



WHAT A MAN CAN BE, HE MUST BE

ABRAHAM MASLOW (1908–1970)

IN CONTEXT

APPROACH

Humanist psychology

BEFORE

1920s Alfred Adler claims there is only one motivating force behind all our behavior and experience: the striving for perfection.

1935 Henry Murray develops the Thematic Apperception Test, which measures personality and motivation.

AFTER

1950s Kurt Goldstein defines self-actualization as the tendency to actualize, as much as possible, the organism's individual capacities, and proclaims that the drive to self-actualize is the only drive that determines the life of an individual.

1974 Fritz Perls says that every living thing "has only one inborn goal—to actualize itself as it is."

Throughout recorded history, questions have been posed about why we are here, and what the purpose is of our lives. Underlying these questions is a need to identify what will make us truly satisfied, and a confusion about how to find it. Psychoanalysts would claim that the fulfillment of innate biological drives leads toward satisfaction, and behaviorists would describe the importance of meeting physiological needs with food, sleep, and sex, but the new wave of psychotherapeutic thought in the early to mid-20th century believed that the path to inner fulfillment was much more complex.

One of the main proponents of this new approach to the problem was Abraham Maslow, a psychotherapist who is considered one of the founders of the humanist movement in psychology. He examined human experience by looking at the things that are most important to us: love, hope, faith, spirituality, individuality, and existence. One of the most crucial aspects of his theories was that in order to reach the most highly developed state of consciousness and realize the greatest potential,

an individual must discover his true purpose in life and pursue it. Maslow refers to this ultimate state of being as self-actualization.

Toward self-actualization

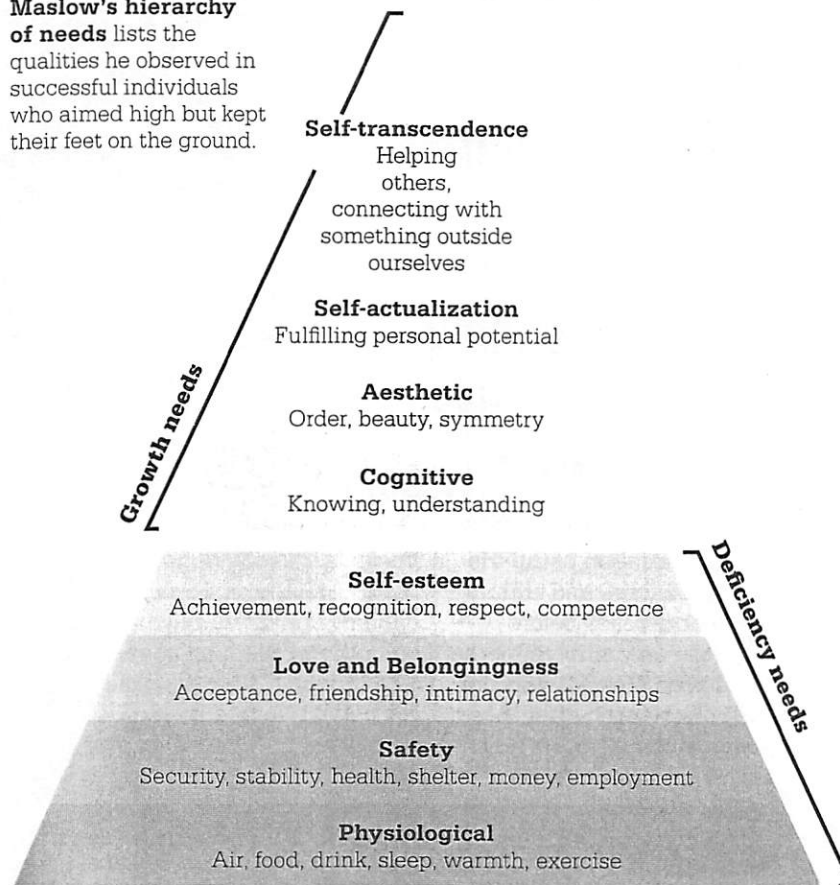
Maslow created a highly structured plan to explain the path of human motivation, defining the steps that humans need to follow as they move toward self-actualization. His famous Hierarchy of Needs, which is often drawn as a pyramid, positions the most basic needs at the base and each of the other essential requirements for a fulfilled life in groups on top.

Maslow's hierarchy is split into two distinct sections: at the beginning are the four stages that make up the "deficiency needs" and all of these must be met before a person is able to reach for greater intellectual satisfaction through the "growth needs." The deficiency needs are simple and basic; they include physiological necessities (such as food, water, and sleep), the need for safety (to be safe and out of danger), love and belongingness needs (our need to be close to and accepted by others), and self-esteem requirements (our need to achieve in our lives and be recognized).

See also: Alfred Adler 100-01 ■ Erich Fromm 124-29 ■ Carl Rogers 130-37 ■ Rollo May 141 ■ Martin Seligman 200-01

The Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy of needs lists the qualities he observed in successful individuals who aimed high but kept their feet on the ground.



At the higher level, the growth needs are cognitive (a need to know and understand), aesthetic (a desire for order and beauty), and lastly, two requirements that define the purpose of life, and lead to intense spiritual and psychological fulfillment: self-actualization and self-transcendence. Self-actualization is the desire for self-fulfillment, and self-transcendence is the need to move beyond the self, and connect to something higher than ourselves—such as God—or to help others realize their potential.

Maslow also proposes that each one of us has an individual purpose to which we are uniquely suited, and part of the path to fulfillment is to identify and pursue that purpose. If someone is not doing what they are best suited to do in life, it will not matter if all their other needs are fulfilled, he or she will be perpetually restless and unsatisfied. Each of us must discover our potential, and seek out experiences that will allow us to fulfil it—"What a man can be, he must be," proclaims Maslow. ■



Abraham Maslow

Abraham Maslow was born the eldest of seven children in Brooklyn, New York. His parents were Jewish immigrants who had left Russia for the US to escape the tumultuous political situation there. They had high expectations of Maslow, and forced him to study law—a parental dominance that continued until 1928 when Maslow decided to take control of his life and pursue psychology instead. In the same year he disobeyed his parents by marrying his cousin, Bertha Goodman, with whom he had two children.

Maslow moved to the University of Wisconsin and worked under Harry Harlow, the behavioral psychologist famous for his work with primates. Later, at Columbia University, Maslow found a mentor in psychoanalyst and former colleague of Freud's, Alfred Adler.

Key works

1943 *A Theory of Human Motivation*

1954 *Motivation and Personality*

1962 *Toward a Psychology of Being*