

Book Review: Hartley Dean (2020) *Understanding Human Need*, 2nd edition, Bristol: Policy Press, ISBN 9781447341987, Pbk, £25.99

It was a real pleasure to review Hartley Dean's second edition of *Understanding Human Need*. Since the first edition was published in 2010, it has been a formative work adding to our broader understanding of social welfare and support, social policy and practices to address specific wants and disadvantages alongside some of the existential needs that we all share. The second edition came at a time of significant and fundamental change to human societies across the globe. Published in 2020, it eerily and presciently tackled some of the needs, wants and wishes arising from the COVID-19 pandemic. In Britain, this followed closely on the referendum vote to leave the EU and intertwined with leaving. Together these two monumental historical shifts created an uncertain and ambiguous context for social policy delivery and welfare practice. These turns were also affected by 10 years of austerity introduced to tackle the financial crisis of 2007-08 and stepped up by the Coalition Government from 2010. As if these events were not significant enough, early 2022, when writing this review, saw a brutal war in Ukraine bringing with it the human tragedies associated with military conflicts but enacted within this turbulent context, and in a Europe, indeed wider global North, which has increasingly lurched towards the populist political right. Dean has much to offer in helping us understand and hopefully to respond appropriately to this crisis.

This book presents a fundamental revision of the first edition in many ways. The first edition has been so valuable in teaching social policy, sociology and social work students to grapple with seemingly obvious but extremely complex and contentious problems. The in-depth analysis of need and development of a well theorised approach takes this edition to a new level. Indeed, it enriches our understanding of the multiplicity of different needs we humans have and the contexts in which they are expressed. At the outset, the glossary of 40 selected 'types' of need demonstrates the growing complexity of the topic, which has moved forward considerably from Jonathan Bradshaw's seminal taxonomy of need developed in 1972 which also recognised the intersecting nature of normative, felt, expressed and comparative needs. Dean's intention, however, is similar in wanting to theorise the 'essential' nature of human need – difficult in a simple sense, but important if needs are to be addressed practically in any useful way. He is also writing in a changed context in which participation is embedded as a fundamental aspect of citizenship, making expressed need civil, political and normative. Human need is not only something which should be defined but is also, in itself, defining. There is something Bourdieusian about this conceptualisation of need as a structuring as well as a structured structure and this could perhaps have been explored in this way. However, this rather pernicky point should not be allowed to detract from an important excursus through definitions and understandings in both a conceptual and practical sense, and an application to the changing social world.

The nine chapters of the book are separated in a fairly traditional way into concepts and theorisation whilst making links to the worlds of social policy followed by arguments concerning what this might mean for social ills and policy areas, for the developing arena of social and human rights and political approaches to human need. The format of each chapter lends itself as much if not more so than the first edition to use in a pedagogical way. The judicious use of boxed summaries and key concepts, the summaries of each chapter and its arguments and the questions that Dean raises can be easily lifted into seminars or 'flipped classrooms' as discussion points. Dean's thesis of need is progressive, it has almost

a contemporary enlightenment element to it, but one which accepts perturbations, cycles and barriers. This is useful in ensuring that understanding and working with the implications of human need are meaningful to those expressing that need. This book should become a staple of social policy, social work and sociology students for some time to come.

Reference

Bradshaw, J. (1972) Taxonomy of social need. In: McLachlan, G., (ed.) Problems and Progress in Medical Care: Essays on current research, 7th edition. Oxford, University Press, London, pp. 71-82.