

Chapter 7: Relative Heaven

I am told that, compared to the poor of the Third World, my poverty is only relative. But that doesn't justify my poverty. Neither is it true. Human needs are absolute. They are also extremely complex. We are both poor, but in different ways. [Footnotes]

The Human Being

To most, man is much more than an animal. His physical form is seen merely as a vessel for the spirit, mind and intellect. But even as a biological life-form the human being stands far above every other thing that lives and moves upon this planet.

Within the human cranium is housed the brain - a massive information processing device made up of around 200,000 million active elements called neurons. These are interconnected to form a variety of networks of many different configurations and architectures. Apart from the ordinary bio-chemical processes it uses, the brain is thought to supercharge its vast capability by employing the quantum-mechanical phenomena that toil covertly deep within the sub-atomic heart of matter.

The human brain is thus able to map the shape and behaviour of both its physical and social environments and learn how best to respond to them. It controls organs and limbs. It creates ideas. It manipulates abstract scenarios and communicates with its peers through symbolic language. And it achieves all this on only 20 watts of power.

The human brain is equipped with a bio-mechanical input/output device called a body. Through this, it senses the events taking place within its environment, and expedites appropriate responses to them. Its modes of mobility and manipulative flexibility are more numerous and complex than those of any other member of the animal kingdom. It is adaptable to the widest possible range of tasks. For example, my body is 1.80 metres high, weighs 80kg and dissipates on average about 100 watts of power. Yet it can walk, run, climb trees and ladders, swim, pedal a bicycle, drive a car, write with a pen, type on a keyboard and employ tools to make and repair all kinds of things.

Its Basic Needs

The human being is not self-sufficient. It has needs. It is a composite creature made up of a physical body and a conscious mind. Both have needs. Hence there are the [needs of the body](#) and also the [needs of the mind](#).

Needs of The Body	Needs of The Mind
1) food	4) the need to know
2) clothing	5) the need to work
3) shelter	6) the need to talk

There is also a 7th need, which applies to both the body and the mind. It is a very important one that modern society denies to all too many. It is the need to rest.

If for any individual, the supply of any one of the 7 basic human needs falls below a certain critical threshold of quantity or quality, then that individual is deprived.

Their Sources

The human life-form is not self-existent. Its needs cannot therefore come from within itself. They must come from without - from its environment. Its environment also is a composite thing. It is made up of two parts. These are: the eco-sphere of the physical earth, and the psycho-sphere of human society. Both the earth and society are vital to providing all its needs.

The outside environment is the universal provider of both food, and the materials to make clothing and shelter. It provides also the much larger expanse of space, which the human being requires for exercise and recreation. Knowledge about nature, and its application through creative work, are needs that are vital to the well-being of the human mind, and consequently to the whole human being. But the human mind has other needs that cannot be fulfilled solely through a relationship with nature. These can be obtained only from other human beings - ie: by communicating with society.

What is Poverty?

The human body needs food, clothing and shelter. The human mind needs knowledge, work and communication. But the mere availability of these things is not enough. Each must be there in sufficient quantity, and be of adequate quality, to meet the minimum requirements of the human machine. For each basic need, therefore, there is a quantity and quality threshold below which healthy, sane human life cannot be sustained.

Deprivation exists where, for any individual, the provision of any of these physical and psychological needs is below the minimum quantitative or qualitative threshold required to maintain that individual in an optimum state of physical and mental health.

The dimensions and parameters of the human form are, to within fairly narrow limits, the same for everybody. The human form is therefore essentially an *absolute* frame of reference. Human needs are determined solely by the dimensions and parameters of the human form. Human needs are therefore an absolute frame of reference. Human deprivation is therefore also an absolute measure. Poverty - a prolonged deprivation forced upon people by the society in which they live - is therefore also an absolute measure. One is either poor or is not poor, irrespective of the socio-economic system under which one may live.

Poverty is not necessarily being deprived of particular items - especially items of modern technology. It all depends on the norm for the time and place in which you live. You could not say that King Solomon was poor or deprived because he did not have a car or a video recorder. To be rich in his society he had no need for either.

This planet is quilted with poverty. But not all its poor suffer the same lacks. And the poverty of most is far from obvious. In the Third World, they suffer physical starvation within socially interactive communities. In the First World, they suffer the psychological starvation of social exclusion while economically imprisoned in apparent affluence.

Attitude To Poverty

The dominant message I hear from society is that being unemployed is entirely one's own fault. Most people seem convinced that if one wishes to earn more, then all one has to do is work harder. This arrogant assumption seems to be overt among the new generation of 'thirty-something yuppies' who now form the influencing majority of 1990's society. The level of State [welfare](#) reflects this contempt that society has for the low-paid and unemployed.

The affluent employed justify their wealth in the close presence of our poverty by asserting that they *deserve* their wealth because they have [earned it](#) through their own hard work. They condemn us because we are, in their view, lazy. Therefore we do not deserve anything. They self-righteously resent having to pay our welfare through their 'hard earned' taxes to preserve our 'worthless' lives.

Yet these nice hard working tax paying people feel compassion for the poor of other lands. They even contribute to so-called charities that purportedly work to alleviate such poverty. This is because, unlike our poverty, foreign poverty is attributed to the austere political régimes under which the poor of other lands are believed to struggle. Their poverty, our employed critics assert, is *absolute*, whereas ours, they say, is only *relative*. We do not deserve their pity. We have no excuse. We should not just stand there bleating. We should get off our backsides, get on our bikes and get a job. However, [as I have already shown](#), this ignorant pathetic dull-brained over simplistic view does not reflect reality.

Poverty in the First World and poverty in the Third World are not different in degree, but in kind. Both have essentially the same effect. They prevent one from fulfilling one's human destiny. They deny one the means of helping oneself. They bar one's escape to economic and social inclusion.

Odious Comparisons

Planet Earth is a bounteous giver. The human race has survived upon it for millennia - often well. Technology is not essential to a fulfilled and comfortable living for all. The fruits of the Earth will grow without it. Provided, that is, that nobody comes along and disrupts the process with swords, arrows, guns and tanks.

In the Third World, the tribal war lord wants what he perceives as a Western life style for himself and a capitalist economy for his fledgling country. For this he needs dollars. He gains Western political support. He forces the people off their tribal lands. On it he grows the lentils we buy in our supermarkets. He gets his dollars. They buy him his life style. But his people are homeless. They have no land. They can grow no crops. They are denied the [need for food](#). They have no material to make or repair their garments. They are denied the [need for clothing](#). They have no place to build their huts. They are denied the [need for shelter](#). They are thus forced to wander to find enough sustenance to keep their biological processes barely alive.

Meanwhile, they who eat the lentils contribute their conscience appeasing pittances to Third World charities. In their pitiful inadequacy, these charities strive to alleviate the poverty of those who were driven from their lands. The cause of Third World poverty is not the African ecosystem. It is not the people's lack of modern technology. It is not their lack of knowledge or skill. It is their ruthless exploitation by powerful bullies with the full approval and backing of Western capitalism.

In the First World, the capitalist battles to preserve and increase his already extensive wealth. He wants a house in the country. He wants an apartment in the city. He wants a Mercedes Benz. He wants to educate his children at private school and then on to a grey brick university. He wants holidays abroad. He therefore needs more capital. So he delays paying his small suppliers. He buys out his undercapitalised competitors. He lobbies for an absolute free market in everything. With no minimum wage he pays his employees as little as the market will stand. He lobbies to abolish tax-derived support for tertiary education. He thus minimises future competition for his own children.

The former true artisans of the free market within which he operates are driven out of business. The lucky ones become captured into his workforce. Their reward for their labour tumbles. The unlucky ones languish on State welfare. These cannot afford books or college courses, and they are too old to qualify for State aid. They are denied the [need to know](#). They have no means through which to

realise their labour. They are denied the [need to work](#). Isolated in their suburban homes, they cannot afford to keep in touch with either their marketplace or each other. They are denied the [need to talk](#).

First World poverty is different from Third World poverty. But which is worse? Is the woman washing her clothes in the Ganges in the social throng of her chattering peers in a better or worse state of life than the housewife isolated in suburban poverty as she waits for her automatic washer to finish, hoping desperately that its ageing main bearing will stay intact for just one more cycle? Is the tribesman in his wholly owned mud hut built upon the warm hinterland of an African river in better or worse accommodation than the victim of negative equity about to be evicted, onto the freezing streets, from the modern house on which he has toiled beyond endurance to pay the interest?

Unable to afford to repair her washing machine, can the isolated suburban housewife revert to washing her clothes in the Thames, the Irwell or the Clyde? Will she meet all her friends as she approaches the banks of her river? Or will it be fenced off, flanked by polluted mud and infested with rubbish? Will her affluent neighbours from the other side of the tracks pour sympathy upon her poverty, or will she be told to park her kids and get on her bike? Is the dispossessed mortgage payer free to build his own mud hut on the freezing banks of the Forth or the Humber? Or would he be violating society's precious planning regulations and a thousand and one other laws?

Clearly, the poor of the First World do not have the same 'fall-back' options as do the poor of the Third World. First World society has removed the option to fall back to a more basic existence. First World society has imposed universal standards to which all must adhere. One is simply not allowed to build or live in a mud hut any more. One can't enjoy the social uplift of communal clothes-washing in the cold dirty waters of a temperate river - especially in winter.

The First World has [burned its bridges](#) back to a Third World way of living. Nobody in the First World has the choice to revert to a Third World way of life, no matter how much personal circumstances may press him. The inhabitants of each are locked into the mode of life that is imposed and enforced upon them by their respective 'worlds'. The notion of *relative* poverty between the poor of these totally different 'worlds' is meaningless. Especially since those affluent First Worlders, who usually pontificate on the matter, have never experienced or suffered either. They are simply not comparing like with like.

Perhaps there is just one observation that could give a clue as to the relative impacts of bodily versus mental deprivation. We have to look at the very poor - the homeless and destitute of First World cities. These human beings often seem to make what, to the less deprived, seems to be a very strange decision. Even though they are literally on the point of starvation, they will use any money they can get their hands on to buy drugs instead of food. It must be a powerful need that drives them to do such a thing.

The fact is that they are trapped in an environment that totally starves the mind. Life has ceased to have purpose. But the mind has an overwhelming hunger. This hunger is so intense that, if it cannot be fulfilled, it has to be numbed. The only way these people have of assuaging their hungry minds is to numb them with drugs. But the mind is not fooled. It realises it is not being fed. Numbing it requires harder and harder drugs in greater and greater quantity delivered more and more directly to the brain. I saw a television documentary once in which a young man, though he knew it would make him blind, regularly injected heroin into his eyeball. He was so desperate for the drug to take effect as intensely and as quickly as possible so as to shut out the futility of his life. From this it appears that indeed, in the final analysis, the needs of the mind outweigh the needs of the body. The mental deprivation of social exclusion turns relative poverty of the body into absolute poverty of the mind. This makes *all* poverty absolute.

As it is with place, so it is with time. To compare the circumstances of a person living in the 1990s with those of one living at the same stage of life in the 1940s is also meaningless.

When considering what one had to do without in the 1940s has to be taken in its context. Did most people also not have the things in question? If so, then not having them was not socially divisive. Common hardship unites. It disseminates knowledge. It facilitates purpose. It engenders communication. It is rich in the food of the mind. Comparing this with what one has to do without in the 1990s also has to be taken in its context. Most people now have the things in question. Selective hardship divides. It stifles knowledge. It frustrates purpose. It inhibits communication. It is devoid of the needs of the mind.

Nevertheless, since no single observer can experience being the same age in the same circumstances in two different eras, there is no common ground on which a meaningful comparison can be built.

The Real Issue

Poverty exists wherever an individual does not receive, in adequate measure, one or more of the 7 basic human needs. By this definition, poverty exists in both the Third World and the First World. The Third World predominantly denies its poor the needs of the body. The First World predominantly denies its poor the needs of the mind. Poverty of either kind is debilitating.

The nature of poverty in these two 'worlds' is different in two ways.

1. The two 'worlds' deprive their poor of different human needs.
2. The two 'worlds' demand different prices for the same needs.

The woman washing her clothes in the Ganges may be lacking to some extent in food, clothing and shelter. Her poverty is in the needs of the body. Nevertheless she enjoys extensive social contact. Her occupation is viewed by her society as right and virtuous. Her social contact gives her access to knowledge. She is rich in the needs of the mind.

The isolated suburban housewife living on State welfare has [what the law says](#), and what her society likes to believe, is adequate food, clothing and shelter. But she has no access to knowledge. The society, that denies her the means to gain from her efforts, looks upon her with contempt. She is cut off from daily social contact. She is denied the needs of the mind. This is because, in her world, the needs of the mind carry, what is for her, an unaffordable £(price tag).

Both are suffering poverty, but of different kinds. To compare their types of poverty would be meaningless. However, both are degrading and debilitating. That is all one should need to know about them.

The Third World woman buys her food from a street market. The First World woman buys her food from an expensive, highly commercialised, profit-oriented, brightly lit, air conditioned supermarket. The First World supermarket simply cannot compete with the Third World street market. And not just by a small percentage, but many orders of magnitude.

The Third World woman may live in, what would appear to a First Worlder as, a shack on stilts. It has no piped water or toilet, let alone a hot water system and an automatic washing machine. But it is not illegal. And it costs nothing. The First World woman, on the other hand, lives in a brick house with piped water, indoor toilet and an automatic washing machine. In her society, anything less would be illegal. By Third World values, her weekly rent is astronomical. The First World society in which she lives imposes far greater obligations and restrictions upon her than Third World society imposes upon her counterpart. The authorities would forcibly prevent her from living a Third World life style. No matter how deprived she may be, she simply does not have that choice.

The young tribesman has direct access to the knowledge, skills and wisdom of his elders. They are in charge. He learns from them. He is rich in the needs of the mind. The young programmer with his brand new degree in computer science gets thrown in at the deep end by bosses who know nothing of his technology. He battles on, making the same design mistakes [all over again](#) that my peers and I made a generation ago. He has no access to the guiding hand of his artisanic elders. They are all unemployed, languishing on State welfare. And his elders must now seek work from him: not he from them. The Third World respects and benefits from the wisdom of its elders. The First World rejects both its elders and their wisdom as out of date and out of fashion. Hence, even the materially very well off in the First World are in certain things poor. Overabundance of one need does not compensate for the lack of another.

Right to The Needs of Life

I think that to qualify as civilised, a society must adequately care for its weak and misfortunate. Ancient civilisations had laws that provided a safety net for the poor. Farmers were told not to harvest every last grain or fruit so the poor could eat:

*When ye reap the harvest of your land
thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of thy field
neither shalt thou gather the gleanings of thy harvest.
And thou shalt not glean thy vineyard
neither shalt thou gather every grape of the vineyard.
Thou shalt leave them for the poor and stranger. - Leviticus 19:9.*

*Thou shalt not oppress the stranger...
Six years thou shalt sow thy land
and shall gather in the fruits thereof
But in the 7th thou shalt let it rest and lie still
That the poor of thy people may eat. - Exodus 23:9.*

I can imagine what would happen if I took my family around a farm or a supermarket to 'eat but not gather' every day.

The inspirer of these words knew that all human beings need adequate food, clothing and shelter: not some arbitrary amount of money that [the law says you need to live on](#). The amount that money buys varies greatly from place to place, even within localised enclaves. It also varies rapidly with the ups and downs of the market. It can never hold even an approximate equivalence to the tangible needs of life it is supposed to provide.

Only by delivering the actual goods could State welfare hope to fulfil its declared purpose. And for the amounts to be properly determined, those who decide what is adequate would have to test the amounts upon themselves. In this hierarchical society of snobbish one-upmanship, I cannot imagine such bureaucrats subjecting themselves to poverty in the interests of doing their jobs properly.

Again, only by delivering an adequate supply of transport and communication through free travel on public transport and free telephone time can the poor become properly supplied with their needs of the mind and the means to re-connect with society. Those who decide how much the poor need of these things do not know the states of mind that isolation engenders. They do not realise that, without the recreation provided by their expensive holidays and social activities, they too would become just as inept, lethargic and uninformed.

A Dangerous Apathy

All over this planet disparity is omnipresent. We see people with a thousand or even a million times the wealth and means that others have. The erratic ups and downs of nature alone cannot account for such a massive and long-term disparity in wealth. In any case, the ups and the downs of nature such as drought or pestilence usually occur in geographically separated areas. Extreme wealth and poverty co-exist in the same town - often in the same street. The very existence of disparities of such magnitude, especially in such close proximity, cannot be accounted for by the resident forces of the natural environment. They can only be caused by man's greed and the propensity of some to turn this into the forcible oppression and exploitation of their fellow beings.

Some have not had the means and "good fortune" to be able to have amassed capital in the form of a permanent home. They become entrapped in the deadly scenario that leads inexorably to destitution and starvation in the cardboard cities on the wastelands and beneath the bridges of every Western metropolis. Without even the option of being able to build themselves so much as a mud hut in the warm hinterland of an African river, these *fellow human beings* know less of human rights than the poor of the Third World on which so many high profile charities focus the public conscience. Yet these hapless souls live not much more than a block away from one whose personal daily tax-free gain is six orders of magnitude higher than my present income, and whose total assets if distributed could instantly bequeath to every family in the country an [inheritance bond](#) well in excess of a year's average wage.

The vast majority of the First World population 'knows' it won't happen to them. In any case, they assume that if it did, there is a 'department' to take care of it - a social security system of *everlasting arms* beneath, which will save them from every least discomfort. For most, such blind faith is, and will remain, untested and unverified. It is only the expanding minority, to whom unemployment actually happens, whose confrontation with its reality consummates their disillusionment while the majority's blind faith stays unpunctured.

A Ticking Time Bomb

The rule of law is strong - so strong as to be able to contain by force these superlative manifestations of social injustice and disparity. But there is a detonation threshold beyond which this social fulminate will explode. It is the threshold at which the Laws of the Land must, and will, submit to the Greater Laws above them - those primal laws of human instinct that bind a father and a mother to feed, clothe, shelter and defend their children.

The cherished Laws of England are indeflectibly aligning themselves into a deadly confrontation with those higher bio-social laws of self-preservation, moral obligation and justice. A point will soon be reached at which crime will leap. But the 'criminals' here will not be the inevitable social residue whose uncontrollable greed is satisfied no other way than by taking by force what is not rightfully theirs. This new breed of 'criminal' will form a righteous army whose [crime](#) will be fired not by greed, but by undeniable moral duty. Theirs will be actions [born of despair](#).

The resources of this planet are far more than adequate to feed, clothe and shelter all of its inhabitants. Taking a global view, there is no technological excuse for poverty. The terrestrial biosphere provides bounteously for all its life-forms. To understand why some of us are rich while others are poor, we must discover the rules that govern how the planet's wealth - the family estate of mankind - is divided among us.

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