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HUMAN WELL-BEING AND SOCIAL STRUCTURES: RELATING THE UNIVERSAL AND THE LOCAL

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'The great struggles of the twentieth century between liberty and totalitarianism ended with a decisive victory for the forces of freedom and a *single sustainable model* for national success: freedom, democracy and free enterprise' (US National Security Strategy 2002, p.1)[1]

'There are no local solutions to globally generated troubles'
Zygmunt Bauman, Identity.

INTRODUCTION

There remains a deep contradiction between the domination of post-modernism and cultural relativism in intellectual life and the universalism and globalism dominant in the real world of institutions and politics. This paper probes that fault-line.[2] It does so in an unashamedly academic way by reviewing theoretical literature and developing arguments. Some policy implications of this stance are developed in the paper by Allister McGregor.

It is divided into three parts following this introduction. The first part looks at human well-being and is itself in divided into three. First, it sets out the intellectual case for a universalist understanding and appreciation of all people's capabilities and needs which, at whatever remove, underpin such global initiatives as the Millennium Development Goals. Then it rehearses the case for localism, respect for people's values and knowledges, the 'understanding of understandings'. The third section considers and evaluates theoretical attempts to communicate between the universal and the local and at ways of reconciling the two. Part two turns to the world of institutions and structures. This considers and critiques theories of globalisation as a universal trajectory. It then moves on to expound and defend multi-level and middle-range frameworks, in particular the regime paradigm for understanding the generation of welfare, illfare, security and insecurity in the contemporary world. The paper concludes by bringing together the two perspectives advocated and favoured in the paper and sketching out their mutual support and interactions. It concludes by restating the case for critical autonomy as a universal basic need, coupled with participation and diverse middle-range structures to foster its enhancement.

Since at least Max Weber's (1921/1972:4) distinction between *Erklären* and *Verstehen*, two fundamental approaches can be distinguished in the social sciences (Nussbaum 1993:233). On the one hand an attempt to develop social sciences in the manner of natural sciences, understanding outcomes detached from the self-understandings of people in social contexts. In the hands of economists this generates simple but powerful concepts and measures of human well-being in terms either of revealed preferences or

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[1] Cited by Timothy Garton Ash, 'Beyond the West', Guardian 10/6/04. My italics.
[2] Thanks to Laura Camfield, James Copestake, Allister McGregor and Robert O'Brien for comments on an earlier version.

of purchasing power over commodities. On the other hand, stands a hermeneutic approach which brings people's own self-interpretations centre-stage, in the manner of much anthropology and cultural studies. Writing of developments in the study of history, Hobsbawm (2002: 294) notes that the latter perspective gained ground some time in the early 1970s: there was a turn 'from structure to culture, from Braudel to Geertz, from analysis to description, from telescope to microscope'. Despite a regular barrage of criticism it is hard not to conclude that this remains the case today.

Yet when we turn to the real world of institutions, politics and power a quite different 'story' dominates.[3] Globalisation is perceived as a structural force-field adapting all practices, cultures, localities and groups that stand in its way. The dominant economic version argues that the power of capital (whether structural or voice-based) is winning out and constraining agents and autonomy across the world, states are losing their capacities to govern and the result is a relentless race to the bottom in everything from cultural preferences to labour and living standards. In the world society version a more Durkheimian process is at work as global norms and discourses are imported into every national setting, whatever the mismatch with reality. Again, despite numerous attempts to critique this structuralist understanding, it remains prevalent among both globaphiles and globaphobes.

Thus the two discourses – on the nature of wellbeing and on the institutions, processes and policies that affect wellbeing in developing countries – are disconnected. This disadvantages peoples – and notably the poor - in the developing world, for two reasons. First, they are deprived of influence over discourses and debates about universal and global goals. Second, they are deprived of influence over discourses and debates about local and place-specific means and policies.

If, as I have argued with Len Doyal (Doyal and Gough 1991, ch.8), basic human needs are universal but need satisfiers are place- and time-specific, then the ability to influence collective understanding of both is lost. The former is lost because all talk of human universals is allegedly modernist, imperialist, Western. The latter is lost because in practice powerful global agencies promulgate and implement 'one size fits all' policies that ignore local realities on the ground. In this topsy-turvy world, core values and needs are relative and local, while means and policies are global and universal. This paper seeks to challenge this worldview.

HUMAN WELLBEING

The universal

The idea that all humans share characteristics and capacities in common is well-founded yet remarkably difficult to conceptualise and operationalise. In an extensive range of writings, Amartya Sen (1982, 1984, 1985, 1999) identifies functionings as what a person manages to do or to be, and capabilities as the different combinations of beings and doings she or he is able to achieve. Sen has applied this framework in empirical studies of famine and illiteracy, for example. However, he is loath to concretely specify a list even of basic functionings and is wary of challenging 'local, internal conceptions of well-

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[3] I am indebted to Chris Holden for this insight

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being in the name of participation. Sabina Alkire's recent book *Valuing Freedoms* (2002) reveals both the richness and the intractabilities of this approach.

Martha Nussbaum has developed an alternative 'thick' neo-Aristotelian notion of human capabilities which both parallels and differs from Sen (Nussbaum 2000). She extols a broad vision of human flourishing and is prepared to identify a lengthy cross-cultural list of human 'functional capabilities'. In applying her perspective, she has skilfully and eloquently confronted these with the political dilemmas of deprived groups, especially of women in India. However, the foundations of her approach are controversial and its potential for securing cross-cultural consensus is thus far unproven.

In *A Theory of Human Need* (1991) Len Doyal and I identify a conceptual space of universal human need, recognize cultural variety in meeting needs, but aim to avoid subordinating the identification of needs to such cultural contexts. Starting from an explicit critique of cultural relativism we claim to develop a universal, objective conception of human welfare. The argument is explicitly hierarchical and moves in the following stages (Doyal and Gough 1991, chapters 4, 8; Gough 2003, 2004).

We begin by distinguishing between *needs* and *wants*, according to the nature of the goals referred to. Need refers (implicitly if not explicitly) to a particular category of goals which are believed to be universalisable, whereas wants are goals which derive from an individual's particular preferences and cultural environment. The universality of need rests upon the belief that if needs are not satisfied then serious harm of some objective kind will result. We define serious harm as fundamental disablement in the pursuit of one's vision of the good, whatever the nature of that vision. It is not the same as subjective feelings like anxiety or unhappiness. Another way of describing such harm is as an impediment to successful social participation. Whatever the time, place and cultural group we grow up and live in, we act in it to some extent. We argue that we build a self-conception of our own capabilities through interacting with and learning from others. It follows that participation in some form of life without serious arbitrary limitations is a fundamental goal of all peoples.

This enables us, second, to define *basic needs* as those universal preconditions that enable such participation in one's form of life. We identify these universal prerequisites as physical health and autonomy. Survival, and beyond that a modicum of physical health, is essential to be able to act and participate. But that is not enough. Humans, distinct from other species, also exhibit autonomy of agency – the capacity to make informed choices about what should be done and how to go about doing it. This is impaired, we go on to argue, by severe mental illness, poor cognitive skills, and by blocked opportunities to engage in social participation. At a higher level, we can talk of *critical* participation – the capacity to situate the form of life one grows up in, to criticise it and, if necessary, to act to change it. This more dynamic type of participation requires a second-order level of *critical autonomy*. Without critical autonomy, the ability of human societies to adapt to changes in their environment would be gravely weakened.

Accepting that these common human needs can be met in a multitude of different ways by an almost infinite variety of specific 'satisfiers', we go on, thirdly, to identify those characteristics of need satisfiers that everywhere contribute to improved physical health and autonomy. These we label 'universal satisfier characteristics', or *intermediate needs* for short. We group these characteristics into the following categories: adequate nutritional food and water, adequate protective housing, nonhazardous work and

physical environments, appropriate health care, security in childhood, significant primary relationships, physical and economic security, safe birth control and childbearing, and appropriate basic and cross-cultural education. All eleven are essential to protect the health and autonomy of people and thus to enable them to participate to the maximum extent in their social form of life. These 'intermediate needs' are based on the codified knowledge of the natural and social sciences.. This knowledge changes and typically expands through time – today often at dizzying speeds – through time. We are comfortable to acknowledge that humans as a species have made and continue to make progress in their capacity to understand and satisfy their needs (Doyal and Gough 1991:111). The concept of human need we develop is historically open to such continual improvements in understanding. We thus end up with a hierarchical list of concepts embracing basic and intermediate needs, all of which purport to be universal and cross-cultural.

However, when identifying specific *need satisfiers*, this common codified knowledge must be complemented by the experientially grounded local knowledge of people in specific contexts. Normatively, if need satisfaction is to be optimized, all groups with knowledge about this context should have the ability to participate in research into need satisfiers and to contribute to policy-making. We conclude that any rational and effective attempt to resolve disputes over needs 'must bring to bear both the codified knowledge of experts and the experiential knowledge of those whose basic needs and daily life world are under consideration .. It requires a *dual strategy of social policy formation* which values compromise, provided that it does not extend to the general character of basic human needs and rights' (Doyal and Gough 1991:141).

Our theory of human need perhaps sits between the Sen and Nussbaum approaches (Gough 2003). By expounding a thin derivation, and by distinguishing autonomy of agency from critical autonomy, it recognises cultural differences within a universalist framework, but by positing universal satisfier characteristics and recognising our collective understanding of these it provides a potentially richer framework for conceiving and measuring human well-being.

But all three lend support to common criteria and indeed some common measures of objective well-being. These include most of the Millenium Development Goals, such as: to reduce infant and child mortality rates, maternal mortality rates, to provide access for all who need reproductive health services, to reduce the proportion of people living in extreme poverty, to enroll all children in primary school by 2015 and to eliminate gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005.

Such universalist perspectives on wellbeing have been challenged on at least three grounds: their individualism, objectivism, and paternalism (eg. Tao and Drover 1997; Menon, 2002). I address only the last here. Do not such approaches imply that we, or Western philosophy, or experts, know best? Any simplistic criticism along these lines can be countered in two ways. First, all recognise the role of wide participation and experiential knowledge in understanding needs and need satisfiers. Second, and more generally, our substantive theory outlined above is complemented by a procedural theory, drawing on Habermas and Rawls, which specifies desirable social procedures

and institutions to permit effective debate and decisions on identifying needs and satisfiers in specific contexts.[4]

Yet, this still leaves unanswered the question: 'who are the "we"?' From what external standpoint do such universalist argument stem? Too often the implicit assumption is that there is some invariant external scientific or normative standpoint: in Nagel's (1986:5) terms, 'a view from nowhere'. On the contrary, as Myrdal (1962) put it, 'a view is only possible from a viewpoint'. This issue is addressed below.

The Local

Geertz's (1983:4) contention that 'the shapes of knowledge are always ineluctably local, indivisible from their instruments and their encasements' entails a hermeneutic approach to understanding well-being; the 'understanding of understanding'. It eschews common criteria of well-being in favour of local, bottom-up understandings. This points to a third dimension of well-being, beyond both the objective conception outlined above, and the individual-subjective conception as measured by psychologists, quality of life researchers, the new 'economics of happiness' and others.[5] This third dimension is the 'relational' and concerns itself with the way subjective perceptions and objective outcomes are constituted through social interaction and cultural meanings – with how people experience wellbeing as a whole (White and Pettit 2004: 4).[6]

This supports participatory approaches to researching wellbeing - from the Participatory Rural Appraisal exercises from the late 1980s to the World Bank's Participatory Poverty Assessments and *Voices of the Poor* study (Narayan et al 2000a and b). The case for participatory approaches is strong. It includes both intrinsic arguments (from Freire's 'conscientisation', through empowerment to the modern concern with voice), and instrumental arguments (participation taps the experiential local knowledge of the poor rather than relying on outsiders 'bussed in' for a few days). It has generated new understandings, for example the significance of gender in influencing both values and knowledge (White and pettit). I return to some of these issues below.

However, there are also fundamental problems faced whenever, in such research, the universal is replaced by the local, 'the telescope for the microscope'. Participatory reseach can hide diversity and present a falsely homogenous view of the 'community' it is studying. This is a particular danger given its ancestry in community mobilisation and collective action. The facilitators 'are actively involved in *creating* that community, and the shared interpretation of reality that animates it' (White and Pettit 2004). This criticism is of course well recognised (Cooke and Kothari, 2001). Some, such as Clark (2002), reject the use of focus groups and other collective methods precisely because they usually favour the voices of the powerful and well-connected over those of the poor and excluded.

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[4] The absence in our theory of Sen's important distinction between functionings and capabilities weakens our own democratic and consensual intent. The functioning/ capability distinction would help the needs approach avoid lingering charges of paternalism.
[5] Unfortunately there is not the space in this paper to consider this whole third realm of subjective well-being.
[6] The WeD programme at Bath is premised on this threefold conceptualisation of well-being - see www.welldev.org.uk/

However, the individual-focussed methods often advocated in their place face a different problem. Asking individuals about their values, expectations, preferences, achievements and satisfactions raises profound questions about what economists call 'adaptive preferences' and sociologists 'internalised common sense' or 'habitus'. The former refers to adaptations to local realities that are not consciously perceived. The latter to ways of seeing that are profoundly internalised and of which individuals-in-contexts are unaware. I return to these issues below.

Another, more practical problem with a strong localist approach to researching well-being is that it provides little guidance on how to compare or evaluate well-being across communities, cultures and nations. Hence this critique has had relatively little impact on the work of international agencies, such as the World Bank and UNDP, and their research and policy agendas.

Reconciling the universal and the local

Let me approach this from two directions: first from the local upwards and then from the universal downwards. Building on Sen's work and applying it to poverty reduction in poor countries, Alkire (2002) distinguishes four merits of 'participatory processes', two of which we have already encountered. First, they have intrinsic value in empowering people and thus in enhancing what Sen calls 'agency achievement'. Second, they normally have instrumental value in generating a more accurate appraisal of local needs through tapping local sources of understanding.[7] But third, they can have constructive effects. By this Sen and Alkire signal the way in which learning from one another can refine and reformulate values. In a collective process beliefs can be challenged by sceptics and critics within the community. Informed scrutiny and the subsequent acquisition of knowledge helps clarify what the group as a whole really wants. In a joint paper with Nussbaum Sen traces this back to Aristotle's argument that 'individual clarification and communal attachment' can be reconciled by a cooperative critical discourse (Nussbaum and Sen 1989).

The fourth and last case for participatory processes goes further still. It is that participation can have 'intransitive or reflexive effects' on identity and culture (Alkire 2002). This argument builds on Geertz. Development' is in part about introducing novel practices, but if this happens without participation the identity of the local culture may be undermined or destroyed. Since cultural beliefs are interlocking – they have a 'strain towards consistency' (Keesing 1974) - imported beliefs cannot be simply added on to existing beliefs. But participation can help integrate new beliefs into the identity or character of a community. An example from Thailand in 2002 concerns an 8 month project using participatory methods to produce emic indicators of happiness. A group of 'local intellectuals' who participated in this reported lasting effects on their happiness, values and behaviour. Moreover, Ryan and Deci's theories of motivation predict that integrating new beliefs, rather than incorporating them through introjection or external regulation, improves the quality of the experiences.[8]

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[7] The 'normally' here refers to the distorting effect noticeable in 'societies with mafias' (Alkire 2002:133).
[8] I am grateful to Laura Camfield for these points.

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These arguments endorse Sen's disagreement with communitarianism - his unremitting insistence that all communities, even the most small and isolated, exhibit diverse viewpoints. There are always multiple identities, which permit learning and adaptation to new environmental demands. Participation is based on pluralism, but permits new identities to grow without being foisted from the outside.

This amounts to a sophisticated argument combining respect for local knowledges with recognition, indeed support for, change, improvement and development. But can this be combined with any outside viewpoint on well-being? Menon (2002: 164), in a critique of Nussbaum, questions this: '"Sensitivity to context", if it is to be more than a formula used to disguise universalism, must rigorously engage with context and with ideas produced within that context, even if universalism fails to survive in the process'. Citing Derrida, she claims that there is a violence involved in judging any persons in an idiom they do not share.

To address this I return to two qualified universal arguments which explicitly reject the 'view from nowhere' approach – the 'transitional objectivity' argument of Charles Taylor (1993) and Amartya Sen's case for 'positional objectivity' (1993).

Taylor, developing an argument of MacIntyre, assumes a post-modern stance of intense moral skepticism, the belief that moral differences cannot be arbitrated by reason. Accepting for the time being that arbitration by externally defined standards is impossible, he claims that *transitions between* one state and another can still be judged as gains or losses. Both he and Sen begin with the less controversial cases of observational, scientific and paradigmatic growth of understanding. The essential basis for describing understanding B as superior to A is that B can explain more *and* explain A. Sen, comparing the Indian states of Kerala and Uttar Pradesh, illustrates this by examining the paradox that self-perceived morbidity is higher among groups with lower mortality. Building on Marx's notion of 'false conciousness' he explains that this illusion has an objective basis because declining mortality generates a heightened awareness of morbidity. From his perspective one can understand both the objective reality and the illusion.

But can this apply to *moral* transitions? Again both Taylor and Sen argue that, in certain circumstances, it can. For Taylor, even where there are diverse and incompatible moralities, there are 'resources in argument'. A hidden insight marginally present in all cultures (eg. the equal potential intellectual capacity of females and males) can be resurrected, fire new demands and challenge previous moral codes. Sen illustrates this with his examination of fine-grained differences of opinion within cultures. Every society contains its dissenters and skeptics. 'Arguments invoking cultural relativism typically operate on units that are much too gross'. Paradoxically, the more we approach the smallest groups and individuals, the more questionable becomes any notion of a holistic 'culture'.[9]

Furthermore, since systemic and long-lasting moral codes claim consistency, participatory debate will frequently entail challenging the cosmology in which the broader codes are embedded. One example is the general trend 'towards a relatively greater *respect* for human beings, one by one, at the expense of previously recognized forms of

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[9] This relates to the 'multiple identities' of peasants and other deprived groups in Peru, cited by Altimirano et al in this issue of GSP.

social encapsulation'. This recognition of 'disencapsulated respect', claims Taylor, is among the most painful intellectual transitions for human beings. He concludes

> 'People can and do live human lives in all cultures. To be able to understand this sympathetically [ie. Across two or more cultures] … is to have a truer grasp of the human condition than that of people for whom alternative ways are utterly inconceivable … the step is an epistemic gain. People may be unhappier as a result, and may lose something valuable that only unreflecting encapsulation gives you, but none of that would make this encapsulation any the less blind' (Taylor 1993: 229).

In conclusion, there remains a strong argument for a dynamic, positional objectivity in conceptualizing and researching well-being. This case is strengthened by the very processes of globalisation, including cultural interconnectedness and human migration, considered next.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES

I turn now to the structures within which livelihoods are constructed and reproduced, lifeworlds lived, and wellbeing pursued. In the WeD framework we distinguish at least five levels here: the household, the community, the region, the nation and the supranational/ global. The aim is to understand how individuals are embedded in lifeworlds and lifeworlds within 'big structures' (Bevan 2004c). Yet at this level another and quite different 'story' dominates today: that of globalisation and homogenisation.

Globalisation as a universal trajectory

'*Globalisation'* is a protean term. It can encompass increasing global connectedness in governance, trade, finance, production, migration, communication, culture and the environment (Held et al 1999). A dominant idea is of increasing convergence, homogenization or isomorphism[10] across the globe. I consider here just two theorizations of globalisation: one dominant (economic globalisation) and one more subterranean (world society theory). Both have implications for social policy making and for the improvement of human well-being.

Economic globalisation embraces the spread of global connections in trade, direct investment, production, and financial markets. These four elements have appeared in roughly this order in the last two centuries of capitalist development, with trade taking off in the second half of the 19th century. However, the period from the mid-1980s has witnessed accelerating global integration on all fronts, with further tariff reductions, an escalation of foreign direct investment and a notable integration of financial markets. One feature of the present period is the enhanced power of capital compared with that of nation states and other actors in civil society such as trade unions. Farnsworth and I (Gough 2000, ch.4) argue that this reflects its greater *structural* power - the ability of business and finance to influence policy without applying direct pressure on government through their agents. This is based on 'exit' rather than 'voice'. Such theories have much in common with Marx's *Communist Manifesto* – 'Marx's revenge', according to Desai ( ).

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[10] Isomorphism: 'similarity in shape or structure in unrelated forms' (Chambers Dictionary).

One commonly alleged consequence is the diminishing capacities of nation states. 'Globalisation' is notably argued to constrain and undermine national welfare states where they exist, to stall their development elsewhere, to encourage 'social dumping' and to generate a 'race to the bottom'. The effects are claimed to operate via lower tax levels, labour standards, social expenditure ratios, coverage of social programmes, and income redistribution.

In contrast, world society theory develops a more Durkheimian account, with different predicted consequences. According to Meyer et al (1997), global cultural and associational processes construct dominant worldwide models of reality. These cognitive and ontological models of reality increasingly shape the practices of actors, including nation states, in virtually all domains of rationalized social life. The result is a strong isomorphism in domains such as constitutional forms, individualized rights, schooling systems, techniques of economic management, population policies, formal commitments to gender equality, and so on. This collective world society is built on a 'massive array' of international associations, from professional bodies to the United Nations and global institutions.

One upshot is that the structures and practices of contemporary nation states are increasingly shaped by this world society. The autonomy of nation states is far less than commonly believed, but the paradoxical result is that the formal *capacities* of states across the world are expanded – the opposite to many globalisation arguments. Driven by the spread of rationalized models of social reality, promulgated by international organizations, national governments become more alike and extensive. However, since these universal policies 'helicoptered in' from above frequently mesh very poorly with the reality on the ground, the result is an 'extraordinary decoupling' of policies from implementation at grass roots level. For example, the standardized international model of schooling may not be efficient or functional in rural Africa. The enhanced capacities of states may not extend beyond the capital city, or even beyond a few ministries and international hotels therein (Meyer et al 1997).

Though very different, these theorizations of globalisation have one thing in common: the prediction of growing homogenization or isomorphism. Yet, both can and have been criticized. The evidence supporting economic globalisation, at least in its impact on Northern states, is remarkable by its absence (see Garrett, Swank etc). The conclusion, rather, is that economic globalisation pressures are usually mediated by domestic and international institutions, interests and ideas. This argument has been developed in relation to the advanced capitalist countries of the North, for example in the work of Scharpf (2000), Rieger and Leibfried (2003) and notably Swank (2002). Now it is appearing in research into social policy reform in the transitional countries (eg Katherine) and the developing world (eg Mesa-Lago 2000 on Latin America and Gough 2001 on East Asia).[11]

Real social formations are not so simple nor so malleable. More useful here, we would argue, is a *middle*-range conceptualisation of institutions and regimes. To move to the opposite extreme and succumb to a purely local analysis would be to accept incomparable experiences and lifeworlds. Criticising the modern enthusiasm for local or in-group history, Hobsbawm writes:

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[11] Though Deacon (2003a) still doubts that this applies to poorer and least developed economies.

'History needs mobility and the ability to survey and explore a large territory, that is to say the ability to move beyond one's roots. That is why we cannot be plants, unable to leave their native soil and habitat… in-group history written only for the group ('identity history') – black history for blacks, queer history for homosexuals, feminist history fro women only, or any kind of in-group ethnic or nationalist history – cannot be satisfactory as history… No identity group, however large, is alone in the world' (2002: 415-417).[12]

Furthermore, the paradoxical counterpart to this worship of the local is the domination of the current hegemonic worldview and policy portfolios of the most powerful global players. Today these are the USA, the major international financial institutions, the leading intergovernmental groups (WB, IMF, WTO) and the G7. My second goal in this paper is briefly to sketch an alternative middle-range theory of big structures.

Diversity, middle-range structures and regimes

Middle-range approaches are of course not new. From an anthropological perspective Mary Douglas (1987) has developed her model of four world-views. She distinguished groups (collectivities incorporated into bounded units) from grids (collectivities circumscribed by externally imposed prescriptions and ego-centred relations). Her approach has been developed and systemised by her followers in 'cultural theory' (see Thompson, Ellis and Wildavsky 1990). The group-grid analysis generates four fundamental 'ways of life' according to the strength or weakness of each: individualism (-/-), hierarchy (+/+), egalitarianism (+/-) and fatalism (-/+). These functional systems generate both patterns of social relations *and* perceptions, preferences and beliefs; indeed, it is the ability of a way of life to generate the practices, values and beliefs to legitimate its patterns of social relations that ultimately determines its viability. Change comes when a way of life cannot deliver on the expectations it has generated. The result is a 'constrained relativism': different ways of life can coexist and persist but they come in only four basic shapes.

A different perspective, modern-day institutionalism, appears in a variety of disciplinary guises including historical institutionalism, sociological institutionalism, public choice economics and institutional economics, and I do not survey them here. Yet they have several things in common: technology and preferences are conceived of as endogenous to economic systems, the neoclassical assumption of equilibrium is replaced with the idea of agents learning and acting through real historical time, structural uncertainty imposes on actors a reliance on routines and habits, durable patterns of behaviour which define social institutions; social processes are characterised by long periods of continuity or 'path-dependent' development punctuated by rapid breaks or institutional shifts. This paradigm also directs our attention to the institutional contrasts between different economic systems or forms of capitalism (Gough 2000, ch.2).

From this perspective, Helliwell (2002) documents the abiding reality of national economies in a globalising world. He identifies 'strong border effects' in the fields of trade, finance and migration. These are explained in terms of networks, norms and institutions (whether or not these are lumped together under the term 'social capital'). It is true that modern technology and decreasing costs facilitates cross-border networks

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[12] It goes without saying that this condemnation applies as much to the male, white, Western history in opposition to which these group histories emerged.

and linkages, but 'the scale of these is still dwarfed by the density of local contacts and commerce' (Helliwell 2002: 74). One result is that the quality of national institutions impacts strongly on general life satisfaction when comparing countries. Distinct national economies persist in a globalising world and so too does the need for distinct national economic policies.

The same applies to social policy. A more recent attempt by a group of us at Bath to develop a middle-range structural framework for understanding well-being in developing countries has radically extended the 'welfare regime' concept of Esping Andersen(1990; Gough and Wood et al 2004). This neo-institutional approach attempts to steer a middle way between teleological or functionalist approaches (both modernisation and Marxist) on the one hand, and post-modern approaches emphasising uniqueness and diversity on the other hand. A *welfare* regime is at the most general level an institutional matrix of market, state and family forms, which generates welfare outcomes. We consider that it offers a powerful framework for studying social policy in development contexts for four reasons. First, the welfare regime approach is concerned with the broader 'welfare mix': the interactions of public sector, private sector and households in producing livelihoods and distributing welfare: a dominant theme in the development literature. Second, it focuses not only on institutions but outcomes – the real states of well-being or ill-being of groups of people. Third, it is a 'political economy' approach which embeds welfare institutions in the 'deep structures' of social reproduction: it forces researchers to analyse social policy not merely in technical but in power terms. Fourth, it enables one to identify clusters of countries with welfare features in common; it holds out the promise of distinguishing between groups of developing countries according to their trajectory or paths of development.

To undertake this task we first redefine welfare regimes in a more generic way to refer to all institutional arrangements, policies and practices affecting welfare outcomes and stratification effects in diverse social and cultural contexts. Within this, we then distinguish three broad families of regimes: welfare state regimes, informal security regimes and insecurity regimes. A *welfare state* regime describes a set of conditions where people normally meet (to varying extents) their security needs via participation in labour markets and financial markets and via the finance and provisioning role of a 'welfare state'. An *informal security* regime describes a set of conditions where people rely heavily upon family, community and parton-client relationships to meet their security needs, to greatly varying degrees. These relationships are usually hierarchical and asymmetrical and result in problematic inclusion or adverse incorporation, whereby poorer people trade some short-term security in return for longer-term vulnerability and dependence. At the extreme, an *insecurity* regime describes a set of conditions which generate gross insecurity and block the emergence of stable informal mechanisms to mitigate, let alone rectify, these. These regimes arise in areas of the world where powerful external players interact with weak internal actors to generate conflict and political instability. Insecurity regimes are rarely confined within national boundaries.

Using this framework we then identify more specific regime types in different zones of the world: mixed *liberal-informal welfare regimes* in Latin American countries outside the Caribbean; *productivist welfare regimes* in East Asia, *informal security regimes* in South Asia; and a generalised *insecurity regime* in much of Africa. Further research would reveal more fine-grained patterns. We contend that the welfare regime framework moves forward the analysis of social policy and human welfare in development contexts.

To conclude, the common element in all these approaches is that they undermine narratives of homogenization and in their place stress diversity and path dependency. They can form a bridge between universalizing and localizing accounts of the world in general and of social structures impacting upon human well-being in particular.

SOCIAL STRUCTURES AND HUMAN WELLBEING

Two conclusions can be drawn from the above. First, contrary to post-modernist and relativist thinking, dynamic, positional, yet objective judgements can be made about the effects on human well-being of changes in circumstances. By these standards individual wellbeing increases with the expansion of meaningful choices – when the bounds of 'unreflecting encapsulation' are loosened.[13] Second, macro structures still matter, but they are more open and varied than the discourse of hegemonic globalisation allows. Given path dependent development and inherited institutions – given in other words the combined and uneven development of history – there is a larger repertoire of institutional configurations and policy options than either globaphiles and globaphobes allow. Do these conclusions enable the contradiction identified in the introduction to be reconciled or at least diminished? Let me answer this at three levels: individuals, lifeworlds and big structures.

Individuals and critical autonomy

Let us begin by comparing empirical studies of the components of well-being in different locales with those identified in universal lists such as those of Nussbaum and Doyal-Gough (see Clark and Gough 2004). Such comparisons reveal much overlap, first between different countries and communities and second, between these and more universalizing lists. The common 'labels' which emerge as desirable facets of well-being inlcude material resources, bodily well-being, social well-being, security, psychological well-being and freedom of choice and action. Yet there are differences, and one important example concerns education and learning. For example, the *Voices of the Poor* study found that knowledge was not generally considered as a good-in-itself, though human capital in an instrumental sense was recognized (Narayan 2000; Alkire 2002:63). Clark (2002:136-139) reports a similar finding in his study of human values in South Africa. Yet this contradicts many philosophical accounts of well-being which emphasise the intrinsic, extrinsic and constructive importance of learning; universal lists of well-being which all include items like understanding, culturally relevant knowledges, and literacy; and well-known indicators such as the Human Development Index which includes two measures of knowledge acquisition as central components.

I would claim that the discrepancies broadly centre on what we have termed 'critical autonomy'. Critical autonomy entails the capacity to situate the form of life one grows up in, to criticise it and, if necessary, to act to change it. This requires two things: individual capacities to exercise critical agency and social preconditions that provide opportunities for the exercise of critical agency. Without a measure of critical autonomy, local

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[13] Though subjective well-being may not be improved. Individuals who exert more critical autonomy and challenge community norms may suffer from ostracism and lowered SWB.

conceptions of well-being cannot be challenged. This applies whether the 'local' conceptions are articulated by individuals or groups.

This is to challenge purely individual, subjective, 'hedonic' notions of wellbeing. One strong reason for doing so is the pervasive propensity of people to *adapt* to changes in their life circumstances, well documented in the psychological literature though the terms vary and include 'adaptive preferences', 'hedonic adaptation', 'the hedonic treadmill' or 'response shift' (eg. Frederic and Loewenstein, 1999, Camfield and Skevington, 2003, Cummins and Nistico 2002). This ability to adapt would appear to be a ubiquitous feature of the human condition and applies to individual misfortunes (debilitating illness) and gains (windfalls and raises), and to collective misfortunes (natural disasters) and improvements (economic growth and prosperity). All of them confound any simple reliance on SWB and hedonic subjective quality of life scores when making intra-personal comparisons or comparisons over time.

This is recognised in an alternative psychological theorisation of *eudaimonic* wellbeing developed by Ryan and Deci (2001). Building on Maslow and Fromm, Ryan and Deci's self-determination theory identifies basic psychological needs which provide a universal foundation underlying the human actions studied by hedonic psychology. The three basic needs identified are *autonomy, competence and relatedness*. There is no space here to develop this theme, but the parallels between this philosophy and psychology of well-being and the objective approach in *A Theory of Human Need* are immediately obvious. In particular, their theory supports the priority we give to *autonomy*, and agree with us that this refers not to independence, or non-reliance on others, as is often claimed by critics, but to self-regulation and volition, the recognition that acts are undertaken by you, not done to you (see Sheldon 2001, Chirkov et al 2003). Camfield and Skevington (2002: 29), who make a similar comparison, consider that 'Doyal and Gough's claim [about the centrality of autonomy] is supported by nearly three decades of research and assessment of the conceptual cluster of control, choice and mastery'. Furthermore, the need for *competence* embraces several other components of autonomy in THN (Doyal and Gough 1991:.59-69), including cultural understanding, cognitive skills, self-esteem, and elements of critical autonomy. There is here a remarkable convergence between psychological need and human need theory.

Cultures and lifeworlds

Culture can be perceived as both a resource and a context for social action. Livelihoods analysis has developed the idea of a portfolio of resources, including material, human and social resources (Carney 1998). In turn the Resource Profiles Approach extends this by including cultural resources (Lawson et al 2000; McGregor, this issue). A culture here is a set of norms, values and rules develop by a particular community in relationship to a particular natural and social environment, which generates meanings for people within that community. It is a resource insofar as it 'contains' durable solutions to problems which those individuals and collectivities face. However, this approach also recognizes that such identities are multiple and the 'solutions' contested, notably in mobile and migrant populations within the peripheral zones of capitalism. As Figueroa et al (1996) argue, deprived people can be culturally excluded via labeling, or have little choice but to trade down to despised identities in order to secure their basic needs (see also Altamirano et al this issue).

This dynamic and contested view of cultural identities is more congruent with the arguments for a more fine-grained interpretation of culture argued above. Critical autonomy requires participatory debate with some members exposed to alternative points of view and external experiences. 'External' here refers to any frame of reference outside that of the group being studied. All the contributors to the earlier discussion of the 'local-upwards' resolution to the universal-local dilemma agree that some kind of inter-cultural discussion should be fostered in order to arrive at ethically justifiable and practically workable conceptions of the good. This requires what we term 'cross-cultural learning'. Thus a more contextual concept of 'culture' does not rule out some testing, evaluation and reform of cultural practices, invoking external viewpoints. The choice is as much between critics and upholders of the dominant local culture as between universal and local conceptions of well-being.[14]

Globalisation and the universal

Globalisation as a power discourse is very different from universalism as a normative discourse, and I begin with the former. The contemporary form of 'incomplete' globalisation is shaped by the most powerful actors in the world system. Today these are the USA, the leading intergovernmental groups (WB, IMF, WTO) and the G7, the major international financial institutions and leading transnational corporations. This remains true despite the frequent framing of these international discourses in terms of human rights. The rights are often framed in too specific, one-size-fits-all (OSFA) terms – the 'single sustainable world model' identified in the US National Security Strategy. Thus democracy is equated with forms of legal democracy or competitive elitism as they have emerged in the West (Held 1996). Thus social rights, where recognized, tend to be interpreted in terms of state-delivered, justiciable, formal rights. Real-world social structures are heavily dominated by a hegemonic Washington-dominated elite with its own self-serving agenda. In this light, cultural diversity and relativism can be interpreted as a form of resistance from below, as argued by the G3, G20 and G77 (Deacon) and members of the anti-globalisation movement. Part of the disconnect identified at the start of this paper can be explained in these terms.

Yet this is too simple and sits uneasily alongside the contemporary view of the end of the Washington consensus (Stiglitz, 1998; Gore 2000) or of Deacon's (2003b) portrayal of

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[14] The news is replete with cases where local cultural practices conflict with notions of universal human needs and rights held by some (and more than a handful of) people within the cultural system concerned. Consider for example, two headlines in the *Guardian* in May 2004: 'Village council approved rapes: A village council in Pakistan permitted a landlord to rape the sister and sister-in-law of a man he accused of an illicit relationship with his daughter, police said yesterday'. Also 'Execution nears for mentally ill Texas killer'. Both actions were challenged: the first by police in the nearby town of Kabirwala, the second by civil rights groups in Texas and the US. In another example, Njoya (2002) discusses the dilemmas faced in Kenya by the current constitution on 'customary law'. All new laws are subject to customary law unless they are 'repugnant to justice or morality'. However, the dominant cultural ideology rules out any such appeal, even in cases of genital mutilation or denying married women's right to inherit property. Groups opposed to these cultural practices have had recourse to two external discourses: 'colonial' law (the 1882 British Married Women's Property Act) and global discourses on rights.

diversity, fragmentation and disunity in current debates and alliances around global social policy. The Bretton Woods institutions disagree with the United Nations institutions, there are divisions within the UN family of organisations, the G7 are opposed by the G3, the US neo-liberal model is contested by the EU social liberal model, while the US currently opposes any form of global social levy or extension of global social rights. Deacon refers to the 'check-mate' at governmental and inter-governmental levels.

This emerging dispute and variety has the merit of challenging OSFA policy prescriptions – there is no longer a 'single policy size' whether in economic, social, environmental or other policy areas. There are signs that this is slowly being recognized within leading international institutions. For example, the *World Development Report 2004: Making Services Work for Poor People*, seems to recant past mistakes and claims that 'no one size fits all'. Instead it develops an extensive case that 'eight sizes do'. This divides countries according to whether politics are pro-poor or clientelist, whether populations and thus service clients are homogenous or heterogenous in their preferences, and whether the particular services are hard or easy to monitor. The first distinction is evidently simplistic, according to our analysis of informal security regimes. Yet, the Report does indicate a process of learning from mistakes and a recognition of the huge importance of context in understanding the delivery and impact of services (and by implication other need satisfiers) at the local level.

Furthermore, Deacon ( ) and some other supporters of a socially responsible globalism argues that this diversity strengthens the need for a 'solid ethical reference point' to arbitrate the various positions of 'actors in practice'. We thus return to the case for an ethically attractive universalism around which consensus can be built. If the powerful are not to determine this, then the struggles to rationalise world governance advocated by GSP are of urgent importance. To succumb to cultural or post-modern relativism would simply leave open the field to the most powerful global forces.

The earlier arguments about diversity, regimes and path dependency perhaps point to a resolution of the original contradiction in terms of *regimes* and *regions*. Our regime approach enables us to combine a universalism about ends with a relativism about means. We conclude that there *is* a moral hierarchy of regime types, from insecurity regimes to informal security regimes to formal security regimes. Yet in proposing and supporting policy measures within a medium term timeframe (say within the lifetime of the Millennium Development Goals) we must be sensitive to history, globalisation and path dependency. Relativism of means entails considering a wide repertoire of policy measures and a wide range of actors in the public domain, not confined to the state (Wood and Gough 2004).

In practice, this may well entail intermediate regional actors and institutions coupled with a concept of multi-tiered, international welfare systems (Deacon 2001). Room (2004), for example, extols the lessons of the most successful regional organisation, the European Union, where growing economic integration has fostered moves towards 'multi-tiered governance' and social interventions. If applied to Southern regional groupings, this would entail a substantial range of measures including regular monitoring of social standards and policy-targets, resource transfers on the basis of regional or global taxation or levies, mechanisms for cross-national policy learning and exchange of best practice, and new institutional arrangements for shared governance. These are ambitious goals, which are far from secure even in the EU. Yet they could potentially

provide an institutional framework enabling policy-learning to take place across regions with a broadly similar socio-economic and cultural context.

Such a dual strategy can begin to resolve the contradiction with which I began. Regional and regime-specific actors and institutions can provide social models and policy learning better moulded to national and local realities than Washington- or Geneva-based global institutions. They can also enhance the voice of peoples and groups within the South. The combination of these with participatory policies to involve the poor can avoid uncritical subjugation to cultural norms while nourishing alternative social policies. Together, they can begin to challenge post-modern relativism about goals and OSFA global norms concerning means. It may reinvigorate the vision of common human needs coupled with local contestation over need satisfiers.

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