

Why Was I Born †?

SECOND EDITION

What is my purpose for being here?
A Humanistic View of life

By Lyle L Simpson

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Preface

Lyle L. Simpson is an attorney practicing law in the Midwest, with a humanistic practice. He specializes in the positive side of law; by helping others create whatever is important in their lives, including forming their own business from the origination of an idea to what ever makes them successful, their transition planning to maximize the value of what they have created, and the estate planning necessary to make the greatest statement of the meaning of their own lives.

Mr. Simpson has a degree in psychology and philosophy, and has significant post-graduate work in both fields of study. He is a member of the American Society of Humanistic Psychologists. He has lectured extensively on the philosophy of Humanism and the psychology of Dr. Abraham Maslow. He served for five years as President of the American Humanist Association, and has served as General Counsel of the Association for over thirty-five years. He created, and is currently President of The Humanist Foundation which he formed to assure preservation of his philosophy of life for future generations.

Mr. Simpson became intrigued with the study of ancient history and its effect upon our thinking today. He is interested in biblical archeology, has attended lectures, studied the Dead Sea Scrolls and visited the site of Qumran in the West Bank of Israel where the scrolls were written, and the Shrine of the Book where they are displayed in Jerusalem.

The Dead Sea Scrolls were written from 200 BC through 67 AD. They remained hidden in caves until they were discovered in 1947. One lesson that they tell us is that our current religious traditions have been molded by history. Because we now find that many of our traditional assumptions regarding our purpose on earth are not “immutable truths”, this raises in question, upon what

authority do we base our very existence? “*Why Was I Born*” is a question we must all answer for our self.

This essay is the last lecture of a series concerning the lessons we have learned from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which was delivered by the author to The Ray Society of Drake University in November 2005. (Members are college graduates and alumni who return to campus to attend mini-university classes in order that they may continue their education, especially after their retirement.) Because the faith of many in our society is threatened with the disclosure that current evidence of the historic facts upon which their religious faith has been based may no longer be true, this lecture was intended to provide an alternative view of life that does not require faith to contrast with their beliefs so that those attending could see where they differ and thereby reestablish for themselves their own faith.

This lecture was intended to give a view of life that is based upon our known truths, as validated by our scientific method of learning about our world. One of the basic tenants of Humanism is that our knowledge is only tentative; as truth unfolds through discovery and research, generally using the scientific method, our beliefs and religious views should also grow and continually adapt to the changing world in which we live. If you were raised on a deserted island, without authorities telling you what you should believe, an intelligent person would naturally acquire the philosophy of humanism on their own.

Humanism does not require faith in order for our own lives to have purpose; and for us to be able to live a good life. Humanism does not intend to challenge anyone else’s faith, but Humanists do affirm that people can live a good life based exclusively upon current empirical knowledge without a need for ascertaining our own truths by having to rely upon blind faith; or to base our life on earth in the search for a life after death that may not exist.

WHY Was I Born?

By Lyle L Simpson

Does a flower blooming in an uninhabited wood have no value? Has its life no purpose? Fulfilling its own destiny, in addition to pollinating its posterity, may be its only purpose, but for that flower, being the best that it can be is enough for its own life to have meaning.

Through the Hubble telescope astronomers have now discovered hundreds of thousands of galaxies, each with millions of stars. Carl Sagan, a popular humanist astronomer, once said to me, "In the known universe, there are at least 300,000 planets, each of which is capable of sustaining life similar to that here on Earth." Therefore, he asserted, "It is rather vain of us to assume humans are the highest form of life in the universe." *If there are higher forms of life, is our goal as humans to evolve into that form?* That may be true, but what does not being the highest form of life say for a purpose of why we are living our own life here on Earth today? *Why was I born?*

Donald Johansson, the paleo-anthropologist who discovered "Lucy" (the evolutionary link which connects human existence from the amoeba to the ape), claimed that Lucy proves human existence is an accident—an anomaly. Much like the arm on a Saguaro cactus is caused by a break in its surface, human existence occurred due to a breakdown in normal genetic evolution. Responding to my comments about Sagan's observation, Johansson pointed out that the statistical odds of such an anomaly occurring again are about 1 in 2 million. In a known population of only 300,000 planets, a second occurrence would be quite rare. Therefore, maybe we are the highest form of life in the universe. *Would being among the highest level of living species in the evolution of life, provide "special meaning" for our lives?* Perhaps it would.

Most intelligent people wonder why he or she exists at some time in his or her life. In our early formative stage, others have attempted to answer that question for us. We accept their notions, at least initially, especially if they are our parents' view; and these experiences permanently influence our beliefs for the rest of our lives. After all, the purpose for our own existence is a difficult question to answer all by our self.

We are riddled with inconsistencies in our understanding of our world; and any knowledge of why we are here on Earth today, that is supported by fact or testable by science, is still primitive.

There are many questions about our world that science has yet to answer. For instance, when asked if "God" exists, today's "Einstein", Stephen Hawking, claimed that, in viewing the basic forces of the universe in a unified theory, there is a gap that can only be explained by the presence of God, or nature.

Even though Hawking may not be religious in the traditional sense, he does share an awe of nature. Hawking's concept does not necessarily imply a concept of a god with an intelligence micromanaging the universe in some supernatural fashion. He merely claims that, so far, we cannot understand some forces in the universe. We cannot, therefore, base a useful existence on Earth through guidance from such an impersonal god—other than to assume that we are supposed to live our lives in harmony with nature. We should already know that. Failure to live in harmony with nature is dangerous to our health.

But, Why Am I Here?

In his article entitled "Spirituality Without Faith," (*Humanist* magazine, January 2002), Thomas Clark reports that current science shows us that the universe is expanding, but does not have sufficient mass to collapse

into another “Big Bang.” He claims that ultimately, all matter will turn to dust; the universe will become black and cold. Science shows that, apparently, our ultimate destiny is to become space dust—which does not make the issue of immortality very appealing. Perhaps it is not very realistic.

Another article in the January 2002 *Humanist* (“Whence Comes Death,” by Joshua Mitteldorf) discusses why humans die. We know that our bodies develop from a single cell that subdivides according to a unique genetic plan, creating all parts of our body. And, at least every seven years, all cells in the body replace themselves. Apparently, there is no biological reason why we could not exist forever—or at least until our sun stops shining.

Mitteldorf points out that our deterioration is due to nature’s evolution of the gene pool. As individuals, we become irrelevant after our childbearing days. Therefore our genes contain a self-destruct mechanism to extinguish our existence in order to keep the gene pool evolving. If every human lived on Earth forever, the gene pool would never change. Apparently the purpose of human life ties to the survival of the species, and not the individual. However, even this will become irrelevant when all earthly life becomes space dust. An ultimate purpose, or meaning, for our own existence remains unanswered. The truth is there may not be one.

Some people do not accept science as relevant in their view of life. Some assert, “Humans are merely living out God’s plan”. This notion merely answers the question simply and definitely—but it makes humans into puppets. If the script is already written, why bother to live? Likewise, some believe we reincarnate, living successive lives until we ultimately become perfect. Unfounded as such a belief is, one can understand why those who find their life insufficient would welcome a chance to come back and try again. Unfortunately, few, if any, of these theories can survive informed intellectual scrutiny, and

many people are unwilling to live their life based upon such unrealistic or trite premises. There must be a better answer.

When we consider ourselves against the vastness of time and the universe, our individual existence becomes fairly insignificant. Why would any god even want to micromanage a tentative speck on Earth? What would be the point?

Yet each of us has “faith” in something, even if it is only in the power of nature to respond to our actions. If we correctly plant a seed, we have faith that nature will cause it to grow. My action was to plant the seed. We do not know why it grows, even though science can tell us how it grows. What happens after planting the seed is beyond my control, although I may continue to influence the result by watering the plant.

We soon learn that, as individuals, we are part of something that is bigger and more powerful than we are. The problem is that our ultimate relationship with our universe eludes us. Many more people today are content to believe that nature does not have to be fully understood for us to accept nature as being all that exists; and, therefore, all that is available for us to interpret, and thereby understand, our own existence. Humanists are among them, and most humanists are willing to accept that such belief leaves many unanswered questions. Science is still expanding, and we are still learning.

Other people expect more immediate completed answers and, left with few alternatives, they frequently fill in the gaps of verifiable knowledge with historically accepted religious answers, or they may create answers of their own. Once any answer is accepted, no one likes to have his or her own answers challenged. Because each of us feels that our own answer is “right” and, therefore, sufficient for our self, thus, for some people, requiring their “truth” to be based upon fact becomes irrelevant. These people frequently accept a myth as their own personal truth, and, once accepted, they will defend it until their death.

What is “Truth” For Me?

At the root of our ability to accept any belief for ourselves is how we determine what is true. Obviously, we cannot test every fact before accepting it as true for our own use--at least for that moment. For many of our beliefs we accept the opinion of others we are willing to rely upon to not mislead us as our authority of truth. Early in our lives we rely upon our parents, or care givers, for the answer to our questions. This is especially true where we are given answers to questions that we did not ask, such as the foundation for our religious views, or our concept of family.

As we mature, for those who are braver, some will test selected beliefs. But, even the brave, will continue to accept some answers from others where they have no immediate personal concern for the answers.

Allowing authorities to provide our answers is easier, and most people follow the path of least resistance. However, for those who are less able to accept the answers of others, they must be able to obtain the same result for themselves by testing at least some of their beliefs before being accepted as their “truth”.

Science is built on the principal of testing each belief. For each observation of a phenomena scientist propose a hypothesis as an explanation. To be accepted as true by scientists others must be able to test the theory by duplicating the result. If others are able to do so the hypothesis is tentatively accepted as true until another answer emerges as a new hypothesis; usually on a deeper level of explanation for the origins of those facts, and the process of our “truths” evolve to a deeper level of belief.

For those living primarily on or below the social level, accepting childhood authorities in established religious faith beliefs may be sufficient for the rest of their lives. Others, especially those capable of living on a higher psychological level, may become skeptical. They may feel

that more proof is necessary for something to be accepted as proven to them to be true. Like scientists, many skeptics distinguish between accepting something as absolutely and forever true, by recognizing that any belief should be merely tentative. A notion may be accepted as tentatively true because it serves the moment, even though we may recognize that belief may not be relied upon as an absolute indisputable “truth”.

Many scientists apply the same rules for accepting their religious views as they do for accepting observations of our physical world as true. Other scientists, and many other people may accept their religious views as a matter of social or family convenience, and are, therefore, not troubled with testing the truth of their personal religious views.

Many people, however, are unable to accept any truth merely on “faith” that their authority is right; or by accepting that a “wish” that something may be true is tantamount to knowing that it is. Some people need to know for sure before accepting an immutable truth. Humanists tend to be among them. To accept something as “true” most humanists must be able to test the facts for themselves. If they cannot prove it, they will not rely upon it. An untested belief is simply a wish that a skeptic recognizes may only be accepted tentatively. It does not matter to a skeptic if the belief is a scientific theory, or their religious beliefs.

Many people cannot accept uncertainty. When knowledge fails us, for the many people who fill the gap with myth or lore, it is difficult to base our existence on the notion that we are here only because nature merely allowed us to be—or, more specifically, that we are here as individuals only by the luck of the draw—although that probably is true. We each want to have a purpose for our own existence.

In our search for the meaning of life, what do we really know? Philosopher René Descartes probably stated

it best when he said, essentially, “*I think, therefore, I am.*” All anyone really knows for sure is that we, as individuals, momentarily exist. Every other belief we accept on some level of faith.

So What Does This Mean?

The more relevant question remains: *if all we know is that we exist, how do we establish purpose in our own life?* If our ultimate purpose is only the survival and growth of our species, is our reason for being here really only to procreate and then die like some male black widow spider? If so, we older folks might as well get about our duty, and quit wasting Earth’s resources. This is not a very satisfying thought.

We should at least have an answer to the question for our self. Human existence may have been an accident, as Donald Johansson suggests. A supernatural god may not be dictating our behavior. Yet this does not mean that, while we are here, our own life should not have value, at least for ourselves. The field of psychology may be the only currently available science to increase our understanding of what is ultimately important in our own life.

Maslow’s Purpose for Our lives

Dr. Abraham Maslow, the founder of humanistic psychology, has scientifically articulated a viable theory for finding purpose in each individual life. Maslow recognized that there are several distinctly different levels, or categories, of needs. He found that humans live on multiple psychological levels and that our behavior, and our individual orientation to life, varies significantly depending upon the level we are primarily living on at the moment. Our current predominant need level, controls our momentary existence. Maslow believed that our objective in life is to achieve our own fulfillment by remaining

primarily on the highest level we are each capable of attaining. Maslow recognized that the meaning of fulfillment varies on each need level.

Psychological As a Science

Psychology originated as a science with Sigmund Freud. Freud assisted mentally ill people to improve their lives by focusing on what was wrong with their behavior. Thus, psychology started as a negative science.

“Behaviorists” represent the second phase of psychology. Everyone has heard of Pavlov’s dog that associated the ringing of a bell with the delivery of food; which proved that behavior could be conditioned.

B. F. Skinner, another humanist psychologist, built mazes in which he experimented with white rats, showing that they can learn. Behaviorism shows that need deprivation causes drive, which results in behavior. By modifying any antecedent stimulus, behavior can be changed. While I was majoring in Drake University’s Department of Behavioral Psychology I was once told that we could toilet train a child in a day using a cattle prod. (Of course, the child would become neurotic for life, but the child’s behavior certainly could be modified.)

Maslow grew up in this era. In an attempt to discern why two of his psychology professors were such wonderful people, Maslow could not ascertain what need deprivation caused their behavior. All of a sudden he realized that maybe psychology had the notion of “needs” backwards. When need deprivation is present, people become abnormal—until they eventually become sick, like Freud’s patients. But when people are totally healthy, Maslow discovered, they lack need deprivation.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow found that needs might be categorized by the strength of the drive level caused by their deficiency; and that needs with greater drive strength prevail. If a person is sufficiently hungry, for example, his or her behavior will address this issue first, deferring a wish to help others, or continuing to listen to Beethoven. Maslow found that there are six distinct, hierarchical levels of human needs.

Survival is the primary concern of all living organisms, and so it follows that the strongest, or primary needs, are those with physiological necessity. Included in these basic needs are the requirement for food, water, air, shelter, sex, elimination, warmth, and sleep, among others. If you really have to go to the bathroom, nothing else is particularly important at the moment. For purposes of illustration, these “basic needs” may be characterized as those needs with a strength level of one.

Once our essential basic needs are sufficiently attended, we naturally “feather our nests” to assure their future satisfaction. We become protective. Maslow classified this next level as “security needs”; and found these needs have a strength level of less than one-half that of basic needs. If you feel secure, you will not think about where the next bathroom might be. While you are unable to satisfy a relief, however, you certainly might worry about what happens the next time, especially if any barriers to your instant relief are present. A private in the Army, having to go to the bathroom while standing at attention in formation, learns that lesson very well.

Once secure, we naturally tend to seek friendships and love relationships—on the “social” need level. We want to belong and be accepted. We bring others within our defense mechanisms and share the satisfaction of our needs. Although this is very important to all of us, yet these social needs have deficiency strength of approximately one

fourth that of basic needs. Try explaining that concept to a teenager with hormones.

When those we love, and for whom we feel responsible, are also safe, and we are then able to feel our lower level survival needs are reasonably satisfied, we are then free to extend our behavior outwards for recognition from others. Maslow classified this level, as “ego needs”. Though ego strength can appear strong, these needs are typically only one-eighth that of basic needs.

Once we are satisfied that we are not only accepted, but appreciated. We are then free to identify with our environment. We then can recognize, and become “in tune” with our own reality. We can then actualize our own existence and become a whole person.

Maslow defined “actualization” needs with fifteen different adjectives, such as truth, goodness, beauty, and justice, to name a few. All creatures are totally selfish on the lower levels of living. Altruism only appears as we approach actualization. A person savoring their world is attempting to fulfill the actualized level of their own needs. Yet, again, we are capable of achieving this goal only when our basic, security, social, and ego needs are reasonably satisfied.

What happens once we fully actualize our own existence is the most important of Maslow’s discoveries. When we actualize our full potential, we may momentarily reach the state of total fulfillment. In this state of contentment we are able to resonate in harmony with our own environment. For, at least this at this instance, we are free of all stress, and may then recognize our own sense of peace for the moment as a “*peak experience*”. More than in any other previous experience in our lives, in a peak experience we feel truly exhilarated, liberated and fulfilled. However, even those who have actualized their own existence must spend most of their lifetime tending to lower level needs, in order to be able to momentarily live on their highest level of living. We live predominantly on

only one level at a time. Maslow found that our objective for life, living only within our self, is for our own continual growth and to sustain our life on the highest level we can attain.

However, Maslow discovered that once a person has arrived at a peak experience some people are then able to make a transition from their own more selfish motivation, for their further efforts to be directed beyond them self. People are then able to move to an external motivational level that transcends into a cause, or another person, or a commitment, possibly to their own physical detriment, that gives intense eternal purpose to their life, allowing their own lives to become even more significant and, thereby, ultimately even more meaningful for themselves. At that point we transcend our own self, and, in effect, become, in essence, “trans-human”, feeling fully alive and in tune with all that surrounds us.

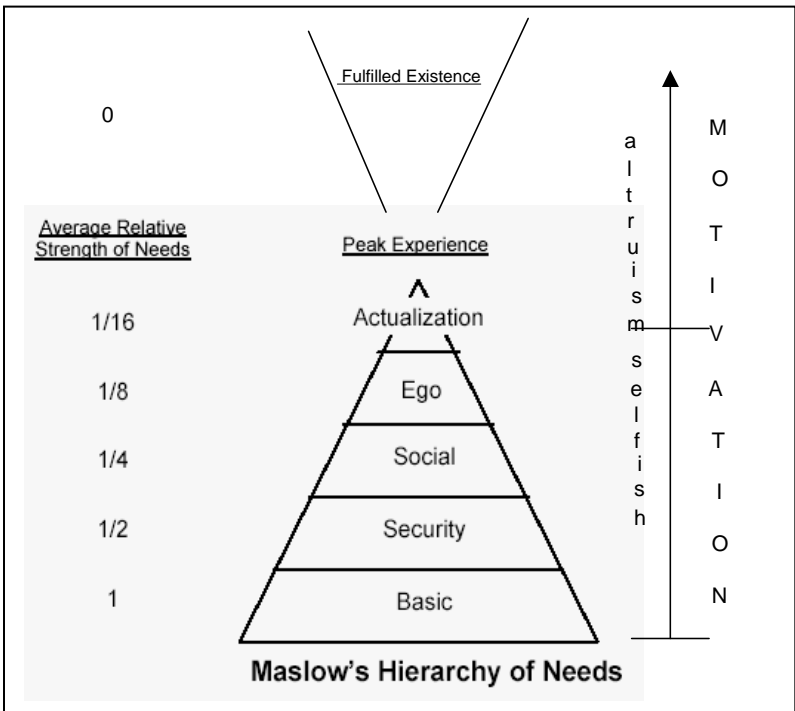
This sixth, or highest, level opens a new realm for living. A mother becomes one with her son or daughter; an artist becomes lost in his or her painting to the exclusion of eating and sleeping; a doctor works to save the patient he or she is serving to the point of a risk for his or her own peril. A teacher loses his or her own identity and becomes fully invested in their students. The needs of the people they serve, or of an idea, or acceptance of a cause with which a person currently living on this level has become fused with themselves, and thereby those external needs may dictate, his or her own needs and wants—even to the exclusion of that persons own needs.

A test to determine if a person is capable of living on this level is to analyze how they describe their own efforts. Does their own description of their life’s work include themselves? If you ask such a person “what gives you the most satisfaction, or reward in your life? What makes your life most meaningful for you?” The transpersonal values expressed by people who have transcended are beyond themselves tells us a lot about that

person. Once a person is capable of living on this level the self merges into the cause which then has become the primary purpose for that person's own existence.

Maslow labeled the phenomena "being-cognition", or "B-values", meaning that person is able to identify their own purpose for their own existence with something beyond themselves. The "cause" becomes what motivates that person to exist. He or she becomes undistinguishable from their cause. They finally are not only able to become a whole person, with a meaningful purpose for their own self, they then measure their own lives in terms of the good they create.

Individuals can transcend themselves at any level of the hierarchy of needs. However, unless the person has actualized them self, their motivation is primarily selfish. Only a person who is totally fulfilled lacks a personal unselfish motive. Below that level degrees of selfishness are the primary influence of our behavior.



Ideally, people will earn their living doing whatever fulfills their own actualization and transcendent needs. For those able to do so, their mission in life provides a sense of purpose; thus we may be capable of supporting all of our needs in life with work that fulfills our passion. Teachers, ministers, artists, or doctors, even some lawyers, as well as many other occupations, may experience a sense of well being and fulfillment, resulting from supporting all of their needs through their professional experience.

Maslow recognized that most people would probably never have a peak experience during their lives, let alone rise beyond that experience. Environment, or their own barriers, will prevent attaining fulfillment of their own life. Most people will never even know that the opportunity for a higher level of living beyond their current existence even exists. That is unfortunate, but very true.

Society must provide the opportunity for all if anyone is to ever succeed. However, providing the opportunity does not mean society should also give away the means. We must accept the responsibility, and produce the result for our self, for our own actualization to have any value. Even though our society does provide the opportunity, most will still not succeed, even though people living in a free society are then free to do so. This is because actualization requires continual effort. Like water running down stream, un-motivated behavior tends to follow the course of least resistance. Unless there is conscience effort applied by the individual to go against the current real success cannot be achieved. For proof we only need to observe the success achieved by recent immigrants from oppressed societies who are now living in our own country; and then contrast their behavior with that of those born here who expect to have what others have achieved, but are unwilling to do the work necessary to acquire their own success.

Taking advantage of opportunity takes initiative. You must really work for success. Lazy people do not have

the anticipatory attitude that allows more successful people the exhilaration feeling they receive by moving toward a goal. The more lazy people easily give up. Those people who are provided opportunity, and are capable of succeeding, but fail to exert themselves deserve to live on a lower psychological level of life. No one is entitled to society providing more than the opportunity for us to achieve our own goals. Much like an athlete who feels good every time he or she performs a little bit better than the last time, most successful people can recognize a sense of reward for their striving for the attainment of their goals, even after expending only a little more effort. Attitude makes a huge difference in our ability to achieve success.

Even with a positive attitude, fulfillment must be earned by each of us if it is to have lasting value. However, success breeds greater success. Attitude makes a difference. It has been previously said: “You are what you think you are,” or “As you think, so you shall become.” Attitude precedes your result.

Wishing to interview higher functioning people to better understand how they achieve fulfillment, and to understand the effect that peak experiences have in people’s lives, Maslow first needed to know who were capable of actualizing their own existence. He first had to develop tests to find those who were living on the actualized level in order to identify people to interview.

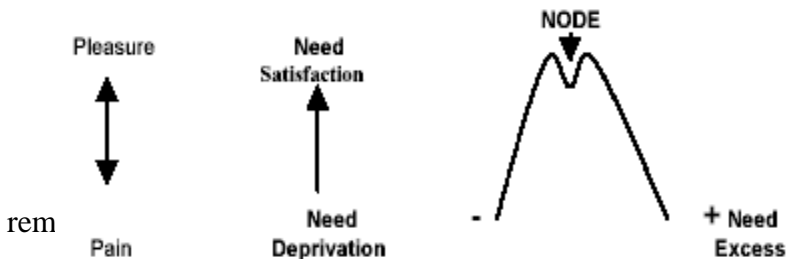
His first test was music. Maslow found that a person living on the basic level found only strong and definite music—loud, hard rock or percussion—to be meaningful. Because we start our lives on the basic level, this may explain why our children prefer loud percussion music in the earlier part of their life. Like all other aspects of life, unfortunately, some never grow out of it.

A person on the social level can easily appreciate popular music. On the actualized level, a person will be more apt to find subtle orchestrations, such as Beethoven, to be beautiful. A person on the actualized level could also

appreciate hard rock, as well as the full range of music, though normally they may prefer more classical, or subtle, orchestration. However, the person living on the basic or security level will typically never enjoy Beethoven.

For another test, Maslow used humor. For a person living on the basic or security level, violence, sex, or some other harsh event, must be included to be perceived as a joke. On the social level, jokes about people may be perceived as funny. On the actualized level, incongruence could be humorous. Again, the person on the basic level will seldom understand why something incongruent could be funny, while a person on the actualized level could appreciate an “off-color” joke, as well as the greater range of humor. For a person living on the basic, or security level, the perception of abstraction in any form is seriously limited. Using these tests helps us differentiate the level of living, and, therefore, understanding of those with whom we must interact.

Satisfaction of each need is not linear, but rather a bell curve with a dimple, or “node,” at the top. Pain can result both from deprivation, as well as the excess satisfaction of a need. For instance, one may be thirsty, start drinking water, and feel significantly better until a peak is reached. From there, a little more water will cause a slight decent, until one feels totally satiated for thirst. Drinking more water will result in excess, at which time ultimately one will once again begin feeling pain. A person can die from either deprivation or from excess. The same path is true for all needs.



balanced existence with all of our needs reasonably satisfied. If, in fact, all of our needs at any given moment are fully satisfied, we can achieve the very unique condition where we are in harmony with our immediate environment. This state, which Maslow labeled a “peak experience”, tells us that for that instant we are fully living on the highest level of our own existence. A fully satiated person enjoying a peak experience is resting within the node of all his or her needs.

When a peak experience occurs, much like a tuning fork, you resonate. You are, for that brief moment, “in tune” with your own universe. It may be subtle, and could be missed. Or, you may experience a euphoric feeling--much like floating in air. While in this state you fully comprehend, and are comfortable with all aspects of life around you, even if your current situation might otherwise be negative. People in jail, even those having just filed for bankruptcy, or those in proceedings for a divorce, are still capable of achieving this state under the right circumstances. Obviously, it is more difficult if their attention is otherwise occupied. Achieving fulfillment is conditioned by our attitude toward our current situation.

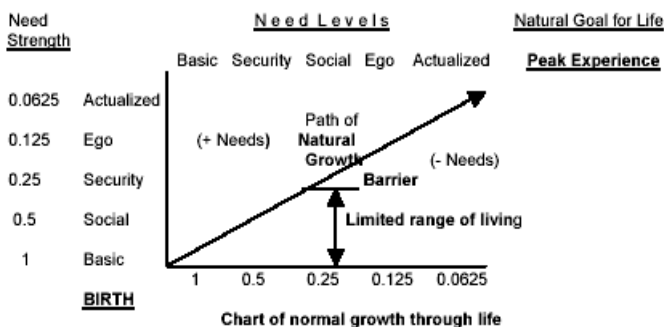
Many of us in our American culture and environment will have felt a peak experience from time to time without recognizing what was happening, or understanding its significance. Because at the moment of a peak experience everything in the world feels right, this can be very scary if one has no basis for understanding what is happening. Maslow believed that the typical “born-again experience” of an evangelical fundamentalist is probably a peak experience labeled in religious terms. It is an “ah, ha!” moment. Because some people are unable to articulate their experience in scientific terms, they will look to what they know to explain the phenomenon, and might, thereby, credit God with their own sense of wellbeing.

For the person on death row in prison, having a peak experience does not mean that they approve of their

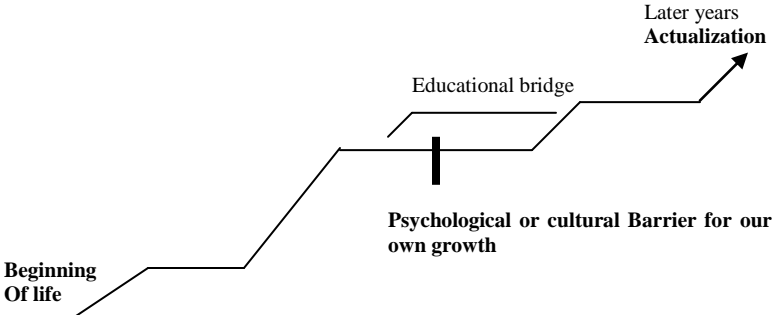
incarceration, but, at that moment, they would at least understand their situation, and then be able to accept the inevitable. They will at least momentarily have much greater insight. A person dying of cancer similarly may have such an experience if he or she has become resigned to their fate. Hospice services do wonders in helping people accept their own deaths using this principle.

For Maslow, being able to achieve a peak experience is the “apex” for our own personal existence, or fully living within our own self. We become a totally “healthy” person, in a psychological sense. In doing so, we have fulfilled all that is then relevant within our own existence at that moment. We are then fully alive, and perfectly content. Living on the actualized level with sustained peak experiences would be difficult, if not impossible. However, if we can capture this moment where we no longer have personal needs we can then transcend beyond our self to become in tune with a cause, or a greater purpose. We then can become a fully functioning person, whose life is not only meaningful to ourselves, but upon transcending we can become even more significant to others.

We must recognize that peak experiences are very subtle. The euphoric feeling may be intense, but there is no strong drive level to cause behavior when we reach a peak experience. The experience will be momentary. Because a lower level need with stronger drive will soon take over—we inevitably become hungry, or face a call of nature, our behavior will change to fulfill this new need because of its higher drive strength.



Traveling the actual path of growth through life does not occur in a straight line. We experience periods of living on a flat plateau while fulfilling the needs on each level as we progress. Moving to the next level for the first time is dramatic. Similar to being a seedling on the basic level, then becoming a plant on the security level, we continue to grow, and mature. Realizing that we have arrived on a higher level is as apparent as if you were a rose bud, on the social level that blossoms into an *American Beauty Rose* on the ego level. On the actualized level, our concerns may shift to perpetuating the opportunity to bloom for others.



Typical successful growth path through life

To reach the next level we must be open and accessible for growth. As we age higher growth can become more difficult because we have acquired more assets, or status, that requires protection; and we may have established artificial goals that absorb much of our energy. On the other hand, as we reach retirement actualizing could become easier, because we no longer feel threatened, and we may no longer feel that we must impress others to get ahead in life.

If we must become “President” of the Junior League to become momentarily self-satisfied we can hardly be expected to recognize other opportunities above the ego

level. It is laudable to serve as president of such a worthy organization. The distinction is the level of need that motivated our wishing to be president. Were you striving to be president for recognition for the satisfaction of your own ego, or for the good that you can provide the world in which we are living by leading such a worthy organization?

On the ego level and below we can absorb so many problems in daily living that we cannot truly appreciate life. Many of us have to reach retirement before we are able to release our sense of commitment to artificial goals, and we can then become free to accept new opportunity and growth in our lives. If we can overcome our lower barriers and all other needs are currently satisfied, only then are we capable of having the sensation that everything is, for that moment, “right” in our lives. According to Maslow, it may be very subtle, but actualization is the state of existence that we all should seek in order for us to be free of our own self to transcend into magnifying the good that we can accomplish in our life for others, if we truly wish to fulfill our own existence while we are here, on Earth.

Why Is Achieving Actualization so Difficult?

We live in a world of violence. All life on Earth exists in a “survival of the fittest” environment. The first and primary goal of every person, or life of any form, ranging from insects to the artificial life form of governments, businesses and institutions, is the same. The primary goal of anything is to survive.

Change threatens existence. Preserving the status quo is every beings constant effort. As we do so we affect the lives of others, sometimes negatively? The food chain dictates that weaker life forms sacrifice their own life in order that others higher in the chain survive—but this does not mean that they do so willingly. Those about to be

devoured fight for their own existence. You only need to try fishing to understand this principle.

Humans are as much a part of the natural world as any other species; every person's environment on Earth frequently can be cruel. We each learn to defend ourselves from pain from the day we are born. Our constant quest to live compels us to continually improve upon our existing condition in life. Since our own survival is essentially a basic need, perhaps naturally, we cannot easily do anything else. However, we cannot healthily grow on our own. We must interact with our environment and others within our culture, in order to survive. These outside factors condition our behavior. Because of the many techniques we create to protect ourselves from threats, especially those that are produced by outside forces, they may cause barriers for our own continued growth. Such barriers can block our natural progression toward the actualization of our full potential. To circumvent such barriers, in order that we may continue normal growth along our natural path, requires continual conscious effort.

If we want to actualize our own life, to become truly healthy and able to transcend into a new realm of living, the first task requires recognition where barriers exist. Seldom do we see our own barriers. People feel safer living within known parameters; and, therefore, many are content with their current existence. Indeed, removal of barriers requires more effort and risk than many are willing to endure. Most live without the knowledge that higher, more rewarding opportunities are even available to them.

We tend to follow the path of least resistance. Growth is not always easy. Eliza Doolittle spent the entire length of the movie, *My Fair Lady*, learning how to grow beyond her earlier life. Many are unwilling to expend the effort; content to remain within the confines of their reduced existence. They are, thereby, condemned to not ever being able to actualize their own existence. That is truly tragic.

To continue to grow, we must continuously concentrate on identifying, and then eliminating, barriers if we ever wish to become fulfilled, and to actualize our own existence. Barriers occur normally without our knowledge, or consent. All barriers need to be immediately challenged if they are to be easily eliminated. Left alone, barriers harden from temporary protections to become permanent—a defense mechanism that ultimately takes over—thus limiting our range of behavior. In that manner barriers can become a scotoma. A “*scotoma*” is a blind spot in our own view of reality. Scotomas are immutable beliefs. Formal education may be the best means of addressing these concerns, because learning new information in a non-threatening environment can provide bridges over, or paths around, barriers; rather than hitting our beliefs head on where our own scotomas will resist change. Forcing ourselves to reach a little further with each activity can do wonders to keep barriers from developing fixations in our own life; as well as in the life of our children and significant others we have allowed within our own defense mechanisms.

Some barriers may be physical, such as limitations upon space, time, or available diet, while others may be belief systems. Some are caused by ill health, or our own previous failures; but more often they are caused by culture. As a seemingly innocent example, the Jewish population historically denied the faithful the right to eat pork because trichinosis was earlier a serious problem. Even though this is not an issue today (at least in the United States), the restriction continues even today as a tradition. Consequently, a Jewish person eating pork might feel guilty, thus denying him or her pleasure in that food. Like water running down hill, we take the easiest path. The easiest path for any of us is not to participate in any activity that causes stress, or discomfort.

Some within the Catholic faith still may feel it is a sin to eat red meat on Friday (at least during Lent), even

though that tradition was created largely to support a declining fish industry. These examples are relatively unimportant; and if they have value for an individual, no one else should care. However, some irrational cultural restrictions could end up being harmful. A Christian Scientist denying a child essential medical care because of their own belief may be one example. Yet it is easy to see how these limitations occur in society. Because all forms of irrational barriers prevail in our culture, finding better paths for living is fertile ground for those wishing to improve society.

Alternative Paths To Actualization

Our body is the “temple” of our own lives. It seems foolish not to protect it. The question may be asked, “If our goal is merely to reach a peak experience, why should we not shortcut the path by using drugs, or possibly alcohol?” Some drugs certainly could cut through all forms of barriers. But is the peak experience achieved with drugs genuine? You would never know. The purpose for the barrier was to protect you from something. With drugs, you would have blasted right through your own barrier. The experience could have serious negative psychological side effects—let alone the established fact that the drugs themselves could permanently harm your body. Therefore, drug use is not an acceptable path for actualization.

Fully living each step of our own life seems to be the only acceptable path for genuine fulfillment of our own existence. There are no shortcuts for a quality life. Success is the journey, or measure of the path, not the goal. A goal once reached is replaced with a new goal. It is our journey through life that matters to us, at least while we are here. That is all that has true real value. Possessions accumulated, and titles acquired, ultimately mean little without the quality of life that we have been able to live.

Achieving the highest level that we are capable of attaining is all that truly matters.

How does my attitude make a difference?

Attitude makes the greatest difference. My attitude is the most critical element in determining the quality of my own life, and the effect that I have upon others. Some authorities declare that there is a “law of attraction” that acts like a magnet pulling our opportunities, or our defeats, out of the mass of stimuli that surrounds us daily. Like preparatory set, the mental orientation we have filters the receipt of all new information, determines its reception, and our interpretation of the data. Our attitude is the filter that defines how we react to the information that we receive.

The attitude that we project to others also influences the response that we receive from them. Even when we are alone, our attitude becomes a self fulfilling prophecy. We get back what we project and we react to what we receive molded by our attitude, thus creating a spiral effect that can either ascend to greater heights and opportunities; or reinforce negative feelings, causing our descent into a state of unhappiness and chaos. A positive happy attitude must precede our actions if we wish to affect how we attain positive results. By modifying our attitude we cause what happens to ourselves. Adopting our own current attitude is the primary control that we have over our own life. If we do not intentionally choose our own attitude in any given moment we are only subject to fate.

We can only live in the present moment. Living in the past may give us a sense of accomplishment or failure that influences the information we use for adopting our current attitude and feeling about our self; but ultimately, living in the past accomplishes nothing to improve our future except to provide us information in a primitive attempt to protect us from failure, or to create wishes that we are not sufficiently motivated to achieve.

The past is only prelude. It can either influence our current attitude, or be ignored by us. That is our choice. The only aspect of our lives that we actually control is how we perceive and accept new data or stimulation that we are receiving at this very moment. Our past experiences may enhance our ability to predict the outcome of our current situation, but the result is not inevitable. If you prefer a different result, the only way that you can influence achieving that result is to modify how you interpret your current situation. If you think positively toward an objective you are much more apt to have a positive result.

I like the statements: “You are what you think that you are”, or “As you think, so you shall become”. “Whether you think you can, or you can’t, you’re right.” Your opinions of yourself in your current situation will, more often than not, determine the outcome of your current behavior. It takes fate or luck to cause any other result. We should be unwilling to live our lives relying upon fate. We must cause whatever happens in our own lives to happen if we truly want to live our own life.

Successful people enhance their opportunity to create successful results because successful people believe they will be successful. It all starts with their attitude. They believe in themselves and know that they can achieve what they want to achieve. An opposite opinion is also true, and even more powerful. If you approach your current situation expecting success, and receive a momentary setback because the ball did not hit the basket, or an intervening event occurred causing a different result, you can view that event as a new opportunity and proceed on with greater enthusiasm; or you can curse the cause or your result, blame yourself, and feel badly you did not win. How you react will determine what happens next. Successful people look upon loss as momentary and only an opportunity to learn so that they can deal with those factors differently next time. It is up to you how you react.

The only control you have over your own life is the attitude that you allow yourself that will influence your future.

If you are afraid that you will lose the race, or the wrestling match, or miss the shot because you have not practiced, or you missed it last time, or you weigh too much, or whatever, you have created the environment that will produce that result. Your attitude becomes its own self-fulfilling prophecy.

Some people pray for a result and are then reinforced in doing so again because that will work. However, it is because they have created an attitude toward their objective, not because God intervened in their life. One acceptable form of prayer is that it tunes your self to reality. Those with a religious perspective may say, "God rewards those who believe". In contrast, when they lose, some will not accept the responsibility by saying, "It was God's will". Meditation is what is really working. God has nothing to do with it. It is terribly vain of us to actually believe that our own God will make a change in our lives that will affect the outcome of our behavior because we are special to God and the person against whom we are then competing is not. At best we are only affecting our own attitude.

There are many ways to become in tune with yourself. Psychology explains that it is your attitude that orients your own life and influences the result of your behavior by enhancing your expectations, energy, and drive toward your objective. Your attitude allows you to focus upon the goal and to become more receptive to the subtle opportunities that enhance the result you wish to achieve.

The opposite is also true. Consider the effect of the behavior of a parent who feels a lack of their own success and projects that attitude upon their own children, and then wonders why their child has low self esteem resulting in lack of success and, in some cases, discipline problems. A totally different result is achieved for the child whose parents support and believe in their child's own ability to

achieve. Your own attitude makes a difference in the lives of others.

If you wish only good results, do not allow yourself to think negatively about anything. Will yourself to think only positively for a day and see how you then feel about yourself and the world around you. Given time it will become a habit that will work wonders for you. Your attitude means everything to you by influencing the results you attain living you life.

Who Am I?

Recognizing that we can be deceived by how our own mind works is important in order to better understand how our opportunities to experience life can become seriously limited. Everyone is oriented to life based upon his or her own perceptions. Our experiences condition the way in which new information is received. In psychology, conditioned orientation (your own “attitude”) for the receipt of new stimuli is called a “preparatory set”. The use of a preparatory set establishes the framework for how new information is received. The same stimuli may be totally accepted by one person, and totally rejected by another, depending upon their own pre-existing orientation.

Once a stimulus, notion or position is accepted to the exclusion of all other, we may become fixated in our own belief. We may then feel that this is the only belief that is acceptable. When a notion becomes valued to the exclusion of all other information, and becomes a scotoma, they act similar to computer spam blockers. They block any contrary information to our current belief, good or bad. Scotomas are the point at which our ability to accept any contrary notion ceases, our minds become closed, and further dialog is useless. We are thereafter conditioned to be blind to reality on that particular issue.

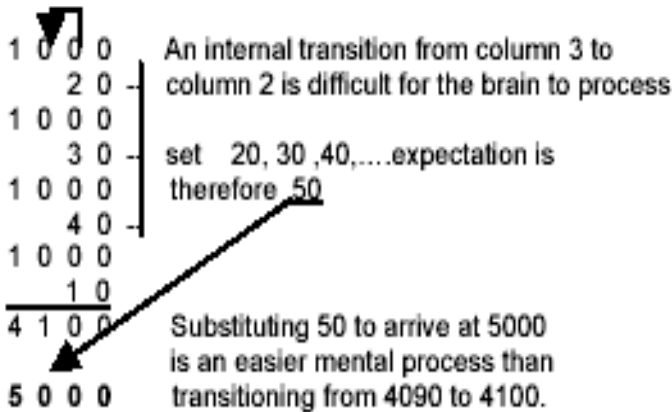
Scotomas do help us filter information so that we can receive useful consistent data, and reject the vast amount of useless bits of information constantly bombarding us. They also harm us by denying us any further acceptance of the truth. When we internalize or accept notions as true for ourselves they can become valued even when they are inconsistent with our own best interests, or may be totally false when viewed as a part of reality.

We all have scotomas because our life-long task is processing the vast amounts of stimuli we constantly receive so that we may select those beneficial to our own survival and reject those that could be harmful. Once we select a life-mate, for example, no other person should thereafter be as important. That scotoma is necessary to maintain a healthy marriage.

Our goal should be to continue growing, by identifying and eliminating negative barriers, before they become scotomas. The healthy approach is to not allow such psychological tools to become permanent barriers for growth. By recognizing how our experiences can combine to create unfounded expectations, we can reduce many of the barriers we encounter to our growth. An example of how our minds works may be helpful for our understanding of the controlling effect of these mental tools.

An Interesting Experiment

Ask someone to add up a column of figures quickly, saying the sum aloud as fast as you write them down, one number at a time. Starting with the number 1,000, followed by the numbers 20, 1,000, 30, 1,000, 40, and 1,000, the sum at that point is 4,090. If we are then asked to add the number 10, the answer received most often is 5,000, instead of the true answer of 4,100.



Try this on an audience, and intelligent people will actually argue with you, insisting that the real answer is 5,000. Try this on your bank teller. People will get upset that you differ with them. Yet this math problem is not associated with any emotion.

The wrong answer is arrived at because a preparatory set was created in adding the figures. We have added 20, 30, and 40 in sequence and, therefore, have an unconscious expectation that the number 50 will be next; the *preparatory set* is the anticipation of the number 50. When, instead, we are asked to add the number 10, we must transfer interior figures from the third to the second column. This is a difficult mental process because people normally process information by bracketing numbers from the outside edges instead of thinking in terms of the middle. Instead of the more difficult mental process of an internal transfer, the mind easily substitutes the number 50 that we were expecting, producing the number 5,000 for the sum of 4090 and 10.

How Should My Beliefs Grow?

This simple math problem is a good example of the effect of preparatory set and how our own mind can deceive us; and yet this example is not based upon an emotion-laden belief. A person trained from early childhood with any particular belief will have emotions invested, and a value attached to his or her own belief. If asked to accept a contrary notion, people will respond emotionally. That is because the feelings that you are experiencing at the moment of accepting a belief are typically associated with the belief from the time it is first acquired, and will be retained associated with that belief for the rest of your life; especially with those beliefs experienced at an early age, before you acquired the ability to reason.

The emotions you experience with a belief when it is first accepted are forever a part of your belief. This is why our own religious heritage has such a powerful effect upon us. If you have been raised in a particular faith you cannot simply ignore your own religious beliefs without suffering an adverse psychological effect. To cause change from childhood beliefs as an adult requires significant education.

Because we naturally associate any belief with the emotions present when they originated, and because we cannot easily take any aspect of our lives out of its context, alternatives to our own scotomas are not only unacceptable, but can be threatening—even to the point where people are willing to risk their lives to defend their current notion of what is right. This phenomenon occurs today, when otherwise intelligent people become suicide bombers in the name of their religious beliefs. It has nothing to do with truth. A logical argument cannot defeat an emotional belief. Significant non-threatening education is required to cause behavioral change. In the Middle East today there

was insufficient time for education; the result is that we are at war because of scotomas.

The mature way of accommodating childhood beliefs with the adult world, and reality, is to continually redefine each concept, or belief, to keep it relevant. People cling to their own beliefs. However, even our religious beliefs should mature just like any other notion that influences our lives. A fear God concept is normal in childhood, but by adulthood a more abstract form of defining God is far more effective. For those raised in the American Christian tradition, their children accept the myth of Santa Claus, but only for a few years because eventually the notion is undermined by reality. Those who do not substitute the good of giving to others for their childish notion of Santa as “their gift giver” feel disappointed and suffer emotionally, whereas those able to develop a healthy change of perspective may continue to celebrate Santa with Christmas as their symbol of giving.

The objective in life is to continue to grow. If our beliefs evolve healthily, to the extent that we are able to live within our full range of needs, through continued growth and development, we should eventually achieve a peak experience. Our goal should be for our individual life to continually become fulfilled, richer, and more satisfying. Although the specific goals that fulfill our individual lives will be unique, understanding the universal process for human growth makes the journey easier.

This Life May Be Our Only Opportunity

Because humanists do not believe that life’s reward is limited to achieving immortality of a soul beyond their current physical existence, they feel that each individual must be responsible for the present. Humanists feel that we should all make the most of each day while we are living on Earth—and certainly not sacrifice this life for a ticket to

an afterlife that may not exist. If there is an afterlife, living a proper life should entitle everyone to whatever rewards are then available. In the meantime we should not miss living this life.

There may be a life after death, but we have no valid evidence it exists. If we believe in an afterlife we only have hope based upon blind faith to rely upon. Therefore, why would we want to sacrifice our lives on earth with only the hope that a life hereafter exists, especially if it requires our denial of the opportunity to live our own life to the fullest here today? Being a suicide bomber makes absolutely no intelligent sense. To a humanist, that person is sick. To deceive such a person, causing them to act against their own best interest for living their life on earth with a promise of “vestal virgins in heaven”, is ludicrous, and certainly a fraud on the individual believer, especially if there is no heaven hereafter.

Striving to maximize the opportunity to live on Earth can cause significant internal conflict. There are people in positions claiming authority that use control devices, such as insisting that heaven is restricted to only those who “believe” in their particular path. Not only is that notion absurd; but why would anyone want to associate with a god that makes such unreasonable demands--with the result that the vast majority of people in the world are denied immortality? That notion does a disservice to those that would otherwise live a quality life on earth; that thereby feel they must now spend their limited time living their own life in search of the ticket that only the control person holds. That does not make intelligent sense; but, if that notion becomes a scotoma in childhood before the age of reason, intelligent people will be afraid not to follow the required prescription.

Most humanists accept that those with this belief have every right to their own notion of truth—except for those who insist that their belief requires that others must

follow the same prescription; and it is their duty to see that they do. Then it becomes offensive. However, similar notions are the substance of wars. Our society is still primitive and we continue to have crusaders even today.

Many people experience trauma in struggling to move out of the cultural limitations of their own childhood. Many experience guilt, fear, or estrangement from the mainstream of society, perhaps even from their own parents, especially if they challenge earlier beliefs their parents still value. Because any living person's, or institution's, first duty is to preserve itself, religions place many cultural barriers on growth, intended to keep their adherents from escaping. Although most humanists consider themselves free of cultural religious barriers, each will still have some. Life is not simple. Ultimately, difficult as it was to get to this point of freedom from our cultural traditions, humanists find that focusing exclusively on this life rather than being concerned with seeking an afterlife is more exhilarating, and is sufficient for them self. Humanist reason for existing is for this life.

What About God?

Human beings identify forces in nature that exceed our ability to understand. Such forces have historically been labeled as a "god". Many primitive people felt that the sun or elements of weather, or even the sea were gods. People prayed, or sacrificed, to such gods for their own safety. Prior to Abraham, many gods were acceptable. When religion required accepting only one god, the use of the term became more complex. As science explained away mysteries, which had once been associated with "gods", the definition of god became more abstract. We are still doing this today. "God" is a universal term used by most people for identifying whatever is beyond our own personal knowledge that we fear or revere.

We each have our own definition of God. Serious argument could be created in any congregation if all members were required to accept the same god concept. Many clergy explain “God” by expressing generalities, or adjectives that are universal, or are non-threatening because they describe the effects of God rather than defining what the term “god” actually means. That avoids conflict.

Claiming, for example, that “God is the Creator” says very little, but implies a lot. The concept of creator could be synonymous with God being nature. Obviously, if nature were your definition, the statement that “God is the Creator” would be true—assuming that the universe has not always existed. That notion, however, does not imply a caring god, or why do we have evil? Nor does it explain anything about our purpose, other than that we were created and are to live this life on earth. It has little additional utility, other than to raise the question of whether there was intelligent thought that caused our being here today.

If you believe that there was an intelligent independent cause that you call God, you might conclude there may be a divine purpose for our individual lives. However, if you believe that Darwin was correct. All forms of life evolve into more complex species through natural selection. We humans are merely a part of the natural evolution of life, created by a natural process of nature. If you can recognize that science is true, you would normally have a different conclusion. Some can accept the first hypothesis “on faith”. Others recognize that facts, tested by science, support a more natural truth, and are believable without a requirement of blind faith in something that logic will not support.

The statement that “God is the Creator” ultimately expresses that power exists in the universe that are superior to your self. Most people would not pray to nature. With a nature approach for viewing life you could still pray, or meditate, to tune your self to your own reality; but the notion of expecting a response from nature would not fulfill

the needs of those who find prayer beneficial. Their god must be more than the forces that created our universe.

What About Those Who Claim To Be Atheists?

Except for those who are determined to deny someone else's beliefs, or are still fighting their own earlier god concept that has not matured, the term "god" does have utility for most people. Because culturally it is used to express what we cannot discern, that we deeply revere or fear, the word denotes something very personal. The more appropriate approach for those who do not believe that the God concept has value for them self, and yet still feel compelled to challenge any one else's right to use the term, is in challenging more primitive definitions of the meaning of the term "God", not in denying another's right to use the term. For most people the term "God" has value because they have no better way to express their concerns.

Wars have been caused throughout the ages because everyone "knows" that their own beliefs are true. It may well be that there is no universal truth regarding faith. Truth may only exist "in the eye of the beholder".

Christians and Jews fight over whether Christ was the promised Messiah. Moslems and Christians fight over whether Mohammad was an even later prophet sent by God. Moslems and Jews still fight over whose lineage are the rightful descendents from Abraham. Who really are "God's chosen people"? Yet even among those of Islamic faith there is significant disagreement over relatively small details that lead Arabs to kill each other to defend their own truth. The Iraq Constitution is a test of compromise over three radically differing views within the same religion. Each has based their position on their claim of historic facts that makes their view the only valid truth.

The Dead Sea Scrolls have proven to us that even finding that the "facts" upon which our own "faith" as is

current in our culture is based may be false, we will each continue to believe what we have always believed and will defend our position to the date of our death. Why? Psychology has shown us how our minds work. Once we have a sufficient answer for ourselves we develop a scotoma that blocks any challenge. Our own truth becomes our own reality--but it is only true for our self.

Paul Tillich, widely recognized as the Dean of Christian theologians forty years ago, stated that our own definition of "God" describes our individual "*ultimate concern*"; the forces that drive our behavior, or the purpose toward which we direct our own life. For Tillich, "God" is not an "it", a person, or a thing; "God" is whatever empowers our own life. According to Tillich we each create our own god. Tillich claims that since "God" is our own concept of what is ultimately important to each of us, God is whatever compels us to act, that which we must seek. With such a concept, "atheism" is absurd. Carried to an absurdity, Tillich acknowledged that your own "god" could be money.

Tillich stated that we express our ultimate concerns in the form of symbols because we cannot fully describe our feelings in any other way. Our symbols become highly valued and form our own religious approach to life. Our "religious symbols" orient us toward our ultimate concerns. Only when the symbols themselves are defended as "the truth", rather than wherever they point, or to whatever they represent, do we then cease to communicate with others.

We cannot deny our own religious symbols, especially those that were learned before the age of reason, without risking negative psychological reactions, or even ultimately developing a neurosis. The best that we can do healthily is for our symbols to grow with us to keep them relevant. Because our own symbols become a part of who we are from the day that they are accepted by us, our symbols must periodically be redefined if they are to remain meaningful; especially for a person whose

knowledge of their universe has expanded beyond the symbols they represent, rather than have their symbols be abandoned, or rejected, as they mature. Symbols are associated with the emotions present when they were adopted. Rejecting them can be painful. Therefore, failing to redefine symbols to keep them relevant will put the person in unnecessary conflict with their own past.

As an example of a symbol, the meaning of a wedding ring cannot be adequately described in ten thousand words. The ring represents something far beyond a piece of metal. A wedding ring is not “truth”, even though truth in the relationship is required to maintain a healthy marriage. When the ring becomes the only thing valued, rather than what it represents, it loses its real meaning. Our own religious orientations are only the symbols we use to express our own “*ultimate concerns*”. If they become valued beyond what they symbolize, or represent, they become “icons”. When we defend our symbols as “the truth”, rather than what they represent to us, we then cease to communicate meaningfully to others, and have lost the meaning of the symbol for our own self.

Maslow found that an individual’s “God” concepts varied depending upon the need level upon which they are then religiously living. A “fear God” concept may be the only way someone living predominantly on the basic, or security level, can perceive his or her “God” as a force. On the social level, a “father God” concept may be more acceptable. Similar to Hawking’s use of the word, “God” may be a synonymous term for nature on the actualized level.

Some people, living on higher need levels, use terms like “love,” “freedom,” or “spirituality,” when defining their “God”; expressing forces they deem important or paramount to their own existence. Some may only use the term “God” to express their reverence for life. Many humanists use the term only to communicate with others; especially those who have a lower need level

concept. Most humanists are more apt to express an awe of their natural world, using terms expressing their reverence for life.

For a person who has an “actualized God” concept, such as a person for whom “God” may be used as a synonym for nature, it would be ridiculous to deny God’s existence by claiming to be an atheist, or even an agnostic. For these people the term “atheist” is repugnant. That term is not only anti-social for its effect on others, but it is also irrelevant. How can anyone deny the existence of nature? Intelligent humanist generally believe that there is no value in denying anyone else’s belief.

Humanism is not atheistic, although many atheists claim to be humanists. Humanism, as a philosophy of life, at best is agnostic because the use of the term “god” is not relevant to humanism. All humans must recognize that some forces of nature in the universe are superior to their own existence—whatever term they use to describe them.

Where all humanists may validly object is when “supernatural” requirements are applied as a prerequisite to use the term “god”. Humanist object, because at that point there is no discernable test for reality, or veracity, only subjective belief, or blind faith. Humanist find no valid reason to base their life merely on blind faith. That would risk reducing their measure of truth to the level of absurdity. We may not fully understand nature now; but that does not mean humans never will. A supernatural belief becomes unnecessary. Humanist do not feel that they have to have to answer every question to live a good life.

There are many additional aspects of understanding the subject of God that exceed this discussion. We know for a fact that we are currently unable to fully comprehend nature. The important point here is that our approach for understanding those forces beyond ourselves is currently deeply personal. No one so far has discovered the “truth”, because the use of the term “God” has no clear definition.

Because of a lack of education, or exposure to an orientation to the contrary, some feel compelled to answer their questions that are beyond their current knowledge with myth or lore. Challenging their faith would leave them without an alternative belief system. Therefore, there is only harm, and no value, in unsolicited challenging another's deeply felt beliefs, or faith. The result of unwarranted attacking another's deeply felt beliefs may cause irreparable harm, not only to the believer, but also to the attacker. Such behavior ultimately will not make you feel better, so why would you do it? Most intelligent humanist would not intentionally do so.

Maslow acknowledged that all humans are subject to cultural and psychological restraints. Once a notion is acceptable to you, we have discovered that it can easily be developed into a limiting scotoma. Try telling those who are still fighting their parents' God concept that atheism is irrelevant. Their view of the god concept is limited to a narrow range; and, because of their barrier, they must expend energy defending their position because they are fighting the "god" of their childhood. They may even feel justified offending others beliefs in their zeal, because of their naivety. Their god concept simply did not mature as they grew, forcing them to now waste their limited energy; like *Don Quixote*, fighting windmills.

Atheist are unaware that what they are objecting to is their own limited definition, not the concept of those identifying whatever is beyond us that may legitimately be expressed, by those who chose do so, by calling these forces "god". They are validly objecting to the notion of supernaturalism, not the use of the term god. They fail to make the distinction. Their inability to recognize that such definitions may be normal and are acceptable may explain why, for those people who are stuck still fighting their childhood beliefs, achieving actualization of their own life may take a lifetime. For some whose growth is restricted by such a barrier, it may be impossible. For those caught

up still fighting their early childhood, their energy becomes absorbed in their negative behavior, rather than enhancing their own continued growth.

Most humanists do not worry about such concerns. When I asked Stephen Hawking's colleague, Steven Weinberg, a humanist Nobel Prize winning theoretical physicist about it, he said to me "Why would I even worry about such things?" Such effort is trivial and of little value to others. Most atheists can accept humanism as a valid life concept, but more often today an informed Humanist does not accept atheism as having any relevance to life. Why offend others with a negative belief, when humanism has so many positive arguments to make that support life? Education is the only valid socially acceptable approach. Challenging another's belief system negatively is never acceptable.

God and Spirituality

According to another Humanist, Harvard's distinguished professor, Edward O. Wilson, the founder of *sociobiology*, everyone has some *spiritual need*; that is, a biological need to connect them self with nature. Sociobiology is the study linking the field of biology with sociology. According to Wilson biology does not end at birth and sociology then takes over. Many of our institutions, including the human need for religion, are biologically determined. All healthy people have a natural spiritual awe of our universe. People may label their reverence for life however they wish. The point is that these are issues everyone is biologically compelled to reconcile for him or herself.

Recognizing that it does little good to challenge another's beliefs, we can accept that each person is entitled to live their own life as they choose--at least until they attempt to limit the rights, or to challenge the beliefs, of

others. The only valid way to change another's belief is to provide acceptable non-threatening opportunity for the introduction of new ideas that are testable in reality so that a person's view of life may grow. Only non-threatening education will expand upon a person's view of their own truths. However, to be effective, people have to be receptive to another view. Our attitude must be open and receptive for new ideas to germinate that may then ultimately be accepted.

So What Has God Told Us?

So what have we learned about why are we here from God? The truth is that we have not learned anything that is empirically testable. People only chose to believe what they accept to be true for them self; some may even then claim the answer came from their God. For most people their own notion is acceptable; and that is all that matters. Those people are content within their own scotomas. However, those who must have testable proof, or reason, and, therefore, cannot accept answers based upon blind faith are left without an answer. It does little good to attack the god concept for not providing an answer.

Nevertheless, the use of the term "God" still has validity for most people today. There does not have to be a supernatural element for the term "god" to have relevance for some, or to provide utility in communication for others.

Each person can live an equally good life on earth, fulfilling whatever is important for them self, without our having to have conflict throughout the world because of another's personal view of life, or because their definitions differ from our own; the members of any congregation will be unable to agree upon a single definition. But, we will only have a stable society if we each are willing to allow everyone else the right to have his or her own view of life.

All we can truthfully say is that God has not answered the question of why we are here on earth for everyone.

How Do We Face Our Own Death?

We are capable of accepting that we are here to experience our own journey through this life. By the time our journey is completed hopefully the life of each of us will have been fulfilled. Maslow concluded that when people reach the point of complete actualization, they arrive at a state of mind where even their own death is non-threatening.

For most people, elementary school was a great experience during the earliest part of our lives, preparing us for the next level of our own growth. Few feel the need to repeat the experience, although we may still enjoy seeing the benefit of the early school experience in the lives of our children and grandchildren. Though it is a good experience for young children, most people are relieved that elementary school is no longer important for them in their later years. For that part of our life, we adults are now fulfilled. We do not want to go back and start over.

Similarly, if we have actualized our own life, having experienced life to its fullest, we will no longer need to fear death. We can then recognize that death is inevitable—not sought, but no longer of necessary concern. When we need to experience nothing further for our own life to be fulfilled, death can be accepted as a natural conclusion.

As our bodies deteriorate our own death may legitimately be sought. Having reached his elder years, and having fully experienced life, Corliss Lamont, (widely considered the “Dean” of humanism,) demonstrated death with dignity, peacefully sitting in his backyard in the sun, and quietly passing away. From this perspective, death is as natural as living; and the notion of life after death is not

necessary in order for our lives to be fulfilled. When we no longer spend our life fearing death, maximizing our own existence while we are living on earth, protecting our family, and preserving our life's work, will be far more relevant.

Why Do We Need Others?

Humans are not self-sufficient. From birth, we are dependent upon others. Growing into a fully functioning healthy person without support from others is impossible. Knowing that we need others for us to even exist, the issue is: *what is the ideal relationship that we should seek with others?* Martin Buber, a noted Jewish theologian and philosopher, recognized what we gain by accepting another person for whom they are, without judgment, or attempting to influence them. This relationship is necessary if we are to acquire another's true perspective to aid us in our struggle to achieve our own full potential. The benefit that results from a healthy relationship—harmonizing with another person without trying to change him or her—is enormous. Buber identified this relationship as the “*I-Thou*”.

We know the depth perspective we experience driving down a highway using both eyes, in contrast with driving while closing one eye. Much like the advantage of perceiving three dimensions by using two eyes, complete understanding and acceptance of another person gives perspective for understanding our self. A healthy self-image is derived only through being accepted, and being fully understood, by another person. The feelings achieved from belonging to a community, or receiving validation of our self through the view of others, are important for our own growth. Therefore, healthy relationships with others become very important, and are necessary for our own life to become significant.

Without healthy relationships with others, our self-image becomes protective and is, in itself, a barrier to achieving fulfillment. We only grow as a healthy person through our relationships with others. The better our relationships with others, the healthier person we can become. Thus, like digging in the sand, where the more we dig the more sand falls back in the hole, the more in depth relationships with others we experience the more we grow.

An Episcopal priest once proved to me that we are unable to give enough of ourselves away to others. He spent his life giving his all, caring for his parishioners and everyone else that he encountered, without worrying about any of his own needs. Yet he never went without, even though he could not have anticipated the source of his needs satisfaction. In fact, he has lived an abundant life. The more we offer to others, the more comes back to us in unpredictable ways. Everyone benefits. Life is far more exciting when we do everything that we can to caringly, and unselfishly, give our self away for the benefit of others.

People need close relationships with others throughout life to become truly fulfilled. The recognition of inter-need dependence for need satisfaction, which exists between two or more people, is what we identify as “love”. The character of love, like all other orientations to life, changes as individuals exist on different need levels. The basic level produces stronger emotions, with survival and sex producing the strongest drives. On the social level, the warmth of sharing is evident. On the actualized level, love may be found between soul mates whose lives are truly integrated together. To be most effective, love must be shared in an *I-thou* relationship.

Our Differing Purposes

Although, according to Maslow, all people have the same need structure, each individual person approaches

satisfying their needs differently. Just how different we humans are can be best understood through contrasting our psychological temperament types. Since the time of Aristotle, it has been known that people have primarily four distinctly different types of temperament personality. Each type thinks and approaches life from distinctively different points of view.

Hypocrites outlined this theory in 370 B.C. There are those of us who live within cultural parameters, providing for others, and those living creatively outside of our societal norms. There are those who comprehend their world, and seek lofty goals, and there are those searching for each step to get a foothold necessary to get there.

Each personality type consists of standards, or values, which adherents of that type share in the same manner, or with the same approach as all others within the same temperament type. It would be rare, if not impossible, for an individual to fit completely into more than one of these basic psychological types, although most people do display some secondary characteristics of another type. However, the secondary characteristic serves only as a modifier of their primary style of thinking. Although, with effort, all people are capable of behavior outside the limitations of their specific temperament style, it is quite difficult, and usually must be specifically learned; much like learning to write your name with the opposite hand. It will not be natural. We each remain our same temperament type for our entire lifetime.

In the early 1950s, Isabel Meyers, and her mother, Kathryn Briggs, brought substance to the ancient psychological temperament type theory by devising a simple questionnaire for identifying type. David Keirsey who authored an excellent book, *Please Understand Me II*, sets forth simple tests to ascertain our personal temperament type. His more recent work amplified Meyers-Briggs explanation of temperament type theory. After describing each personality type in detail, Keirsey

then shows how differing types interact. You feel like Keirsey knows you personally. In a few pages of reading you not only know yourself, but can also understand your potential areas of conflict with your life partner.

Psychologists make the point that we are only able to maximize our lives on Earth, and become fully actualized, if we follow a path consistent with our own personality type. Behaving inconsistent with your own type can cause neurosis. We cannot walk in someone else's shoes; we must create our own path. But in order to do that, we must first understand ourselves. It is very beneficial, in actualizing ourselves through our relationships with others, to know which personality type we have, and what that means for us. It is even more effective when we can also understand the personality type of those with whom we closely relate.

I have identified my own type, as defined by Meyers-Briggs, as an *idealist*. This is a rare type, found in less than ten percent of society. According to Keirsey, I am further identified as an *idealist-idealist*; he labels a "*counselor*," because I have no other secondary characteristic. Less than one percent of our society view information by processing in the same manner that I do.

Idealists require recognition from others to find self-worth—and constantly must seek validation, so we are compelled to spend our lives giving to others. Though idealists are capable of solving other people's problems relatively naturally, idealist generally cannot solve their own problems without help. Idealists are incapable of seeing themselves. Idealists easily see the big picture; and are able to instantly put complex issues in proper perspective. But don't bother an idealist with details. Because they leap to the solution, idealists become frustrated when a person must explain a situation by relating each and every blow.

My wife thinks exactly opposite from me; she is a *rationalist*. They are even rarer representing only six

percent of society. For rationalists, who are only able to validate themselves from within, imposing the requirement to serve others is seriously frustrating. Rationalist might want to serve others, but only by choice; they do not feel the compelling need to do so.

My wife must understand each step in any process for herself first before she can proceed to the next step. In contrast, I leap to conclusions. For me, her effort is ponderous, but for her it is essential. Truth is her most important consideration. She can only discover truth by observing every fact. My wife finds the journey more important, and rewarding, than the objective. She gets so absorbed in what she is seeing on her journey that she may forget where she was going. My mind is already there, but I cannot remember the route that I traveled.

We discovered our differences the first time we bought a birthday card for a friend. I immediately found a card containing an appropriate message for the friend, with an acceptable design. I was ready to buy the card and get on with life. My wife, however, was unwilling to buy any card until she examined every one, to make sure the one we chose was the very best available. We proceeded to frustrate each other, due solely because of our differing personality types. If we had not discovered Meyers-Briggs theory, our relationship undoubtedly could not have survived. This is serious stuff.

We now have agreed to compromise. If I find a card that I like, I am free to proceed to the register. In the meantime, my wife continues to examine all other cards. If she finds a better card before I have paid, I will purchase her card instead, without question. If I have already paid for my card, my wife has agreed to leave with me, now feeling that she has at least done her best. We recognize that this solution may not be perfect, but it works for us.

On the other hand, we have also enlarged our own experiences in life by now observing the world through each other's eyes. When we take time to appreciate nature,

I am more interested in how what we are seeing integrates into the natural world. My wife sees a bunny in the road, stops to smell the flowers beside our path, and gets totally immersed in the setting, while I am more apt to seek the end of the path, wondering where it leads. We have discovered that neither of us is “wrong;” we are simply different. I like the statement of Shakespeare, “*Nothing is either ‘right nor wrong’, but thinking makes it so.*” Life is much richer when it can be appreciated from another’s perspective. To be effective, however, this must be achieved through an *I-thou* relationship, without attempting to change the other person.

A different perspective is that of *guardians*; the largest number of the personality types which Meyers-Briggs found in approximately forty-five percent of society. Guardians expect everyone to abide by “the rules”, and they expend significant effort assuring that they do. Guardians make wonderful schoolteachers, police officers, homemakers, ministers, nurses, and physicians—occupations in which dependability, and their need to provide for others, are their primary concerns. They get things done instantly, without question, because they feel obligated, since it is the “right thing to do.” In turn, they also make sure that everyone else is doing their job. Guardians need constant praise for their services, however, or they will resent having to serve.

The rest of society may be classified as *artisans*. People with this personality type are capable of seeing the world without restraint. They do not like routine, and may ignore social norms, because they cannot accept living “inside of the box.” Artisans obviously make great artists, but they are also frequently good musicians, actors, advertising agents, or politicians. Many artisans, however, are also the criminals who cannot be controlled by society, or those who become social deviants. Artisans can really frustrate guardians, who feel that no one should ignore the rules. By contrast, a rationalist can ignore an artisan unless

imposed upon. An idealist can appreciate the creativity of an artisan, but will have little tolerance for any deviation that does not move toward a positive goal.

If a church dinner is being organized, for example, guardians are the ones to manage it—but do not spell their name incorrectly in the church bulletin! If the church fails to provide recognition, the rationalist may not notice, the idealist would quit participating. The guardian would resent it, but would begrudgingly continue to serve out of a sense of duty. In the meantime, guardians would be infuriated with the idealist for quitting. The rationalist would still be washing the dishes, ignoring everyone else—doing their job just because it needs to be done. The artisans may not show up to prepare for the dinner at all—and if they did, they would be decorating the tables.

So, what does all this have to do with the quality of our own life? Everything! Success can only be measured personally. Increasing our self-awareness will in turn increase our opportunity for living a successful life. Not knowing who we are leaves us vulnerable. Assuming others think from the same perspective, or personality type, as we do, could be disastrous for any relationship. Thus, first knowing our self becomes essential for our own happiness. Understanding and appreciating the differences in others improves the quality of our own life.

When a companion stops to examine the flowers, for example, idealists can react in one of two ways: they can become irritated and impatient to get where they are going; or they can see an opportunity to expand their own horizon. One approach limits their existence; the other enhances their life. Understanding the differences between ourselves and another can only expand our experience, and enrich life far beyond what each could achieve individually.

The rationalist asks the idealist, artisan, or guardian to “stop and smell the roses.” The idealist expands the other types’ horizons and goals. The guardian can feel more

genuine with the idealist, inspired by the artisan, more genuinely understood by the rationalist while they diligently serve others. The artisan may create works of art and beauty for all to enjoy and not care that they act differently than anyone else. Interaction with each type will provide a different result; combining personality types in a relationship enhances both; but only if each can accept the other as they are in an *I-thou* relationship.

Keirsey, in amplifying upon Meyers-Briggs theory, found that, although we each have only one primary type, most of us have a predominant secondary characteristic incorporating one of the other types, that modifies our behavior, but to a much lesser extent than our primary type. Thus, people may be best understood by recognizing in which of the sixteen categories they live. By understanding psychological types we can reduce negative effects, so that a weakness in our own psychological type does not become a dominant weakness, and cause barriers in our relationships with others. By understanding each category we can be even more effective in maximizing the quality of our own life. Others can help us create new paths around our own barriers better than we can ever accomplish on our own. We created, or accepted, a barrier for some reason. It takes others for us to bridge or circumvent our own barriers.

By fully utilizing our individual strengths, and bridging our weaknesses with the strengths of others, we can enhance both our own existence, and our relationships with others. The effect is like a spiral. We are better able to fulfill our own life when we share our journey with others. As we share we grow. As we grow we are better able to actualize our own existence, and to help other maximize theirs.

Why Should We Make Our Lives Significant?

After years of contemplation, I have found that, ultimately, only two aspects of life hold relevance for me. First, ***“our own life is meaningful to the extent we share in happiness.”*** By achieving actualization in the manner articulated by Maslow, we can reach the pinnacle of our own existence. However, that alone can cause one to become selfish and to miss the greater values in life that come from sharing our existence with others. Therefore, the second relevant element is equally necessary.

Simply stated, ***“our lives become significant to the extent the world becomes a better place because we have lived.”*** Thus, we are responsible for not only actualizing our own existence, but also for assisting others to achieve the highest quality of life they may attain, both now and for the future. Acting together we can achieve far more than anyone could accomplish individually. The healthy person keeps both of these values in balance.

This philosophic approach to life is consistent with Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. Living one’s life to the fullest by actualizing our own existence makes our life meaningful. Extending our own existence by transcending ourselves in order that we may make a contribution to the life of others, makes our own life significant for ourselves, as well as to others.

Many other contributions can be made by our working collectively to improve our world. Our own life effort should be to add value. By focusing our attention on constructive issues, and providing solutions, we raise our own consciousness of opportunities, hopefully motivating ourselves to action, as well as influencing others to act whenever such an opportunity is presented to them.

How Do We Apply All of This?

I know an intellectually challenged person, whose life is dependent upon Good Will Industries. If they did not exist, upon the loss of his parents or other caregivers, my friend could be among the homeless, wandering the streets—or would not survive. Alone he could not exist above Maslow’s basic level of existence. Even now, with the continual assistance of others, he barely lives on the lower social level—although, this is at least two need levels above what he could accomplish by himself. Does this make his life insignificant, or not worth living? Not to him.

For my friend, his own existence may be all that is relevant—and yet he still cares about others. He feels that he is doing a good deed when he smiles and says “hello” to everyone he meets; he knows no strangers. He does not need to write a book, or play a piano, to make his own life meaningful. As a matter of fact, it may be easier for my friend to actualize his own existence than for anyone else I know, because—although he has some intellectual barriers to overcome—he does not create psychological barriers for himself. We more “normal” folk have far more barriers, because we absorb cultural limitations, and establish artificial goals that my friend does not perceive.

Moreover, because my friend is so good-hearted, those who care for him—no matter what personality type—are able to recognize that they enhance their own lives by helping him. The guardian’s effort to enrich his life gives them a sense of purpose. The idealist gains satisfaction from serving on the Good Will board, or fundraising for the organization. The rationalist finds value buying products sold at the Good Will store. An artisan probably designed the brochure that helped raise money for the institution.

The real purpose for each person’s participation is not only to serve my friend—it is for each person to fulfill his or her own purpose through that effort. Everyone continuously struggles to improve their current position in

life, socially and economically, and to enhance their own sense of self-worth. No action is purely altruistic. We are motivated to perform in assisting in my friend's needed activities in order to gain fulfillment for ourselves, each in our own way. As a side benefit, we all know that we are doing something worthwhile for a good person who needs our help.

What Can We Do Collectively?

One purpose of formal education should be to reduce cultural barriers that inhibit normal growth and actualization—if not for the public at large (who are frequently bound up with scotomas on any subject we are trying to communicate), at least for the more informed people who more easily recognize such barriers. The masses are typically ignorant on any given subject.

Provided the opportunity, people will actualize at their own rate, and in their own manner, based upon their own personality and needs. We cannot change all of society. But the opportunity must be available, and cultural and environmental obstacles to growth must be identified and eliminated, for anyone to be able to live on the highest levels. All of us do not have to actualize our own life to justify our society—but we must each have the opportunity to do so. Our Constitution, as proclaimed in the Declaration of Independence, guarantees us the right to *life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness*, but it does agree to provide us the means for achieving it. We must earn that for our self.

One cultural barrier, for example, is a lack of public understanding that there are different personality types; and what that means in our ability to understand each other. As previously stated, understanding our differences in thinking and motivation can improve everyone's quality of life by reducing miscommunication. Accepting the diversity in other people has great value for our own life.

Another barrier is most people's limited ability to relate to those living on other psychological levels of need. Even governments operate on differing need levels, identifiable on Maslow's scale. It is unrealistic, for example, to expect the Russian public at large, generally existing on the high security/low social level, to appreciate the cultural concerns of Americans, who generally exist on a high social/low ego level. Nor can the typical Afghani Muslim be expected to appreciate our way of life.

People must first be taught to recognize these differing levels, and then how to speak more effectively to those with whom we wish to communicate, by first communicating on their level of living. Similar to Maslow's problem of understanding a joke, or appreciating music, communication must begin on the lowest need level of those communicating. Teaching the public to identify and understand others' need levels could make a significant difference in meaningful communication.

Another barrier is caused by our educational methods. This can be effectively challenged without threatening anyone's belief system. Frank Goble, author of *The Third Force*, a book amplifying Maslow's humanistic psychology, proposes an educational philosophy offering optimizing human awareness, helping all people to create, grow, and control their own choices and goals. Goble contends that understanding humanistic psychology can help provide early educational opportunities tailored to each child's needs, rather than using pre-established educational patterns that may be inconsistent with individual needs. Making everyone fit into the same box does not effectively work to maximize growth. This change in how we approach education could dramatically enhance the opportunity for children to fully actualize their own existence.

How Do I Make A Difference In My Own Life?

The message for each of us is to fully become ourselves—but first we must know ourselves. Only then can we be authentic, and achieve a meaningful fulfillment of our own life. Maslow contributed by providing a means for understanding of the process for how each of us can become fulfilled. We must provide the goals, or path, for ourselves. How we apply our lives to make the world better, and our own life significant, will be unique to each of us. We each need to start toward our own actualization by defining our own mission in life. Otherwise daily living will define us; and because of cultural limitations we may miss the opportunity to fulfill ourselves.

Happiness is the content feeling we get from feeling fulfilled. At the moment of a peak experience we will have the exhilarating, and possibly scary, feeling of total awareness—we will gain a rare insight into our personal universe. At those moments, we will know that we are then totally fulfilled, and have actualized our own life. We will have uniquely experienced and be able to feel the success and enjoy our own path getting there. Sharing our lives with others enhances our opportunities. We can now understand that the differences in each of us are what make life challenging and exciting. The world would be a dull place if we were all alike.

As I previously stated, as an idealist, only two aspects of life are relevant for me. *My life is meaningful to the extent I am able to achieve actualization. My life will be significant to the extent that the world is a better place because I have been here.* To be healthy, I must keep both in balance.

Considering only these two values, of the many leading to a successful life, others will respond very differently to the same circumstance. The response to additional values will equally differ; thus, there are

multiple approaches to a successful life. To illustrate the point:

If you are an artisan, you might say: “My life is meaningful to the extent that I am creatively engaged, and to the degree that I am excited about life’s opportunities. My life is significant when I have made a uniquely creative work that is really mine, and is genuinely prized by others.”

A guardian may say: “My life is meaningful when I am accepted by others I care about; when I know that my family and loved ones are safe, and when my world feels in order. My life is significant when I am in charge of what I do, and I am appreciated by others for what I provide.”

A rationalist could say: “My life is meaningful when it is peaceful, when I know what is true, and I am fully functioning in the world—at least to the degree that I am then comfortable in my role. My life is significant when I feel my own contribution has succeeded better than my previous efforts, and when I know that my efforts are right.”

These statements may be valid only momentarily, and will typically vary as we mature, and as our mission in life becomes continually more focused. The younger rationalist, for example, may be more concerned with understanding how he or she is to accomplish a specific task. Upon aging, however, the need to know grows, and he or she eventually may want to know how *everything* works. Goals for all other personality types similarly change. Nothing human is etched in stone; including our own religious views.

Although everyone’s approach to life is “hard wired” each person’s particularly important aspects of life at any moment will be tentative. However, the method of our individual processing remains consistent for our lifetime. The method of our processing is similar only for others within the same psychological temperament type. However the means of implementation of our actions may differ from others of the same type because of our level of

growth, maturation, and level of education. Thus, we will all appear different, even though those of the same temperament type will always process in the same manner.

Fortunately, there is no universal truth, no single answer for life's purpose—although, most of us will continue to assume everyone else understands us; and should agree with us. But imagine how boring the world would be if everyone had to agree. Our personal mission statement is only valid for ourselves, but even that may be tentative. Fortunately, there are few absolute truths. The fact that each person will approach actualizing their own existence in a different manner is good for society, because these differences enhance the quality of all of our lives by expanding our vision.

In Conclusion

What all of this means is that—even recognizing that we ultimately will physically become space dust—we still have value in our own existence, at least for us today. Should we tell the sun that, even though it was formed and has existed for millions of years, that just because its light will eventually become extinguished, it has no current value? The sun's value is to provide sustenance, contributing to the panoply of life, and offering the rest of us a chance to live. The sun's being here gives us the opportunity for happiness and meaning in our own lives. It does not have to exist forever to have value.

The truth is that we know very little about anything. We know even less about how and why our own life came to be. We can only act upon what we know, or what we are willing to believe. Even though humans might not be immortal, our individual lives are valuable for ourselves today. To exist for any interval of time requires us to contribute as if there will always be a future. Life is sufficient justification for itself. Nothing else is necessary for our own life to have meaning. Whatever else we may

choose to believe can only add to the meaning of our own life, but only for our self.

Instead of feeling that they are giving up something valued, those who accept the notion that this life could possibly be all that there is, express a sense of appreciation for the opportunity to maximize their own existence while here on earth today. They express that the freedom they experience from concern, and for wasting their energy, seeking an afterlife, encourages them to maximize their own opportunities here on Earth today because there are no longer inhibiting barriers. At least they do not lose this opportunity to fully live the only life we know. To the contrary, people with this view find that they must put even more effort into their life on Earth because this may be all that there is; they feel greater need for achieving actualization, and thus fulfilling their own purpose.

All that anyone really can verify is that we live our own life for ourselves, and those we love. Anything more is essentially a matter of faith, not fact. However, even those who choose to believe there must be an afterlife, benefit by fulfilling their own existence while here on Earth.

We may be here through a fluke in nature; but we do exist. Humans are part of the natural evolution of life. Regardless of whether nature is attempting only for the development of the species, or whether there may also be a specific purpose for each of us as individuals, is not really possible for us to know. All we do know is that as an individual, we only have this one opportunity to live. Our immediate objective is to live our own life here today, striving to be the very best that we can become.

By showing us that there exists higher levels of living, Maslow has helped our understanding how to enrich our own lives by providing a path to follow to actualize our own existence. By limiting barriers, and fulfilling all of our needs on all levels of living, we are able to grow and expand our own life.

We know now that we must, however, discover the specific path for ourselves. When we achieve a peak experience, we will then know we have fulfilled our own life, at least for that moment. When we have done our best to assist others in their journey, our lives will have significance. By fulfilling our own mission statement—if our own life is meaningful to our self, and significant to others—to the extent we fulfill our own mission, our own life will have then served its own purpose.

At some point, death is inevitable. For those who believe that the soul and body will then separate, actualizing their existence while here on Earth should only enhance this opportunity. By actualizing their own existence, their life would not have been wasted in a search for life hereafter, should an after life not exist. This approach to life should not conflict with any intelligent religious view. If it does, an educated person should question the value of their limited view. Those with faith may win even more by actualizing their own existence here on Earth. Especially, if they are correct.

Today, many people are content believing that this life is all that exists. No one knows for certain. Hopefully, for all of us, by actualizing our own existence, and thus knowing that we have fully lived while we are here, we will be able to peacefully accept the end of our own life when the time comes. We should need nothing further for our own life to have purpose.

To leave the world better in some way for our having been here—even a humanist could agree—is an acceptable form of immortality. Like our sun, or a flower in the forest, when we have lived this life to its fullest, there need be nothing further for our own life to be important. For us, at least, our own life will then have had purpose. If we can then go out sliding safely into home plate shouting, **“Wow! What a trip!”** we will know that our own life will have been fulfilled.

Addendum
A DECLARATION OF HUMANISM
A Humanist Ethic

I.

Humanism is a philosophy, or an approach for living this life on earth. It starts with the premise that we are part of nature and only know for certain that we are living this life today. Certain aspects of life have value for living a good life. Consistent with this philosophy, I personally believe that the healthy person grows through the following stages, normally in this order. This is my philosophic ethical approach for living my life:

1. Existence. My body is my temple of life, and health is essential for my existence. This life is all that I know for certain that I possess.

2. Responsibility. I must assume the sole responsibility for my own life. My behavior is within my control. I can only make my choices as I live in the present.

3. Meaning. My life is meaningful to me to the extent my own needs are satisfied, and I achieve the homeostatic state of happiness. There need not be a universal purpose for my life to have meaning. My own life is sufficient as my purpose for living.

4. Security. To secure my opportunities, I must support justice for all, and respect the freedom of choice of everyone else. Justice is a progressive attainment of equality, limited only by the constraints of the uniqueness of each person. Force should be tolerated only to suppress force that would otherwise inflict a person's unwarranted will over another person.

5. Social Relations Human interdependence is essential for health and growth. I must be willing to give mutual respect and trust to maintain close personal relationships. I recognize as love the relationship of inter-need dependence with others. I allow those I love within my defense mechanisms in order that we might share our lives together for our mutual support. I must allow all others to be themselves.

6. Actualization of Life. My purpose for living is to experience the joy of life, and to actualize my growth to my fullest potential as a human being, consistent with my responsibility to others, within the personal, environmental and social resources available to me. I have an awe and spiritual reverence for nature while living my own life as a part of our natural universe, recognizing that I am a Stewart of its resources each day while I am on earth. I do not live my life today searching for a future beyond my life on earth.

7. Commitment to Others. My life becomes significant to the extent I assist the growth of others to attain actualization of their own lives. I believe

that the healthy, mature person will balance the meaningfulness of his or her own life with significance to others in order to achieve the highest quality of life. Only in consort and harmony with others will my own life reach its maximum potential.

8. Knowledge. I feel that it is essential to maintain the conditions of free inquiry, and an open society, in order to encourage the expression of all ideas because the expansion of knowledge can ultimately result in the best choices for the growth of everyone. I support using all means available for ascertaining the truth, and applying the results obtained in the most reliable manner that will improve the welfare of all life on earth. My values and standards are relative because they are allowed to modify in order that they may improve as I grow through my own experiences.

9. Social Institutions. Within my own resources, I encourage people I encounter, as well as governments and other institutions, to reduce and eliminate all barriers to growth, and to provide optimum conditions for the healthy development of all people. Democratic process assures the greatest opportunity for most people. We live in a world economy. World government should assure peace from physical conflict for all people on earth.

10. Interdependence of Life. I affirm the wonder and beauty of nature as the creative process from which humans have evolved; and I thereby recognize the unity and interdependence of, and feel

respect for, all life on earth. All people must share responsibility for the maintenance of the ecological order. Life is sacred. However, over population of any species may threaten the opportunity for a quality life for all species. Humans are not an exception. Nature attempts to maintain a healthy balance. All living creatures on Earth must share our world together in harmony and balance if we are to survive and grow to our full potential.

II.

Additional expressions, such as an emotional attachment to a particular religious view, are personal, arising primarily from previous experiences that have oriented our own individual lives. We are each entitled to have our own. Therefore, such views should not be imposed upon others.

Lyle L. Simpson

Bibliography and Suggested Reading

(The two books highlighted in bold are the most important sources for improving your own life.)

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