

*Prof. Derek K Hitchins, Retd.*

INCOSE Pioneer

Systems Science/Anthropology

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Dirige Veritas Me

## The Human Condition?

Who knows? Who cares? But, should we...?

**Y**ou don't hear much about the "Human Condition" in these "Human Rights" times. Now, there's a curious thing... According to Google:

*The human condition is all of the characteristics and key events that compose the essentials of human existence, including birth, growth, emotion, aspiration, conflict, and mortality. This is a very broad topic which has been and continues to be pondered and analyzed from many perspectives, including those of anthropology, art, biology, history, literature, philosophy, psychology, and religion.*

...Which might go some way to explain why we don't hear much about it. The Human Condition that is. I like to think of it, more simply, as our underlying mental state of contentment, disturbance, conflict and concern, for the past, present and—particularly—for the future. Oh! And that each of us is, introspectively, *alone in our own mind...* So, underlying just about everything we think, feel, anticipate, fear and do.... Not unimportant, then, you might agree.

**A**braham Maslow (1908-1970) was a US psychologist. He postulated a "Hierarchy of Needs" (Table 1) to explain human motivation. (Maslow, 1943). The idea was that individuals have 'degrees' of needs, the most basic being, at Level 1, the fundamentals of life: air to breathe, food & water, sex, sleep, excretion and homeostasis. Level 2 is about safety in the broadest sense, so about those things that make us feel secure, like being part of a family, having a job, good health, possessions, morality, etc., so free from immediate concerns. And so on, up the hierarchy.

At the top level, 5, is self-actualization, i.e. *"The realization and fulfillment of one's talents and potentialities, especially considered as a drive or need present in everyone."*

Table 1. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

5	Self-actualization	Morality, Creativity, Spontaneity, Problem-solving, Lack of prejudice, Acceptance of facts
4	Esteem	Self-esteem, Confidence, Achievement, Respect of others, Respect by others
3	Love/belonging	Friendship, Family, Sexual intimacy
2	Safety	Security of: body, employment, resources, Morality, the family, health, property
1	Physiological	Breathing, Food, Water, Sex, Sleep, Homeostasis, Excretion

Not everyone agrees with Maslow, particularly about the placement of ‘sex’ in Level 1, and some suggest that levels may ‘overlap’, rather than be discrete steps. But, on the whole, Maslow’s Hierarchy has stood the test of time...And it offers insight into the Human Condition.

A cursory examination *might* suggest that the Human Condition has significantly improved in recent years in measurable, physical aspects such as health, longevity and education. But, this may have been at the expense of hard-to-measure aspects such as:—

- *happiness*
- *contentment*
- *freedom of thought & speech*
- *freedom from fear*
- *safety*
- *creativity*
- *sense of purpose*
- *opportunity to live for the present without concern for the future...*

Contemporary humans, especially city dwellers, do indeed appear to “suffer greatly from the human condition.”

**T**was not always so... feelings of safety and security were higher, *much* higher, during the fifties and sixties, even with—or perhaps *because* of—the Cold War... Sorry, but they were! And there was the Moon Landing, bringing the whole world together in awe and wonder...also courtesy of the Cold War competition between the Soviet Union and the US of A...

**I**n the 1950s, children sported scabs on arms and knees as a badge of honor: children wandered freely in woods, fields and parks, enjoying total freedom, skinny-dipping, climbing trees, picking blackberries, building dens and tree-houses, looking for frogspawn, birds nests, bull-heads, minnows, sticklebacks, grass snakes, even adders—often all day. *Really!* And there were no mobile phones with which parents could check up. Today's parents are loath to let their children out of their sight for fear of abduction or worse.

In earlier times, pre- and post-WWII, innate honesty of one's neighbors was taken for granted. Except in big cities, people left their doors open, without any feeling of insecurity. If someone found money in the street, they would take it to the nearest bobby—and there would be a bobby, too, at a nearby crossroad, or junction. He would be a friend, and children would be taught to take lost property to him, ask him the time, or for directions.

Nowadays police rarely patrol alone, nearly always in pairs for fear of being attacked, and rarely amenable to being addressed. And when a vehicle recently ran into a jewellers shop window, local people vied with each other to steal the jewels from the smashed window...

Moreover, policemen themselves may be viewed with a measure of distrust, after highly-publicized violent behavior towards women...which may have arisen, more generally and counter intuitively, from women's liberation, and their vociferous desire to be 'ordinary,' rather than viewed with chivalry and "put on a pedestal," as had been the practice for centuries previously. With this delicate feminine mystique of privacy & untouchability removed, the "Women's Libbers" may have, inadvertently, lowered the cultural drawbridge for all women.<sup>1</sup>

Until recently, for instance, expectant fathers were not allowed at the birth of their children. The clichéd father was kept outside the birthing chamber, smoking nervously, with a bouquet of flowers for his long-suffering wife once the long-anticipated birth—details of which, he knew *nothing*—occurred...

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<sup>1</sup> *I still recall my surprise when a young woman in London's Oxford Street swore at me for holding the door open for her...as, of course, I had been brought up to do.*

What has happened since the end of WWII to encourage today's widespread:—

- *criminality*
- *violence*
- *knife-crime*
- *drug addiction*
- *porn addiction*
- *obsessive gambling,*
- *impaired mental health,*
- *immorality,*
- *sexual dysphoria,*
- *antisocial demonstrations...*

How has the population at large become so:—

- *antisocial, humorless, aggressive, risk-averse, litigious and compensation-conscious...*

..in such a short time? Harking back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, suggests that many of our city dwellers, in particular, are struggling to rise up to, let alone beyond, Level 2...

Looking at the various social influences (media expansion, marginalizing of Christianity, political correctness, compensation culture, woke, etc.) *individually*, it may seem that each is a passing issue, and that society recovers in time.

And it appears to be the case that society at large *is* resilient, i.e., left to its own devices, it will stabilize, or at least calm down. Only, it isn't left to its own devices. Looking at the UK "social situation" post WWII, it is possible to detect a continuing trend in which "the human condition" has been progressively, yet unwittingly, compromised.

As Figure 1 (overleaf) controversially argues, State Welfare addresses many more aspects of social life than was anticipated by its original architects. While the social benefits of State Welfare might seem obvious in the abstract, those supposed benefits might not have accrued in practice.

Many negative effects are shown in the figure: there are others. For example, today, presumably as always, an intellectually stimulating, nurturing and physically safe family, with both parents, is important to the upbringing and wellbeing of children. A comparison between two nations (UK & US), with and without significant State Welfare, shows that Welfare cannot compensate for the absence of one parent, having a stepparent, etc: for reasons that are unclear, the effect is most marked with boys. (Parcel, 2012.) Counter intuitively, such studies suggest that provision of State Welfare, far from alleviating the human condition, may be aggravating it...

Figure 1 covers the period 1945–2012, and refers to the UK. It addresses much more than State Welfare, of course. It purports to illustrate the progressive



Since that time, in the last ten years, the UK has been burdened with riots, demonstrations designed to disrupt everyday life, such as those of Extinction Rebellion, others in Bristol attempting to kill policemen by setting fire to their vehicles, defacing of statues, particularly of British heroes of the past...

Not to mention ISIS/IRAQ, Climate Change/Global Warming, Islamic fundamentalism, Afghanistan, Russian assassins, everyday cybercrime, overpopulation, the growth of antisocial media to shield racist abusers, and generate conflict and discord. Oh! And the US-inspired “woke” and Black Lives Matter international wave of discontent which swept around the world, also largely through antisocial media.

The progressive aggravation of the Human Condition suggested by Figure 1 may be reasonably assumed to have continued unabated. Except, of course, for health & longevity—the easily measurable parameters. Education, despite protestations to the contrary, has also been something of a casualty, ever since it became a political football post-WWII, to be “tinkered with” on the basis of class prejudice, without regard to net outcome for the nation as a whole.

All of this while social engineering by successive governments, of whichever political dogma, has continued unabated in the UK. Which seems to suggest that the contemporary system of government does not serve the population at large as well as it might...

***So, what might be going awry? It is really hard to put one’s finger on any singular cause...***

Surprisingly, perhaps, examination of earlier civilizations may give a clue. You think not? Mmm... Well, go along with me here, please, if only for the ride...

Consider ancient Egypt, where a pristine society auto-developed some 2,600 years ago or more, on the banks of the Nile, in splendid isolation. So, no external factors to muddy the waters of comprehension. And, the people could write and record, so we know something of what happened.

Their’s was a thriving, robust pyramidal society, with a King at the pinnacle, some nobles and provincial governors below him, and the vast bulk of the c.2m population below them. Today, we might call it a benevolent dictatorship, but that would not be truly appropriate to the time.

The King was responsible for maintaining Ma’at, the ancient Egyptian concept of truth, balance, order, celestial harmony, law, morality, and justice. No democracy. No socialism. Not invented. *No need.* No money, so barter and ‘payment in kind.’ No class warfare. Instead, a place for everyone, and everyone in their place. No social distinction between men and women. Marriage was, seemingly, for life. No real healthcare. High infant mortality. Women stood up to urinate—men sat down (sic).

And a widespread belief in life after death. Plus a widely understood morality, defining what was good and bad behavior—see Annex, Table 2. Good behavior got you into the afterlife with your other half, jointly restored to your optimum vigor and health. Bad behavior, and your heart was eaten by Amit, the Devourer of Souls. End of! Oh! And the King-as-Osiris balanced your heart against the goddess Ma’at’s Feather of Truth to judge whether your behavior through life had been good or bad! (Whence ‘heavy-hearted,’ or ‘heart as light as a feather.’)

And it all seemed to work well, as far as we can tell at such a distance. Their food supply depended on the annual Inundations of the Nile, which famously allowed them to sow three crops per annum. And their faith in their afterlife seems to have mitigated their fear of death—instead, they had something to look forward to. They created magnificent artifacts, from murals, through grand furniture, to even grander pyramids, suggesting that many were operating at Maslow’s Level 5. And that period in Egyptian life, the Pyramid Age, was considered a Golden Age by their successors.

And that gives us a clue. The ancient society, with its concomitant Human Condition, thrived during times of plenty, in an ordered, structured society, with a widespread belief in an afterlife. But, nothing to do with politics, democracy, socialism, finance, big business, rioting, equality, inclusivity, class warfare, antisocial media, racism, gender politics, etc., etc. Not invented. No need. No *point*.

So, could it possibly be that our political system might be better focused today? At least in part? The economy is evidently important, provided everyone benefits from success. And, ‘benefit’ means everyone has sufficient—with no concerns for the morrow. And successive governments do pay much attention to the economy, although in different ways, some more successful than others.

But the nation is not happy: there isn’t a place for everyone, and everyone isn’t in their place. Class warfare and “raw envy” stalk our corridors, there is a general dysphoria, distrust, social conflict, ill humor, self-harm, crime, immorality, violence on the streets, and resort to drugs of all kinds.

Meanwhile successive governments propagate a culture to suppress, or at least *conceal* much of these underlying ills, with PC ruling social intercourse, Equality for all, Diversity plus Inclusivity, Human Rights, increased policing, overcrowded jails, and ever more particular laws to address crimes against women, increasing crimes against small children, raping very old ladies in their own homes, etc., etc. None of which seem to compensate for the aggravated Human Condition...but is more suggestive of *clamping down the lid on a bubbling cauldron*...

If we try to relate these phenomena to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, many of our city dwellers might seem to fall short of the Safety needs of Maslow Level 2... Morality<sup>3</sup> in particular might appear to be 'in short supply.' (Levels 2 & 5)

We mislabel many of the "problems:" agism, racism (or is it *name-calling*?), sexism (*gender confusion*?), misogyny (but no *misandry*), homophobic (but no *heterophilic*), dysphoria (but no *euphoria*)—putting each in a box, pretending that we then understand, and know how to deal with them, leading to more labels: feminism, equality, diversity, transphobia, non-binary, etc., etc.

**B**ut, no-one *ever seems to look for the root cause* of these phenomena, with a view to *correcting the cause*. Are we scared? Are we afraid of *finding* the causes? Perhaps we know the causes but don't know how to/can't conceivably afford to—put things right? Perhaps we inadvertently caused them, and daren't admit it. So, instead, we try to outlaw them, or ratify them, or change dictionaries so that they no longer seem 'wrong.' But, it has to be said, time and time again, we just create another -ism label, wring our hands, and tinker with the law—yet again... But never, ***never do we go back and undo the mistakes we made in the past. Never.***

(Uh...as far as I can tell, that is...)

Would it all clear itself up if we got the economy into such a state where everybody had sufficient for today and for tomorrow, and so had no concerns, present, or future? Seems like it would certainly help, and we might expect more of our people at Maslow's levels 4 and 5. However, that may take a very long time to achieve, and the approach is uncertain...

And, we would still have our human mortality to contend with—we can't get away from it. It's always there, in the background, growing as we age.

**N**ow, I'm on dodgy ground here, but I think there might just be a way of getting around our contemporary social ills, even without faith in an afterlife. (Although, mortality is always going to be an issue with *homo sapiens*.)

I call the approach Societal Systems Engineering (SSE) (Hitchins, 2012), using systems thinking, systems science and systems methods to address and enhance quality of life and the Human Condition in societies. Or, in other words, to address and resolve the needs revealed in Maslow's Hierarchy of

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<sup>3</sup> **Moral:** of, or relating to, character or conduct considered as good or evil; ethical; adhering to, or directed towards what is right; virtuous, especially in matters of sex; capable of knowing right and wrong, etc. **Morality:** the quality of being moral; that which renders an action right or wrong; the practice of moral duties apart from religion. Chambers Dictionary.



Needs in such a way as to move the population at large from Level 1 & 2 up the higher levels 3, 4 & 5, so necessarily incorporating all the levels below.

That would involve a massive shift in the way we do things:—

- A job, home, and family for everyone would be paramount, which in turn implies *getting the economy right*...(Levels 2 & 3)
- Reinstatement of “the family” as the social, moral and economic building block of society. (Levels 2 and 3).
- Our education system to be given a major shakeup, from bottom to top, so that people—everyone able—becomes educated more broadly *through life*. (Level 4)
  - Children to receive education from their outset in morality and ethics/ right and wrong/good and evil (Levels 2 & 5)
- Respect and respectability to be restored. A tricky one, this. (Level 4)
- Old people to be cared for in the family environment wherever possible.
  - And grandmothers, in particular, to regain their special rôle in bringing up teenagers and ‘mediating’ with parents (!) (Levels 2 & 3)

None of that would be straightforward. *But, perhaps the most challenging element would be the restoration and instilling of some form of morality, or integrity.* In the past, moral codes have been presented within, and as part of, religions.

As the UK is now replete with many religions, and a population comprising many who have little or no interest in religion, the idea of instilling a morality based on that of any one religion would seem to be, at the very least, impractical and unlikely to be acceptable. On the other hand, it may be evident from old religious texts what morality and ethics used to be about, before we became so “sophisticated...” See the Annex, Table 2

Meanwhile, how would Societal Systems Engineering work? SSE would address the situation as it is, creating dynamic societal models, and seeing what the outcome might be if any, or all, of the bulleted practices above were introduced, and how best to introduce them—including, of course, some form of morality, or *integrity*. In that way, SSE would ‘experiment’ with differing ideas, regimens, disciplines, in dynamic systems models, rather than introduce something which may operate counter intuitively. Subject to the quality of the models—always an issue—it should be possible, in principle, to counteract many of the deleterious effects of social engineering indicated in Figure 1...

**A**lthough, of course, it would be more pragmatic to repair the legislation that, however inadvertently, caused the problems in the first place!!

Table 1. (Repeat) Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

5	Self-actualization	Morality, Creativity, Spontaneity, Problem-solving, Lack of prejudice, Acceptance of facts
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3	Love/belonging	Friendship, Family, Sexual intimacy
2	Safety	Security of: body, employment, resources, Morality, the family, health, property
1	Physiological	Breathing, Food, Water, Sex, Sleep, Homeostasis, Excretion

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Table 2. The Ancient Egyptians' Negative Confession- Egyptian Book of the Dead, ...extracted from Spell 125 (Faulkner, 1985)

1. I have done no falsehood	2. I have not robbed	3. I have not been rapacious.	4. I have not stolen.	5. I have not killed men
6. I have not destroyed food supplies	7. I have done no crookedness.	8. I have not stolen the god's-offerings	9. I have not told lies	10. I have not taken food.
11. I have not been sullen.	12. I have not transgressed.	13. I have not killed a sacred bull	14. I have not committed perjury	15. I have not stolen bread
16. I have not eavesdropped	17. I have not babbled.	18. I have not disputed except as concerned my own property	19. I have not committed homosexuality	20. I have not misbehaved.
21. I have not made terror.	22. I have not transgressed	23. I have not been hot-tempered	24. I have not been deaf to words of truth	25. I have not made disturbance.
26. I have not hoodwinked.	27. I have neither misconducted myself nor copulated with a boy	28. I have not been neglectful.	29. I have not been quarrelsome.	30. I have not been unduly active.
31. I have not been impatient	32. I have not transgressed my nature, I have not washed out (the picture of) a god	33. I have not been voluble in speech.	34. I have done no wrong, I have seen no evil	35. I have not made conjuration against the king
36. I have not waded in water	37. I have not been loud voiced	38. I have not reviled God	39. I have not done...	40. I have not made distinctions for myself
41. I am not wealthy except with my own property	42. I have not blasphemed God in my city			

N.B. Negative Concession No. 39 is undecipherable.  
Others may be irrelevant, or obscure, e.g. NCs 13, 32 and 36