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WHAT IS QUALITY OF LIFE ?

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"These goals cannot be measured by the size of our bank balances. They can only be measured in the quality of the lives that our people lead." (Lyndon B. Johnson, Madison Square Garden, New York, 31 October 1964.)

Quality of Life studies are at present in a state of considerable confusion. Not only do we not know what QOL is; we don't even know what *category* of thing it is. Is QOL a state of mind or a state of society ? Does its definition vary from individual to individual, from culture to culture, from geographical area to geographical area, or is it the same for all people, everywhere ? Is QOL measurable, and if so why do there continue to be profound differences of opinion over which social indicators are relevant to its determination ? President Johnson seems to have been the first person to refer to QOL, in 1964, but since that time there has been little or no agreement as to what he was talking about[1].

Contrasting curiously with our low level of comprehension of QOL is the high level of importance which many researchers attach to it. The reason for this stems partly from progressive disillusionment with materialistic goals : from the inability of affluence, economic growth and technological progress to satisfy man's most basic desires. Thus Campbell, Converse and Rodgers :

"A nation which has been known, and criticized, for its materialistic values is now asking itself whether in fact the good life can be measured in terms of consumer goods, and those who presume to define the national goals increasingly speak of quality of life rather than of further material possessions."[2]

So far so good. It is impossible to be against quality of life, any more than it is possible to be against motherhood, consensus, or international understanding. The trouble comes when we try to say what QOL is, or to devise ways of assessing it. Campaigning for the presidency in 1932, Herbert Hoover promised "a car in every garage and a chicken in every pot". Yet to attempt to measure QOL in 1932 by counting cars and chickens would be about as successful, in the eyes of many, as to attempt to assess it today in terms of crime rates and air purity, unemployment indices and national income, divorce rates and participation in noon-hour fitness programmes. We feel intuitively that these items should be in some way relevant to QOL, but in the absence of any clear idea of what the latter consists in we are incapable of judging their importance or their weight. It may not even be obvious whether the correlation with QOL should be positive or negative : is a climbing divorce rate, for example, indicative of high or low QOL ? This question, and many more like it, currently lack answers.

For lack of any obvious correlation between QOL and "objective" conditions such as crime rates and unemployment, current thinking has tended to swing to the opposite extreme and identify QOL with subjective or psychological factors. This is the route chosen by Campbell et al, who following Bradburn and Caplovitz[3] and Cantril[4] state that their study of QOL will focus on a person's "sense of well-being", on individual "satisfaction", and on "the quality of life experience". The determination of QOL thus depends upon obtaining and analyzing a variety of psychological data, based upon questions ranging from "How important do you feel it is to lock your doors when going out of the house for just an hour or two ?" to "How satisfied are you with your life as a whole these days ?". In the opinion of the present author, analyzing QOL in terms of subjective or psychological factors is a mistake, and leads to a distorted picture of what QOL consists in.

The reasons why we must distinguish carefully between QOL and individual satisfaction or happiness are as follows. First, we already have a name for the index of social welfare derived from assessing personal satisfaction/dissatisfaction and summing over the total number of individuals in a given society. This is the index of social utility, incorporated in the theory of utilitarianism of Bentham and Mill. It is true that Mill defined "happiness", his key measure, as "pleasure and the absence of pain". But the utilitarian approach, which is to assess social goals and policies in the light of a collective

index formed by aggregating individual psychological states, is plainly identical with that of Campbell et al., and to define QOL in terms of "the greatest happiness of the greatest number" would be merely to repeat Mill's work. This is not to say that the index of social utility, defined psychologically, is not an important and interesting quantity which we should be at pains to measure. But it is not QOL.

A second reason for separating QOL from satisfaction/dissatisfaction reports is that the first may vary quite independently of the second. Consider a society blessed with every conceivable advantage : good schools, democratic government, delightful neighborhoods, public transportation, clean air, no crime, negligible unemployment, creative work opportunities, excellent health and longevity, a high level of affluence and no poverty. And yet, sad to say, almost everyone in the society is, for various personal reasons, unhappy. A's mother has just died, B can't get along with his boss, C has an anxiety neurosis, D and E suffer the pangs of unrequited love, F is married to the wrong man, etc. Does this mean that QOL is low ? It would if QOL were measured by aggregating the individual satisfaction/dissatisfaction levels of A, B, C etc. Note that overall unhappiness, if strong enough, may colour satisfaction reports about all dimensions of life, no matter how mundane. Thus C, if sufficiently depressed, may describe the public transportation system as being "lousy", even if it is in fact the best in the world.

Suppose now that the psychological atmosphere in our model society improves. A gets over his mother's death, B changes jobs, C goes to an analyst, D and E get married, and F gets divorced. Does QOL increase ? No. The sum total of human happiness increases, but this is not QOL.

In Huxley's *Brave New World* a soma pill, which induced a positive sense of well-being, was mandatory for all residents. To define QOL in terms of a sense of well-being would be to accept the implication that one way to increase QOL would be to prescribe soma pills. To regard QOL in this way is surely to mis-categorize it : to look for it in an area where it is not to be found.

A final reason for not defining QOL in terms of perceived well-being or satisfaction stems from the work of Stanley Seashore on the quality of working life (QWL)[5]. Seashore notes the difference between objective and subjective indicators in the field of QWL studies, distinguishing such factors as pay, hours of work, health conditions

and pension benefits from *satisfaction* with pay, *preference* for more or fewer hours of work, *preception* of hazard, *expectation* of promotion. One might think that job satisfaction varied as widely or more widely than "objective" working conditions, but surprisingly this is not so. In the U.S. in 1969—70, 85 % of employed adults reported thmeselves as being at least "somewhat" satisfied with their jobs, and only 15 % dissatisfied[6]. Seashore anticipates these figures will remain fairly constant, for the following reason. Job dissatisfaction, on his analysis, represents an unstable and transitional state, which is sooner or later removed by man's capacity to adapt himself. "Adaptation", of course, may take different forms, from changing jobs to lowering expectations to other more pathological ways of coping with the situation. But in one way or another, if Seashore's theory is correct, the large majority of working people will eventually come round to being "satisfied". Even Ivan Denisovitch, in his Siberian labour camp, meets and overcomes challenges in ways analogous to the ways North American workers do, and at the end of the day goes to bed a "satisfied" man[7].

This relative constancy of satisfaction indices over time, their tendency to become stabilized through the process of adaptation, constitutes a serious objection to identifying satisfaction with QOL. The same objection applies to even treating satisfaction as a QOL-indicator. If what Seashore says is correct, and if most humans eventually become resigned or even satisfied with their lot, no matter what their lot may be, than to go out and measure QOL with satisfaction-indices will reveal few surprises. By and large, the world over, we shall find that QOL stands at more or less the same level : that over the long run, people describe themselves as more or less "satisfied". This is scarcely the result we look to QOL-studies to provide.

Very well, then, what *is* QOL ? Before we attempt to deal with this question, it should be noted that any answer will be partly descriptive and partly prescriptive. QOL is not a term with a long and respectable philosophical history. Hence, in giving an analysis of its meaning, we cannot appeal to any accepted tradition or traditions, as we can in the case of an expression like "morality" or "freedom". On the other hand, QOL is not so amorphous a term that it can be given any meaning we wish. There are limitations to the range of possible meanings it can bear, within which we are free to make recommendations. For this reason foundational or definitional studies of QOL are partly descriptive, partly prescriptive.

In the account of the model society given earlier, with its clean air and safe streets, the reasons why people were unhappy were all *individual* or *personal* reasons. They had nothing to do with the overall climate or character of the society as a whole. This will provide a hint as to how a definition of QOL very different from that of Campbell et al. may be constructed. Let us following Rescher[8] distinguish between the feeling of happiness, satisfaction, or well-being on the one hand, and the *necessary conditions* for happiness on the other. These two are plainly not identical : the necessary conditions for happiness may be met without anyone actually being happy. Next, among these necessary conditions, let us distinguish between :

(a) *General Happiness Requirements.* What it requires for anyone to be happy. The GHR's are the same for all people everywhere; they do not vary from person to person or from society to society. Note that they are merely necessary conditions, hence their presence does not guarantee happiness, though their absence prevents or impedes it.

(b) *Individual Happiness Requirements.* What it requires for me to be happy, or for you to be happy, above and beyond the general happiness requirements. The IHR's, unlike the GHR's, depend upon the individual differences that distinguish one person from another. For example I may like active, competitive and athletic sports, whereas you may prefer cooperative and sedentary pastimes, with the result that I am happy and you are miserable at a ski resort, while the reverse is true at the Louvre. Happiness, therefore, depends partly upon the satisfaction of conditions that are common to all, and partly upon the satisfaction of conditions that distinguish one person from another.

Given the concept of the general happiness requirements, we may define quality of life as follows. QOL consists in the availability, throughout a society, of the general happiness requirements. To the extent that these requirements are met, QOL is high. To the extent that they are not met or are available to some but not to all members of the society in question, QOL is low. QOL, like the index of social utility, is aggregative in the sense that if X is a member of a population P, and if X formerly lacked certain GHR's which later become available to him, then the QOL of P increases. Conversely, if certain GHR's that were previously available to X cease to be available to him, the QOL of P decreases. These increases and decreases will in

general, of course, be uncorrelated with increases and decreases in the overall happiness found in P, since the presence of the GHR's constitutes a necessary but not a sufficient condition of happiness.

What has been done is to define the notion of quality of life in terms of the notion of the general happiness requirements. But what are the GHR's ? This is a difficult question, and in the remainder of the paper we shall do no more than sketch the general outline of an answer. The form of the answer is this : to meet the GHR's is to provide people with the means to satisfy universal human needs.

A good way to explicate the notion of a need is to contrast it with a want. Although these two have the appearance of being similar, they are in reality quite different. The differences have important implications for the concept of QOL[9].

(i) The statement "X needs Y" is elliptical for "X needs Y in order to Z", whereas the statement "X wants Y" is not elliptical for "X wants Y in order to Z". Thus "This knife needs sharpening" is short for "This knife needs sharpening in order to cut cleanly". The ellipsis is common and harmless. But "John wants a cup of coffee" is not short for "John wants a cup of coffee in order to Z". A man needs money in order to eat, but a miser may simply want or desire it, not as a means to something else, but for its own sake.

(ii) Wants are controllable in a way that needs are not. We can want things, but not need them, avidly, passionately, secretly, guiltily, or with indifference. Alexander the Great, when offered his army's last cupful of water in the deserts of Baluchistan, was able to control his desire for it but not his need.

(iii) What a person wants, and what he needs, are in general quite independent of one another. I may need to consult a psychiatrist, although I may not want to; I may want a mint parfait, even though it may be the last thing I need. In general (although there are exceptions) an individual is the best of judge of what he wants, but not necessarily of what he needs.

(iv) Wanting or desiring is frequently said to have an intensional character, as opposed to the extensional nature of a need. For example, I may want to climb the highest mountain in eastern Zaire, and the highest mountain in eastern Zaire may be an erupting volcano, but it doesn't follow that I want to climb an erupting

volcano. On the other hand, if I need to eat the most nutritious substance available, and if the most nutritious substance available is curdled goats milk, then I need to eat curdled goats milk.

(v) Wants escalate, while needs do not. Why it is, for example, that despite the fact that modern man possesses many of the material comforts his ancestors arduously sought, he regards himself on the whole as less happy than they ? The explanation normally provided is the familiar phenomenon of rising expectations. A want satisfied, instead of producing a neutral non-affective state, normally generates another want. A need satisfied, on the other hand, does not generate another need. There is no suggestion that if you give me what I need, I will immediately start to need something else, whereas in the case of want-satisfaction new expectations will automatically ensure the creation of new wants and desires. Only in the case of the temperate man, according to Plato (Gorgias 493B—494A) will the phenomenon of new want-creation cease to operate : the implication is that in this regard most of us are intemperate.

Given these differences between wants and needs, and given that QOL consists in the availibility or means to satisfy universal human needs, it still remains to say what universal human needs are. The most ambitious attempt yet made to answer this question is that of Abraham Maslow, whose well known hierarchy of needs is as follows[10] :

(1) Physiological needs. The lowest category of needs, comprising the need for food, water, sleep, shelter, reproduction, etc. These needs are prepotent, and if they are not satisfied, dominate the individual's behaviour.

(2) Safety or security needs. Needs for protection from harm and for a life that is safe and secure, including assurances about the future satisfaction of physiological needs.

(3) Belongingness needs. The need for love and affection. These needs are of two kinds — the passive need to be loved and accepted, and the active need to love others.

(4) Esteem needs. People's need for a stable, firmly based, usually high evaluation of themselves. Like belongingness needs, esteem needs divide into a need for the esteem or respect of others, and for self-respect or self-esteem.

(5) Self-actualization needs. These needs. the highest in Maslow's hierarchy, are often said to differ from the others in being "growth" rather than "defiency" needs, although the exact nature of the intended difference is unclear. The satisfaction of self-actualization needs is said to correspond roughly to what some personality theorists call "the 'fully mature' person, adding to the notions of emotional balance and of self-acceptance a notion of drive, of open-ended achievement in unfamiliar and challenging situations".

It will be noted that most of the needs in Maslow's hierarchy are what we may call "psychological" needs, meaning that the purpose of meeting them is to achieve a psychological state of health or happiness. However, although the end state is psychological the means of achieving that state are in general not. For example, one way to satisfy belongingness needs is (in Africa at least) to be a member of an extended family, but being a member of an extended family is not a psychological state. The question of just what physical, interpersonal, or social institutions are causally related to what psychological end-states is one that admits of no simple answer. No doubt the answer is different in different societies. But if Maslow's theory, or some theory similar to it, is correct in asserting that a list of needs can be drawn up which holds for all men at all times and places, then the first step will have been made in laying down a set of objective criteria for QOL.

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NOTES

[1] See S. McCall, "Quality of Life", *Social Indicators, Research* 2 (1975), pp. 229—248, for a discussion of the main conceptual difficulties that beset QOL studies.

[2] Campbell, Converse and Rodgers, *The Quality of American Life*, New York, 1976, p. 1.

[3] *Reports on Happiness*, Chicago 1965.

[4] *The Pattern of Human Concerns*, New Brunswick, N.J. 1965.

[5] Seashore, "Job satisfaction as an indicator of quality of employment," in A. Portigal (ed.) *Measuring the Quality of Working Life*, Department of Labour, Ottawa 1974, pp. 9—55. Reprinted, but

without the interesting discussion of Seashore's paper, in *Social Indicators Research* 1 (1974), pp. 135—168.

[6] Seashore's results compare closely with those of Campbell, Converse and Rodgers. The latter asked respondents to rate personal job satisfaction on a scale of 1 ("Completely Satisfied") to 7 (Completely Dissatisfied"), the question being "All things considered, how satisfied are you with your job ?" If we assign one half of those who assess their degree of satisfaction/dissatisfaction at the median value of 4 to the top end of the scale, and one half to the lower end, we can total the percentage of those who place thmselves in the top half of the scale. The results then are that 85.5 % of those surveyed by Campbell Converse and Rodgers in 1971 rated themselves as falling within the top half of the satisfaction scale, while 85 % did the same when the survey was repeated in 1978. (Personal Communication from Angus Campbell).

[7] A. Solzhenitzyn, *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovitch*; Seashore, p. 53.

[8] Nicholas Rescher, *Welfare*, Pittsburgh, 1972, pp. 62—63.

[9] For an excellent discussion of the differences between needs and wants see A.R. White, *Modal Thinking*, Ithaca N.Y., 1975, pp. 103—116.

[10] A.H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality*, New York, pp. 35—47, 1954.