TRANSCEND

THE NEW SCIENCE OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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A TarcherPerigee Book

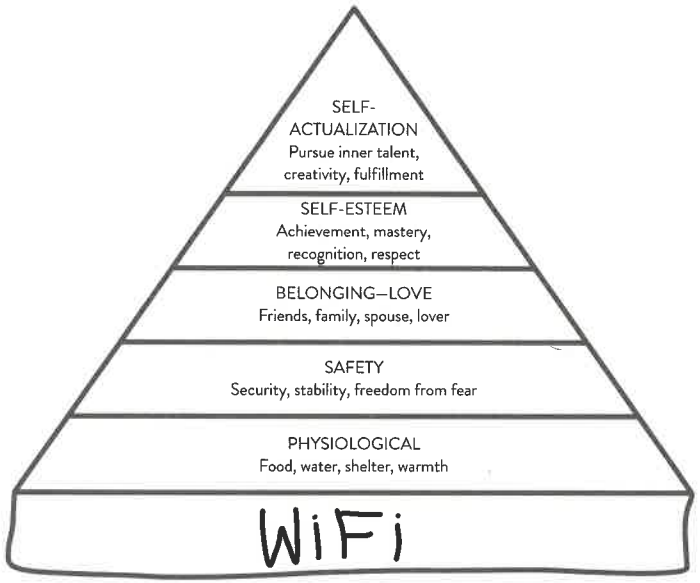
Preface

On June 8, 1970, a warm summer day in Menlo Park, California, Abraham Maslow was furiously writing in his notebook. His mind was full of so many theories and ideas about the higher reaches of human nature, including a theory he had been developing for the past few years: Theory Z. His wife, Bertha, lounged a few steps away by the pool at their home. Glancing at the time on his stopwatch, Maslow begrudgingly realized it was time to do his daily exercise. He was under strict doctor's orders to engage in light exercise to help rebuild his heart. Ever since a heart attack in December 1967, he had experienced frequent chest pains, constantly reminding him of his mortality. He canceled all speaking engagements and even declined to give a prestigious presidential address at the American Psychological Association.

Most people are familiar with Maslow's "hierarchy of needs," with self-actualization depicted at the top of a pyramid. Chances are, you learned about it in your introduction to psychology course in college or saw it diagrammed on Facebook.

As it's typically presented in psychology textbooks, humans are motivated by increasingly "higher" levels of needs. The basic needs—physical health, safety, belonging, and esteem—must be satisfied to a certain degree before we can fully self-actualize, becoming all that we are uniquely capable of becoming.

Some modern-day writers have interpreted Maslow's notion of self-actualization as individualistic and selfish.[1] However, a deeper look at Maslow's published and unpublished writings tells a very different story. In an unpublished essay from 1966 called "Critique of Self-Actualization



No, not *that* one.

Theory," Maslow wrote: "It must be stated that self-actualization is not enough. Personal salvation and what is good for the person alone cannot be really understood in isolation. . . . The good of other people must be invoked, as well as the good for oneself. . . . It is quite clear that a purely intrapsychic, individualistic psychology, without reference to other people and social conditions, is not adequate."[2]

During Maslow's later years, he became increasingly convinced that healthy self-realization is actually a *bridge* to transcendence. Many of the individuals he selected as self-actualizing people experienced frequent moments of transcendence in which awareness was expanded beyond the self, and many of them were motivated by higher values. At the same time, Maslow observed that these individuals had a deep sense of who they were and what they wanted to contribute to the world.

This created a deep paradox for Maslow: How could so many of his self-actualizing individuals simultaneously have such a strong identity and actualization of their potential, yet also be so *selfless*? In a 1961 paper, Maslow observed that self-actualization seems to be a "transitional goal, a

rite of passage, a step along the path to the transcendence of identity. This is like saying its function is to erase itself."[3]

Maslow believed that striving toward self-actualization—by developing a strong sense of self and having one's basic needs met—was a crucial step along this path. As he wrote in his 1962 book *Toward a Psychology of Being*: "Self-actualization . . . paradoxically makes more possible the transcendence of self, and of self-consciousness and of selfishness."[4] Maslow observed that self-actualization makes it *easier* to merge as a part of a larger whole. Maslow's lectures, unpublished essays, and private personal journal entries make clear that he became preoccupied with this paradox of transcendence in the last few years of his life.

On September 14, 1967, Maslow delivered a riveting lecture at the San Francisco Unitarian Church titled "The Farther Reaches of Human Nature."[5] Those who were in attendance remarked that he looked frail and weak as he walked down the aisle to reach the podium at the front of the room. However, once he started speaking, he immediately lit up the room. "It is increasingly clear that a philosophical revolution is underway," he began. "A comprehensive system is swiftly developing like a fruit tree beginning to bear fruit on every branch. Every field of science and human endeavor is being affected."

Referring to the "Humanistic Revolution," Maslow explained that humanistic psychology is beginning to unearth the mysteries of "real human experiences, needs, goals, and values." This includes our "higher needs," which are also part of the human essence, and include the need for love, for friendship, for dignity, for self-respect, for individuality, and for self-fulfillment. After pausing for a moment, he took a bold next step:

> If, however, these needs are fulfilled, a different picture emerges. . . . The fully developed (and very fortunate) human being working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his self. They are not selfish anymore in the old sense of that term. Beauty is not within one's skin nor is justice or order. One can hardly class these desires as selfish in the sense that my desire for food might be. My satisfaction with achieving or allowing justice is not within my own

> skin; it does not lie along my arteries. It is equally outside and inside: therefore, it has transcended the geographical limitations of the self.[6]

Maslow was working with great urgency on this idea. Just a few months after this speech, however, he suffered a coronary heart attack, revealing the source of his frailty during his lecture. He survived, but he said he suddenly felt less urgency. This confused him because it seemed to contradict his original theory, in which he argued that physical survival is the most important human need. In a journal entry dated March 28, 1970, he wrote:

> That's weird—that I should be enabled to perceive, accept, & *enjoy* the eternity & preciousness of the non-me world just because I became aware of my own mortality. The "being able to enjoy" is puzzling.[7]

Instead of falling all the way down to the bottom of his hierarchy, the awareness of his mortality actually *heightened* his own personal experience of transcendence. Noting a significant shift in values, Maslow observed: "The dominance hierarchy, the competitiveness and glory, certainly become foolish. There is certainly a shifting of values about what's basic and what's not basic, what's important and what's not important. I think if it were possible for us to die and be resurrected, it might then be possible for more people to have this post-mortem life."[8]

In his last major public seminar just a few months prior to his death, Maslow elaborated: "It's quite clear that we are always suffering from this cloud that hangs over us, the fear of death. If you can transcend the fear of death, which is possible—if I could now assure you of a dignified death instead of an undignified one, of a gracious, reconciled, philosophical death . . . your life today, at this moment, would change. And the rest of your life would change. Every moment would change. I think we can teach this transcending of the ego."[9]

During the last few years of his life, Maslow was working on a series of exercises to transcend the ego and live more regularly in the "B-realm"—the realm of "pure Being." He was also working on a comprehensive psychology and philosophy of human nature and society. In a journal entry dated December 26, 1967, just as he was leaving the hospital after his heart attack, Maslow wrote:

> New worries about the journals. What to do with them? The way I feel now, I just don't feel up to writing all the things I feel I ought to, the world needs, my duties. Wouldn't *mind* dying as a result, but I just don't have the stamina to *do* them. So the thought is save it all in little memos in these journals & the right person to come will know what I mean & why it *must* be done.[10]

On that warm, sunny day in Menlo Park, on June 8, 1970, Maslow put down his notepad, and with great frustration, he got up to do his daily exercise. He did not want to leave his work, even for a second. As he slowly started to jog, his wife, Bertha, wondered why he seemed to be moving in such an odd way.[11] Just as she was about to ask whether he was all right, Maslow collapsed. By the time she rushed to his side, Maslow was dead at the age of sixty-two, with so much of his work left unrealized.

ABOUT THIS BOOK

Maslow is destined, in my view, to be rediscovered many times before the richness of his thought is fully assimilated.

—**Irvin D. Yalom, *Existential Psychotherapy* (1980)**

The typical textbook version of Maslow's hierarchy of needs is seriously inaccurate as a reflection of Maslow's later formulation of theory. . . . The time has come to rewrite the textbooks.

—**Mark E. Koltko-Rivera, "Rediscovering the Later Version of Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs" (2006)**

When I discovered Maslow's later writings, sprinkled throughout a collection of unpublished essays, journal entries, personal correspondences, and lectures, I immediately felt a deep resonance with his thinking and vision, and deep admiration and affection for his life and work.

After listening to one particular lecture of Maslow's, I now even count him as a friend. One evening, while sitting on my bed listening to a series of public lectures he gave at the Esalen Institute in 1969, I was struck by his answer to a question from an audience member: "How do you define the word 'friendship'?"[12] Maslow began by defining a friend as someone who is truly "need-gratifying" and whose needs you want to gratify in return. He then defined the friendship of lovers as one where each other's needs melt into one, as the partner's needs become your needs.

But it's what Maslow said next that really got to me: "At a higher level . . . then something else happens that it's possible for me to feel very friendly, as I do, to count among my friends Abraham Lincoln, Socrates . . . Spinoza, I have great affection for Spinoza, great respect. At another level, corresponding to love or admiration or respect for the being of the other person. . . . It could be said that I have love for William James, which I do. I am very fond of William James. It happens sometimes, I talk about him in such an affectionate way, that people ask me, 'Did you know him?' [To which I reply,] 'Yes.' [Audience laughs.] 'Which [of course] I couldn't have.'"

My career as a psychologist—and my personal approach to life—has been profoundly shaped by Maslow's thinking and by the thinking of an entire generation of humanistic thinkers from the 1930s to the late 1960s, including Alfred Adler, Charlotte Bühler, Viktor Frankl, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Rollo May, and Carl Rogers. Their combined wisdom about essential human concerns—security, commitment, love, growth, meaning, authenticity, freedom, responsibility, justice, courage, creativity, and spirituality—is just as relevant today, if not more so. We live in times of increasing polarization, selfish concerns, and individualistic pursuits of power.[13]

Humanistic psychology sings to my own deepest being and resonates with my belief that to help people reach their full potential, we need to take into account the *whole person*. I have spent the past twenty years studying all kinds of minds,[14] from those who struggle with learning differences such as autism, dyslexia, ADHD, and generalized anxiety but who nonetheless have substantial talents, passions, and creativity; to prodigies with the normal social interests and playfulness of children but who also have an intense rage to master in a specific domain; to savants who have extraordinary dysfunction (e.g., have difficulty speaking) coupled with incredible skills (e.g., painting, playing the piano); to intellectually precocious youth who often feel isolated and awkward in school but who are ready and eager to master material many grade levels ahead of their peers; to adults with extremely high levels of narcissism who, though impeded by their intense self-absorption, have many other facets of themselves that want to be actualized.[15]

In my career it has become clear that the more we have limiting notions of potential that are dictated by others (schoolteachers, parents, managers, etc.), the more blind we become to the full potential of each and every unique individual and their own unique path to self-actualization and transcendence. My research has convinced me that we all have extraordinary creative, humanitarian, and spiritual possibilities but are often alienated from them because we are so focused on a very narrow slice of who we are. As a result, we aren't fulfilling our full potential. We spend so much time looking *outward* for validation that we don't develop the incredible strengths that already lie *within*, and we rarely take the time to fulfill our deepest needs in the most growth-oriented and integrated fashion.

Indeed, so many people today are striving for "transcendence" without a healthy integration of their other needs—to the detriment of their full potential. This ranges from people who expect a mindfulness retreat or yoga class to be a panacea for their traumas and deep insecurities, to spiritual "gurus" abusing their positions of power, to the many instances of vulnerable people (especially vulnerable young people) seeking unhealthy outlets for transcendence, such as violent extremism, cults, and gangs.

We also see this at play among the many divisions we see in the world today. While there is a yearning to be part of a larger political or religious ideology, the realization of this yearning is often built on hate and hostility for the "other," rather than on pride and deep commitment for a cause that can better humanity. In essence, there is a lot of pseudo-transcendence going on, resting on a "very shaky foundation."[16]

I have written this book to reinvigorate the wise, profound, and essentially human insights of humanistic psychology with the latest scientific

findings from a wide range of fields—including positive psychology, social psychology, evolutionary psychology, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, personality psychology, organizational psychology, sociology, cybernetics, and neuroscience. The integration of a wide variety of perspectives is necessary for a more complete understanding of the full depths of human potential, as too much focus on a single perspective runs the risk of giving a distorted view of human nature. As Maslow said, "I suppose it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail."[17]

In this book, I will attempt to flesh out Maslow's outlines on the highest reaches of humanity, unravel the mysteries of his later writings, and integrate the corpus of ideas put forward in the humanistic psychology era with the wealth of scientific findings that have accumulated since then on the higher reaches of human nature, including my own research on intelligence, creativity, personality, and well-being. Throughout this book, I'll highlight the human potential for truth seeking, beauty, connection, exploration, love, flow, creativity, purpose, gratitude, awe, and other transcendent experiences that are deeply embedded in the fabric of human nature. I will also help you recognize and reflect on your most *unmet* needs, so that you can make concrete changes in your life to come closer to wholeness and transcendence in your daily life.

While this book is about our higher possibilities, I wholeheartedly believe that the best way to move toward greater growth and transcendence is not by ignoring the inevitability of human suffering but by *integrating everything that is within you*. This requires penetrating the depths of your being with piercing awareness with the intent of experiencing the full richness of human existence. This is very much in line with Maslow's call for a "Being-Psychology," which incorporates a full understanding of human needs that transcends the "psychopathology of the average" but also "incorporate[s] all its findings in a more inclusive and comprehensive structure which includes both the sick and the healthy, both deficiency, Becoming and Being."[18]

Too many people today are feeling deeply unfulfilled in our chaotic and divided world, which encourages the pursuit of money, power, greatness, even happiness, as the pinnacles of humanity. Yet despite climbing

the status hierarchy and achieving monetary feelings of success, or even experiencing momentary feelings of happiness, we are still left feeling deeply unsatisfied, yearning for deeper connections with others and with our own fragmented selves. The social psychologist and humanistic philosopher Erich Fromm was quite right that there is an art of being.[19] But now there is also a *science* of being.

This book will present an update on Maslow's hierarchy of needs that is grounded in the latest science and provides a useful framework for making sense of your patterns of behavior and how your current way of being may be hindering your growth and transcendence. The aim is to help you boldly and honestly face who you are head on, so that you can become the person you really want to become. You'll find insights you can put into action in your own life. In the appendices I've presented even more practical exercises and ideas. And to deepen your quest further, go to *self actualizationtests.com* for online tests to help you gain deeper insight into your personality patterns so that you can help realize the best version of yourself.

Throughout the book, I hope to show you greater possibilities for yourself and the human species than you ever realized was possible. It turns out that self-actualization is only part of the journey; I'll help take you all the way.

Introduction: A New Hierarchy of Needs

There is now emerging over the horizon a new conception of human sickness and of human health, a psychology that I find so thrilling and so full of wonderful possibilities.

—**Abraham Maslow,** ***Toward a Psychology of Being*** **(1962)**

Through his research on self-actualizing people, Maslow discovered that those who are reaching the full heights of their humanity tend to possess the characteristics most of us seek in life; they tend to be altruistic, creative, open, authentic, accepting, independent, and brave. However, Maslow did not prescribe that one *must* be this way. Instead, it was his belief that if society can create the conditions to satisfy one's basic needs—including the freedom to speak honestly and openly, to grow and develop one's unique capacities and passions, and to live in societies with fairness and justice—what naturally and organically emerges tends to be the characteristics that resemble the *best* in humanity.

Maslow viewed the role of the teacher, therapist, and parent as horticulturists, whose task is to "enable people to become healthy and effective *in their own style*."[1] To Maslow, this meant that "we try to make a rose into a good rose, rather than seek to change roses into lilies. . . . It necessitates a pleasure in the self-actualization of a person who may be quite different from yourself. It even implies an ultimate respect and acknowledgement of the sacredness and uniqueness of each kind of person."

Maslow was passionate about the need for a "Being-Psychology"—a field that involves the systematic investigation of ends rather than means—*end-experiences* (such as wonder, laughter, and connection), *end-values* (such

as beauty, truth, and justice), *end-cognitions* (such as efficient perception of reality and newness of appreciation), *end-goals* (such as having an ultimate concern or purpose), and with *treating people as ends unto themselves*, not means to an end (what Maslow referred to as "Being-Love," or "B-Love" for short). Maslow's call for a Being-Psychology—which he also sometimes referred to as "positive psychology"[2] or "orthopsychology"—was in response to a psychology focused more on "not-having rather than having," "striving rather than fulfillment," "frustration rather than gratification," "seeking joy rather than having attained joy," and "trying to get there rather than being there."[3]

Maslow was not alone. Between 1930 and 1970, a group of like-minded thinkers arose—including Alfred Adler, James Bugental, Charlotte Bühler, Arthur Combs, Viktor Frankl, Erich Fromm, Eugene Gendlin, Karen Horney, Sidney Jourard, Jim Klee, R. D. Laing, Rollo May, Clark Moustakas, Carl Rogers, Donald Snygg, and Anthony Sutich—who all saw the limitations of the experimental psychology, behaviorism, and Freudian psychoanalysis of the day. These disciplines, they felt, did not do justice to the individual as a whole; they left behind humanity's immense potential for creativity, spirituality, and humanitarianism. Referring to themselves as the Third Force, they attempted to integrate the insights of the more traditional perspectives while exploring "what it means to be fully experientially human and how that understanding illuminates the fulfilled or vital life."[4]

Eventually, the Third Force psychologists became known as the "humanistic psychologists," and the field was officially created when Maslow and Anthony Sutich launched *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* in 1961. Today, there exist a number of psychotherapists and researchers explicitly working within the humanistic psychology tradition (many of them refer to themselves as "existential-humanistic" psychotherapists),[5] and there remains a strong emphasis on such humanistic themes as authenticity, awareness, compassionate social action, societal and ecological conditions most conducive to growth, spirituality, self-transcendence, integration, wholeness, and embracing the inherent struggles and paradoxes of human existence.[6] Within the humanistic psychology framework, the healthy personality is considered one that constantly moves toward freedom, responsibility, self-awareness, meaning, commitment, personal growth, maturity, integration, and change, rather than one that predominantly strives for status, achievement, or even happiness.[7]

In the late nineties, psychologist Martin Seligman galvanized the field of positive psychology in order to generate more rigorous scientific research on well-being and what "makes life worth living."[8] Today, humanistic psychologists and positive psychologists share a desire to understand and foster healthy motivation and healthy living.[9,10] The following thirteen sources of well-being have been rigorously studied over the past forty years, and each one can be reached in your own style:[11]

Sources of Well-Being

- *More positive emotions* (higher frequency and intensity of positive moods and emotions, such as contentment, laughter, and joy, in one's daily life)
- *Fewer negative emotions* (lower frequency and intensity of negative moods and emotions, such as sadness, anxiety, fear, and anger, in one's daily life)
- *Life satisfaction* (a positive subjective evaluation of one's life overall)
- *Vitality* (a positive subjective sense of physical health and energy)
- *Environmental mastery* (the ability to shape environments to suit one's needs and desires; to feel in control of one's life; to not feel overwhelmed by the demands and responsibilities of everyday life)
- *Positive relationships* (feeling loved, supported, and valued by others; having warm and trusting interpersonal relationships; being loving and generous to others)
- *Self-acceptance* (positive attitudes toward self; a sense of self-worth; liking and respecting oneself)
- *Mastery* (feelings of competence in accomplishing challenging tasks; a sense of effectiveness in accomplishing important goals one has set for oneself)

- *Autonomy* (feeling independent, free to make one's own choices in life, and able to resist social pressures)
- *Personal growth* (continually seeking development and improvement, rather than seeking achievement of a fixed state)
- *Engagement in life* (being absorbed, interested, and involved in one's daily activities and life)
- *Purpose and meaning in life* (a sense that one's life matters, is valuable, and is worth living; a clear sense of direction and meaning in one's efforts; a connection to something greater than oneself)
- *Transcendent experiences* (experiences of awe, flow, inspiration, and gratitude in daily life)

Note that many of these sources of well-being go beyond stereotypical notions of happiness. Becoming fully human is about living a full existence, not one that is continually happy. Being well is not always about feeling good; it also involves continually incorporating more meaning, engagement, and growth in one's life—key themes in humanistic psychology.

In this introduction, I will present a new hierarchy of human needs for the twenty-first century that is in line with the spirit of humanistic psychology but is also grounded in the latest science of personality, self-actualization, human development, and well-being. I believe the new hierarchy of needs can serve as a useful organizing framework for the field of psychology as well as a useful guide for your own personal journey of health, growth, and transcendence.

But first there are a number of common misconceptions about Maslow's hierarchy of needs that we must dispel at once.

LIFE IS NOT A VIDEO GAME

Maslow's theory of needs is often presented as a lockstep progression, as though once we satisfy one set of needs, we're done forever with concerning ourselves with the satisfaction of that need. As if life were a video

game and once we complete one level—say, safety—some voice from above says, "Congrats, now you've unlocked belonging!," never to return to the prior need in the hierarchy. This is a gross misrepresentation of Maslow's theory, as well as the spirit of Maslow's overall body of work. While rarely acknowledged as one, Maslow was actually a developmental psychologist at heart.[12]

Maslow emphasized that we are always in a state of becoming and that one's "inner core" consists merely of "potentialities, not final actualizations" that are "weak, subtle, and delicate, very easily drowned out by learning, by cultural expectations, by fear, by disapproval, etc.," and which can all too easily become forgotten, neglected, unused, overlooked, unverbalized, or suppressed.[13] Maslow made it clear that human maturation is an ongoing process and that growth is "not a sudden, salatory phenomenon" but is often two steps forward and one step back.[14]

An underdiscussed aspect of Maslow's theory is that his hierarchy of needs serves as an organizing framework for different states of mind—ways of looking at the world and at others. Maslow argued that, when deprived, each need is associated with its own distinctive world outlook, philosophy, and outlook on the future:

> Another peculiar characteristic of the human organism when it is dominated by a certain need is that the whole philosophy of the future tends also to change. For our chronically and extremely hungry man, Utopia can be defined simply as a place where there is plenty of food. He tends to think that, if only he is guaranteed food for the rest of his life, he will be perfectly happy and will never want anything more. Life itself tends to be defined in terms of eating. Anything else will be defined as unimportant. Freedom, love, community feeling, respect, philosophy, may all be waved aside as fripperies that are useless, since they fail to fill the stomach. Such a man may fairly be said to live by bread alone.[15]

While Maslow often relied on extreme examples such as these, he was also quick to point out that most people "are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time."[16] He was insistent that "any behavior tends to be determined by

several or *all* of the basic needs simultaneously rather than by only one of them," and that any one of us at any moment in time can return to a particular state of mind depending on the deprivation of the need.[17]

Another common misconception is that the needs are isolated from one another or don't depend on one another in any meaningful way. Again, this couldn't be further from what Maslow's theory *actually* stated: "[The human needs] are arranged in an integrated hierarchy rather than dichotomously, that is, they rest one upon another. . . . This means that the process of regression to lower needs remains always as a possibility, and in this context must be seen *not* only as pathological or sick, but as absolutely necessary to the integrity of the whole organism, and as prerequisite to the existence and functioning of the 'higher needs.'"[18]

The English humanistic psychotherapist John Rowan used the analogy of Russian nesting dolls to illustrate Maslow's notion of an integrated hierarchy: each larger doll includes all the smaller dolls but also transcends them.[19] Once we are working on our highest purpose, for instance, our needs for safety, connection, or self-esteem don't vanish; instead, they become *integrated* with our more transcendent purpose. When the whole person is well-integrated, all of their basic needs are not merely met but work together to facilitate growth toward realizing their highest goals and values.

Another implication here is that if you try to grow too soon without a healthy integration of your insecurities and deprivations, the growth is less likely to reach its full height. Listening to a meditation app for a few minutes once a week or doing the downward-facing dog yoga pose every morning won't magically give you a deep sense of self-worth and connection with others. Again, Maslow viewed development as often involving a two-steps-forward, one-step-back dynamic,[20] in which we are continually returning to our basic needs to draw strength, learn from our hardships, and work toward greater integration of our whole being.

Maslow never actually created a pyramid to represent his hierarchy of needs.

Modern-day presentations of Maslow's theory often leave out this critical notion of an integrated hierarchy and instead focus on the stage-like pyramid—even though in his published writings *Maslow never actually created a pyramid to represent his hierarchy of needs.*[21,22] Todd Bridgman and his colleagues examined in detail how the pyramid came to be and concluded that "Maslow's Pyramid" was actually created by a management consultant in the sixties. From there, it quickly became popular in the emerging field of organization behavior. Bridgman and his colleagues note that the pyramid resonated with the "prevailing [post-war] ideologies of individualism, nationalism and capitalism in America and justified a growing managerialism in bureaucratic (i.e., layered triangular) formats."[23]

Unfortunately, the continual reproduction of the pyramid in management textbooks had the unfortunate consequence of reducing Maslow's rich and nuanced intellectual contributions to a parody and has betrayed the actual spirit of Maslow's notion of self-actualization as realizing one's creative potential for humanitarian ends.[24] As Bridgman and his colleagues noted, "Inspiring the study of management and its relationship to creativity and the pursuit of the common good would be a much more empowering legacy to Maslow than a simplistic, 5-step, one-way pyramid."[25]

Finally, there is a common misconception that Maslow's theory didn't allow for cross-cultural variation or individual differences. However, Maslow acknowledged that not only can our basic needs ebb and flow in salience across a person's lifetime, but there can also be significant cultural and individual differences in the order in which people satisfy their basic needs.[26] For instance, a number of societies that lack important resources for security and health—such as a war-torn society where there is real danger and fear on a regular basis—will certainly be focused more on the basic necessities of survival. Even so, such societies can supply, to a certain extent, a sense of community, respect, and the opportunities to develop skills and talents. As the consultant Susan Fowler notes, "People are 'self-actualizing' all over the place."[27] Addressing real structural inequalities around the world is absolutely *essential* to giving everyone opportunities to self-actualize and transcend, but this does not mean that people must wait

We can work on multiple needs simultaneously.

to work toward a deeper sense of fulfillment until more security-related needs are met. We can work on multiple needs simultaneously.

Even *within a society*, people differ in what needs they are most motivated to pursue due to a combination of temperament and environmental experiences. For instance, some people are consistently more interested in forming deeper connections with others, whereas others are more consistently driven by accolades and the respect of others. And even *within individuals*, our needs are likely to change in importance as we mature and develop. Again, the key here is change and growth.

While the precise ordering of Maslow's hierarchy of needs has shown to vary by culture, from person to person, and even within a person's own lifetime, there is one core aspect of Maslow's hierarchy that *has* stood up remarkably well to modern scientific scrutiny. Let's take a look at that now.

DEFICIENCY VS. GROWTH

While most people focus on the triangular arrangement of the needs, Maslow actually emphasized a different feature of the hierarchy. Maslow argued that all the needs can be grouped into two main classes of needs, which must be integrated for wholeness: deficiency and growth.

Deficiency needs, which Maslow referred to as "D-needs," are motivated by a lack of satisfaction, whether it's the lack of food, safety, affection, belonging, or self-esteem. The "D-realm" of existence colors all of our perceptions and distorts reality, making demands on a person's whole being: "Feed me! Love me! Respect me!"[28] The greater the deficiency of these needs, the more we distort reality to fit our expectations and treat others in accordance with their usefulness in helping us satisfy our most deficient needs. In the D-realm, we are also more likely to use a variety of defense mechanisms to protect ourselves from the pain of having such deficiency in our lives. Our defenses are quite "wise" in the sense that they can help us to avoid unbearable pain that can feel like too much to bear at the moment.

Nevertheless, Maslow argued that the growth needs—such as self-actualization and transcendence—have a very different sort of wisdom associated with them. Distinguishing between "defensive-wisdom" and "growth-wisdom," Maslow argued that the Being-Realm of existence (or

B-realm, for short) is like replacing a clouded lens with a clear one. Instead of being driven by fears, anxieties, suspicions, and the constant need to make demands on reality, one is more accepting and loving of oneself and others. Seeing reality more clearly, growth-wisdom is more about "What choices will lead me to greater integration and wholeness?" rather than "How can I defend myself so that I can feel safe and secure?"[29]

From an evolutionary point of view, it makes sense that our safety and security concerns, as well as our desires for short-lived hedonic pleasures, would make greater demands on our attention than our desire to grow as a whole person. As the journalist and author Robert Wright put it in his book *Why Buddhism Is True,* "The human brain was designed—by natural selection—to mislead us, even enslave us."[30] All that our genes "care" about is getting propagated into the next generation, no matter the cost to the development of the whole person. If this involves narrowing our worldview and causing us to have outsize reactions to the world that aren't actually in line with reality, so be it.

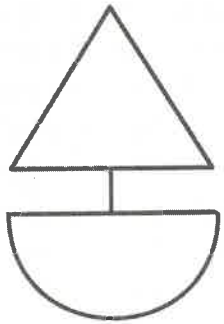
However, such a narrowing of worldview runs the risk of inhibiting a fuller understanding of the world and ourselves. Despite the many challenges to growth, Maslow believed we are all capable of self-actualization, even if most of us do not self-actualize because we spend most of our lives motivated by deficiency. Maslow's emphasis on the dialectical nature of safety and growth is strikingly consistent with current research and theorizing in the fields of personality psychology, cybernetics, and artificial intelligence. There is a general consensus that optimal functioning of the whole system (whether humans, primates, or machines) requires both stability of goal pursuit in the face of distraction and disruption as well as the capacity for flexibility to adapt and explore the environment.[31]

Recognizing that security and growth are the two foundations necessary for becoming a whole person, including healthy transcendence, it's time for a *new* metaphor.

A NEW METAPHOR

The pyramid from the sixties told a story that Maslow never meant to tell; a story of achievement, of mastering level by level until you've "won" the

game of life. But that is most definitely not the spirit of self-actualization that the humanistic psychologists emphasized. The human condition isn't a competition; it's an experience. Life isn't a trek up a summit but a journey to travel through—a vast blue ocean, full of new opportunities for meaning and discovery but also danger and uncertainty. In this choppy surf, a clunky pyramid is of little use. Instead, what is needed is something a bit more functional. We'll need a *sailboat*.



As we sail through the adventure of life, it's rarely clear sailing. The boat itself protects us from seas that are rarely as calm as we'd like. Each plank of the boat offers security from the waves. Without it, we'd surely spend all our energy trying to stay above water. While even one plank is better than nothing, the bigger the boat, the more waves you can endure. Likewise in life, while safety is an essential foundation for feeling secure, adding on strong connections with others and feelings of respect and worthiness will further allow you to weather the storms.

Having a secure boat is not enough for real movement, however. You also need a sail. Without a sail, you might be protected from water, but you wouldn't go anywhere. Each level of the sail allows you to capture more wind, helping you explore and adapt to your environment.

Note that you don't "climb" a sailboat like you'd climb a mountain or a pyramid. Instead, you *open* your sail, just like you'd drop your defenses once you felt secure enough. This is an ongoing dynamic: you can be open and spontaneous one minute but can feel threatened enough to prepare for the storm by closing yourself to the world the next minute. The more you continually open yourself to the world, however, the further your boat will go and the more you can benefit from the people and opportunities around you. And if you're truly fortunate, you can even enter ecstatic moments of peak experience—where you are really catching the wind. In these moments, not only have you temporarily forgotten your insecurities, but you are growing so much that you are helping to raise the tide for all the other sailboats simply by making your way through the ocean. In this way, the sailboat isn't a pinnacle but a whole *vehicle*, helping us to explore the world and people around us, growing and transcending as we do.

OPENING YOUR SAIL

Just what are the metaphorical components of the boat that ultimately provide the vehicle for transcendence? The needs that comprise the boat itself are safety, connection, and self-esteem. These three needs work as a whole dynamic system, and the severe thwarting of any aspect of the whole can have profound effects on the rest of the system. Under good conditions, the security needs work together to spiral upward toward greater security and stability, but under unfavorable conditions, they can lead to profound insecurity and instability—causing us to get stuck in our journey as we focus our attention on defending ourselves. Unfortunately, too many people get caught up in insecurity throughout their lives, and stay there, missing out on the immense beauty in the world that is still left to explore and the possibilities for their own self-actualization and, ultimately, transcendence. We miss the ocean for the waves.

What about the sail? The sail represents *growth*. While growth lies at the heart of self-actualization, one fair criticism of the term "self-actualization" is that it is a vague hodgepodge of characteristics and motives lumped together under a single umbrella.[32] Maslow recognized this, and in his later writings, he preferred the term "fully human" to capture what he was really trying to get at.

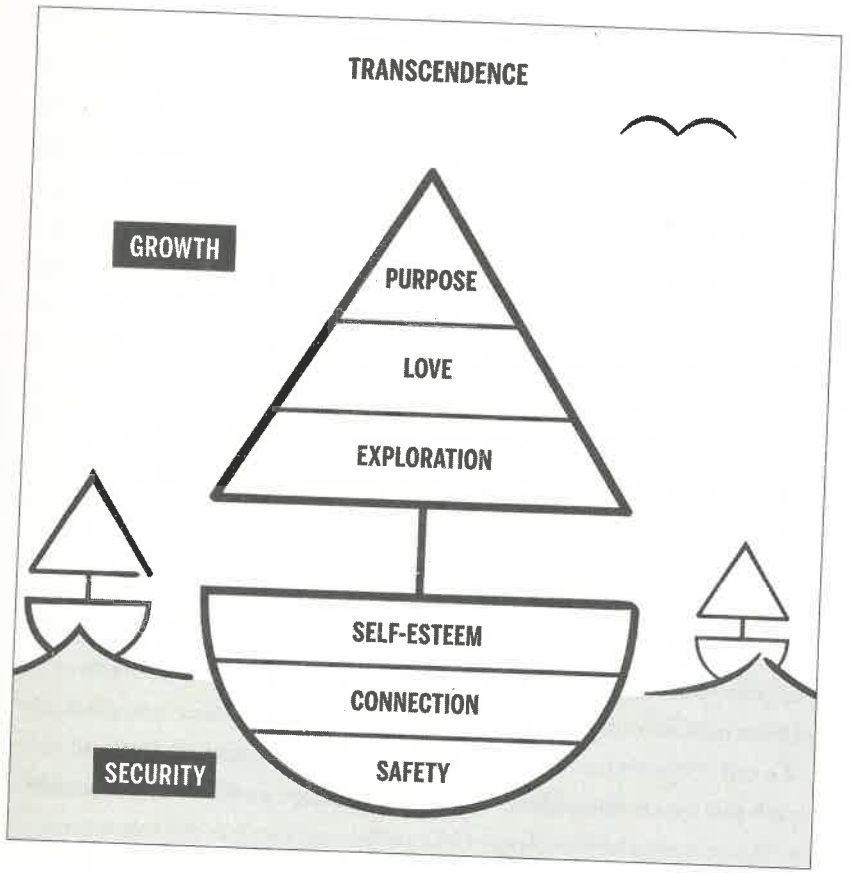
To help clarify this point, I have broken self-actualization—and therefore growth—into three specific needs for which there is strong contem-

porary scientific support: exploration, love, and purpose. I believe that these three needs capture the essence of how Maslow really conceptualized self-actualization. Further, I believe these three needs cannot be reduced to the security needs, or completely reduced to one another (although they can build on one another). These three needs work together synergistically to help us grow as a whole person. Under favorable conditions, the satisfaction of these needs helps us move toward greater health, wholeness, and transcendence. Under unfavorable conditions, we become preoccupied with safety and security and neglect our possibilities for growth.

At the base of growth is the spirit of *exploration*, the fundamental biological drive that all growth needs to have as its foundation. Exploration is the desire to seek out and make sense of novel, challenging, and uncertain events.[33] While security is primarily concerned with defense and protection, exploration is primarily motivated by curiosity, discovery, openness, expansion, understanding, and the creation of new opportunities for growth and development. The other needs that comprise growth—love and purpose—can build on the fundamental need for exploration to reach higher levels of integration within oneself and to contribute something meaningful to the world.

I believe the drive for exploration is the core motive underlying self-actualization and cannot be completely reduced to any of the other needs, including our evolved drives for affiliation, status, parenting, and mates. While I do agree with evolutionary psychologist Douglas Kenrick and colleagues that the hierarchy of needs can be built on an evolutionary foundation, I believe the need for exploration deserves a place at the evolutionary table all on its own.[34]

Finally, at the top of the new hierarchy of needs is the *need for transcendence*, which goes beyond individual growth (and even health and happiness) and allows for the highest levels of unity and harmony within oneself and with the world. Transcendence, which rests on a secure foundation of both security and growth, is a perspective in which we can view our whole being from a higher vantage point with acceptance, wisdom, and a sense of connectedness with the rest of humanity.



ALL AT SEA[35]

Life comes from physical survival; but the good life comes from what we care about.

—Rollo May, *Love & Will* (1969)

The new hierarchy of needs that I present in this book is fundamentally human. Yes, we are apes, but we are apes insatiably curious about personal identity, creative expression, meaning, and purpose. Humans have developed a capacity for growth unprecedented in the animal kingdom. We are truly unique in the long time scale of our goals and in the flexibility to choose which goals we most wish to prioritize, and therefore in the

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> ...e that there is something more than the usual ...straints, when you think of the Skeeball Champion of ...We don't have monkeys who are Skeeball champions. ...freedom to select various goals and to invent new goals. ...rtainly tie them back to certain evolved motives, but you ...st list the individual's evolved adaptations and from there be able ...gure out what the range of human beings' possible behaviors is ...ing to be. We have to be able to give people the freedom to choose from a very large menu of possible goals and pursuits and, even more than that, freedom to invent new ones.[36]

Of course, we do share many drives with other animals, and understanding the panoply of evolved psychological mechanisms is a very worthy goal.[37] However, it's notable that no other animal has existential crises quite to the extent that we do. In *The Sane Society,* Erich Fromm argued that the human condition involves the fundamental tension between our common nature with other animals and our uniquely developed capacities for self-awareness, reason, and imagination. As Fromm notes, "The problem of man's existence, then, is unique in the whole of nature; he has fallen out of nature, as it were, and is still in it; he is partly divine, partly animal; partly infinite, partly finite."[38]

To use the sailboat metaphor, while we each travel in our own direction, *we're all sailing the vast unknown of the sea.* Human existence comes with conditions that are sometimes hard to swallow and difficult to comprehend, but there is something comforting about the fact that we all exist together and have to confront the same existential dilemmas. As one patient told existential psychotherapist Irvin Yalom, "Even though you're alone in your boat, it's always comforting to see the lights of the other boats bobbing nearby."[39] Here are the four "givens of existence" that Yalom argues all humans must reconcile:

While we each travel in our own direction, we're all sailing the vast unknown of the sea.

(1) Death: the inherent tension between wanting to continue to exist and self-actualize and the inevitability of perishing,
(2) Freedom: the inherent conflict between the seeming randomness of the universe and the heavy burden of responsibility that comes with the freedom to choose one's own destiny,
(3) Isolation: the inherent tension between, on the one hand, wanting to connect deeply and profoundly with other human beings and be part of a larger whole and, on the other hand, never fully being able to do so, always remaining existentially alone, and
(4) Meaninglessness: the tension between being thrown into an indifferent universe that often seems to have no inherent meaning and yet wanting to find some sort of purpose for our own individual existence in the incomprehensibly short time we live on the planet.[40]

Therefore, the new hierarchy of needs is not only a theory of human nature but is ultimately a theory of *human existence.* Unearthing the evolved tendencies and instincts of humans is very important, and I will do so throughout this book. But I'm ultimately interested in what makes human life valuable and significant to the individuals *who are actually living it.* This book is not only about the parts of our evolutionary heritage but also about how each and every one of us can *transcend* our parts—becoming

something greater than the sum of our parts as we each deal with the givens of existence in our own style.

THE GOOD LIFE

I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man's life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience.

—Martin Buber, as quoted in Aubrey Hodes, *Martin Buber: An Intimate Portrait* (1971)

"No one can build you the bridge on which you, and only you, must cross the river of life. There may be countless trails and bridges and demigods who would gladly carry you across; but only at the price of pawning and forgoing yourself. There is one path in the world that none can walk but you. Where does it lead? Don't ask, walk!" . . . It is . . . an agonizing, hazardous undertaking thus to dig into oneself, to climb down roughly and directly into the tunnels of one's being.

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *Schopenhauer as Educator* (1874)

The vision of the good life I present in this book isn't one that is typically touted these days. It's not one where the primary motivation is money, power, social status, or even happiness. Instead, the good life that I present, which is deeply grounded in the core principles of humanistic psychology and a realistic understanding of human needs, is about the healthy expression of needs in the service of discovering and expressing a self that works best for *you*.

The good life is not something you will ever achieve. It's a way of living. As Carl Rogers noted, "The good life is a *process*, not a state of being. It is a direction, not a destination."[41] This process won't always bring feelings of happiness, contentment, and bliss, and it may even sometimes cause pain and heartache. It's not for the "faint-hearted," as Rogers

notes, as it requires continually stretching outside your comfort zone as you realize more and more of your potentialities and launch yourself "fully into the stream of life."[42] Just like it takes courage to open your sail on a sailboat and see where the winds will take you, it takes a lot of courage to become the best version of yourself.[43]

Nevertheless, if you stick with it, you are sure to live a richer life, one that is better characterized by adjectives such as "enriching," "exciting," "rewarding," "challenging," "creative," "meaningful," "intense," and "awe-inspiring." I believe in the fundamental capacity of humans for growth. No matter your current personality or circumstance, I believe that this book can help you grow in precisely the direction you truly want to grow, in your own style, and in such a way that allows you to show the universe that you really existed, and benefited others, while you were here.

Let's begin the process of becoming.