

MASLOW'S THEORY: ANOTHER VIEW[#]

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Maslow's (1954) theory barely explains human motivation in it's true perspective. The hierarchical model, which he advances is very simplistic if it is seen in terms of complexity of human nature. He has attempted to explain human motivation in a sequential order, which states that once one gets satisfied with one motive on the lowest ladder then he moves on a step further up. Contrary to the 'sequential order' explanation, the present author theorizes that human motives i.e., biological, security and social are placed on the edges of a triangle and any one of them can take a primary position and the rest move on to a secondary level. Selection of motive depends on one's cognitive structure, training, and culture.

Maslow (1954) elaborately discussed human motivation in his theory of need hierarchy and it was well received and appreciated in the circle of scientists studying human behavior. Before him, experts in the related field, were mainly explaining human behavior in terms of instincts and pre-determined concepts. It was, naturally, a welcome change as it attempted to explain human behavior in terms of humanistic approach an approach which elevated human being to its destined position.

Maslow claimed that human beings, like other stages of development, also, pass through a set pattern of need development. He put it in the form of a ladder or hierarchy. Satisfaction of one kind of motive will pave way for different types of need. When one gets contented with one motive then he moves upward to achieve another higher one on the ladder. And when all his physical and biological desires are fulfilled, he moves towards his psychological desires. Several authors (e.g., Geller, 1982; Smith, 1973) have criticized Maslow for his biological and genetic analyses, for claiming that human potentials preexist and wait only the right moment to develop. Nord (1977) has also been critical of humanistic psychology, and Maslow in particular, for failing to consider "the role of sociological

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and economic conditions in both the suppression and achievement of humanistic goals.

Heylighen (1992) criticizes Maslow's need hierarchy and model of self-actualizing personalities since, the definition of self-actualization is confusing and the gratification of all needs is insufficient to explain it. Heylighen reconstructed the theory on the basis of a second order, cognitive systematic framework. A hierarchy of basic needs is derived from the urgency of perturbations for which an autonomous system must compensate to maintain its identity. It comprises the needs for homeostasis, safety, protection, feedback, and exploration. Self-actualization is redefined as the perceived competence to satisfy these basic needs in due time. This competence has three components: material, cognitive, and subjective. Material and/or cognitive incompetence during childhood create subjective incompetence, which in turn inhibits the further development of cognitive competence, and thus, of self-actualization.

O'Manique (1994) proposes that Maslowian and other Western models of individual motives reflect frustrated human reality, but that the integrated, holistic, and dynamic Marxian hypothesis may more accurately reflect the natural human condition and explain political upheaval as the drive to overcome that frustration. To him the Marx's vision of human being is more valid, more complete, more biologically founded, and more compatible with trends in natural sciences and psychology. In a study by Sumerlin and Norman (1992) to investigate the relationship between brain needs deficiency and self-actualization by comparing "street" homeless men and college students, insignificant results were found. Maslow's (1954) hierarchical model was the formation for establishing known-groups, evidence supporting this notion was not justified.

Here, we will analyze and discuss Maslow's need theory and see whether his concepts adequately explain human behavior or it has some potent shortcomings. Self-actualization is thought to be the top need in a hierarchy of needs or motives (Maslow, 1954). If we move down, the needs in the hierarchy are (i) the need for self actualization, (ii) esteem needs, such as needs for prestige, success, and self respect, (iii) belongingness and love needs, such as needs for affection, affiliation and identification, (iv) safety needs, such as needs for security, stability, and order, and (v) physiological needs, such as hunger, thirst, and sex.

For Maslow self-actualization mean the need of individuals to develop his or her potentialities to a maximum extent, in other words, to do what he or she is capable of doing. Self-actualizers are then

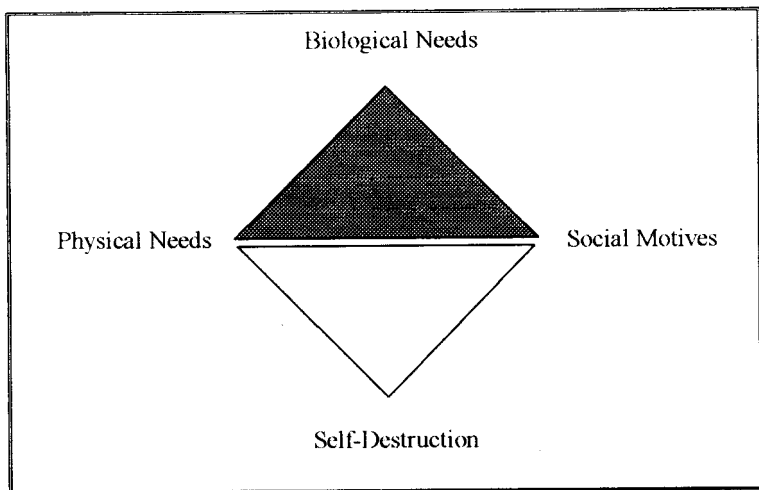
people who make the fullest use of their capabilities. Of course, the goals, which are sought in meeting this need, vary from person to person. For some, it means achievement in the literacy or scientific field, for others, it means leadership in politics, the community or religion; for still others, it merely means living life fully without being unduly restrained by social conventions.

Let us discuss his theory in a more detailed way. Was Maslow correctly and precisely explaining human motivation? Are physical and biological needs the most important ones? Is it necessary that self-actualization motive should be preceded by other motives? The answer could be "yes" but only for an ordinary and common man and not for those who want to achieve self-actualization. Because once a person gets entangled in gaining material things then he can not escape from this dreaded trap. The more he tries to move out, the more he gets caught. For him accumulation of things become primary and important. The greed becomes a reinforcing agent itself and it produces more greed. And this, in turn, makes him blind, incapacitating him to see things in proper perspectives. In this scenario how can one expect from a person to be self-actualized i.e., working for others altruistically and selflessly, while negating his own desires? However, according to this hierarchy we can easily conclude that all those people who get materially satisfied will aspire for self-actualization. But our experience shows altogether a different picture. If we look around and observe people who have an easy access to material gains usually suffer from psychological problems. They usually end up in a psychotherapist's and psychiatric clinic rather than growing in terms of personality development.

Secondly, we should not confuse and intermingle needs and wants with interests. They are two different things. There are numerous types of needs: Biological, physical, social, etc. Biological motives are related to hunger, thirst, sex, etc. while physical motives deals with security and shelter. Social motives i.e., power, affiliation, and achievement motives have been thoroughly studied by McClelland and Winter (1969) who attributed these motives to training and learning. According to them various cultures encourage different types of motives, whereas, Bandura and Walters (1963) has been emphasizing modeling as the major factor in inculcating motives among the learners. More specifically, Bandura and Walters (1963) asserted that children learn by copying the behavior of their parents and other important people who serve as models. Self-actualization is also a learned and social motive.

The important factor here is that these motives are not in sequential or hierarchical orders, as Maslow suggests, rather it can be in a triangular shape and they are usually mutually exclusive and has little influence on each other (see Figure 1). It means if any one motive becomes dominant in an individual, then it would become his primary motive and other motives will take secondary positions automatically. It all depends and varies on one's cognitive structure training, the environment and socialization agents. We all have primary biological needs and every body attempts to satisfy it. Some live for food and other take food to live and this second category people are basically the self-actualized ones. The self-actualized people only satisfy their primary needs to fulfill their dominant interest.

Figure 1: *Motives in a triangular shape*



Self-actualization, here, unlike Maslow's (1967) definition, means highly contented and complete individuals, in all respects who have the desire to grow psychologically. For them honesty, uprightness and integrity are the prime principles of life. Their dealings with people are exemplary. They are not interested in the worldly things rather they have a noble cause in front of them which is always for the betterment of humanity. They get satisfaction when they see other people happy and satisfied. They love the art of creation as they can see a glimpse of their own being in it. Sometimes, individuals who reach to a self-actualization stage are usually the most deprived ones.

Our history is rich of such exemplary people, which can support this hypothesis. To begin with Prophets (peace be upon them) who were a great source of enlightenment and inspiration faced a lot of financial and economical constraints during and before their prophethood. They would go, sometimes, to sleep without even taking two meals a day. But they attained a position of self-actualization, which few could even imagine. And they modified the whole scenario of religion, politics, and philosophy of their time. Their contribution in producing long lasting effects on the thinking and ideology of people is unparalleled.

But somebody can raise this question that they were Prophets and they were performing the duties which God had destined and ordained unto them. But then we have some worldly leaders as well. And we must start from modest and humble examples of *Abdus Sattar Edhi* from Pakistan and *Mother Teresa* from India, the two great selfless social workers who are a symbol of unpretentious and deferential qualities. They have achieved the self-actualization state without satisfying all the lower motives. Then, we have Marx. Though people can be highly critical of his thinking and philosophy but there can be no two opinions regarding his theory in the field of economics and the followers it attracted. When he was producing *Das Kapital*, his own children were dying due to non-availability of drugs. Nelson Mandela is another towering personality who combined in him courage of conviction as well as magnanimity. Many would remember him as a ceaseless warrior who spent a lifetime fighting for freedom and justice. He would have won a place of honour in the annals of history as the liberator of a people held in bondage. To secure dismantling of the apartheid system was remarkable accomplishment. After a long and protracted struggle for freedom, incarceration, when he stepped into the corridors of power he did not adopt the route of revenge against those sadists who took pleasure in inflicting pain on him. No one, in the contemporary history, can match his compassion, humility and the largeness of heart. He is in a real sense a commander of his own self who directs his own self rather than being bogged down by selfish, self-seeking ideas. If he wanted, he could have contained his rule as he was indisputable leader of the country but he relinquished power and stepped down, which is unparalleled in the history of the continent to which he and we belong, to display once again his generosity and distaste for power. These are the people whom we know but there are hundred and thousands of people marching on the road of accomplishment and self-actualization but they are doing it in a way that even their own hand does not know what the other is doing.

Maslow seems to have been influenced by socialism and for him road to higher psychic achievement is through materialistic gains. If your belly is full then you will be able to think and create. But people have proved him wrong not once but many times. People with even empty stomach can create and produce things which human nature can relish and boast of. They can better understand the pangs of hunger and can empathize with the have-nots. They only wait for the right time and right opportunity. Once they are given a chance they seize and exploit it to the fullest extent. Their only objective in the total exercise is to selflessly improve the conditions of the underprivileged class. It gives them, in turn, a psychic power which makes them think on a level on which other people fear to tread.

And here is the big paradox in Maslow's theory because he put people of diverse and various categories into the same closet i.e., self-actualization. It seems almost impossible to imagine that people who would aspire to be political leaders and those who are utterly disrespectful and abhorrent towards futile and sterile social conventions could be put together in the same category. While no doubt, people who give least importance to social values, (who want change in positive direction), may have achieved the highest stage of the hierarchy. As they may be wearied and irked of their social system, they may endeavor to change, which will demand resolution and perseverance in the face of resistance by the people of status quo. This resistance may even, sometimes, cost him his own life. This behavior needs no explanation as human beings have the tendency to live a life according to set rules and patterns and do not easily accept change. History is full of instances where people were gruesomely tortured and killed when they preached and advanced new ideas and propositions. Conventional and orthodox leaders of the society made every effort to hamper, thwart and impede the ways and means of flourishing new and novel ideas. But on a political leader and businessman there are some other motives working. Though they might be satisfied with their biological and physical needs but still they would like to achieve more of the same kind. Like Freud's concept of fixation they might have fixated on one of the ladder of the motives. Either they are under-satisfied or over-satisfied on a particular motive and do not like to move ahead.

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