences of this sort of instrumental rationality as the basis for Burton's practice. The application of acute analysis by

the facilitating panel, of sufficient learning of costs by the parties, will “output” in the form of cost-reduction/utilities maximizing rational behavior. Empowerment is beside the point because power as conventionally understood is simply not relevant.⁶

How singular is Burton’s approach can be seen in the record of a series of public conversation held at ICAR in 1988, between Burton and ICAR colleague James Laue. Laue was a superb practitioner with experience in the American Civil Rights movement (the subject of his Harvard doctorate in sociology) and in Bobby Kennedy’s Community Relations Service in the Department of Justice. He put issues around the ethics of third-party interventions in the forefront of his practice, and held that “conflict resolution must be put in the service of three core values: empowerment, justice, and freedom” (Black and Avruch 1999: 31). Under no circumstances should a third party intervene in such a way that benefits the stronger party or blocks the attainment of justice for the weaker (Laue and Cormick 1978). We are fortunate that Richard Rubenstein recorded the substance of these several conversations and published an account of them. Laue and Burton disagreed strongly on the notion of “social justice.” Laue understood it in an absolute form. Burton (uncharacteristically relativist!) argued that the only definition of social justice was one the parties themselves had: the third party had no role to play here. When the issue of power imbalance arose the disagreement became even sharper. Rubenstein (1999: 40) recounts the exchange:

With the mention of “empowerment” Burton would lean forward with a strained smile. “But Jim,” he would inquire, “if you really intend to ‘empower’ the weaker party, why should the stronger party stay at the table for a moment? And what do you mean by ‘justice’? When the parties discover a solution to their problem that satisfies their basic needs, they recognize that access to the satisfier is power, and that the satisfaction of basic human needs is justice.” Other forms of apparent power are illusory, John maintained, like the alleged superiority of American might in the Vietnam War.

In the face of insuppressible BHN, power is “illusory.” Asymmetries of power are absorbed and disappear, in a sense, into the dynamics and process of a well-run problem-solving workshop. But then why *do* stronger parties ever agree to come to one? Presumably because they have begun to see or feel some of the “costs” involved in continuing the conflict? This bears some resemblance to I.W. Zartman’s (2000) notion of negotiation proceeding when a “mutually hurting stalemate” between the parties has been reached. Perhaps, though notice that even “mutual hurt” implies a sort of equality or equivalence of power. This equality is precisely what situations of profound power asymmetry lack. Put differently: the “hurt” imposed on the weaker party by the stronger can be much greater, and go

on for a much longer time, before the stronger party begins to feel anything mutually perceptible. A lot of sorrow may be harvested, napalm dropped and blood spilled, in proof of the illusory nature of power, Jim Laue might say.

Conclusion: Basic Human Needs are dead. Long live Basic Human Needs!

In the end, Burton's conception of basic human needs can be found wanting on two counts. First, Peirce notwithstanding, it is difficult to see them satisfactorily accounted for within the framework of hypothesis-testing positivism or "behavioral science." One can't see Galileo or Bacon here. But one might easily pick out Kant. Second, in the crucial matter of connecting theory to practice, Burton failed in the end to link the idea of power and BHN coherently to his hyper-rational conception of facilitated conflict resolution. In short, I think he never resolved the dilemma of "real-world" power asymmetry in practice. But I do see the power of basic human needs all around me. Students respond almost viscerally to the notion. It has tremendous face validity for them, even if it resists operationalization. In 2011 they saw a young Tunisian street merchant endure decades of abuse from authorities and crack after he is publicly slapped by a police officer. (A *female* police officer. Is the social construction of gender in the Arab world of significance, here? Do we need a dollop of cultural context?) Following his dramatic suicide the Arab world explodes. They call for dignity and freedom. Are these needs "basic"? Can they be accurately measured? They are certainly palpable.

One also sees the concept of basic human needs in the theoretical work of some younger scholars who strive to revise the idea in their own ("post-positivist") vocabularies: phenomenology (Väyrynen 2001); narrative generativity (Simmons 2008); psychoanalysis and critical theory (invoking both Marcuse and Ricoeur; see English 2010; Park 2010). One sees it in many different manifestations in the descendants of the analytical problem-solving workshop that Burton's (prescriptive, overly rigid and rationalistic) form has given birth to: in the practice of Herb Kelman, Chris Mitchell, Ron Fisher, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Diana Francis and Susan Allen Nan.

And one sees the idea stretched onto a much broader canvas. Twenty-five years ago perhaps no-one (save the visionary John Burton, himself) would have foreseen the idea of "human security" arise and gain wide acceptance as an imperative, at times competing in a political-moral discourse with the old imperative of "national security." One sees it underlying Amartya Sen's linkage of development and freedom. And one sees it, of course (here adverting to Kant) in the entire globalizing discourse of human rights wherein it is argued that these are the rights "one has simply because one is a human being" (Donnelly 1989: 1). Basic human needs

are not inducible, deducible or abducible. They are however the central element, the motivating thematic, of very important narratives we tell ourselves and others tell us, about how to understand serious or deadly social conflict in this century. And in this way they are powerful indeed.

Notes

- 1 Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Book V (85–113).
- 2 Let the record show that Burton and Sandole contacted Bill Breslin, *Negotiation Journal*'s editor, suggesting he publish an Avruch-Black response (Sandole 2006).
- 3 Malinowski's seven needs and associated cultural satisfiers: metabolism-commisariat; reproduction-kinship; bodily comforts-shelter; safety-protection; movement-activities; growth-training; health-hygiene (Malinowski 1944: 91).
- 4 On verification, Chris Mitchell tells me (having once expressed to him similar doubts about method) that Burton would have responded by arguing that the theory would be "verified" (or at least tested) insofar as the ideas were recognized as relevant by the workshop participants. I would argue this simply puts us in a different epistemological muddle if "science" is our grail. But it certainly makes Burton appear a Peircean pragmatist of the first order.
- 5 Mitchell also found it productive to focus less on the nature of "power" and more on the varied manifestations of "asymmetry" (Mitchell 1991, 1995, 2009; also Avruch 1998, 2012).
- 6 One ought also to treat rational decision-making itself as an empirical question. Political and social scientists studying decision-making and conflict have taught us too much about predictable cognitive distortions to give free and full confidence in decision-making rationality. "Higher" distortions include reactive devaluation, groupthink, self-fulfilling prophecy, mirror imaging, entrapment and autistic hostility, among others (Jervis 1976; Kahneman 2011).

Bibliography

- Alinsky, S. (1971) *Rules for Radicals*, New York: Random House.
- Avruch, K. (1998) *Culture and Conflict Resolution*, Washington D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Avruch, K. (2006) "Toward an Expanded Canon of Negotiation Theory," *Marquette Law Review*, 89(3): 567–582.
- Avruch, K. (2012) *Context and Pretext in Conflict Resolution: Culture, Identity, Power and Practice*, Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
- Avruch, K. and Black, P.W. (1987) "A Generic Theory of Conflict Resolution: A Critique," *Negotiation Journal*, 3(1): 87–96, 99–100.
- Avruch, K. and Black, P.W. (1990) "Ideas of Human Nature in Contemporary Conflict Resolution Theory," *Negotiation Journal*, 6(3): 221–228.
- Avruch, K., and Black, P.W. (1991) "The Culture Question and Conflict Resolution," *Peace and Change*, 16(1): 22–45.
- Azar, E. (1985) "Protracted Social Conflicts: Ten Propositions," *International Interactions*, 12: 59–70.
- Azar, E. (1990) *The Management of Protracted Social Conflict: Theory and Cases*, Brookfield, VT: Gower.
- Azar, E. and Burton, J.W. (eds) (1986) *International Conflict Resolution: Theory and Practice*, Sussex, UK: Wheatsheaf Books.

- Birkhoff, J. (2002) *Mediators's Perspective on Power: A Window into a Profession?* Unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation, ICAR, George Mason University.
- Black, P.W. and Avruch, K. (1999) "Cultural Relativism, Conflict Resolution, and Social Justice," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 6(1): 21–36.
- Boulding, K. (1989) *Three Faces of Power*, Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Burton, J.W. (1962) *Peace Theory*, New York: Knopf.
- Burton, J.W. (1965) *International Relations: A General Theory*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burton, J.W. (1969) *Conflict and Communication: The Use of Controlled Communication in International Relations*, London: Macmillan.
- Burton, J.W. (1972) *World Society*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Burton, J.W. (1979) *Deviance, Terrorism, and War*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. (1987) *Resolving Deep-Rooted Conflict: A Handbook*, Lanham, MD: University Press of America.
- Burton, J.W. (1990) *Conflict: Resolution and Provention*, London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. (ed.) (1990) *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, London: Macmillan and New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. (1997) *Violence Explained*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press and New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. and Dukes, F. (eds) (1990) *Conflict: Readings in Management and Resolution*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. and Dukes, F. (eds) (1990) *Conflict: Practices in Settlement, Management, and Resolution*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Burton, J.W. and Sandole, D.J.D. (1986) "Generic Theory: The Basis of Conflict Resolution," *Negotiation Journal*, 2: 333–344.
- Burton, J.W. and Sandole, D.J.D. (1987) "Expanding the Debate on Generic Theory of Conflict Resolution: A Response to a Critique," *Negotiation Journal*, 3(1): 97–100.
- Coate, R.A. and Rosati, J.A. (eds) (1988) *The Power of Human Needs in World Society*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner.
- Curle, A. (1971) *Making Peace*, London: Tavistock.
- Curle, A. (1986) *In the Middle: Non-Official Mediation in Violent Situations*, Oxford: Berg.
- Donnelly, J. (1989) *Universal Human Rights in Theory and Practice*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Dunn, D.J. (2004) *From Power Politics to Conflict Resolution: Assessing the Work of John W. Burton*, Revised edn, London: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- English, M. (2010) "For Liberation or Exploitation: Reviving the Human Needs Debate," *Unrest Magazine*. Online. Available www.unrestmag.com/unrest-magazine-issue-one-september-2010 (accessed August 28, 2012).
- Fisher, R.J. (1997) *Interactive Conflict Resolution*, Syracuse: Syracuse University Press.
- Fisher, R., Ury, W. and Patton, B. (1991) [1981] *Getting To Yes*, 2nd edn, New York: Penguin Books.
- Freire, P. (1970) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, New York: Continuum.
- Groom, A.J.R. and Webb, K. (1987) "Injustice, Empowerment and Facilitation in Conflict," *International Interactions*, 13(3): 263–280.
- Hempel, C.G. (1965) *Aspects of Scientific Explanation*, New York: Free Press.
- Isaacs, H. (1975) *Idols of the Tribe: Group Identity and Political Change*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

- Jervis, R. (1976) *Perception and Misperception in International Politics*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Kahneman, D. (2011) *Thinking Fast, Thinking Slow*, New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux.
- Kelman, H. (1990) "Applying a Human Needs Perspective to the Practice of Conflict Resolution: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," in J.W. Burton (ed.) *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Laue, J. and Cormick, G. (1978) "The Ethics of Intervention in Community Disputes," in G. Bermant, H. Kelman and D. Warwick (eds) *The Ethics of Social Intervention*, Washington, D.C.: Halstead Press.
- Louch, A.R. (1966) *Explanation and Human Action*, Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Malinowski, B. (1944) *A Scientific Theory of Culture*, Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press.
- Maslow, A. (1954) *Motivation and Personality*, New York: Harper.
- Mitchell, C.R. (1990) "Necessitous Man and Conflict Resolution: More Basic Questions about Basic Human Needs Theory," in J. Burton (ed.) *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Mitchell, C.R. (1991) "Classifying Conflicts: Asymmetry and Resolution," *Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences*, 518: 23–38.
- Mitchell, C.R. (1993) "The Process and Stages of Mediation: Two Sudanese Cases," in D. Smock (ed.) *Making War and Waging Peace: Foreign Intervention in Africa*, Washington, D.C.: United States Institute of Peace Press.
- Mitchell, C.R. (1995) "Asymmetry and Strategies of Regional Conflict Reduction," in I.W. Zartman and V. Kremenjuk (eds) *Cooperative Security: Reducing Third World Wars*, New York: Syracuse University Press.
- Mitchell, C.R. (2003) "Mediation and the Ending of Conflicts," in J. Darby and R. MacGuinty (eds) *Contemporary Peacemaking: Conflict, Violence, and Peace Processes*, London: Palgrave/Macmillan.
- Mitchell, C.R. (2004) "Ending Confrontation between Indonesia and Malaysia," in R.J. Fisher (ed.) *Paving the Way: Contributions of Interactive Conflict Resolution to Peacemaking*, Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
- Mitchell, C.R. (2009) "Persuading Lions: Problems of Transferring Insights from Track-2 Exercises Undertaken in Conditions of Asymmetry," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict*, 2(1): 32–50.
- Morgenthau, H. (1967) *Politics among Nations*, New York: Knopf.
- Park, L. (2010) "Opening the Black Box: Reconsidering Needs Theory through Psychoanalysis and Critical Theory," *International Journal of Peace Studies*, 15(1): 1–17.
- Ramsbotham, O. (2005) "The Analysis of Protracted Social Conflict: A Tribute to Edward Azar," *Review of International Studies*, 31: 109–136.
- Rouhana, N. (2004) "Group Identity and Power Asymmetry in Reconciliation Processes: The Israeli-Palestinian Case," *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology*, 10(1): 33–52.
- Rouhana, N. (2010) "Key Issues in Reconciliation: Challenging Traditional Assumptions on Conflict Resolution and Power Dynamics," in D. Bar-Tal (ed.) *Intergroup Conflicts and their Resolution: Social Psychological Perspectives*, New York: Psychology Press.
- Rubenstein, R.E. (1990) "Basic Needs Theory: Beyond Natural Law," in J. Burton (ed.) *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New York: St. Martin's.

- Rubenstein, R.E. (1999) "Conflict Resolution and Distributive Justice: Reflections on the Burton-Laue Debate," *Peace and Conflict Studies*, 6(1): 37–45.
- Sandole, D.J.D. (2006) "Traditional 'Realism' versus the 'New' Realism: John W. Burton, Conflict Prevention, and the Elusive 'Paradigm Shift'," *Global Society*, 20(4): 543–562.
- Scimecca, J.A. (1990) "Self-Reflexivity and Freedom: Toward a Prescriptive Theory of Conflict Resolution," in J. Burton (ed.) *Conflict: Human Needs Theory*, New York: St. Martin's.
- Scimecca, J.A. (1991) "Conflict Resolution in the United States: The Emergence of a Profession?" in K. Avruch, P. Black and J. Scimecca (eds) *Conflict Resolution: Cross-Cultural Perspectives*, New York: Greenwood.
- Simmons, S. (2008) "Generativity-Based Conflict: Maturing Microfoundations for Conflict Theory," in D.J.D Sandole, S. Byrne, I. Sandole-Staroste and J. Senehi (eds) *A Handbook of Conflict Analysis and Resolution*, New York: Routledge.
- Sites, P. (1973) *Control: The Basis of Social Order*, New York: Dunellen Publishers.
- Thucydides (1998) *History of the Peloponnesian War*, Trans. B. Jowett, Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
- Vasquez, J.A. (1993) *The War Puzzle*, New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Väyrynen, T. (2001) *Culture and International Conflict Resolution*, Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press.
- Zartman, I.W. (2000) "Ripeness: The Hurting Stalemate and Beyond," in P. Stern and D. Druckman (eds) *Conflict Resolution after the Cold War*, Washington, D.C.: National Academy Press.