

Epilogue

The Future of Basic Needs Fulfillment

Basic needs fulfillment is fundamental to becoming human. Unlike other animals, humans are vastly shaped after birth (e.g., Gómez-Robles, Hopkins, Schapiro & Sherwood, 2015; Trevathan, 2011). Born extremely immature, human beings have a great deal to be formed, with less and less plasticity over time, until adulthood (around age 30), so much so that early experience is critical for supporting the development of full human capabilities. Evolution (what we call the evolved developmental niche) took care of this by shaping a developmental system that optimizes development over the course of maturation (e.g., Narvaez, Panksepp, Schore & Gleason, 2013). Every human capacity is influenced by postnatal experience, grounded in neurobiological structures initialized and then co-constructed with caregivers.

Ethogenesis describes the development and shaping of the moral self, the ethical orientations and moral capacities an individual displays and prefers across the lifespan (Narvaez, 2016, 2018). The species-typical pathway for ethogenesis, found in the societies that represent 99% of human genus history—small-band hunter-gatherers—includes relational attunement and communal imagination, the foundational components of cooperation that helped our ancestors survive, thrive and reproduce. The species-typical pathway requires basic psychosocial needs fulfillment during the course of development (with adulthood arriving around age 30), which is provided by the evolved developmental system or niche that we have examined in several chapters in this book.

Species-atypical pathways are shaped by toxic early stress, and their nature depends on the nature, timing, intensity, and duration of that stress. Lack of basic needs satisfaction in early life undermines the full development of capacities for relational morality and social cooperation.

Instead, the individual is governed by the past—by the resultant conditioning to feel unsafe in the world, to become threatened in social situations, bracing against others instead of opening toward them. Rather than approaching social relations with a hospitable orientation toward others, the individual starts with basic distrust and employs self-protectionist measures, whether to suppress the true self or to control the other. Fear and insecurity drive aggression or disengagement, allowing bullies and sociopaths to run the world (Narvaez, 2014).

Today, children's basic needs are not being fulfilled—intentionally. Over the last decades, the world has been governed by neoliberalism philosophy in nearly every sector of social life (Harvey, 2005). Neoliberalism sacrilizes so-called free markets, set up to give the power of citizenry over to corporate and oligarchic interests and, increasingly, to computer programs that focus on profits, using government money and power for militaristic endeavors to keep the status quo. It honors money and moneymakers over life and living systems (Korten, 2015). As a result, a 'survival of the fittest' mentality rules the structure and functioning of social institutions—they support wealth and the wealthy while making everyone else compete to survive. These social institutions and social systems ensure that the basic needs of nearly every human being will *not* be met. What parent has time to attend kindly and responsively to the needs of a baby when they must juggle the demands of low-paying jobs, rent making, health care, transportation, government demands, getting enough sleep and food on the table, along with child raising—by themselves because of the absence of an extended compassionate family and community? Instead of a supportive niche or nest, children grow up in competitive environments (e.g., same-age groupings) starting with stranger daycare, followed by schools that follow neoliberalism's philosophy and a society that treats them as expendable. Parents and communities instead focus on how little can be provided children so they still get by and remain

‘resilient’ while adults are busy with neoliberalism’s goals (competing over money making). This deterioration of expectations for living life represents a slippage of baselines for what is good/right for children and what can be expected from adults and societies (Narvaez & Witherington, 2018).

As we have discussed in this book, thwarting basic needs produces toxic stress that has widespread and long term effects on the mental and physical health of citizens, on their social capacities and preferences, and on their moral orientations—shaping the culture that emerges from these underdeveloped individual that moves further and further away from meeting the needs of its members, and building rationalizations and beliefs that ‘there is no other way’ (Christen, Narvaez & Gutzwiller, 2017).

Even when an individual takes up a self-healing path, the challenges are many. There are capacities missing that were scheduled to develop in childhood and those sensitive periods have passed. Much like learning a language is more difficult after childhood, retraining one’s self-regulatory systems such as the vagus nerve or stress response after childhood takes a great deal of courage, self-discipline and support (Narvaez, 2014).

What is needed is an awakening to the needs of young children, to the understanding that human nature itself is molded by experience early on and that sociomoral capacities are built on neurobiological foundations that must be set properly for full human potential to blossom. The perils are great—sociopathic institutions and individuals, born of the misunderstanding of child development and its intergenerational effects, are driving ecological and social crises and leading to planetary ruin. It is time to reshape priorities to supporting proper human development—human nature and the rest of nature depends on it.

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