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**An Exploration of Transcendence in Abraham H. Maslow's  
Psychology of Religion**

by

**Jennifer Holman, B.A. Hons.**

**A thesis submitted to  
the Faculty of Graduate Studies  
in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the degree of**

**Master of Arts**

**Carleton University  
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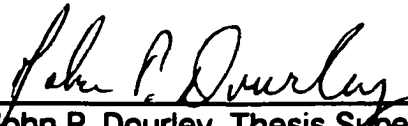
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Psychology of Religion**

**Submitted by Jennifer Holman  
In partial fulfilment of the requirement for  
the degree of Master of Arts**

  
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## **ABSTRACT**

**Abraham H. Maslow's theory of psychological development holds that human development culminates in a transcendent experience. Maslow's theory does not allow for an existence of a divine entity or God, inciting a discussion of the nature of transcendence to which Maslow refers. Despite Maslow's claim that the peak-experience is compatible with theistic notions of transcendence traditionally associated with mystical experience, it becomes apparent that Maslow's transcendence is intra-psychic and legitimate only within the confines of his psychological theory.**

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## **CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION**

### **BACKGROUND**

There are those who believe that the world today is in crisis. We are not the first to suffer from starvation, social disruption or war, but some suggest that we are perhaps the first to suffer a crisis from within. Wulff (1997) has suggested that Americans around the period of World War I in particular underwent a “wave of spiritual depression and religious skepticism” that left the next generation in an age of anxiety without fixed values or norms (p. 1). In the 1960’s this was reflected in the growing dissatisfaction with institutional religion and orthodox science, which had tried to take its place.

Now, at the turn of the century, we can observe a sharp resurgence of the ‘quest’ type of attitude towards spirituality and religion. Wulff defines the quest religious orientation as “an understanding of religion not as a shared body of established truths and obligatory practices, but as an active and personal search for deeper understanding of and contact with ultimate reality” (1997, p. 663). We are witnessing a new spirituality, in the form of a movement commonly called “The New Age Movement”. This new religious style is marked by an emphasis on individual choice, a mixing of various religious codes, a valorizing of religious experience and growth, and increasing indifference to religious institutions and hierarchies (Wulff, 1997, p. 9). The New Age Movement is likely a product of today’s religious pluralism, as it “aspires mainly to personal rather than social

transformation” (Wulff, 1997, p. 9), but it may be contended that it also has definitive roots in the transpersonal psychology tradition, inspired in part by Abraham H. Maslow.

Since William James wrote **The Varieties of Religious Experience** in 1902, the psychology of consciousness and religion has been a source of debate within the field of psychology. This issue is probably not any closer to being resolved now than a century ago. In fact some still believe that spiritual matters are no longer the focus of modern psychology. Others believe that psychology is a poor lens with which to examine humankind's understanding of spiritual matters (Wulff, 1997, p. 13). Regardless of such objections, the Anglo-American tradition of psychology of religion has grown steadily since the mid-1800's (Wulff, 1997). Its broad issues have been: the relationship between mental health and religious belief, the effects of post-modernism, and, of course, the nature of the mystic or religious experiences themselves. The Anglo-American tradition seems to have evolved from a largely descriptive tradition with William James to one that takes into account physiological processes, as we will see in Maslow's work and the work of some of his contemporaries. While the presence of science and the scientific method has become more and more obvious in mainstream psychology, many who study the psychology of consciousness believe that their findings are congruent with science as it was originally viewed – the search for truth.

### **MASLOW'S LIFE: AN OVERVIEW**

Maslow (1908-1970) grew up in Brooklyn, New York, the oldest child of Russian immigrant parents, Samuel and Rose. His father left the Russian town of Kiev at the age of fourteen with a large number of other Jewish immigrants and the young Maslow was

often the target of anti-Semitism in his youth. Partly as a result, Maslow does not appear to have had a happy childhood. At school he was often the only Jewish student in his classes and was belittled by his peers and his teachers alike. His only reprieve was reading, but he was forced to navigate through the hostile streets to reach the library and was often the target of violence along the way. He made his only true friendship in his teens with his cousin, Will Maslow, when he moved to a nearby neighborhood (Hoffman, 1988).

His family life was not a happy one either. Maslow was emotionally distant from his father and was often belittled and disparaged by his mother. Abraham was one of seven children, until his younger sister Edith died. For this he always partially blamed his mother, for she was an “extremely unloving and rejecting” woman (Hoffman, 1988, p.2) and he felt that his mother could have prevented her death had she been kinder and more generous.

In spite of the hostility his family encountered as Jews, they were not ritually observant. Instead, his mother was a “superstitious woman who often disciplined the boy for minor misbehaviours by threatening him with God’s relentless punishment” (Hoffman, 1988, p. 2). Among other unusual behaviours, his mother kept a bolt lock on the refrigerator door and “only when she was in the mood to serve food would she remove the lock and permit her children to take something to eat” (Hoffman, 1988, p. 7). Though her actions might have been the result of psychological adaptations to the persecution she suffered as a youth, Maslow felt that he and his siblings had to bear the consequences of what seemed to be cruel and unreasonable behaviour. It is interesting to note that much of the research Maslow conducted was a direct result of his relationship

with his mother. He writes, "...the whole thrust of my life-philosophy and all my research and theorizing also has its roots in a hatred for and revulsion against everything she stood for..." (Maslow, 1979, p. 958).

As a result of his mother's superstitious attitudes and often hypocritical actions, as well as the merciless persecution he suffered because of his surroundings, Maslow developed a mistrust of religion in general, and a proud atheism. He believed that religious observance was something performed only by the most naïve or by complete hypocrites – in either case, these were energies wasted that could be put to better use.

Maslow's parents placed great importance on education and Abraham went dutifully to study law at the City College of New York. It did not last long, however, and soon he was married to his wife Bertha and had transferred to the University of Wisconsin to study psychology. After receiving his Master of Arts degree in 1931, Maslow worked with Harry Harlow, the famous primate researcher, on the delayed reactions of monkeys, and was committed to the vision of behavioural psychology. He was particularly interested in the motivations of the monkeys when he began to notice that the behaviourist reward-punishment model was not complex enough to account for their behaviours. According to behaviourist theories of B.F. Skinner and other prominent behaviourists, people and animals should be motivated to carry through a task for reward, and would be discouraged by the threat of punishment. Sometimes however, the monkeys would casually throw away the food reward, which according to behaviourist theory is the only reason for working at the problem and following it through. In fact, Maslow found that the monkeys would work hard and persistently to solve puzzles without any reward at all (Maslow, 1963, p. 111). Regardless of his concerns, Maslow

was impressed with the potentials of behaviourism, and he was inspired by John B. Watson's optimism that scientific psychology could be used to train anybody to be anything (Maslow, 1954). Maslow received his PhD in 1934 and returned to New York to be a research associate with Edward Thorndike, a prominent behavioural psychologist, at Columbia.

Maslow later accepted a professorship in the department of psychology at Brooklyn College. New York City was one of the nation's greatest intellectual centers at this time, and Maslow found mentors at the New School for Social Research that included Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm, Karen Horney and Margaret Mead. Two scholars in particular became good friends with Maslow: Ruth Benedict, an anthropologist, and Max Wertheimer, the founder of Gestalt psychology. Maslow was deeply inspired by Benedict and Wertheimer, personally as well as professionally. He began keeping a journal on the two of them, trying to identify what it was about them that made them so special. In his journals, Maslow writes,

My investigations on self-actualization were not planned to be research and did not start out as research. They started out as the effort of a young intellectual trying to understand two of his teachers who he loved, adored, and admired.... I could not be content simply to adore, but sought to understand why these two people were so different from the run-of-the-mill people in the world.... I made descriptions and notes on Max Wertheimer and... Ruth Benedict. When I tried to understand them, think about them, and write about them in my journal and my notes, I realized in one wonderful moment that their two patterns could be generalized. I was talking about a kind of person, not about two noncomparable individuals (1971, p. 41).

However, it was not until 1951, when he left Brooklyn College to serve as chair of the psychology department at Brandeis University, that he began his crusade for humanist psychology. This marks the shift in Maslow's approach to psychology.

Maslow now wished to use science to release individuals from external controls, not to predict or control behaviour (Wulff, 1997, p. 605).

Maslow's personal background is worthy of psychological study in itself.

Maslow lived in a rejection of his mother, calling her a "horrible creature" (Hoffman, 1988, p. 1). It is speculation that perhaps Maslow rejected her so fiercely because he wished to reject all that she stood for, particularly ritual, religion, superstition, etc.

Maslow rejected his parents' wish to study law and left to study in Wisconsin, leaving his familial and Jewish roots behind him, making a complete break with his heritage. He later returned to be a part of the intellectual scene in New York, at that time home to many European scholars who fled from Nazi persecution. Maslow re-entered the intellectual Jewish community at The New School for Social Research and, it can be suggested, adopted Max Wertheimer and Ruth Benedict as substitute parents. Maslow appears to be in denial about his roots, and it can be speculated that all this is the result of self-hatred or *selbsthass*, as the son of Jewish immigrant parents. This could also explain Maslow's adoption of an extremely North American liberal approach in his theories—denial of his past.<sup>1</sup>

During Maslow's career he served as the president of the American Psychological Association in 1967, and helped to found the Association for Humanistic Psychology with Rollo May and Carl Rogers. To aid others in exploring the farther reaches of human potential, Maslow inspired the founding of the Journal of Transpersonal Psychology, and published a multitude of articles, papers, lectures and books promoting humanistic or 'third force' psychology. In 1968, Maslow was given a grant which he used to devote his

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<sup>1</sup> This speculative discussion arose in conversation with Professor Eugene Rothman in the department of religion at Carleton University.

last years to writing. He left Brandeis and went to California, where he died of a heart attack in 1970. Maslow had almost no formal background in theology or comparative religion and yet his thoughts on religion have been placed among James' *Varieties* and Fromm's *Psychoanalysis and Religion*, and subsequently, his theories have inspired much research (Wulff, 1997).

### **TRANSCENDENCE AND CONTEMPORARY LITERATURE**

A review of the literature confirms the importance and centrality of the phenomenon of transcendence and of transpersonal psychology in contemporary discussion. One such example is Robert E. Ornstein, a research psychologist at the Langley Porter Neuropsychiatric Institute, and professor at the University of California Medical Center in San Francisco. Ornstein's principal interests involve the two sides of the brain, biofeedback, and the psychology of meditation. Ornstein's contribution is important to note because his goals are similar to Maslow's, and his main works emerge where Maslow's have left off.

Ornstein's *Psychology of Human Consciousness* (1977) is his attempt to redefine the scope of the sciences to include a study of all modes of human consciousness. Ornstein begins by offering the definition of a 'paradigm' as "shared conceptions of what is possible, the boundaries of acceptable inquiry, the limiting cases" (1977, p. 5). A scientific paradigm is analogous, he says, to the individual's assumptions about reality. Such paradigms are generally shared, which allows us to communicate about aspects of 'reality' in a specialized language. Ornstein suggests that the danger of

**working within an established paradigm is that individuals often lose sight of any possibilities beyond their own particular set of assumptions.**

**When it comes to a discussion of psychology, which started out as the study of consciousness, Ornstein says that it has become “sterilized” by the limitations of the early mentalist approach, which focused mainly on introspection and questions “of interest only to them” (p. 6). Psychologists began to ignore or deny the existence of phenomena that did not fit into the dominant scheme. This is contrary to the primary intention of the scientific method—the raw experience should be able to disprove the accepted criteria, this is how our world view has gradually evolved over centuries, but instead in this case, the experience or data is molded to fit the accepted criteria. Ornstein states:**

**“Objective” factual knowledge was emphasized, to the exclusion of any question not subject to a verbal, logical answer. The reductio ad absurdum of this position was that of logical positivism, which maintained that any question not amenable to a perfectly logical answer should not even be asked. (1977, p. 7)**

**Along came humanistic psychology, with the intention to correct the “distortions” of both behaviourism and psychoanalysis. Ornstein holds that the early promise of this approach was never fully realized in mainstream psychology and became largely a divisive force, because its practitioners often belittled the worth of science and therefore offered almost no research to support their ideas (1977, p. 7). Ornstein states that psychologists have failed to recognize that their discipline is supposed to be “the scientific study of human concerns and needs to embrace both positions” (p. 7). It is suggested that the influence of humanistic psychology would have been greater and more lasting – as Maslow envisioned it to be – if they had contributed more to science. Ornstein suggests a return to a psychology with an outlook that is reminiscent of William**



**James and his views on consciousness, and that “ with a recognition of the biological basis of...consciousness, we may be able to redress the imbalance in science and psychology” (p. 39).**

**Ornstein discusses “reality” and what is considered “normal” consciousness. He argues that this consciousness is a constructed reality, that in order to create a stable, manageable environment, a sensory-filtering system develops from infancy and is continually shaped by subsequent situations. Sensory systems function to reduce the amount of useless information reaching us and to serve as selection systems. “Our human ‘agreement’ on the nature of external reality is subject to common shared limitations that have presumably evolved to ensure the biological survival of the race” (p. 48-49). It is very easy to confuse our common agreement with actual reality.**

**Ornstein proposes two major modes of consciousness: analytic and holistic. The analytic mode views the individual parts of an object/experience, and the holistic views the whole object/experience. Both systems have their specific functions, and are ultimately complementary. Similarly he expresses the dichotomy of human knowledge through the ‘rational’ and ‘intuitive’ sides of humankind. Ornstein is demonstrating that “modes of knowing” have been wrongly compartmentalized into separate areas and are not allowed to mix. Extreme reliance on the rational mode of consciousness has led to the overlooking of the intuitive mode, hence a denial to our “inner” life, as well as the habitual filtering/reduction of sensory input.**

**The analytical mode of consciousness has been useful, according to Ornstein, because it ensured our mastery over the environment and continued biological survival. However, our cultural evolution has progressed well ahead of our biological evolution,**

and our needs have changed. Our continued reliance on the analytic mode alone is no longer enough and we must search for alternate understandings and shared paradigms.

...just as the biological and sociological levels of analysis can coexist, so can the personal, individual consciousness coexist with another that is often called objective or cosmic consciousness. The esoteric practices attempt to suppress temporarily the individual, analytic consciousness... and to allow the consciousness of the 'whole organism' to emerge. (1977, p. 151)

Another writer is Charles T. Tart. He is internationally known for his psychological work on the nature of consciousness (particularly altered states of consciousness), as one of the founders of transpersonal psychology, and for his research in scientific parapsychology. Tart's **Altered States of Consciousness** (1969) and **Transpersonal Psychologies** (1975) have become widely used classics and have found their way to become part of modern psychology. He was active in amateur radio in his youth, and then studied electrical engineering at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology before electing to become a psychologist. Tart received his doctoral degree in psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1963, and then received postdoctoral training in hypnosis research with Professor Ernest R. Hilgard at Stanford University. Tart is currently a Core Faculty Member at the Institute of Transpersonal Psychology and a Senior Research Fellow of the Institute of Noetic Sciences, as well as Professor Emeritus of Psychology at the Davis campus of the University of California, where he served for 28 years.

As well as a laboratory researcher, Professor Tart has been a student of the Japanese martial art of Aikido, of meditation, of Gurdjieff's work, of Buddhism, and of other psychological and spiritual growth disciplines. His primary goal is to build bridges

between the scientific and spiritual communities and to help bring about a refinement and integration of Western and Eastern approaches for knowing the world and for personal and social growth (<http://www.pathwaysminneapolis.org/tart.html>). Tart aspires to transcend the narrow confines of academia and science, and uses the scientific methods and independent thinking to satisfy spiritual and religious queries.

Tart criticizes the unnecessary mystification associated with states of consciousness, and for this reason Tart defines a state of consciousness as simply “a pattern of mental functioning.... a unique configuration or system of psychological structures or subsystems” (1986, p. 3). The pattern or system determines the state of consciousness, in which the nature of the pattern and its elements dictate the capabilities (and limitations) of what can be experienced in that given state. Tart does not think that this is a radical concept; we already make distinctions between states, for example, the states of dreaming and waking present entirely different realms of perception. Tart reserves the term “state” for only major alterations in the way the mind functions, not to be confused with different thoughts or feelings themselves, such as the state of hunger or state of happiness.

A state is considered altered if it is “discreetly different from some baseline state we want to compare things to” (1986, p. 5). This baseline state is usually ordinary waking consciousness, but Tart feels that it does not necessarily reflect reality. Tart, in accordance with Maslow, believes that individuals are born with the innate potential to be a ‘human being’ but Tart does not underestimate the role that the environment plays on these potentials. Each culture has certain potentials they think are good and they cultivate those, while stifling others, and to survive in any culture it is necessary to

conform to these norms. This is what Tart calls the “consensus consciousness”, the idea that our “normal consciousness” is culturally relative. Our ordinary state of consciousness is constructed by our thinking, feeling, and perceiving, and reflects the consensus of what our culture thinks is important and good.

One way to escape from a “cultural trance” is to cultivate altered states of consciousness:

if you think of your ordinary state of consciousness as a semi-artificial structure, you can see an altered state as something that temporarily knocks it to pieces. With many of your habits temporarily nonfunctional there is a chance for you to perceive in a more unedited, unstricted sort of way, a more natural sort of way. (Tart, 1993, <http://www.lawsofwisdom.com>)

The enlightenment that can accompany “unedited” perception serves a psychological purpose in bringing to the attention of the individual all the capabilities and potentials that he or she was unaware of in ordinary waking consciousness. Tart’s explanation of the altered state is also similar to the way James described access to the *more*, that “the world of our present consciousness is only one out of many worlds... and that those other worlds must contain experiences which have a meaning for our life also” (1902, p. 334). Enlightenment is a process of development, and altered states of consciousness provide us with “jumps” on the overall continuum, because enlightenment consists of many different kinds of knowledge, state-specific knowledge, which cannot be acquired in our ordinary state of consciousness (1986).

Tart believes that 30 years ago many people underwent transpersonal experiences and concealed them from the fields of psychology and psychiatry for fear of being deemed unstable and referred for treatment for psychopathology. Tart sympathizes,

saying that “many of these experiencers suffered a great deal through having no support networks to help them realize the growth potential of their experiences, rather than wondering if they were crazy or possessed by the Devil” (Tart, 1996). Tart aspires to a world where the majority of people have “direct, experiential knowledge of deep spiritual realities” (Tart, 1996) and he considers it the responsibility of transpersonal psychology to facilitate this vision in the West.

Tart and his colleagues must first overcome many boundaries presented by academic psychology, which tends to consider man a machine, a field that is incapable of recognizing “the possibility of waking up and going beyond the mechanical, so it soft pedals its dehumanizing philosophical foundations to itself as well as to others” (1986, p. 22). As psychology has become increasingly “scientific” it has become increasingly susceptible to scientism, rejecting the possible existence of nonphysical entities and reducing phenomena to their psychological function. Tart cites the example of prayer:

a genuinely scientific attitude towards prayer would be to admit that factually we know almost nothing about it, and that dogmatic and a priori rejection of the possibility that prayer has effects beyond the psychological is not good science (1986, p. 227).

Unfortunately, orthodox science almost totally rejects the experiences and knowledge gained from altered states of consciousness, which is why Tart has developed a theory of state-specific sciences.

Tart wishes to demonstrate that it is possible to investigate and work with the material gathered from altered states of consciousness in such a manner that is consistent with the fundamental nature of the scientific method (1975, p. 207-228). Tart propounds that because science has been dominant in dealing with the physical world, it is now associated with a philosophy of physicalism, “the belief that reality is all reducible to

certain kinds of physical entities” (1975, p. 211). Tart insists that the fundamental premises of the scientific method can be applied to altered states of consciousness. The four basic rules that constitute the scientific endeavor, according to Tart in **States of Consciousness**, are: (1) good observation, (2) the public nature of observation, (3) the necessity to theorize logically, and (4) the testing of theory by observable consequences (1975, p. 212).

Tart suggests that some aspects of organized religion resemble state-specific sciences, in that the training systems of some religions have devoted specialists, scholars, developed techniques and frequent experiencing of altered states of consciousness with the intention of furthering religious knowledge. The difference is that religious organizations have an a priori idea of the truth that they are aiming to experience, while the state-specific science is a search for the truth without a particular belief system. Tart and Maslow have many similarities, among which are the dedication to scientific truth and the desire to incorporate transpersonal experiences in a revised framework of the scientific method. In both cases personal introspection and experience are deemed suitable criterion for scientific research.

A third scholar for our consideration is Jean Piaget, a famous psychologist known for his research in developmental psychology and genetic epistemology. Piaget’s works are extensive, including over sixty books and several hundred articles. He is known all over the world and is still an inspiration in fields like psychology, sociology, education, epistemology, economics and law. However, Piaget did not call his work ‘psychology’. He preferred to call his enterprise “genetic epistemology”. This refers to “the study of knowledge as it exists at the present moment; it is the analysis of knowledge for its own

sake and within its own framework without regard for its development” (Piaget, 1970, p. 2). The main tenet of Piaget’s work is that we cannot expect to understand knowledge unless we understand how it is acquired. Piaget rejected the theorizing of cognitive abilities, such as memory and problem-solving ability, that neglects to address the manner in which these abilities are developed.

A long time critic of ‘armchair’ epistemology, Piaget believed such knowledge necessitates active psychological and historical investigation. This is the first principle of genetic epistemology: to take the study of consciousness seriously, to use research and not speculation (1970, p. 9). In addition to this, Piaget believed in fully exploring the implications of theory – applying the consequences of his own theories to all aspects of cognition, intelligence and moral development.

Genetic epistemology asks the question: by what means does the human mind go from a state of less sufficient knowledge to a higher state of knowledge? Piaget inquires as to “how the transition is made from a lower level of knowledge to a level that is judged to be higher” (p. 13).

Piaget is probably most famous for his concepts surrounding cognitive structures, in particular, the four main stages of child development. Within each one of these stages are up to forty distinct structures covering classification and relations, spatial relationships, time, movement, and more. The primary cognitive structures correspond to child development and they are: the sensorimotor stage (0-2 years), the preoperation period (3-7 years), concrete operational stage (7-12 years), and the formal operations stage (12-15 years). In the first stage, sensorimotor, intelligence takes the form of motor actions. In the preoperation stage intelligence is more intuitive in nature. Cognitive

structure is more logical in the concrete operational stage, but is dependent on concrete referents. In the final stage of formal operations thinking involves abstractions. Though these stages correspond to certain age spans, cognitive development varies for every individual, according to Piaget.

Cognitive structures change via the processes of adaptation: assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation refers to the process by which an event is interpreted in terms of existing cognitive structure; and accommodation refers to the modification of the existing cognitive structure to make sense of the experience or environment.

Piaget acknowledged that psychology could not provide a judgment on religious values, but that it can evaluate whether or not “the deduction of a certain value from a particular experience accords with the laws of logic, the child’s understanding of which he was then researching” (Wulff, 1997, p. 45). In Piaget’s writings on religious attitudes, he notes that there are two distinct types, related to qualities attributed by the individual to God: transcendence and immanence. The transcendent God is “a God of causes, implicitly divine causes that lie beyond our understanding”, while the immanent is “a God not of causes but of values, a God that lies within us rather than outside the world” (Wulff, 1997, p. 46). Piaget proposed that individuals are inclined towards one or the other depending on the relationship they have had with their parents. If an individual was taught to have a unilateral respect for adults, with an emphasis on a morality of obedience, he or she is more likely to adopt the transcendent model. The immanent type is characterized by a morality of autonomy and results from an attitude of mutual respect (Wulff, 1997, p.46). Piaget himself considered the transcendent God type to be no more



than a symbol of “the mythological and infantile imagination”, and instead he opted for immanentism (Piaget, in Wulff, 1997, p. 46).

Another important idea to come out of Piaget’s work was the notion of decalages, described as a lag or unevenness in development among structurally similar concepts.

**The main line of Piaget’s position is to insist that thought grows through action, but at the same time that actions of a given stage are determined by the intellectual level then achieved by the child. This position allows for minor disparities or decalages between thought in one domain and another... (Gruber & Voneche, 1977, p. 155).**

Piaget’s work in this area is the foundation for many theories involving a biological or genetic epistemologist approach that is interested in uncovering not only the possible discoveries in human intellect, but also interested in the passage from one state of knowledge to another. Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili in their work, **Brain, Symbol and Experience** (1992), credit much of Piaget’s work as an influence.

Laughlin, McManus and d’Aquili encompass, between them, the fields of anthropology, neuroscience, and social psychology, and are all interested in the relationship between the brain and culture. **Brain, Symbol and Experience: Toward a Neurophenomenology of Human Consciousness** is an exposition of their biogenetic structural theory, a theory they hope will explain the relationship between conduct of the brain and behavior of the mind. This theoretical perspective holds a non-dualistic approach towards mind and body, is not intended to be reductionistic, and has been informed by all ‘reasonable’ sources of data about human consciousness and culture. They state that their approach is largely anthropological and that sources outside of anthropology have been evaluated from an “ethnological background” (1992, p. 3).

**Biogenetic structuralism offers the view that “universal structures characteristic of human language, cognition about time and space, affect, certain psychopathologies, and the like were due to the genetically predisposed organization of the nervous system” (Laughlin, 1996). This view holds that the world of our experience is a construct of our nervous system, that, “in a very fundamental way... it seems that we create the world we live in, we create what we see, and what we experience” (1992, p.6).**

**Within the autonomic nervous system (ANS) there exist the sympathetic system and the parasympathetic system. The sympathetic system is responsible for energizing adaptive responses (such as “fight-or-flight”) and is usually experienced as bodily arousal or stress. On the other hand, the parasympathetic system instigates vegetation, repair, growth and development most often experienced as bodily relaxation, calm and tranquility. These systems operate in a complementary fashion and operate to provide balance for the individual with regards to the world. It is their contention that the “simultaneous discharge of both the excitation and relaxation systems may lead to profound alterations in consciousness” (1992, p. 147). This particular balance of excitation-relaxation in a ‘normal’ state of activity can be learned, which Laughlin et al call ‘tuning’. Re-tuning the balance of ANS functions may lead to alternate phases of consciousness.**

**Certain attributes of ritual can be seen as ‘driving’ mechanisms for re-tuning ANS activity in participants. A ‘driver’ is a concept derived from Ernst Gelhorn’s work and refers to any stimulus that produces a distinct and repeatable change of phase of consciousness (1996). The driver could be external to the individual, or internal. Extrinsic drivers include rhythm through drumming, flickering light, psychotropic drugs, or**

**imagery. Intrinsic drivers include fasting, physical exertion, seclusion or breathing exercises (Laughlin, 1996).**

**Laughlin et al point out that our personal experience is limited and preprogrammed by society because we are encouraged to participate in some rituals and symbols, and steered away from others:**

**Certainly all ceremonial ritual operates in part by manipulating awareness of symbols.... by controlling awareness of certain symbols, a group may easily control the neural systems brought into play. The society may not merely direct attention, it may determine to a great extent what is experienced. Directing one's orientation to objects associated with awe and fear... will result in an experience different from one in which attention is directed to objects associated with love and nurturance... (Laughlin et al, 1992, p.146).**

**Finally, there is the more theistic viewpoint of Peter Slater. Slater looks at the dynamics of religion, and in particular, the nature of the transcending process. Slater's framework rests on the premises that 'transcendence' is a relative concept, that what is transcending for one individual may not be so for another individual. What is transcendent at a certain stage in life may not seem so at another. He proposes that what is absolute is the transcending process itself, not one particular image of a transcendent being (1981, p. 47).**

**Religion, in Slater's model, is a personal way of life informed by traditional elements of creed and code, and is directed toward the realization of some transcendent end. The degree of emphasis on any one element reflects whatever is central to the way of life in question (1978, p. 6). Different religions have different priorities and this model of religions warns us against the assumption that all religions are concerned only with dogma. In addition, he notes that the sacred and the transcendent may be affected by**

**“cultural coloring” that must be considered – Slater does not propose to consider any state of being or entity in isolation (1981, p. 40).**

**He notes that transcendence is a notion that is easier to use than to define. Slater considers all experience as relevant if it is a “saving experience”:**

**It will be the experience of one who was shattered and is now whole, was lost but is found, was utterly gloomy but is now ecstatically joyous. It will be the experience of one who has transcended, or is transcending, whatever conditions are hellish and is entering on the path to Nirvana. In William James’s sense, it is the experience of the twice-born. (1981, p. 41)**

**From within this criterion, Slater differentiates between the ‘teleological’ vs. the ‘interpersonal’ models of transcendence, to which he refers as ‘vertical’ and ‘horizontal’ respectively (1981, p. 46). He notes that among Christian theologians since Hegel, if not before, horizontal conceptions of transcendence came to dominate the thought of those who no longer accepted supernaturalism. However, he contends that there is in fact, “both a vertical and horizontal aspect to the transcending process. What varies is the emphasis and priority given to one over the other in each cultural milieu” (1981, p.46). For these reasons, Slater looks at three variables that he considers to be present in all transcendent experience: the situation, the referent and the individual. All three of these components can affect the nature of the transcendent experience, the experience of transcendence comes from the interplay of all of these components, “not the contrasts in status ascribed to either end of a relationship taken in isolation” (1981, p. 41).**

**The nature of transcendence is formed in part by the situation that the individual comes from. The transcendent experience and the situation to be transcended are linked. A particular religious denomination or spiritual outlook, current ideals or limitations may define the situation. The individual may be alone in the world, or a part of a large**

**community. According to Slater, the transcendent experience is uniquely affected by the time and place, just as the revelations were said to have been revealed with specific timing. Slater says,**

**What I am arguing for is acceptance of the relativism of each successive world view and conception of transcendence, coupled with the realization that religious thinkers in each age will want to drive beyond the conditions in which they find themselves toward the conditions of the new life (1981, p. 47).**

**The referent is Slater's choice of word for that to which the transcendent experience is directed. Slater is relatively ambiguous about what that could be: a divine entity, something personal or non-personal, a transcendent reality, or a divinity which is considered immanent. Traditionally we have seen this entity as the sacred. Regardless, Slater holds that an individual's referent – what or who he or she wishes to attain through the experience – is a determinant of the experience itself, that the nature of the experience is uniquely affected by the relationship the individual has with the sacred referent.**

**The individual is the third component to Slater's framework. Slater concedes the possible effects of cultural progress and institutional developments which may help the individual towards religious maturity, but holds that each of us "starts as an infant in matters of faith" (1981, p. 48). The individual's attitudes, prejudices, maturity level, the stage in his or her life may all affect the degree to which the individual experiences transcendence, as well as the nature of the experience itself. The way in which the individual interprets the experience will also affect his or her relation to the sacred, but will most often affirm it.**

**Slater holds that the transcending process itself is the only absolute and that the constant dynamic of these three factors (the situation, referent and individual) determine**

the particular thrust of the transcending process at any given time (1981, p. 46). Slater states that,

**As faith centers on new facets of saving experience, some ideas and practices drop by the wayside and others are added on. In each tradition we discern family resemblances between expressions of faith from one generation to the next. But there is no single essential core, such that we can say that this or that concept of transcendence or the sacred is necessarily present in the minds of the faithful at any given time (1981, p. 48).**

Slater holds that each generation's experience is not simply a repetition of its predecessors', nor is it a replica of "some eternal pattern" (1981, p.54). It is a dynamic and unique experience, resultant of the interplay between the individual, referent and situation. We will use this framework to evaluate Maslow's concept of transcendence and its validity.

### **THESIS APPROACH**

This thesis uses Slater's framework to evaluate Maslow's psychology of religion because it adheres most closely to a theistic standpoint. In particular it uses Slater's model to address Maslow's transcendent experience, which is deemed by Maslow to exist in the absence of a higher authority, and to determine whether or not Maslow's transcendence is compatible with traditional religious notions of transcendence, as typically associated with mystical experience.

Here, Maslow's transcendent or peak-experience will be shown to be a 'horizontal' rather than 'vertical' transcendence – that Maslow's transcendence is not the transcendence aspired to by religious mystics, for example. Maslow's "peak experience" as the prototype for religious transcendence allows for a certain degree of secular 'New

**Age' reflection, but his neglect of the other aspects of religion makes his an incomplete conception on which to found a theory of religion.**

**An exposition of Maslow's psychology is necessary to provide the basic framework of Maslow's psychology of religion. The next chapter will lay out the overall assumptions of humanistic psychology, Maslow's psychology, Maslow's views on religion and science, and his hierarchy of needs. In the later chapters, the peak- and plateau- experiences will be defined and analyzed, as they serve as the bridge between Maslow's thoughts on psychology and his feelings about religion. The last chapter will include a critique of Maslow's concepts and methods. At this point, Maslow's psychology of religion will be thoroughly examined and the last section will propose to what extent Maslow's transcendent experience is compatible with traditional notions of transcendence, as outlined by Slater.**

## **CHAPTER 2 MASLOW'S PSYCHOLOGY**

### **HUMANISTIC PSYCHOLOGY**

In the twentieth century, it has traditionally been said that there have been three “waves” of psychology (Heylighen, 1992). The first wave is largely psychodynamic, with emphasis on the psyche and its neuroses. Led by Sigmund Freud, this school of thought is mostly concerned with the negative side of mental health, the subconscious and instincts. B. F. Skinner and his behaviorist emphasis towards psychology initiated the second wave. These researchers place emphasis on statistical correlation, stimulus and response. Their main premise assumes that the environment shapes the person. The third wave is that of the humanistic psychologists, whose main concern lies with development, needs and motivation. It is their aim, not so much to discover the root to neuroses, but rather to discover the path to optimal mental health and happiness (Heylighen, 1992). At the forefront of the humanistic movement, we find Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers and others. There is now wide recognition of a fourth wave of psychology – transpersonal psychology. The transpersonal psychology movement is derived from humanistic psychology, and includes the study of consciousness in an approach compatible with science and is in use by scholars such as Ken Wilbur, Charles Tart and others. Because this approach was unformed in Maslow’s time, this thesis will be concentrating on humanistic psychology.

Humanistic psychology appears to have come into existence only after 1958, though many associate its creation with William James and G. Stanley Hall several decades before, both of whom were advocates of a psychology that would leave “the



wholeness, passion, and uniqueness of the individual intact” (Shaffer, 1978, p. 3). Shaffer (1978) believes that the rapid advancement of humanistic psychology after 1958 is largely due to that point in time. The emergence of humanistic psychology was largely identified with the counter culture and human potential movements of the 1960’s and 1970’s, it gained swift momentum from what was seen as the attempt to liberate the alienated man or woman from a dehumanizing culture.

**The Journal of Humanistic Psychology** defines humanistic psychology as,

primarily an orientation toward the whole of psychology rather than a distinct area or school. It stands for the respect for the worth of persons, respect for differences of approach, open-mindedness as to acceptable methods, and interest in exploration of new aspects of human behaviour (cited in Maslow, 1970, p.70).

Some scholars insist that humanistic psychology is not a field or academic school of its own, but rather it is an attitude that exists only by virtue of a common dissatisfaction with the contemporary psychological approaches at the time, namely the psychodynamic and behaviouristic disciplines (Berlyne, 1981).

Berlyne offers five “lines of dissent” that can be discerned in the writings of humanistic psychologists. They appear to be protesting against (1) the application of scientific method to the study of human behaviour, (2) the conception of science that is prevalent in contemporary psychology, (3) behaviourism, (4) neglect of some important characteristics of human beings and (5) the distribution of the research effort and funding among psychological topics of little importance or relevance to the every day lives of human beings. This clarifies what humanistic psychology is certainly not. Humanists insist that a psychological model of humankind would be more useful if it is “guided by a

conception of man as he knows himself rather than by some nonhuman analogy” (Child, 1973, p. 13).

Humanist psychologists tend to protest against the common concept of science in our society. This is not to say that psychologists in the field object to scientific study. It is quite the opposite. They wish to include subjective knowledge, and develop a science of human experience. Humanistic psychology objects to the sterilized terms and assessments used primarily in the behaviourist field of research. And finally, they believe that some of the most important, and most subjective, facets of human nature are often overlooked because they are difficult to quantify or measure. And as a result of that, psychological study risks focusing its research effort where it makes little difference to humanity.

There are five central emphases in humanistic psychology (Shaffer, 1978). The first is that humanism is strongly phenomenological or experiential. Its starting point is conscious experience (p. 10). In humanistic psychology there is a strong interest in subjective psychological events. Each person’s unique feelings or point of view is seen as indisputable, unlike Freud who is seen as reductive by discounting complex feelings and motives as more basic drives and defenses, of which the individual is not aware.

Second, humanists insist on man’s essential wholeness and integrity (p. 12). Shaffer quotes Gordon Allport in saying that “human beings have an essential core or being that integrates their seemingly isolated traits into a unique patterned whole which gives each of them their own, never-to-be repeated character” (p. 13). Humanistic psychology generally rejects trait theories which conceive of the individual as a pattern of

**distinct habits that may be mapped according to degree. Traits cannot be understood in isolation because they are all interrelated.**

**While humanistic psychology admits that there are limits in human experience, they believe that human beings retain an essential freedom and autonomy (p. 14). This necessarily excludes the possibility of the individual who is controlled by his or her own death instinct, or an individual whose behaviour is shaped by stimulus inputs and environmental effects of which we are largely unaware.**

**Humanistic psychology is antireductionistic in its orientation (p. 15). As mentioned above, they do not believe that we are passive beings who are shaped by our environments, or the unconscious. Humanists believe that this does not give us enough credit. According to humanistic psychology we are active and whole – the notion of a fragmented psyche is unwelcome. Humanists do not necessarily reject the idea of an unconscious mind, but do not consider it to be helpful in any case because its nature can never be known.**

**Finally, humanistic psychology holds that human nature can never be fully defined (p.17). As long as the limits of human nature are not certain and adaptable, then the human personality is infinitely open to growth and change. This view is in direct opposition to Freud's notion of man as a regression-oriented organism who is "forever in search of earlier, more primitive forms of gratification" (p. 17).**

**A former scholar of behaviorist theory, Maslow believed that it was time to concentrate on the positive aspects of human nature, believing that one cannot understand mental illness until one understands mental health (Goble, 1970). With this premise, Abraham Maslow became a highly influential thinker, pioneering humanist research.**

## **MASLOW'S APPROACH**

**Maslow opposed reductionism in psychological research and proposed a holistic approach to personality research (Heylighen, 1992). Reductionism describes the tendency to explain human behaviour in elementalistic terms, while holism maintains that there is an “essential principle in every person, which synthesizes him or her as a unified whole” (Parangimalil, 1985, p. 200). Maslow’s holistic theory of human nature encompasses a variety of assumptions, as outlined by Parangimalil (1985, p. 201). This view sees man as an integrated whole, to which a biologically based inner nature is “natural”. This inner nature is unique to each individual and it is Maslow’s theory that one should bring it out and encourage it, rather than suppress it. This is not always easy, as culture, habit or wrong attitude can easily overcome the inner nature. Most of psychology has dealt with skills, associations and capacities as being acquired, and therefore not intrinsic to the human personality. Intrinsic learning was important to Maslow in order to learn “how to be a human being” and how to specifically be your own particular human being (1971, p. 164).**

**Maslow felt that this inner nature is, in everyone, entirely good (Rosenblatt, 1977). It follows from this idea that morality and goodness come from ourselves and not from somewhere else, whereas “any concept of human nature that says man is innately bad leads to an extra-human interpretation of goodness. The worse man is, the more you need a God” (Maslow, 1970, p. 36-37). All needs that arise out of the inner core of a human being are also good or neutral. Any destructiveness or evil is not essential to the nature of human beings, but rather a result of the frustration or denial of our positive**

needs. It is this system of needs and instincts that underlie Maslow's theories concerning self-actualization and motivation.

Maslow believed that psychology had for too long studied neurotic and unhealthy individuals and wished to form a theory that examined the potential for optimal mental health. Maslow argued that the inner core of human nature contains urges or "instinct-like propensities" that create basic needs within each person (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 14). Maslow differentiates between two sorts of needs: deficiency needs and growth or "being" needs. Deficiency needs (D-needs) imply that something is missing, while B-needs are designated as "meta-needs" which involve values such as Truth, Goodness, Wholeness or Aliveness (Parangimalil, 1985). This is the basis for Maslow's theory of motivation, which holds that neuroses and illness occur when these needs are not met, but the fulfillment of needs makes for an increasingly healthy and happy person. These needs are universal, existing within every person, and therefore, the potential for mental health lies within each person as well.

Maslow holds that humans are "wanting animal[s]" (1954, p. 7), and that a state of satisfaction is never predominant except for a short while. While other theories perceive motivation as being a special, distinct state, Maslow believed that every organism exists in a motivational state (1954). He assumed that motivation is constant, never-ending, though fluctuating and complex – and that it is most likely the most universal characteristic of practically every being. When one desire is satisfied, another arises and overtakes the one before it. Therefore, in Maslow's view, wanting anything in itself implies already existing satisfactions of other wants. Maslow establishes two important facts that are crucial to his theory of motivation: a human being is never

satisfied except in a relative or progressive fashion, and second, desires seem to arrange themselves in hierarchy of prepotency (1954, p. 7).

### MASLOW'S HIERARCHY OF NEEDS

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is often displayed in the form of a triangle or pyramid, with the wide base at the bottom and the narrow peak at the top. It has been suggested that this is an inappropriate fashion to display the hierarchy, as it implies that there is a end point to personal growth and Rowan (1998) said that Maslow himself never presented his material this way. The hierarchy is as follows:



Maslow's needs are presented in this form with the most basic D-needs at the bottom and the B-needs at the top. Need fulfillment begins at the bottom of the hierarchy and with the completion of one need, the individual begins work on the next need, until eventually he may, or may not, reach the top. The nature of the hierarchy in itself is

**complex and Maslow attributes defining characteristics to the structure in *Motivation and Personality* (1954, p.57-59).**

- 1. First, the higher need is a later phyletic or evolutionary development. We share the lower D-needs with almost all living things, but the higher the need the less universal and the more distinctly human it is.**
- 2. Higher needs are later ontogenetic developments. The younger we are in years, the more basic our needs are. As we grow older, we naturally ascend the ladder towards growth-needs.**
- 3. The higher the need, the less important it is for survival, the longer gratification can be postponed, and the easier it is for the need to disappear permanently. There are individuals who may never pass beyond the deficiency needs because B-needs do not impose as large a threat, nor tend to be as desperate as the lower needs.**
- 4. Living at the higher need level means the fulfillment of the lower needs. As previously mentioned, the present need must be fulfilled in order to move up to the next one in the hierarchy. It follows also that every higher need has more preconditions than the one before it.**
- 5. Higher needs are less urgent subjectively. High needs are less perceptible, and external forces may make it harder for the individual to recognize what he or she really wants. Simply recognizing a growth need is a “considerable psychological achievement” in itself.**

**6. A greater value is usually placed upon the higher need than upon the lower by those who have been gratified in both. Maslow declares that such people will relinquish more for the higher need and are then more willing to undergo low-need deficiency.**

**7. The pursuit and gratification of the higher needs have desirable civic and social consequences. Maslow notes that the higher the need, the less selfish it is. Low-level needs require personal gratification, whereas the higher needs usually involve the satisfaction of others.**

**8. The higher need has more preconditions. Prepotent needs must be gratified before the individual can search for satisfaction of his or her present want.**

**9. Higher needs require better outside conditions to make them possible. The better the environmental conditions the easier it is for the individual to attain higher level need satisfaction.**

**10. The higher the need level, the wider is the circle of love identification, and the greater the number of people love-identified with. Maslow defines love identification as a merging into a single hierarchy of the needs of two or more people. Two people who love each other may care as much about the needs of the other individual as they do about their own: the other's need *is* one's own need. The higher the need on the hierarchy and the wider the scope of love identification, the less selfish it is and thus, the more socially desirable are the consequences. Maslow says they tend to develop such qualities as "loyalty,**



friendliness, and civic consciousness, and become better parents, husbands, teachers, public servants, and so on” (p. 58).

11. Satisfaction of higher needs is closer to self-actualization than is lower-need satisfaction. The higher the need level, the more the individual will begin to reflect the qualities of self-actualizing people.

12. The pursuit and gratification of the higher needs leads to greater, stronger, and truer individualism.

13. The higher the need level the easier and more effective psychotherapy can be; at the lowest levels it is of hardly any avail.

14. The lower needs are far more localized, more tangible, and more limited than are the higher needs.

All of the needs are subject to certain preconditions for their gratification. These prerequisites include certain freedoms such as freedom to express oneself, to seek information or to do as one wishes. Cognitive capacities, perceptual, intellectual, and learning are basic tools in need satisfaction (Maslow, 1954, p. 46).

In **Motivation and Personality** (1954), Maslow outlines each of the levels of need in the hierarchy. He begins with the physiological needs, which form the base of the hierarchy, as they are the lowest of all the deficiency needs. Maslow refers to homeostasis as the body’s “automatic efforts to maintain a constant, normal state of the blood stream”, including sugar content, salt content, fat and oxygen (p.36). This is the body’s way of involuntarily maintaining its needs. Other needs in this category include

**hunger, sex, sleep and exercise. If all of the needs in the hierarchy are unsatisfied, the individual would become preoccupied with this need group specifically and put the others aside. Skills that would be appropriate for fulfilling higher needs would be pushed into the background and relevant skills would be accentuated, the entire body and psyche of the individual focused on resolving unsatisfied physiological needs.**

**Once the physiological needs are resolved, the next set of needs emerges: the safety needs. “Safety” may encompass a variety of needs, not only security and protection, but also dependency, freedom from fear, structure, laws and limits. Once again, in the absence of these structures, the individual may become “wholly dominated by them” making the intellect and other capacities become primarily “safety-seeking tools” (p. 39). Maslow notes that this level is mostly obvious in children who exhibit their safety concerns quite boldly, while adults are taught to suppress them. Young children tend to be frightened upon leaving their mothers or fathers, or entering a new situation. Children are vulnerable at this level and need structure and security in their lives. Maslow believes that this is why children of divorced or quarreling parents tend to suffer psychologically, as their safety needs were not met as children.**

**Maslow proposes that we see this tendency in adults who seek stability and safety through the “very common preference for familiar rather than unfamiliar things, or for the known rather than the unknown” (p.41). Maslow suggests that even the need for religion or world philosophy may be an attempt to achieve freedom from feelings of anxiety or chaos. The neurosis that most finds its root in the frustration of the safety need is the obsessive-compulsive neurosis. Obsessive-compulsives try desperately to order their**

world so that no unexpected disaster will erupt (p.42). Unfamiliarity and spontaneity result in a panic reaction, much more extreme than the situation necessitates.

Upon the satisfaction of the physiological and safety needs, the individual will want companions, love and acceptance. The need for affectionate relations with friends or family will be felt more strongly than before and the individual will endeavor to find a place for him/her self among others. Maslow cites the destructive effects on children of moving too often, of disorientation, over-mobility, being removed from one's family, or of being "without roots" (p. 43). It is his opinion that psychology has underplayed the role of group membership, that it is our "deeply animal tendency to herd, to flock, to join, to belong" (p.44). It could be the frustration of this need that causes the adult to join gangs, cults and the like, in a desperate yearning for belonging. Promiscuity is also noted as a misplaced need for love and affection.

Maslow divides the esteem needs into two distinct categories. Firstly, there is the desire for adequacy, competence, and confidence in oneself. And secondly, there is the desire for reputation or prestige, to be seen as adequate and competent by others. These needs are related naturally to self-confidence and self-worth, but the frustration of these needs produce feelings of helplessness, inferiority and weakness (p. 45). There is much danger in placing one's sense of competence in the hands of others. It is quite common in our society that individuals value the esteem of others and take it as their own, leading to a fragile and inconsistent view of oneself.

Maslow notes that there are certain consequences of satisfying a basic, deficiency need. One such consequence is independence of and a certain disdain for the old satisfiers and goal objects. In general, Maslow states that there tends to be: (1) an

overestimation of the satisfiers of the ungratified needs and, (2) an underestimation of the satisfiers of the gratified needs (1954, p.33). This shift in values is the result of our constant re-construction of our vision of the future, of “the good life”. For the most part, Maslow says, we tend to take for granted what we already have, even more so if we never had to struggle for them.

Self-actualization is probably Maslow’s most famous and complex concept. Placed at the top of the hierarchy of needs, self-actualization refers to Maslow’s vision of the ultimate in human potential and mental health.

### **SELF-ACTUALIZATION**

The “ultimate” in mental health differs for each individual. The inner core of the individual comprises certain potentials which, if actualized, provide a “fuller knowledge of, and acceptance of the person’s own intrinsic nature... an unceasing trend toward unity, integration or synergy” (Parangimalil, 1985). Maslow’s definition is as follows:

Self-actualization is defined in various ways but a solid core of agreement is perceptible. All definitions accept or imply, (a) acceptance and expression of the inner core or self, i.e., actualization of these latent capacities, and potentialities, “full functioning”, availability of the human and personal essence, (b) They all imply minimal presence of ill health, neurosis, psychosis, of loss or diminution of the basic human and personal capacities. (1962, p. 197)

This state of Being, rather than of striving, is suspected to be synonymous with selfhood, with being “authenticated”, with being a person, with being fully human. (1962, p. 202)

It is important to note the movement from the deficiency needs to the growth needs, in the sense that “deviations from the previously reached equilibrium state are not

reduced, but enhanced, made to grow” (Heylighen, 1992, p. 41). The quality of awareness changes after the completion of the lower level needs (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Now that the individual is no longer preoccupied with lower level needs, he or she is free to “relate” to the B (or meta) needs (Rosenblatt, 1977).

Maslow insists that self-actualized individuals are recognizable by certain common characteristics (1954, p. 153). Self-actualized individuals have a more efficient perception of reality and are comfortable with their relation to it. Maslow’s S-A (self-actualized) groups found it easier to identify “confused or concealed” realities and were found to make predictions of the future based more on fact than upon wish, desire, or character-driven optimism or pessimism (1954, p.153). Not surprisingly then, he also found that the group had high levels of general acceptance, of themselves, others and nature (p.155). Self-actualized individuals did not feel as anxious about the discrepancy between their ideal and real selves. These subjects were far more likely to “see human nature as it is and not as they would prefer it to be” (p. 156). This group showed a marked lack of defensiveness and pose, and displayed distaste of those qualities in others.

Maslow also described self-actualizing people as spontaneous, in behaviour and in thought, “marked by simplicity and naturalness, and by lack of artificiality or straining for effect” (p. 157). Perhaps this spontaneity and enthusiasm is bolstered by what Maslow called “continued freshness of appreciation”. Such individuals have the capacity to experience “newness” repeatedly, to experience wonder and awe at even the basic goods of life which may become stale to the ordinary individual (p. 163). Creativeness was also characteristic of the self-actualized groups without exception, though it is described as a general creativity which affects every activity the individual participates in (p.170).

Observed individuals also communicated a need for privacy, and Maslow found they can be solitary without discomfort and for the most part, enjoyed being alone more than other individuals. In this similar vein, self-actualizing individuals often display autonomy, independence of culture and environment, and a definitive sense of will (p. 162).

Self-actualized individuals were also found to have closer, deeper personal relationships than other adults. Maslow suggested that this might be because of their capabilities to transcend ego boundaries and identify well with others (p. 166). In general, self-actualized people were found to have a more philosophical, unhostile sense of humour. They do not find hurtful, smutty or superior humour funny, but are instead more likely to be amused by humour intrinsic to the situation (p. 169-170).

Self-actualization theory gained in popularity until eventually Maslow's ideas became the center of the humanistic movement of the 1960's. Maslow's theory of needs and ideas of human development appealed to those who did not feel satisfied by either conventional religion, or hard-core scientific theory. Maslow propounded that the rigidity of each of these institutions had left us without a person-centered institution to assist us in achieving self-actualization. He felt this important role was provided in humanistic theory. Maslow's consequent theories of peak-experience and plateau-experience arose from this conception and also garnered a lot of attention in the humanistic and transpersonal psychology fields. This thesis will address both the peak- and plateau-experience in the next chapter.

## **RELIGION AND SCIENCE**

In the preface to **Religions, Values and Peak-Experiences**, Maslow warned his readers against the tendency to polarize and dichotomize on the basis that religious institutions generally develop two extremes: the mystical/individual and the legalistic/organizational (Maslow, 1970). He posited that the organized type risks a reduction to the solely behavioural, while the mystical risks being reduced to the merely experiential. He believed that a medium path between the extremes was possible for the self-actualized individual, saying,

the profoundly and authentically religious person integrates these trends easily and automatically. The forms, rituals, ceremonials, and verbal formulae in which he was reared remain for him experientially rooted, symbolically meaningful, archetypal, unitive. Such a person may go through the same motions and behaviours as his more numerous co-religionists but he is never reduced to the behavioural, as most of them are (p. vii).

Maslow does not offer further explanation as to how to keep the two extremes integrated, but it is suggested that the key to integration is to embrace one's religious experiences, which self-actualizers are prone to do more easily and frequently. He states, "the mystic experience, the illumination, the great awakening... are forgotten, lost, or transformed into their opposites" (1970, p. vii). Maslow does not hesitate to identify the culprit that makes people forget or deny their religious experiences: the institutionalized Religion. It concerned Maslow that organized religions polarize the sacred and the profane, and consequently de-sacrilize much of ordinary life (Maslow, 1970). As long as religious experience and feeling are confined inside the walls of the church or to the "exclusive jurisdiction of a priestly class" (Parangimalil, 1985), we are less likely to interpret other experiences in life as authentically meaningful, for example, the feeling

one may get while looking at art, listening to music or dancing. Maslow considered it his calling to take the word “religious” out of the context of the church and dogma and “distribute it in principle throughout the whole of life” (Parangimalil, 1985).

It follows then that Maslow was opposed to the polarization between religion and science. Maslow felt a commitment to scientific truth (Hoffman, 1998) but it has been noted that he was frustrated with “the narrowness of its scientific vision” (Wulff, 1997, p. 605). In *The Psychology of Science* (1966), Maslow states that science should “release the individual from external controls and ... make him less predictable to the observer... even though perhaps more predictable to himself” (cited in Wulff, 1997, p. 605). He believed that science, when dealing with human beings, should not aim to control or predict, but to help us learn more about ourselves, incorporating “experiential knowledge” and “spectator knowledge”, including all subjective knowledge. Science should be seen as “looking at [reality] for oneself” and Maslow considered science to be the religion of the non-religious (Wulff, 1997, p. 605).

Science and religion, in isolation of one another, will each become pathological in Maslow’s opinion. When science is “reduced to the concrete” it may become amoral, in some cases anti-moral, “merely technology which can be bought from anyone for any purpose” (Maslow, 1970, p. 16). Science, by excluding subjective experience, makes it impossible to study the abstract, such as religious experience or symbolism, as well as the B-values that really matter to regular people, such as love and virtue (Maslow, 1970). Religion without science, on the other hand, risks becoming superstitious or degenerating into blind belief, with little relation to the human world and to human nature. To Maslow, most experiences in life belong to the realm of both “religion” and “science” but as result



of the polarization between the two, those experiences are truncated and devalued, like the peak-experience. He identified organized religions with a capital “R”, and said that “small “r” religion is quite compatible... with science, with social passion” (Maslow, 1970, p. xiii).

Because neither institutional religion nor orthodox science emphatically encourage human growth, it was Maslow’s position that the classical concept of science should be replaced by a new science that includes “the highest levels of human nature” (Loebel, 1986, p. 48). In this ideal situation, his own theories could eventually be amenable to laboratory confirmation (Loebel, 1986). In *Toward a Psychology of Being*, he states, “we have, each of us, an essential biologically based inner nature... It is possible to study this inner nature scientifically and to discover what it is like...” (p. 3, italics added).

## **THE NEW SCIENCE**

*Psychology of Science* (1966) is largely dedicated to Maslow’s visions of a reformed scientific method and criticism of orthodox science. In the introduction Maslow states,

This book is not an argument within orthodox science; it is a critique ... of orthodox science and of the ground on which it rests, of its unproved articles of faith, and of its taken-for-granted definitions, axioms and concepts” (1966, p. 1).

Maslow wished to examine science “as one philosophy of knowledge among other philosophies” (p. 1). The foundation begins with the rejection of the traditional but “unexamined” notion that orthodox science is the only reliable path to truth, which Maslow considered to be “philosophically, historically, psychologically, and

sociologically naïve” (p.1). Within this text Maslow discusses the desacrilization of science, value-free science and different types of knowledge, with the goal of describing the “ideal” scientist. Maslow’s comments are specifically in relation to the field of psychology because he felt that the shortcomings of classical science show up most obviously in the fields of psychology and ethnology (p.4). In both of these cases an objective study of human behaviour is not enough; for complete understanding the subjective must be considered as well (Goble, 1970).

Maslow attempts to provide a new framework for our thoughts about what is and what is not science based on the axiom that science is simply the search for truth, insight and understanding (Goble, 1970). In psychology, the fundamental “datum” is itself a reflection of a whole worldview, and the traditional framework of orthodox science may impede attainment of the complete picture, as it excludes subjective knowledge. Maslow reminds us that science can also be used as a defense, a complicated way of avoiding disruption, of “ordering and stabilizing rather than discovering and renewing” (1966, p. 33). In this effort to sterilize experience, science is often used as a tool to de-emotionalize and desanctify our understanding of things. To desacralize is to “remove the sense of awe, privacy, fear, and shyness before the sacred and of humility before the tremendous” (p. 139). Maslow cites his own experiences at medical school where professors seemed to deliberately teach students to approach death and disease in a cool, unemotional manner, for example, calling the bodies for dissection “cadavers”. This toughness is ingrained in young doctors because we have been taught to think that emotions might interfere with the objectivity of a physician (p. 139). Maslow reminds us that science is a human creation, not an autonomous, nonhuman “thing” with intrinsic rules of its own: “its

origins are in human motives, its goals are human goals, and it is created, renewed, and maintained by human beings.” (1954, p. 182).

Maslow is critical of the qualities that “good” scientists are expected to present. Many scientists commit “methodolatry,” Maslow’s term for the arrogance of thinking that one knows the answer (or the path to the answer) to every question, their tendency to place too much trust in their abstractions and to be too confident of them (p. 144-145), ultimately the implication being that science is knowing rather than questioning.

Maslow suggests alternate qualities that he believes are important in the ideal scientist: modesty; constant awareness of the possibility of multiple theories for any set of facts; humility; acknowledgement of the primacy of experience, of facts, and of description over all theories. A scientist must be healthy-minded with an open-minded approach, a problem-centered attitude, not an ego-centered one (Goble, 1970). Maslow wishes to encourage scientists to remain grounded in the concrete reality of facts, their multiplicity, their contradictions and ambiguities, and he says that one will become aware of the relativity of our knowledge, “relativity to the century, the culture, the class and caste, the personal character of the observer. It is so easy to feel certain and yet to be mistaken” (p. 147). Maslow says that if science is only one means of access to knowledge of natural, social and psychological reality, and that true science is really only the discovery of truth, then the line between scientist and non-scientist becomes blurry – there are no criteria.

Maslow believed that scientists should be sensitive to the two different kinds of knowledge: nomothetic and idiographic. Nomothetic knowledge is that of laws, of generalization, of average, whereas idiographic knowledge is that of the individual, of

particularities. Classical science is mainly concerned with generalization, developing laws of reality based on specific experiences, for example, it would be of little or no relevance to experiment on a white rat if the outcome is specific only to that rat. It must generalize to all rats and so on. But for the individual or layperson, “nomothetic knowledge is only useful if it can channel through and improve my idiographic knowledge” (p. 10, *italic added*). Maslow’s use of “improve” probably does not refer to only the quantity of knowledge being improved, but also that it should aspire to a positive change in the world. Maslow also seemed to be trying to convey the necessity of science to be conscious of higher values.

Maslow would surely agree that a scientist should have values and morals in regards to his or her scientific endeavors. Maslow felt that orthodox science is missing this component, defined as value-free, “as having nothing to say about the ends, the goals, the purposes, the rewards, or the justifications of life” (p. 120). When science becomes completely absorbed in whether something is possible, no one asks whether it ought to be possible.

Maslow believed that this problem has gotten worse over the years because of the orthodox scientist’s voluntary detachment from religion and therefore a higher authority or logic (p. 122). But in reality, one must question if that distinction is so straightforward – the scientific process is full of selectiveness, choice and preference (p. 122) and yet scientists act as though they are indiscriminant in their work. If a scientist, according to Maslow, has freedom to choose, he or she is also free to reject. Maslow cites two hierarchies of esteem in science: the hierarchy of well organized knowledge (whatever its value), and the hierarchy of importance of the questions one chooses to work with.

**Maslow's evaluation of "good" science is measured according to the latter hierarchy (p. 148).**

**If science is the search for truth, and truth is a B-value according to Maslow, then it inherently encompasses other ultimate values, such as beauty, goodness, simplicity, unification and justice. Science should also aim to use truth to realize these others values, for example, a tree may appear more beautiful once one knows more about botany (p. 123). A reformed science should aspire to discover truth, and realize more beauty, symmetry and B-values in the universe, and in ourselves. Maslow states that,**

**This exploration of the secret inner life of good scientists can be a foundation for a kind of ecumenical movement that will bring together scientists, artists, "religious" people, humanists, and all other serious people (p. 149).**

**This is analogous to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, as Maslow seemed to be looking for a self-actualized science, one developed to the point of searching for B-values which are common to all fields and persons. Just as the self-actualized person is unified and transcends all dichotomies, a new science would also provide unification, one to incorporate both religion and science.**

### **CHAPTER 3 PEAK- AND PLATEAU- EXPERIENCE**

The notion of peak-experience came about when Maslow came to believe that the prevailing theory of self-actualization no longer seemed comprehensive enough (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Peak-experiences can be seen as examples of mystical experience, but more importantly, the peak-experience provides an “exemplar of what the self is or could be” (Rowan, 1983, p.11) which makes this theory acutely related to self-actualization. In this state of consciousness “a human being [experiences] his or her highest point of unity and integration. The highest values in life are discovered in peak-experiences” (Parangimalil, 1985, p. 215).

#### **WHAT IS A PEAK-EXPERIENCE?**

In the field of psychology, particularly around the time Maslow was starting his study, the prevalent idea was that since the inner mind was intangible, it could not be studied objectively. Maslow hoped to provide a framework which could be used, both personally and scientifically, to explore peak-experiences. With a common vocabulary (“peak-experience”), the frequency of occurrence and variation of the experience can be measured and examined. Individuals can use Maslow’s terms to relate their subjective experience and compare it to the subjective experiences of others. In this manner, Maslow feels these experiences will become incorporated into our everyday language and our culture.

**Maslow (1954) describes the peak-experience as:**

Feelings of limitless horizons opening up to the vision, the feeling of being simultaneously more powerful and also more helpless than one ever was before, the feeling of great ecstasy and wonder and awe, the loss of placing in time and space with, finally, the conviction that something extremely important and valuable had happened, so that the subject is to some extent transformed and strengthened even in his daily life by such experiences (p. 164).

In Maslow's **Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences** (1970), he offers many characteristics to describe this experience (p. 59-68). During the peak-experience the individual feels as though he or she has experienced the universe as an integrated and unified whole, and that whole is seen as essentially good and desirable. Good is seen as inevitable and evil is seen as a product of a limited, selfish vision or understanding. Living becomes ultimately worthwhile. The experience is ego-transcending and unselfish and the individual refrains from projecting any human purposes on the world. Fear disappears and in the wonder and reverence at the experience, all dichotomies, polarities and conflicts are seemingly transcended. The individual feels graced, fortunate or blessed, more loving, less needy, and the center of his/her own self. Maslow compared the peak-experience to heaven, saying that the peak-experience makes the individual feel as though he/she has been allowed a glimpse of it.

Maslow describes the peak-experience as a state of Being. This state is temporary, self-validating, non-striving; it is an end-state. This state involves a particular kind of cognition, that which Maslow calls cognition of Being, or B-Cognition (1959). This type of cognition is in contrast to cognition organized by the deficiency needs of the individual, which Maslow calls D-Cognition. For example, Maslow illustrates the difference in the deficiency- and being- cognition outlooks by comparing different types of love. Maslow says that there is love that stems from a deficiency of love, the simple

**gratification of a love need; or there is love that is an end unto itself, often called Agapean or Godly love. It is the love of the core of another person or thing. Maslow would call the first type d-love and the second, b-love.**

**Being-Cognitive in peak-experiences reflects several differences from regular D-Cognition (from "Cognition of Being in the Peak-Experiences", 1959):**

- 1. In B-Cognition the experience or object tends to be seen as a whole, as a complete unit, detached from relations, from possible usefulness, from expediency, and from purpose.**
- 2. When there is B-Cognition, the precept is exclusively and fully attended to. This may be called "total attention" or "focal attention".**
- 3. In B-Cognition the individual is capable of perceiving external objects as separate or divorced from their human use or concern.**
- 4. Perception is richer in B-cognizing.**
- 5. Perception is more likely to be ego-transcending.**
- 6. The experience itself is felt as self-validating, self-justifying, and carries its own intrinsic value or worth.**
- 7. There is frequently a disorientation in time and space, being oblivious of his or her surroundings and of the passage of time.**

**It is in part the Being-Cognition that Maslow believes is unique to the peak experience. Maslow believed that it was important for individuals to develop the ability**



to attain such levels of cognition and experience these heights of cognitive and personal awareness. The secondary effects of Being-Cognition include higher levels of creativity, awareness, social responsibility and intrinsic motivation. This is the underlying motive behind Maslow's support of the arts in education systems. A humanistic education would also seek to teach individuals how to access their own personal peak-experiences and Being-Cognition.

Just as the peak-experience is different for each individual, the trigger of a peak-experience is largely dependent on the nature of the individual. Most individuals experience a peak or ecstasy at some point in their lives, and so Maslow maintains that there are many different kinds of triggers for the peak-experience. "There are many paths to heaven" insists Maslow, though he states that for most individuals, music and sex (in b-love not d-love) are said to be the easiest ways to induce a peak-experience (1971, p. 169). In general, any experience of "real excellence, of real perfection, of any moving toward the perfect justice or toward perfect values" may also invoke a peak-experience (1971, p. 169). Women are often cited as having a peak-experience during childbirth. Other triggers include dancing and athletics.

The after effects of the peak-experience range in intensity. At its most extreme, the experience can be life changing, altering the perception of the individual permanently. It is possible that the experience fulfills a therapeutic need, helping one to feel in touch with one's inner self and needs. The experience might aid to eradicate "existential meaninglessness" and help show the depressed individual that pure joy exists and might well exist again (Maslow, 1970). Peak experiences can have the same effect as psychotherapy. Maslow cites two reports of mystic or "oceanic" experiences so profound

as to remove neurotic symptoms permanently (1959). The peak experience is seen as breaking up anxieties, of helping to develop spontaneity, of courage, sensory and body awareness (1971, p. 171). Ultimately the goal is always to aid in the individual's process of self-actualization. The peak-experience's most valuable effect is of moving toward the discovery of identity. The peak-experience is seen by Maslow as a call to the outward-focused individual, a reminder, to nourish the self.

### **THE PLATEAU-EXPERIENCE**

After Maslow's first major heart attack in 1968, he declared that he was living a "post-mortem life". After expecting to die of this heart attack, Maslow began to perceive a whole new appreciation for life. He claimed that

every moment of every single day is transformed because the pervasive undercurrent –the fear of death- is removed... I could have just as easily died, so that my living constitutes a kind of an extra, a bonus..." (cited in Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 2).

Maslow managed to incorporate his new perspective by introducing a new concept that he referred to as the "plateau-experience" (1970, p. xiv). The plateau-experience is related to the peak-experience; Maslow believed that as one grows older and experiences more of life - especially those tragic aspects of life - the peak-experiences are less common and an experience marked by serenity and calm may take its place.

As these poignant and emotional discharges died down in me, something else happened.... a sort of precipitation occurred of what might be called the sedimentation or the fallout from illuminations, insights, and other life experiences that were very important... The result has been a kind of

unitive consciousness which... [I can define] as the simultaneous perception of the sacred and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the ordinary, or the miraculous and the rather constant... (1972, p. 113)

This experience is cognitively a high plateau where the individual experiences a profound sense of illumination or awakening. The individual can see the miraculous and the sacred in something that is completely ordinary. Serenity and calm mark the plateau experience and along with a noetic quality that is distinctly cognitive (unlike the peak-experience, which can be entirely emotional). The plateau-experience is more voluntary than the peak-experience, as “one can learn to see in this Unitive way almost at will” (1970, p. xiv). The plateau-experience is

A witnessing, an appreciating, what one might call a serene, cognitive blissfulness which can, however, have a quality of casualness and of lounging about....to be profoundly touched with (sweet) sadness and tears at the contrast between their own mortality and the eternal quality of what sets off the experience (1970, p. xv).

Maslow’s personal experience and the plateau-experience can be likened to the near-death experiences (NDE). The after-effects of NDE’s such as loss of the fear of death, a sense of timelessness, heightened awareness of the present moment, and the dividing of their “former” life from the present one are all characteristics that Maslow uses to describe his “post-mortem life” (Atwater, 1998, <http://www.iands.org/nde/html>).

Maslow introduced the notion of the plateau-experience as a key element in the process of spiritual self-development (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). Maslow suggested that individuals capable of having transcendent experiences were more likely to lead longer and fuller lives because they would be able to transcend everyday frustrations and conflicts (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.6).

**Maslow suggested that the plateau-experience might be experienced at different levels of intensity. He proposed that a lesser intense plateau-experience might be perceived as pure enjoyment and happiness.**

**A mother sitting quietly looking, by the hour, at her baby playing, and marveling, wondering, philosophizing, not quite believing... she can experience this as a very pleasant, continuing, contemplative experience... [instead of] a climatic explosion... (Maslow, 1970, p. xv)**

**It is evident that there are considerable differences between the peak- and plateau-experiences. The peak-experience is likely energetic, brief and climatic, while the plateau-experience is marked by serenity, with a lesser intensity, but longer duration. Dance, music or sex may invoke the peak-experience, while the plateau-experience is more likely to be inspired by aesthetic perception or awe (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p.7). Peak-experience may be purely emotional, while the plateau-experience is necessarily cognitive in its noetic quality and in the perception of “witnessing”. The plateau-experience may be cultivated and knowingly invoked, while the peak-experience is generally a surprise to its perceiver.**

**In two conferences that Maslow attended in the months before his death, he addressed the plateau-experience and related themes saying, “this is a very brief anticipation of a more detailed study of ‘plateau experiences’...which I hope to write soon” (Maslow cited in Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 6). Presumably, his research on the plateau-experience would have continued had he not died of a heart attack shortly after. Because of this, our understanding of what Maslow meant by the plateau-experience is limited, and specifically, the relationship between the peak-experience and plateau is unclear. The plateau-experience appears to be born of the peak-experience, and developed in response to its limitations. They share many qualities such as awe and**

mystery, but Maslow felt that the peak-experience was limited by its transience and excitement that can result in neglecting paths that lead to more sustained transcendent experience (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995). In addition, in his own experience Maslow found that his peak-experiences had decreased as his plateau-experiences increased. Maslow felt that the transition from peak-experiences to plateau-experiences had to do with age, that confrontation with one's own mortality incites the progression from the climatic, emotional peak to a more cognitive, sophisticated witnessing of reality (Krippner, 1972, p.113). Had Maslow further developed the concept of the plateau-experience we would have probably seen the plateau-experience as succeeding the peak-experience as Maslow's paramount experience of transcendence.

### **MASLOW'S TRANSCENDENCE**

Maslow used the concept of transcendence more and more frequently as it seemed he needed to accommodate his newfound appreciation of life into his personality theory. At first Maslow treated self-actualization and transcendence as one and the same, but eventually he added transcendence to the hierarchy, though it was never clear whether it preceded or succeeded self-actualization (Rowan, 1983). Regardless however, the two experiences are linked, as Maslow states that "when we are well and healthy and adequately fulfilling the concept of 'human being', then experiences of transcendence should, in principle, be commonplace" (1970, p. 32). Transcenders also tend to be "peakers" and are among those who experience the plateau experience.

A considerable portion of **The Farther Reaches of Human Nature** (published posthumously in 1971) is devoted to Maslow's contemplation of transcendence and its various connotations. For the most part, he discusses transcendence in either (1) its effect on the individual's perception of the happenings around him or her, or (2) how transcendence negates or prevents the effects of the environment on the individual. It is Maslow's position that there has been a resurgence of the association of psychological health with adjustment – to reality, to society, to other people. This is disturbing to Maslow, as he feels that the authentic or healthy person is not being defined in his or her own right, but rather by environmentally centered terms (1961). It is Maslow's position that "an extra-psychic centering point cannot be used for the theoretical task of defining the healthy psyche" (1961, p. 1). For Maslow, it follows that supreme mental health is equated with transcendence of environment in general; that authenticity is the opposite of being the product of one's environment; that self-actualized and transcending individuals are ruled by the laws of their own character rather than by the rules of society.

Such examples are: the **transcendence of culture**, where Maslow states that the transcendent self-actualized individual is a universal person, not someone who is easily swayed by ethnocentricities or habits of culture. The **transcendence of time and space** refers to Maslow's observation of individuals who meditate or concentrate so hard on something outside of their own psyche that he or she transcends his or her own skin and body. The individual may also view him or herself as a symbol of something larger, that which is eternal and permanent. Maslow refers to the **transcendence of dichotomies and polarization**, that the individual will rise from dichotomies to wholes. Maslow describes the **transcendence of one's own will** as: "to yield to one's destiny or fate and to fuse

with it, to love it... a rising above one's own personal will..." (p. 264). Maslow also cites the **transcendence of fear**, which is the overcoming of inhibitions and denials, and of the present situation (p. 259-268). Transcendence is "to relate to existence also in terms of the possible as well as the actual" (p. 263). He describes transcendence as loss of self-consciousness, as "meta-human" and of Taoistic objectivity. Maslow's "condensed statement" on transcendence is:

Transcendence refers to the very highest and most inclusive or holistic levels of human consciousness, behaving and relating, as ends rather than means, to oneself, to significant others, to human beings in general, to other species, to nature, and to the cosmos. (p. 269)

Maslow suggested two directions that could be taken in response to mortality: "widening the scope of one's consciousness or narrowing it" (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 9). Transcendence was Maslow's answer to the ultimate widening of the consciousness and gaining of wisdom and understanding.

According to Maslow, cognizing transcendence is most likely in individuals who are:

1. self-actualizers
2. highly talented or creative people
3. highly intelligent people
4. very strong characters
5. powerful and responsible leaders and managers
6. exceptionally good (virtuous) people

**7. heroic people who have overcome adversity (and are strengthened).**

**These people are generally also “peakers”, and life-positive individuals who are more aware of the B-realm of living, who are more meta-motivated.**

**In the chapter “Theory Z” in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* (1971), Maslow outlined the differences between self-actualized people and those self-actualizers who are also “transcenders” (p. 273). The transcenders are described by Maslow as those individuals who go beyond “merely healthy”, for they have transcended self-actualization in a sense. Maslow attributes to these individuals many characteristics typically attributed to religious leaders or mystics. Maslow states that “non-transcending and transcending self-actualizers share in common all the characteristics described for self-actualizing with the one exception of... the number and importance of peak-experiences and B-cognitions and... plateau experiences...” (1971, p. 273).**

**Transcenders are concerned with peak- and plateau- experiences as the most important things in their lives, and can speak easily, naturally, and without self-consciousness in the language of Being. They often find it easier to perceive the sacred in the secular than other self-actualized individuals. They are deliberately meta-motivated. They are reported to be more responsive to beauty as they perceive life more unitively, holistically or sacrally. Maslow observed that transcenders can more readily identify each other and mutually understand one another. Transcenders showed a stronger propensity of the self-actualizer’s natural tendency towards synergy – intrapsychically, interpersonally, intraculturally – to “transcend the dichotomy between selfishness and unselfishness and includes them both under a single superordinate concept” (1971, p.**



278). Maslow notes that transcendents' happiness is often tinged with sorrow, more so than regular healthy people, as they are prone to sadness over the cruelty of people or the state of humankind. Transcendents are often more religious or spiritual in their nature, and reconciled with concepts of evil. They are giving and can easily transcend his or her own ego. Finally, transcendents according to Maslow, are more taoistic: B-cognition makes everything look more miraculous, more perfect, just as it should be.

It may appear that transcendents have all the characteristics of regular self-actualized individuals except they are intensified and more extreme. Transcendents are not, however, only poets or artists. Maslow insisted that he found as many reports of transcendent experiences among businessmen, industrialists, and politically minded people than as among the "professionally religious" (1971, p. 285).

In Maslow's framework, transcendence remains a vague concept.

Transcendence can mean to live in the realm of Being, speaking the language of Being, B-cognizing, plateau living. It can mean the serene B-cognition as well as the climactic peak-experience kind of B-cognition. After the insight or the great conversion, or the great mystical experience or the great illumination, or the great full awakening, one can calm down as the novelty disappears, and as one gets used to good things or even great things, live casually in heaven and be on easy terms with the eternal and infinite (Maslow from Rowan, 1983, p.11)

Any individual without the direct goal of self-actualization will not experience the full extent of the transcendental nature of the peak- or plateau-experience. In order for individuals to access the self-transcendental aspects of our human nature, they must have as their direct goal the actualization of B-values (Loebel, 1986). For example, in a discussion with Stanley Krippner (1972, p. 116), Maslow discusses a plateau-experience:

**Maslow:** Well, you can do that all the time when you attain the plateau-experience. It's the transcending of time and space which becomes quite normal, so to speak.

**Krippner:** You can do that all the time?

**Maslow:** Whenever I wish.

## **RELIGIOUS IMPLICATIONS**

Maslow accentuated the importance of disassociating this experience from any theological or supernatural origin. It was his belief that peak-experiences are perfectly natural glimpses into self-actualization, "exemplars of what the self is or could be" (Rowan, 1983, p. 11). Maslow felt that we do not have to be religious practitioners or mystics to have an epiphany in daily life. The more emotionally healthy we are the more likely we are to have peak-experiences and the more frequent they become in daily life.

In his later years, Maslow seemed to wish to reconcile the peak-experience with mysticism and religion. In **Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences**, Maslow attempted to make this connection by noting that all "high" religions are "revealed" to the people by a prophet, and suggesting that these revelations might warrant being re-labeled "peak-experiences" (1970, p. 19). Maslow considered it "quite probable" that the peak-experience may be the model of the religious revelation, that while at the time these were seen as supernatural, they were in fact "perfectly natural, human peak-experiences" (1970, p. 20). It is Maslow's proposition that all these experiences have been described the same way and therefore,

to the extent that all mystical or peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same, *all religions are the same in their essence and always have been the same* (1970, p. 20). [italics added]


It is Maslow's logical supposition that we should all agree to what is common to all religions. This "something common" Maslow calls "core-religious experience" or the "Transcendental Experience" (1970, p. 20). The "core-religious experience" is what remains after we eliminate all the localisms, all the accidents of particular languages or particular philosophies, all the ethnocentric expression, all those elements which are not common to all religions. Maslow is not reducing all religions to one common religion, but in the essential core-religious experience lies the possibility of bringing all faiths and atheists together on a common meeting ground; learning about these experiences may help us to better understand larger revelations, allowing for variety within this unity.

If all revealed religions came from, in essence, the same experience, how does Maslow account for the diversity among the "high religions"? Maslow explains that because peak-experiences have never before been understood in a naturalistic way, the mystic was obliged to describe his/her experience with whatever explanation, language and phrasing (usually religious) readily available in his/her time and place (1970, p. 72). The differences among religions are essentially explained as cultural variants. The experience itself is compared to mortar and brick, saying that the Frenchman, the Arab, the Chinese man, etc., may each make a different house, yet despite the differences in style, the essence of each house is the same (1970, p. 73).

Differences between religions may be due in part to the organizations that were founded on them. Maslow insists that the institution which is built on the prophet's revelation "is like the IBM version of the original" (1970, p. 21). Maslow sees organized religion as an effort to communicate peak-experiences to the non-peakers. Because they do not really understand it, the non-peakers are forced to imitate, "concretizing all the

symbols and ceremonies to try to make them sacred” (1970, p. 24). Essentially, the relationship of the peaker and non-peaker becomes analogous to the relationship between the prophet and the organization.

Prophet  Institution

Peaker  Non-peaker

A “non-peaker” is not necessarily someone who is incapable of having a peak-experience – there can be self-actualized non-peakers – but one who suppresses them, or is afraid of them, who denies or “forgets” them. This person is generally someone who is extremely rational or materialistic (1970, p. 22).

The plateau-experience also involves a somewhat mystical component which Maslow calls “witnessing” which is often a quality encountered in mystic experiences (Rowan, 1983). Witnessing refers to the feeling of the individual who perceives a vision of the environment external to one’s self that may have gone unnoticed before. Maslow states that the witnessing perspective may aid the individual in seeing the world as “miraculous because it liberates the perceiver from reducing the world to the concrete” (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 8). The individual may now perceive the world beyond the “here and now” and see the many generations before him/her and envision those that are to follow. It is for this reason that the plateau-experience may be paradoxical; it is “a mixture of permanence and mortality” (Cleary & Shapiro, 1995, p. 9). The realization that there is an order in the world, but that the individual is only a small part of it can be comforting, and at the same time saddening.

Maslow's concept of witnessing is reminiscent of Edmund Husserl's notion of "bracketing". Husserl had similar intentions to Maslow's: that "science ought to and can provide human lives with a 'spiritual meaning'" (Patocka, 1996, p. 1). Husserl was determined that science and spirituality could be brought together, to complement one another. Central to Husserl's phenomenology is the concept of **Lebenswelt**, which is the immediate human "life-world". For Husserl it follows that there exists "**Lebenswelt-consciousness**" which is taken as the matrix of all phenomena (Capps, 1995). Husserl proposed the term "phenomenological reduction" for his method of reflection on the meanings the mind employs when it contemplates an object. Husserl said that the method involves "bracketing existence" so that the contents of the **Lebenswelt** may be considered in and of themselves (Stroker, 1993). If the subject suspends all judgment and presumptions about the ultimate nature of things, then Husserl suggests, "the essence of objectivity can be studied in all its basic forms... this evident "seeing" itself is truly cognition in the fullest sense and objectivity is not a thing contained in cognition as in a sack..." (Husserl in Patocka, 1996, p. 95).

The distinctively cognitive aspect of Maslow's concept of the plateau experience is incredibly similar to Husserl's notions of meta-noetics and of "seeing" with outstanding clarity. Maslow would agree with Husserl's position that, in this state,

[there] is nothing other than the discovery of the freedom of the subject which is manifested in all transcendence, most of all in temporal, presentational transcendence – in our living in principle in horizons which first bestow full meaning on the present and that, in the words of the thinker, we are beings of the far reaches (Patocka, 1996, p. 135).

Maslow states that the transcendent experiences occur universally, and they can be characterized as being of a theistic, supernatural, or non-theistic content. Maslow

stresses the idea that the experience is as unique as the person experiencing it. Regardless of content, and how the experience is interpreted and used, Maslow points out that there are certain characteristics which are constant to what he has termed “peak-experiences”, a term which encompasses the spectrum of mystical states of consciousness. Maslow prefers the term “peak-experience” because he wishes to secularize the experience. He felt it necessary to define the experience as one that is natural and available without an organized religious context. However, this is not to say that religious context is unimportant. He comprehends the need for a framework of values with which to interpret and understand the experience. However, Maslow believed that since the peak-experience can be stimulated by non-religious settings and activities, the framework by which we interpret our experience must encompass everyday life – beyond the realm of religion. Then, Maslow says, “religion becomes... a state of mind achievable in almost any activity of life, if this activity is raised to a suitable level of perfection” (p. 170).

Maslow’s concept of the transcendent experience comes more and more to resemble mystical and religious experience. Maslow suggested that all mystical experiences and peak-experiences are the same in their essence and have always been the same (1970). He cited such common concepts as “mystical fusion... with the whole cosmos” or “to become divine or godlike, to go beyond merely human” (1971, p. 261, 264). Maslow suggested that the revelations of the “high religions” are peak-experiences or transcendent experiences that were misinterpreted as signs of divinity, supernatural existence or a higher plane of reality. In light of this, Maslow considered it important to remind his readers that by these statements he was not implying anything extrahuman or

**supernatural, that in fact, to become godlike or divine is indeed a potentiality of human nature.**

**Maslow's list of characteristics – formerly assigned only to religious contexts – encompass all varieties of transcendent experience, whatever the context. He described how the experience tends to be unifying, noetic, and ego-transcending; it gives a sense of purpose to the individual, a sense of integration. He felt that peak-experiences can be therapeutic, as they tend to increase free will, self-determination, creativity and empathy. Maslow believed that we should study and cultivate peak-experience, so that we can teach those in our culture who “have never had them or who repress or suppress them” (p. 179), providing them a route to achieve personal growth, integration and fulfillment.**

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **A CRITIQUE OF MASLOW'S PSYCHOLOGY**

Theories of self-actualization have appealed to the Western mind since Aristotle.... For one thing, self-actualization theories resurrect the moral optimism of our enlightenment heritage by affirming the positive and good-promoting potentialities of human nature. For another, they provide a normative theory for the guidance and direction of human life. Finally, they present a clear and unambiguous view of what it means to be human and how this humanity can be best developed.... [However] self-actualization theory...has very little to offer in the way of understanding and improving the human condition within the late-twentieth-century Western society (Geller, 1982; p. 57).

Leonard Geller received his Ph.D. in philosophy, and is interested in work regarding the nature of the self, and explaining social action. He feels that despite the superficial appeal of Maslow's theory, there is much valid criticism of a hierarchical system of needs and the concept of self-actualization. This chapter will examine the shortcomings of Maslow's theory and method, address several possible oversights, and discuss the logic of a mental health hierarchy and the role of the environment on the individual. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the validity of the framework upon which Maslow's values, Being-cognition and finally, the transcendent experience is based.

#### **METHODOLOGY AND APPROACH**

There are many shortcomings in Maslow's theoretical framework, for it is said that, aside from the actual hierarchy of needs itself, Maslow lacked an "integrated conceptual structure" (Heylighen, 1992, p. 45). His observations and findings are usually presented in an extremely conversational tone, as a list of remarks mentioned in passing.



**This makes it difficult for others to organize Maslow's observations; they are seemingly arbitrary, as there appears to be no order to the characteristics that he lists (Heylighen, 1992). The term "self-actualization" is especially confusing in this regard because it is often not clearly defined. Nor does Maslow offer a comprehensible route or method of therapy for achieving self-actualization (Sipe, 1987).**

**Maslow's lack of scientifically valid study is problematic, and is often a general criticism directed to humanistic psychology on the whole. It is questionable whether the methods and procedures of orthodox science can be applied in a humanistic way (Sheehan, 1982). As we have seen, Maslow was of the opinion that the natural sciences should not presume to serve as a model for psychology, and that instead a new and more appropriate conception of science should operate as a replacement. In addition, it is one of the primary contentions of humanistic psychology that all experience is subjective, that each of us sees the world in an entirely different way. This view does not allow for "any act of awareness to be made into an object to be studied, [it] can only be understood by a person's living of that act" (Greeway, 1982; p. 232).**

**Maslow's approach is difficult to pinpoint. Loebel (1986) notes that Maslow appears "favourably disposed towards phenomenology, particularly as it applies to the development of psychology. However, Maslow has virtually nothing explicit to say on this subject" (p. 158).**

**As a result, Maslow's selection of subjects and his observations would be difficult, if not impossible, to reproduce scientifically (Heylighen, 1992). Much of his earlier research in self-actualization was conducted through his investigation of the lives**

of individuals that Maslow felt had already attained perfect mental health, for example, Eleanor Roosevelt and Thomas Jefferson (Wulff, 1997). For this type of research he must have had to rely on third party resources, which he had no way to verify. One must also consider the likely occurrence of the experimenter effect. The experimenter often has a tendency to see what he/she wants to, and given Maslow's hazy definition of certain terms, it is possible that Maslow's findings were too susceptible to his subjective interpretation.

...look at what he says about self-actualizers and at the list of people he offers as examples. These people have no faults, never seem to do anything wrong and always appear to be in control of the situation. This is certainly not a description of what life is really like (Loebel, 1986, p. 169).

It appears that Maslow eliminated those individuals who showed any form of pathology or maladjustment – the Dostoyevskys and Van Goghs – and chose individuals whose values he personally admired. An empirical definition of mental health cannot be based on Maslow's own implicit values trusted to be universal (Smith, 1973).

When it comes to his more contemporary subjects, Maslow tried to find “Good Human Beings” but apparently there were not many to be found, which perhaps explains his reliance on historical figures. In *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow states:

I must be careful also not to give any false impressions about the numbers of subjects (only three or four dozen who have been more or less carefully talked with and observed, and perhaps another hundred or two talked with, read, and observed but not as carefully or in depth) or about the reliability of my information (this is all exploration or investigation or reconnaissance rather than careful final research... (1971 p. 285)

One additional criticism of Maslow's work is that he seems to be unaware, or unconcerned, with relevant research that was being produced during this time (Prattis, 2000; personal communication). Mircea Eliade published **Shamanism: Archaic Techniques of Ecstasy** in 1964. This was published during Maslow's career, but he seemed not to have noticed Eliade's work on shamanism and altered states of consciousness. Joseph Campbell also had been publishing prior to this time, and one would have thought that Maslow would have greatly appreciated **The Hero with a Thousand Faces**, as he too was concerned with spiritual journeys and personal human development. Victor Turner's **Ritual Process** and Elizabeth Kubler-Ross' **On Death and Dying** both surfaced in 1969 as revolutionary to the fields of psychology, anthropology and religion alike, but Maslow never made mention of them. One possible explanation could be that Maslow tended to consider the core religious experience only in the "high" religions of Christianity, Judaism and Islam, assuming his findings would generalize to all people. This would account for Maslow's complete neglect of shamanism, as well as many other subjects. In Maslow's defense, his published works after 1968 are rare, but it seems problematic that he isolated his own thoughts from those of his contemporaries when indeed it appears that the influence of each of those thinkers could have improved his theories substantially by forcing Maslow to consider other cultures and religions beyond those in the West.

### **MENTAL HEALTH HIERARCHY**

As we have seen in Chapter 2, Maslow's principles governing human development (that is, how human beings grow and develop) are internal or intrinsic to

human nature, and they mold the entire course of human development. What Maslow believes we are capable of becoming is supposedly logically implicit in our nature – provided it is not impeded by outside circumstances. Geller (1982) discusses the logic of such a system, and says that Maslow's system is

[m]erely a deductive unfolding of this [human] nature, an inexorable movement from premises to conclusion... For a conclusion to be deducible from a set of premises, it must be reducible to those premises.... Similarly, if the logic of human development is a deductive unfolding of our inner nature, then whatever unfolds in the course of this development is implicit in and reducible to this inner nature. (p. 66-67)

Geller is stating that because Maslow's concept of the 'inner nature' is biologically or genetical determined (Parangimalil, 1985), all that unfolds from this nature is biologically based. Because the mystic or peak-experience is natural and intrinsic to the individual's inner nature, it too is biologically based. Geller concludes that Maslow is therefore committed to a genetic or biological reductionism in which the distinctly human is reducible to the genetic make-up of the individual. Needs, for Maslow, are neither caused nor created, but are simply intrinsic to our genetic nature.

Geller (1982) argues that this framework is reductionistic. Geller proposes that human needs are much more complex, that a need is not a "nonconceptual, nonmeaningful, nonsymbolic impulse that impels the human organism into action.... Any human need is to have a need for something or other under certain conditions" (p. 68). Maslow's theory does not account for the meaning or significance to the individual whose need it is. Geller offers the example of eating, a deficiency-need :

...to eat is not a blind impulse pressing for release but a highly complex and sophisticated cultural desire. Far from just desiring to eat, I desire to eat certain foods at certain times with certain people under certain conditions. The same intricate symbolic structure applies to all other

**human needs, whether it be the need for sex, love, security, or self-actualization (p. 68).**

**Fox (1982) offers the same objections: aren't there needs that are socially acquired?**

**It appears that Maslow has given little credit to the individual to control their needs, critically evaluate their wants, or mold their desires in response to circumstances in their social world. It follows that we may doubt whether the hierarchy is, and must remain under all conditions, a hierarchy. One wonders that perhaps, even under threat to safety, human beings can still achieve higher need level satisfaction. Francis Heylighen focuses on the evolution of complexity, how higher levels of organization originate and develop. He has done research and written papers on various subjects in various scientific disciplines, from mathematical physics, and computer support systems to humanistic psychology. He cites Nazi concentration camps as an example of a group of people with constantly unmet lower level needs who maintained "dignity and altruism" (1992, p. 46), a point that is reiterated by Frankl, 1966. Fox (1982) raises similar objections to the logic of Maslow's hierarchy, asking,**

**Why, then, do people commit suicide? Why will many members of a starving group refrain from cannibalism, while others resort to it? Why have thousands starved in India in the midst of herds of sacred but quite edible animals? ...[M]any great artists and composers created their masterpieces during extended periods of time in which they were subjected to grinding deprivation and critical rejection, if not outright ridicule.... We can find countless examples in the present and past of people preferring psychological survival to what they perceive to be dishonorable physical survival. (Fox, 1982, p. 30-31)**

**In addition, Maslow credited his own heart attack (a major threat to physiological and safety needs) for his "post-mortem life", his rejuvenated concern and appreciation for B-**

values. It appears from Maslow's own example that a threat to lower level needs may actually provoke the realization of B-values and the fulfillment of higher level needs.

This oversight may signal that Maslow's work is too person-centered, to the extent that the structure only works in isolation from the environment. By concentrating so much on the individuals alone, Maslow ignores the social, political and economic environment of the individual. "Since all that man can be comes from inside himself, the environment plays no direct role in character formation" (Loebel, 1986, p. 196).

### **THE ROLE OF THE ENVIRONMENT**

Maslow recognized self-actualization as the development of those needs or potentialities that are inherent in human nature. The fulfillment of those needs is to journey towards growth and mental health. The failure or frustration of those needs is the only origin Maslow allowed for the occurrence of neuroses and mental illness. This premise upholds his claim that the inner nature of every individual is good and positive. The implication here is that the inner nature is something that is always to be expressed, not repressed, in all cases.

If the environment has very little or no effect on character formation and man is basically good, we are left with the question of the existence of evil – where does it come from? Because Maslow is committed to the essential goodness of human nature, the origin of evil must lie outside the self – but he denies the influence of the environment on the development of the individual. We cannot point to external circumstances in order to justify aspects of ourselves that we do not like. Also, deficiency-needs are the only ones that rely on external sources for fulfillment, and therefore, the only ones that could be

frustrated or denied by environmental conditions. All growth-needs and being-values are intrinsically accessible.

Only if a need is other-dependent (a deficit need) can the environment play a role in human development. But if a need is not dependent upon other for gratification, then the environment can have no responsibility for its satisfaction or frustration. This is precisely what growth needs are. Neither their gratification nor their frustration depends upon the presence or absence of anything in the environment (Geller, 1982; p. 65)

So, what about the frustration of growth needs? Failure to grow is not only the result of the non-emergence of growth needs, but also the frustration of those needs once they have arisen. Individuals whose low-order needs are completely met may suffer from what Maslow calls high-order dysfunctions or “metapathologies” (Maslow, 1971, p. 305-309). These individuals, despite having met all their basic needs, do not advance to the self-actualization stage. Maslow speculated that these individuals have experienced a “vulgarization or destruction” of all intrinsic values, via an outside source such as television, for example, and hence they do not aspire to full humanness (1971, p. 306). Maslow stated that, “the metapathologies of the affluent and indulged young come partly from deprivation of intrinsic values, frustrated ‘idealism’ from disillusionment with a society they see (mistakenly) motivated only by lower or animal or material needs” (1971, p. 309). Maslow believed that this “social pathology of the affluent” was due mainly to intrinsic-value starvation. This metapathology is speculated by Maslow to be the result of a combination of a continued search for something to believe in and anger at being disappointed. Maslow also suggests that it is a function of the disillusionment that accompanies getting material gratification in life, and then still not being happy, despite it all (1971, p. 310). The effects of metapathology may range from joylessness and apathy to destructiveness and despair (1971, p. 307). For those who suffer from a

metapathology, due to a B-value absence, Maslow suggests it may be necessary for them to experience the loss of their blessings in order to be able to appreciate them again (1954, p. 40).

If the environment does not have any role in the development of our higher order needs, it also has no role in determining what values, attributes or metapathologies we develop. At this level, Loebel states, “the only answer open to Maslow is to either deny evil or admit that it must come from the individual. To do the latter is highly damaging for Maslow, for this indicates that perhaps there are certain aspects of man that should not be acknowledged” (1986, p. 196). If Maslow were to admit that human nature is multipotential, that there are good and bad potentialities within us, there is no possible criteria for determining which ones should or should not be developed. In addition, Maslow’s theory offers no criteria to resolve which potentials are impossible or realistic. Consider the latent potentiality of an individual towards musical talent or athletic prowess. Will this potentiality ever be actualized if it is not nurtured by the environment, i.e. exposure to music or sports instruction? A musical disposition cannot singularly bring about musical behaviour.

Maslow’s representation of the basic character of humankind is flawed and leads to many contradictions, ultimately undermining his entire framework. Does Maslow’s view of the inner nature of humankind have any validity? Is the essence of human nature good? Are values really biologically inherent?



## **SELF-ACTUALIZATION AND VALUES**

**We must return to Maslow's development of self-actualization theory. As we have seen, to establish the concept of self-actualization Maslow studied a "sample" of individuals from the historical past and at his point in time. It is highly problematic that Maslow chose to study only individuals whom he felt had already attained high levels of mental health, giving Maslow the final word on the ultimate in human potential and value. His selection of individuals reflects liberal values to a large extent. They were "democratic, autonomous, individualistic, and, true to the liberal penchant for piecemeal progress, preferred work ... on matters relating to social injustice" (Buss, 1979, p. 48).**

**In the opinion of Loebel (1986), self-actualization "becomes a way for Maslow to put forth his own preferences in the guise of normative and universal characteristics" (p. 179). If Maslow says that classical music is on a higher plane than rock music, then it is also a quality that all self-actualizers share.**

**In addition, Mook points out the distinct American bias in Maslow's qualifications for ultimate mental health (1987, cited in Heylighen, 1992). In discussing transcendence of the environment as a sign of mental health, Maslow states:**

**Examples...are Walt Whitman or William James, who were profoundly American, most purely American, and yet were also very purely supracultural, internationalist members of the whole human species. They were universal men not in spite of their being Americans, but just because they were such good Americans. (Maslow, 1961)**

**What Maslow suggests as healthy for the average American may be considered extremely unhealthy in other societies. In a tribal community for example, a strong sense of individualism and a tendency to "go it alone" would be considered ill-health because it would simply not be beneficial for the individual in that environment. Fox (1982) reports**

that “a majority of older Japanese, including those who have achieved security and success, still view compliant and enthusiastic submission in a group as being more mature and commendable than development of individual potentialities” (p. 30). It follows that not all values that Maslow considers intrinsic to human nature are even considered values at all in all cultures. Skirbekk comments, “those norms that are not accepted in all cultures cannot be humanly inherent.... Moral standards that seem obvious are no longer so if it can be proved that other countries have other mores” (1976, p. 30). Maslow suggests transcendence of culture, but as long as he considers “our” way to be above the influences of American culture, it does not appear that he has thoroughly investigated the concept. Maslow’s premise that the “localisms” of different religions “cancel one another out” and his disregard of the effect of environment probably account for these oversights. Maslow almost exclusively studied Americans and generalized to all people.

How does one decide what is morally “right”? And how do we determine which values we should encourage? Without any proven biological basis for the values which Maslow proposes, Orcutt and Williams, who appear to be coming from a behaviourist perspective argue that it seems to be based on a completely subjective standard (1974). They state that “a further weakness arises when an ethical position is reduced to the level of subjective feelings. If a person does something to feel ‘good’, and then says he has done this for ‘good’ reason, there is no room for conflict between two [different] courses of action” (p. 81-82).

Moreover, is it logical to assume, as Maslow does, that the potentiality of certain values or talents, leads to the moral imperative to actualize those gifts? Maslow’s theory

would hold, for example, that the actualization of the individual's latent musical potential is ethically and morally good (Franck, 1977). But as Franck (1977) points out, there is no contradiction, logically speaking, to say that it is not good to actualize one's musical ability. That certain predispositions are "good" is not a fact deduced from the principle that humanity has the tendency to actualize them. In *The Philosophical Forum*, Franck (1977) states:

The purported "goodness" of some propensities and the "oughtness" that is attached to the idea of their realization, are thus not at all intrinsic to the fact that men have an intrinsic tendency to realize them. The claimed goodness or oughtness of these propensities is completely extrinsic to the "need" for their realization, and the justification of the claim that they are good rests upon some other foundation. (p. 9)

This undermines the notion of self-actualization as an ethical norm, that all self-actualizing acts are ethically good or right, as assumed in Maslow's theory. Within his "system of values", Maslow does not provide a logical argument to support the notion of self-actualization as an ethical or moral imperative. Nor does Maslow's theory inherently provide an acceptable means of determining the moral or ethical value of any action. This completely negates the moral validity (and purpose) of a set of values such that Maslow proposes.

Self-actualization is now reduced to a circular motivational principle (McMullen, 1982). Without a valid relationship between the act of self-actualization and the inner nature of humankind, the only proof or justification for a self-actualizing act is the action itself. McMullen, who claims that he looks at Maslow from a realist perspective, says that Maslow's theory "allows for no test because it is unfalsifiable; if we predict that an individual will actualize himself by doing X, and he does not do X, then surely he has

actualized himself none the less, because all behaviour (X and non-X) satisfies the single motive [self-actualization]" (McMullen, 1982, p. 226).

We have seen so far in this chapter that self-actualization is a morally vacuous concept, as it holds no logical tie to any moral imperative based on our intrinsic nature. Self-actualization can be seen more and more as a concept that is popular and attractive, but in the context of Maslow's theory, it holds little validity, and almost no depth. In addition, we have critiqued the development of Maslow's theory and noted that it is extremely problematic, particularly Maslow's sampling of subjects. Maslow's conception of universal values is not logically consistent nor proven to have any sort of normative basis. Among those values that may be latent in humankind, Maslow offers no criteria for determining which are impossible or possible, except to say that since all human nature is good, that all of them should be encouraged. This was problematic when one considers the occurrence of evil and the existence of high-order metapathologies, and this inconsistency greatly damages Maslow's framework.

One of the significant conclusions of all these criticisms is that Maslow's framework for self-actualization is not proven to be a universal theory that applies across different cultures, eras or individuals. We have discovered quite the opposite. Maslow's humanistic psychology was revolutionary in its field at the time of its conception, but has not managed to exert influence outside of the time and society in which it began. This goes a long way in supporting Buss' theory that humanistic psychology is founded upon the tenets of 1960's liberalism, rather than the universal laws of biology (1979, p. 47). Buss, a psychologist specializing in areas surrounding history and personality, argues,

Maslow's elite – the one percent of the general population who define and thus control what is meant by self-actualization – are the psychological

embodiment of the social elite who are society's decision-makers. The structure of Maslow's psychological theory can be seen as incorporating the structure of his society. Maslow's hierarchical or "class" theory of self-actualization consists of social categories projected onto the individual. (p. 52).

In the 1960's, the decision-makers of the time were exclusive according to race, class etc. but the notion of universal acceptance and togetherness was becoming very popular. Maslow offers a microcosm of this: though he propounded universality and accessibility to mental health, he still largely restricted the impoverished, individuals of colour, individuals from non-Western cultures or religions by virtue of the pre-conditions to self-actualization. In view of this, one must be amenable to the possibility that Maslow's personal worldview was largely influenced by the conditions of existence in America at his time. Maslow attempted to provide a system of meaning to a gradually secular, non-denominational society, one which attempted to shed the traditional notions of divinity and the search for a self-sustaining truth. Maslow's contribution to psychology of religion might be best framed within the 'hippie' dissatisfaction with institutional religion and orthodox science – a gap which Maslow tried to fill by providing an autonomous system of mental health which encourages individuals not to look outside oneself for meaning, in perfect accordance with the individualistic spirit of the 1960's.

## **CHAPTER FIVE CONCLUSION**

### **VARIETIES OF PEAK-EXPERIENCE**

As we have seen earlier in this thesis, Maslow fails to provide a framework that satisfies the need for moral standards that are universal and above all “localisms”, or that in fact, self-actualization itself is an imperative as he implies. Maslow’s theory does not provide a reasonable course of determining the moral or ethical value of any action. We have seen that Maslow’s psychology of religion has been largely motivated by the time and place that Maslow lived, and in most cases, his psychological theories would not apply to an individual outside of his Western context. If self-actualization and b-values have been shown not to be universal, then we must further investigate the concept of the peak-experience and its supposed universality, which is the basis upon which Maslow extrapolates that religious feeling or mystical experience is the same as peak-experience.

It was Maslow’s contention that his psychology of religion and humanistic outlook could effectively replace religion, and become the main provider of meaning to individuals in our society. Maslow felt that his psychology of religion had the basic conditions necessary to replace religion in a secular world, that in fact, his configuration would be more suitable to people in this age: “It’s possible now to make a completely coherent and comprehensive psychological and naturalistic theory of religion – far more clear and real than any theology or religion has ever been” (Maslow, 1979, Vol 1., p. 146).

It is now possible, after critically assessing the shortcomings of Maslow's psychology, to re-examine the concept of the peak-experience and its supposed transcendent nature and evaluate whether or not Maslow's theory could adequately replace religion on the basis of the universal peak-experience. Though this paper is sympathetic to the concept of the peak-experience on a whole, we remain unconvinced that Maslow's framework is sufficient to replace a religious system.

Maslow exhibited a reductionist tendency in describing consciousness, wherein he uses many supernaturalistic terms. Supernaturalistic terms "refer to a personal entity who is distinct and separate from the material world but who in spite of this separateness can direct events in this world" (Thorsen, 1983, p. 62). Maslow believed that they could be interpreted in such a way that they do not refer to any supernaturalistic entity at all (Thorsen, 1983). Maslow states in his journal, "pratically all the words used by the priests and by now totally identified with 'religion' I can give a naturalistic meaning and bring back into the realm of human cognition and science" (1979, vol. 1, p. 146).

Maslow's peak-experience can be seen as the secular version of mystical experience and non-theistic in its connotation. Maslow continuously substituted vague terms for what has previously been known as religious experience. He uses "illumination", "great awakening", "ecstasy", or "transcendent experience" as closely related to or as synonyms for the term "religious experience". Maslow never clearly defines what any of those terms mean, instead we are lead to assume that the illumination, awakening, transcendent and mystical experiences are all different degrees of peak-experience. In *Lessons from Peak-Experiences*, Maslow states, "what their true relationship is I do not know. My best guess is that they are different in degree but not in

kind. The total mystical experience, as classically described, is more or less approached by greater or lesser peak-experience” (1962b, p. 18). It appears that the only distinctly “religious” experience is that the peak-experience has arisen in a religious context and has therefore been ‘mislabeled’.

Many of the criticisms of Maslow’s psychology apply to a greater extent in his psychology of religion. In Maslow’s psychology, there was a hierarchy to aid us in following his otherwise informal and disorganized notes, but among all the different degrees of peak-experience, Maslow never provides us with criteria for determining which are of the ‘greater’ sort, and which are of the ‘lesser’. Maslow had a background in experimental psychology such that he should have been able to carry out well-planned research that might lead to a testing of his ideas. It is obvious that he spent a lot of time interviewing people, but the outcome is extremely informal. Child (1973) states, “though obviously the master of the necessary skills, he did not seem greatly interested in applying them” (p. 21).

What criteria do we have to distinguish between the experiences of prophets, saints, or ‘regular’ people? It seems that Maslow is trying to tell us that there is no difference in essence, that all of the experiences are the same, that saints differ from us only in the degree to which they let these experiences affect their lives (Slater, 1978). But even Maslow claims that there can be different levels of intensity and it seems logical to assume that the peak-experiences of great religious leaders were more profound. When discussing peak-experiences, doesn’t ‘ecstasy’ imply more than an ‘illumination’?

Criteria for distinguishing between two different peak-experiences could be many things. A few suggestions are the degree to which the experience impacts the individual;



the value of the 'lesson' learnt through the experience; the number of, or degree to which, b-values are realized during the experience; the degree to which the experience brings the individual closer to self-actualization. In addition, Maslow does not provide a hypothesis for why the peak-experiences can vary so much.

As difficult as it is to uncover the rank of the wide variety of peak-experience, it is also very challenging to find a common element in every one of the different varieties of peak-experience. What is the common element in all experiences that range from simple happiness to an experience so profound that it has been "misunderstood" as religious revelation? Maslow offers many descriptions of possible feelings that occur during a peak-experience, but he does not form a normative structure in this segment of his theory. A classification akin to William James' four common elements of religious experience would have been helpful in defining the essential structure of peak-experience. Thorsen (1983) states that "the vagueness of Maslow's descriptions do not make it possible to establish any contextual reasonable interpretation" (p. 140).

In discussing the supposed 'ineffability' of the peak-experience, we must wonder about the prophets whom Maslow includes in this category. If prophets and great religious leaders experienced the same peak-experience that Maslow describes as having an ineffable quality, we might find a contradiction. As Scholem noted, the prophetic experience is something entirely apart from mysticism as we currently understand it:

prophecy as it was originally understood is something entirely different. The prophet hears a clear message and sometime beholds an equally plain vision, which he remembers clearly.... In this it differs fundamentally from mystical experience... For as we have said, the mystic's experience is by its very nature indistinct and inarticulate, while the prophet's message is clear and specific" (Scholem, 1965, p. 10).

While Maslow joins the mystic and the prophet into the same category, Lucy Bregman (1976) insists that common sense would lead us to question this grouping. Although the ineffability of the experience might lead to “poetry or confusion”, Bregman considers it unlikely that a distinctly ineffable experience would result in revolution and transformation to the extent of the founders of religions. In addition, she notes that Maslow has failed to mention the importance placed on “visions and voices” in many past accounts of religious experiences. She states,

For Maslow the ‘message’ of the prophet was a fumbling attempt to communicate the ineffable. That there is nothing ‘fumbling’ about the prophecies of Jeremiah did not occur to Maslow; the difference between ‘confusion’ and a clear but unpopular message is ignored (1976, p. 148).

### **THE ESSENTIAL ELEMENT**

Most controversial of all Maslow’s views is of the peak-experience as the essential element in all religions. Bregman (1976) eloquently paraphrases Maslow’s position,

the entire sets of beliefs, activities and institutions associated with religion can either be derived from peak-experience itself, or is only accidentally and mistakenly associated with ‘religion’ at all. Theological dogmas and religious organizations are thoroughly irrelevant to the ‘core’ of religion.... Peak-experience is the same now and forever, for Jesus, for Buddha, and for us. (p. 141)

Much of Maslow’s psychology of religion is based on the predication that (1) the mystic or religious experience is the core of all religions and, (2) that Maslow’s psychology of religion also shares in the core elements of all religions.

There is very little basis for either tenet. All religions are multifaceted and individuals become attracted to religion for many different reasons, many of which are

common to all religions. Other possible essential elements may include those offered by Thorsen (1983), such as holding as true some basic dogmas, living in accordance with certain rules, rituals or ceremonies, or endeavouring to act in accordance with some normative ethics.

To replace all that religion offers to its adherents, Maslow would have to provide not only the basis for a mystic or ecstatic experience, but also a framework which included the above mentioned qualities: basic dogma, rules for living, and morals. If one were to argue that one of these were in fact the essential element in all religions, does Maslow's psychology of religion still support any of these other common elements? If Maslow's theory were to have a basic dogma, we would suppose that it would be ruled by the principles of self-actualization; Maslow's rules would be those of the mental health hierarchy; and his normative ethics would be the B-values that he propounds are related to self-actualization and being-cognition.

Where does Maslow find the root of the proposal for the mystical experience as the 'core' of all religions? One of Maslow's supports is that there exists mystical traditions in most all religions and that mysticism preceded formal, institutionalized religion. We assume that Maslow was offering an empirical and naturalistic account of the history of religions, but nowhere are we to find any evidence to support this claim. Though Maslow would have us believe that mystical experience is an experience as old as time, in fact Bregman (1976) informs us that 'mysticism' as a special type of religious phenomenon developed rather late in many religious traditions, and it did not always involve "union" with either God or Being.

Theologically oriented scholars would object even further, such as Gershom Scholem, a scholar of Jewish mysticism. Scholem states that mystical experience, because it is unstructured and ineffable, necessitates a system of symbols and beliefs in order for the individual to properly reflect upon it –let alone communicate it to others (Scholem, 1965). Scholem holds that these religious sources should exist outside of mysticism proper – in “cosmological myth, prophetic visions, or even a scientific ideology” (Scholem, 1965, p.7).

It follows that Scholem would object to Maslow’s contention that the prophetic message is a mislabeled peak-experience. As we have seen, Scholem holds that the experience of the mystic and the prophet are entirely different in nature. He concedes that the mystical experience could be interpreted according to his or her language, images or concepts that were created before him or her. He states, “in general, then, the mystic’s experience tends to confirm the religious authority under which he lives; its theology and symbols are projected into his mystical experience, but do not spring from it” (1965, p. 9).

It follows from Scholem’s study of mysticism that the experience of the prophet as Maslow describes it is unlikely. Scholem concedes that an experience which is vague and formless may be molded to fit a previously formed system of symbols or theology. However, a prophetic message and vision is reported to be loud and clear, and yet does not have a previously established system upon which to base his experience if the individual is the founder of a new system – as Maslow suggests is the case for Jesus, Buddha, Muhammad and others.

## **‘PUBLIC’ VS. ‘PRIVATE’**

Lucy Bregman is a member of the religion department at Temple University, concentrating on culture and psychology of religion – and specifically, the modern inner religious experience. She states that,

Combining religious history for a few examples of ‘mystical-peaks’ and setting an Indian example next to a European Christian example is relatively easy, especially if one knows exactly what to look for and what to omit. In short, to seek unity beyond all diversity requires that at some point one take diversity seriously. It is highly unlikely that Maslow really comprehended the immense multiplicity and sheer ‘otherness’ of religious phenomena. (1967, p. 161)

Bregman proposes that the real reason Maslow chose the peak-experience to be the “core” of all religions is evident through the application of Luckmann’s public vs. private spheres to Maslow’s psychology of religion.

Bregman suggests that Maslow’s battle between the revolutionary mystic and the bureaucracy is essentially a replication of Luckmann’s ‘public’ and ‘private’ realms (1976). Luckmann, in his work **Invisible Religion**, discusses the sacred cosmos. The sacred cosmos is a part of our world view that represents our beliefs, norms, etc. Traditionally, religion dominated in the public sphere and the norms and beliefs that make up the sacred cosmos have been religious in nature. Religious norms would therefore be internalized as a part of the objective reality, and come to form a subjective system of ‘ultimate’ meanings and beliefs for the individual.

Gradually over time, “more traces of a sacred cosmos are eliminated from the ‘secular’ norms, [and weakens] the plausibility of the global claim of religious norms. The latter become attached in an increasingly exclusive manner to the ‘part-time’ religious roles” (1967, p. 85). Western civilization is increasingly marked by the

**confinement of religion to more and more specialized roles, gradually severing the previous relationship of a unified sacred cosmos to a self-contained society. These are themes that are also evident in the works of Peter L. Berger who states that “as there is secularization of society and culture, so is there a secularization of consciousness. Put simply, this means that the modern West has produced an increasing number of individuals who look upon the world and their own lives without the benefit of religious interpretations” (1967, p. 107-108).**

**It follows that affairs that were previously the domain of the ‘public’ sphere are now gradually shifting into the realm of the ‘private’. Ultimately, Luckmann states, personal identity becomes a private phenomenon, and suggests that this is possibly the most revolutionary trait of modern society. The results, according to Luckmann are grim, “the ‘liberation’ of individual consciousness from the social structure and the ‘freedom’ in the ‘private sphere’ provide the basis for the somewhat illusory sense of autonomy which characterizes the typical person in modern society” (p. 97).**

**Luckmann likens the sense of autonomy which he feels characterizes the typical individual in modern post-industrial societies to a “pervasive consumer orientation” (p. 98), which is not limited to economic products, but characterizes the relation of the individual to the entire culture. The only determinant of an individual’s conduct is his or her own subjective preference. The individual has no objective standards and is left to construct a system of ultimate meanings in life by his or her own devices.**

**Religious representations in this case have ceased to be the ‘only and obligatory’ themes in the sacred universe. Newer themes of ‘ultimate’ significance have emerged and battle for acceptance in the sacred cosmos. The individual is exposed to different**

**'versions' of the worldview. It is in this sense that the individual approaches the sacred cosmos as a 'buyer'. Because religion is now deemed a 'private' affair, he or she may choose from the assortment of 'ultimate' meanings, as she or he wishes, and a 'religious preference' may be abandoned as readily as it was first adopted (Berger, 1967, p.133). Luckmann stressed that "an important consequence of this situation is that the individual constructs not only his personal identity but also his individual system of 'ultimate' significance" (p. 99).**

**The result, according to Luckmann, is that the 'autonomous' consumer selects certain religious themes from the available assortment and builds them into a somewhat precarious private system of 'ultimate' significance. These individual systems are often syncretistic and vague, and are not fully internalized. Any subjective religiosity is "weakly coherent and nonobligatory" (p. 116). The dominant themes the modern sacred cosmos bestow something like a sacred status upon the individual by articulating his or her 'autonomy' (p. 109). It follows that in the modern sacred cosmos self-expression and self-realization represent the most important means of nurturing one's own autonomy. Luckmann notes that death does not often appear even as a subordinate topic in the sacred cosmos of a modern post-industrial society, "nor are growing old and old age endowed with 'sacred' significance. The 'autonomous' individual is young and he never dies" (p. 114).**

**Bregman suggests that Maslow's use of the peak-experience vs. institutional religion is analogous to Luckmann's distinction between the modern sacred cosmos and the sacred cosmos of a traditional social order. As our society puts more and more emphasis on individuality and autonomy, organized religions and belief-systems that**

view human finitude or limitations have become unpopular and seen as vaguely threatening. Maslow is seen as responding to this sentiment (and perpetuating the move towards privatization of meaning) by trying to relegate religion to the 'private' sphere, which becomes "an ideological 'legitimization' for...the 'ultimate' importance of autonomy and the quest for identity" (Bregman, 1976, p. 155), similar to what we have seen described as the 'quest religious orientation' by Wulff (chapter 1). The sacred in our society is now the variety and choice of "potential identity-fragments" (p. 154), the ultimate meanings of which, according to Bregman, can be traded in and exchanged. Because our society lacks universal moral criteria, determining the "ultimate meanings and values" is difficult.

Examining Maslow's theory within this framework, we can interpret Maslow's theory as a stepping stone towards the relegation of religion towards the private sphere, and possibly a prime example of one of the alternate systems of meaning 'for sale'. Maslow's psychology of religion fits the description in large part. We have already noted in Chapter 4 the lack of criteria he offers for the individual to discover appropriate values, beliefs and norms. We have seen that Maslow's list of 'ultimate' values is largely subjective, that his ethical position is reduced to the level of emotion, what is 'right' 'feels good'. Humanism in general places much emphasis on the individual as autonomous and on self-realization as the means, or access, to the sacred – the self. Instead of asking the individual to select certain religious themes from the "available assortment", Maslow manages to incorporate the 'essence' of them all into one experience: the peak-experience, a concept which is indeed, in Luckmann's terms, "weakly coherent", "nonobligatory" and "vague".



## **THE REFERENT**

One of the major objections for those who are theologically orientated is the lack of referent in Maslow's transcendent peak-experiences. One such example is Scholem's definition of a mystic:

a man who has been favored with an immediate, and to him real, experience of the divine, of ultimate reality, or who at least strives to attain such experience. His experience may come to him through sudden illumination, or it may be the result of long and often elaborate preparations. From a historical point of view, the mystical quest for the divine takes place almost exclusively within a prescribed tradition –the exceptions seem to be limited to modern times, with their dissolution of all traditional ties (1965, p. 5-6).

One may note that Scholem's definition rules out one uninterested in God or ultimate reality.

As previously seen, according to Slater traditional concepts of transcendence consist of three components: the situation to be transcended; referent of the experience; and the individual who experiences it.

**The situation.** The nature of transcendence may be shaped by the situation to be transcended (Slater, 1981). Transcendence is intrinsically linked to the circumstances that the individual derives from. This may include religious denomination, time and space, the particular strife and struggles of each generation. The transcendent experience, according to Slater, is not one of isolation; conversely it involves the universal will (1981). Admittedly, the occasional individual mystic stands apart from the crowd, but identification with the All is the opposite of individualism.

Maslow's definition of transcendence does not appear to take these factors into account. Slater insists "each generation's experience is not simply a repetition of its predecessors' or a replica of some eternal pattern. Its thrust is both vertical and horizontal

relative to the conditions of existence under which each new life begins” (1981, p. 54).

But Maslow believed all transcendent experiences to be of the same substance and essence, that all prophets of centuries ago had the same experience as people today, and that the experiences only differ in their ethnocentric phrasing (Maslow, 1970. p.72-73). It seems that Slater’s view is more encompassing of the variety inherent in religious experience; that the knowledge acquired through transcendent experiences is relative to the situation of the individual.

In this context, Maslow’s view of the transcendent or core-religious-experience appears narrow as it denies the importance of the situation upon the transcender. Also Maslow did not consider the possibility that the knowledge via transcendent experiences may need to be shared with a larger community. Contrary to the individualism that Maslow encouraged, “the fruits of a seer’s seeing, or what a prophet hears, are passed on...” and throughout history we see that the “fruits” are often specific to the struggles of the community at large (Slater, 1981, p. 42). Maslow’s view of transcendence is decidedly narrow in that he discussed only the psychological benefit of the transcendent experience on the individual and dismissed the possibility of higher knowledge that is sensitive to the situation of a larger community.

**The referent.** The “referent” denotes the object towards which the transcendent experience is aimed. It is not enough to understand transcendence as a simple act, one must ask, “transcendence in relation to what?” (Olsen, 1981). The answer truly determines the nature of transcendence itself, because it is by virtue of its relationship to the object that experience derives meaning. Traditionally this is the sacred.

Bregman notes that Maslow's descriptions of the peak-experience are distinctly lacking in "encounter imagery" and "moral demandingness" in comparison to traditionally documented mystical experiences (1976, p.147). Notions of 'presence' in mystical experience have been neglected in Maslow's review of mystical experiences, past and present.

Slater (1981) propounds that a true transcendent experience is dependent on the relationship between the sacred and human: "the experience of transcendence comes from the interplay between poles, not the contrasts in status ascribed to either end of a relationship taken in isolation" (p. 44). The "sacred" may be a culturally relative term, as well as one that changes with time. The locus of the sacred is most often seen as an "I" and "Thou" relation, that of the Other.

This is where Maslow's atheistic bent truly becomes obvious – what is the referent of the peak-experience? Although he wrote of going "beyond merely human" (1971, p. 264), isn't that exactly what his theory aspires to, ultimate humanness through the realization of potential? Maslow's closest conception to divinity is by means of the B-values such as Truth, Beauty, etc., but he insists that these are latent in our own biological natures (Maslow, 1971). Because Maslow's framework dismisses the possibility of any higher power, or transcendent being, one cannot go "beyond" the human; the locus of the sacred necessarily rests within the individual in the form of his or her true potential.

**The individual.** The notion surrounding the individual is the component of the transcendental experience which Maslow explores most fully. The foundation of Maslow's theory is that maturity is a precondition of any transcendental experience. By virtue of the ascension through Maslow's hierarchy of needs, the individual is

psychologically capable of experiencing “the most inclusive and holistic level of human consciousness” in the form of a transcendental experience (Maslow, 1971, p. 269). As we have seen, it is problematic that an individual should have to progress through all the need levels and be fully satiated in all aspects of life before being capable of experiencing such levels. Indeed, there are a multitude of examples of religious leaders and prophets who realized the heights of religious and mystical awareness while deprived of food, comfort and often even companionship.

Slater considers Maslow’s transcendent experience and agrees that such a theory is bound to be popular among those who believe that psychological maturity is a precondition to the transcendent experience. This spiritual elitism is problematic for Slater, he feels that Maslow’s psychology of religion “does not embrace the institutional and ontological ramifications of religious experience – even though all of his examples (maestros at the piano, mothers cooking their specialities) are of people of institutional settings” (1981, p. 41).

### **IMPLICATIONS FOR THE PEAK-EXPERIENCE**

Maslow’s work on the peak-experience has given us interesting insight into the psychological catalysts, reactions and effects of transcendental experience on the individual. But in truth, Maslow’s consideration of the individual in this modern post-industrial society is perhaps the only component of traditional transcendence that is earnestly explored. Maslow aimed to develop a theory of religion that applies to all persons across all times and places, but failed to acknowledge the true variety of religious experience and is not compatible with a theistic framework in any degree. It is the

position of this paper that Maslow's view was entirely too simplistic to accommodate for all religious experience.

Maslow is accused of implementing liberal values as the basis of his psychology by Allan Buss, among others, who states: "Maslow's psychological theory is founded upon... the tenets of liberalism. Such themes in his writings as growing, becoming, self-actualization, individual freedom, and tolerance, are the psychological embodiment of the liberal frame of mind..." (1979, p. 47). Maslow does this by choosing people as examples of self-actualizers, at least partly, because they embodied liberal values.

When Maslow does that, he is forming his psychology of religion in line with the norms and values to which he prescribed, and Maslow's theory begins to look very much dominated by the influences of the liberal outlook in the last half century (Loebel, 1986). Along with such popular ideas as pluralism and piecemeal progress, Maslow necessarily adopts some of the conditions of existence in America at this time – a culture inundated with the rejection of traditional notions of divinity and the search for self-sustaining truth.

We have seen that Luckmann's theory of public and private spheres is particularly relevant here. Maslow's environment at this time is a prime example of conditions under which religion is relegated to the private sphere, and no longer the one and only theme in the 'sacred cosmos'. It can be argued, as it has been in this chapter, that humanistic psychology and Maslow's self-actualization in particular have contributed to the number of themes that compete in the sacred cosmos, in order to provide systems of meaning. We have also seen that Maslow's peak-experience is one of the theories which contribute to the 'consumer orientation', that whatever is comfortable is absolute – until it becomes *uncomfortable*, at which time you can trade it in for another 'ultimate' meaning.

As Luckmann has pointed out, autonomy and individuality are the number one priorities in modern post-industrial society, and the “self” is ultimately worshipped. Maslow’s peak-experience fits this description almost perfectly, as Maslow’s theories have catered to this popular perception. Maslow managed to incorporate very little objective criteria for morality, values or even for the peak-experience. Maslow’s concepts about religion and peak-experience are almost entirely non-committal, and aim to accommodate every individual and his or her perception of morality, by virtue of the fact that they are all subjective. Unpopular elements, such as institutional religion, death and ideas of revelation, are played down, demonized or entirely overlooked.

As individuality and the ‘self’ are the ‘sacred cosmos’ in Luckmann’s framework, we may say that the ‘self’ represents the sacred referent in accordance with Slater’s framework of transcendence. For Maslow, the locus of the sacred necessarily rests within the individual in the form of his or her own potential, or true self. Bregman states, “the true referent for the concept of God is the peak-experiencer himself!” (1976, p. 148). This supports Peter Berger’s suggestion that more and more cosmology has become psychology, and that “‘reality’, insofar as it is still maintained by the individual, is apprehended as being rooted within the consciousness of the individual rather than in any facticities of the external world – religion no longer refers to the cosmos or to history, but to individual *Existenz* or psychology” (1967, p. 151).

It is the final position of this paper that Maslow’s version of transcendence cannot be equated with “the transcendent end-state sought in all religion” (Slater, 1978, p. 66). Maslow’s theory of transcendence is deficient on several accounts, and would perhaps warrant being renamed a transpersonal experience. Because it lacks a consideration for

circumstances outside the individual, Slater notes, "Maslow's peak-experience as the prototype for religious transcendence... [and] the mistrust of the institutional dimension of religion makes his an incomplete conception on which to found a theory of religion" (1978, p. 66).

Maslow's version of transcendence can be seen as a microcosm of the transcendent in its larger meaning. For Maslow, the situation being transcended is ordinary living, the realm of deficiency needs and unrealized potentials. The individual, via the peak-experience, then transcends his or her own circumstances, biases and self-consciousness to realize the potentials and B-values which are imbued within his or her own nature.

Maslow's contribution to the field of psychology of religion might be seen as the product of his time. Among a growing dissatisfaction with institutional religion and orthodox science, Americans were searching elsewhere for systems of meaning. Maslow attempted to provide a stepping-stone between religion and science, as well as recognizing the spiritual needs of modern society. His theory may be considered an adequate response to society's mistrust of institutionalized religion by providing validation for 'religious' feeling within a naturalistic paradigm. I must agree with Lucy Bregman's evaluation of Maslow when she writes,

it is 'directed to trimming down all specific beliefs, ending all creedal strife, so as to supply a language of faith that can serve the individual without compelling him to serve a creed'.... Maslow's [final product] is no more "Christian" than the society in which he lived. Nor is it Taoist or Buddhist, needless to say. It is authentically post-industrial and peculiarly American. (1976, p. 162)

## CONCLUSION

This thesis was written with the intention of examining Maslow's concept of the peak-experience, in particular its notions surrounding transcendence and its religious connotations. We set out to provide an evaluation of Maslow's notion of transcendence from a theistic standpoint, as represented through Slater's framework. This was to assess the degree to which the peak-experience and traditional notions of religious experience are compatible. It was also to place Maslow's work within the context of a religious viewpoint and to consider the effect of the current age on the popularity of Maslow's work. It was my expectation that Maslow's psychology of religion would not properly incorporate a religious perspective, despite its claiming to be universal, and in particular, that the peak-experience could not account for all transcendent and religious experiences. It was also expected that Maslow's work would reveal itself to be too narrow in its approach to psychology and religion – that it excludes any and all who do not resemble him.

We began with an in-depth look at Maslow's psychological framework, main approach and conceptual structure, in specific, his hierarchy of needs and the well known model of self-actualization. This provided the background necessary to introduce Maslow's notions of the peak- and plateau-experiences as the basis for Maslow's transcendent experience, and these were discussed at length in regards to self-actualization. In the fourth chapter, we introduced some of the major objections to Maslow's psychology of religion. We discussed the role of the environment, the questionable validity of the concept of self-actualization, Maslow's ethnocentrism and methodology among his other shortcomings. In the last section, we utilized Slater's



framework of transcendence and Luckmann's notions surrounding the public and private to evaluate Maslow's transcendent experience from a theistic position.

It is the conclusion of this thesis that Maslow's concept of transcendence is too psychic, too person-oriented and therefore too narrow to apply to all religions and mystical experiences in both the ancient past and modern day, as Maslow attempts to do. Despite the popularity of Maslow's concepts, he provides a purely psychological model of transcendence which is not congruent with a theistic standpoint. Despite his claims to universality we have seen that his values are flexible, personal, and possibly motivated in large part by the liberal values of the counter-culture that humanism identified with in the 1960's.

There are numerous interesting possibilities for future study which have arisen from this thesis. The first involves the blatantly troubled relationship that Maslow had with his parents and his own heritage. It would be an interesting undertaking to analyze the possible effect of this discord and its effect on his theories. Maslow has stated that all his efforts in humanistic psychology were motivated in part to spite all his mother stood for, it would be interesting to see how this manifests itself in Maslow's theories.

The second suggestion for further research in this subject is perhaps a more sociological endeavour. The possible relationship between Maslow's theories and the rise of the New Age movement would be worthy of investigation. It is implied by some scholars that the 'hippie' peace movement and humanistic psychology were very much informed by one another in the 1960's (Loebel 1986, Buss 1979) and it would be interesting to see if the New Age movement and transpersonal psychology have a similar

relationship in this age. Maslow is often credited with inspiring the transpersonal psychology movement, often called the 'fourth wave' of psychology.

Two other alternate areas of research might include (1) further examination of Luckmann's public and private spheres with Maslow's psychology, as well as the location of the 'sacred cosmos' in Maslow's conceptual framework and, (2) an examination of Maslow's psychology of religion as compared to elements of Robert Bellah's 'civil religion'. Civil religion may be defined as the consensus between "the profoundest commitments of the Western religions and philosophical tradition and the common beliefs of ordinary Americans" (Bellah, 1970, p. 183). One might propose that Maslow uses the 'civil religion' of the United States in lieu of any of the traditional theistic standpoint in his psychology of religion.

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