

Maslow's Holistic-Dynamic Theory

Abraham Maslow's personality theory has been called humanistic theory, transpersonal theory, the third force in psychology, needs theory, and self-actualisation theory. However, Maslow referred to it as holistic-dynamic theory because it assumes the whole person is constantly motivated by one need or another, with potential to grow toward psychological health through self-actualisation.



The Third Force in Psychology

First Force

Psychoanalysis and its modifications, focusing on unconscious drives and past experiences

Second Force

Behaviourism and its various forms, emphasising observable behaviour and conditioning

Third Force

Humanistic psychology, highlighting human potential, growth, and self-actualisation

Maslow criticised both psychoanalysis and behaviourism for their limited views of humanity and inadequate understanding of psychologically healthy individuals. He believed humans have a higher nature and dedicated his later years to discovering the characteristics of psychologically healthy people.





Abraham Maslow's Troubled Childhood

Born in Manhattan on 1st April 1908, Abraham Harold Maslow endured perhaps the most lonely and miserable childhood of any major psychologist. As the eldest of seven children in Brooklyn, he experienced intense shyness, inferiority, and depression.

His relationship with his mother was particularly traumatic. Rose Maslow was cruel, selfish, and lacking in love for her family. In one horrific incident, she killed two kittens young Abraham had rescued by smashing their heads against basement walls. This cruelty, combined with her religious threats, shaped Maslow's lifelong hatred of religion and commitment to atheism.

Educational Journey and Self-Discovery



Love Conquers Family Opposition

Despite family resistance, Maslow married his first cousin Bertha Goodman when he was 20 and she was 19. His parents objected partly due to their youth but primarily feared hereditary defects from cousin marriage—ironically, as they themselves were first cousins with six healthy children.

This marriage became a source of strength and stability throughout Maslow's life, providing the love and acceptance he had never received in childhood.



Academic Struggles and Breakthroughs

After completing his doctorate in 1934, Maslow faced significant challenges finding academic positions due to both the Great Depression and anti-Semitic prejudice prevalent on American campuses. He briefly considered medical school but was repulsed by surgeons' cold, dispassionate attitudes toward patients. (desacralization: the type of science that lacks emotion, joy, wonder, awe, and rapture)

His breakthrough came when he scored 195 on E.L. Thorndike's intelligence test at Columbia University, earning him free rein as a research assistant. This fertile environment allowed his innovative ideas about human dominance and sexuality to flourish.

Influential Mentors in New York



European Psychologists

Met Erich Fromm, Karen Horney, Max Wertheimer, and Kurt Goldstein—refugees from Nazi rule who became his teachers



Alfred Adler

Attended Friday night seminars at Adler's home, alongside future psychologist Julian Rotter



Ruth Benedict

Anthropologist who encouraged his 1938 studies among Northern Blackfoot Indians of Alberta, Canada

Maslow believed he had the best teachers of anyone who had ever lived, learning from the greatest minds who had escaped Nazi persecution. To Maslow, Wertheimer and Benedict represented the highest level of human development, and he called this level “self-actualization.”



Life-Altering Wartime Insight

In December 1941, following America's entry into World War II, Maslow experienced a profound revelation whilst watching a veterans' parade. He realised his life must be devoted to developing "a psychology for the peace table."

This insight gave birth to his revolutionary idea that human motives are hierarchical, with higher-order needs like growth and well-being only becoming focal points once lower-level biological and safety needs are relatively satisfied.

Health Struggles and Academic Success

Maslow's health began deteriorating in the mid-1940s. At age 38, he suffered a mysterious illness leaving him weak and exhausted. Taking medical leave, he moved to California as nominal plant manager of the family cooperage business, using his light schedule to research self-actualising people through biographical studies.

In 1951, he became chairman of psychology at newly established Brandeis University, where he wrote extensively in journals and achieved fame during the 1960s. However, student rebellions against his intellectual approach and a severe heart attack in 1967 led to disenchantment with academic life.

Final Years and Legacy

Despite achieving the presidency of the American Psychological Association (1967-1968), Maslow grew increasingly disappointed with academic life. He accepted a position with Saga Administrative Corporation in California, enjoying freedom to think and write without specific duties.

On 8th June 1970, at age 62, Maslow collapsed and died of a massive heart attack. His influence extended far beyond psychology into business management, marketing, theology, counselling, education, and healthcare fields.

Core Assumptions of Maslow's Motivation Theory

Holistic Approach

The whole person, not individual parts or functions, is motivated

Complex Motivation

Behaviour springs from multiple, often unconscious motives

Continuous Motivation

People are constantly motivated by one need or another

Universal Needs

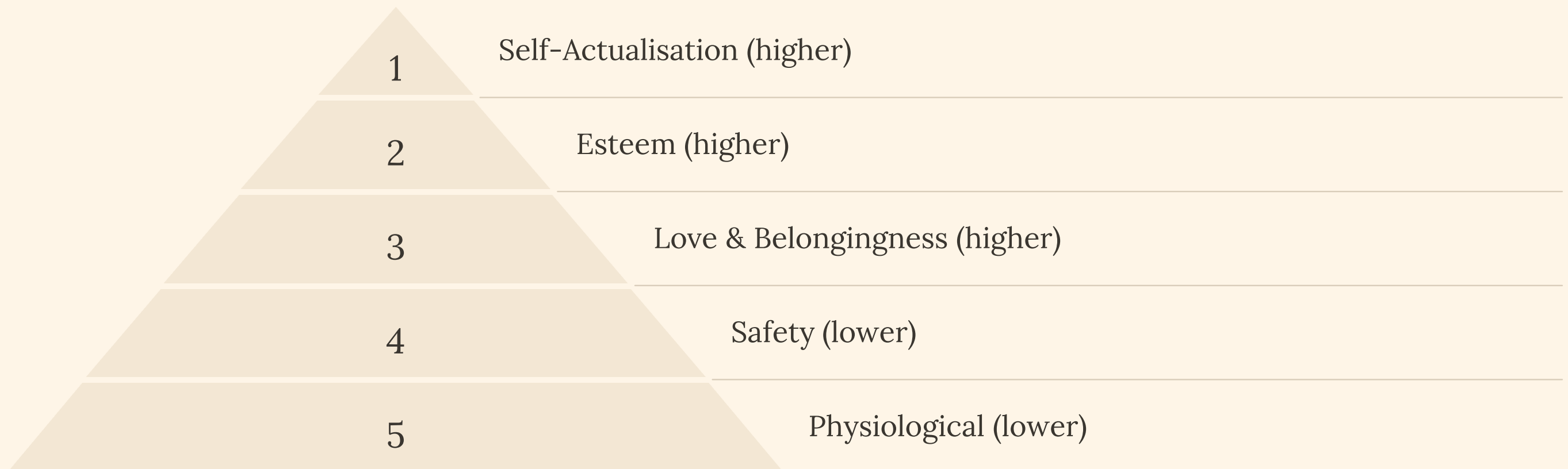
All people everywhere share the same basic motivational needs

Hierarchical Structure

Needs can be arranged in order of prepotency and importance

The Famous Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's hierarchy assumes lower-level needs must be satisfied before higher-level needs become motivators. The five conative (striving) needs form a hierarchy where each ascending step represents a higher but less survival-basic need.



Interestingly, Maslow never created or endorsed the pyramid visualisation—this was proposed by a consulting psychologist nearly 20 years later.

Physiological Needs: The Foundation

The most basic human needs include food, water, oxygen, and body temperature maintenance. These needs have prepotency over all others—perpetually hungry people are motivated solely to eat, not to make friends or gain self-esteem.

"It is quite true that man lives by bread alone—when there is no bread."

Physiological needs differ from others in two key ways: they can be completely satisfied (even oversatisfied), and they constantly recur. After eating, one will eventually become hungry again, requiring constant replenishment.



Safety Needs: Security and Stability

Once physiological needs are partially satisfied, people become motivated by safety needs: physical security, stability, protection from threatening forces like war, terrorism, illness, and natural disasters. The needs for law, order, and structure are also safety needs.

Unlike physiological needs, safety needs cannot be completely satisfied—people can never be fully protected from all potential dangers. Children are more often motivated by safety needs due to threats like darkness, strangers, and parental punishment.

Adults who retain irrational childhood fears spend excessive energy trying to satisfy safety needs, suffering from what Maslow called "basic anxiety" when unsuccessful.





Love and Belongingness Needs

After satisfying physiological and safety needs, people seek friendship, companionship, family belonging, and both giving and receiving love. Maslow identified three categories of people regarding love needs:

Adequately Loved

Those satisfied from early years don't panic when denied love, having confidence in their acceptance

Never Loved

Those who never experienced love become incapable of giving it, learning to devalue love entirely

Partially Loved

Those receiving only small doses develop the strongest motivation to seek love and acceptance

A woman with red hair pulled back, wearing a black blazer, is looking over her shoulder at the camera. She is holding a large blueprint in front of her. The blueprint has the title "The verdant Spire" in a cursive font at the top, followed by a technical architectural drawing of a tall, pointed structure with many lines and measurements. The background is a modern office interior with large windows and a potted plant with purple flowers.

Esteem Needs: Respect and Recognition

Esteem needs include self-respect, confidence, competence, and knowledge that others hold them in high regard. Maslow identified two levels:

Reputation

The perception of prestige, recognition, or fame achieved in others' eyes

Self-Esteem

Personal feelings of worth, confidence, strength, achievement, mastery, and independence

Self-esteem reflects a "desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for mastery and competence, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom." It's based on real competence, not merely others' opinions.

Once esteem needs are met, people stand on the threshold of self-actualisation—the highest recognised need.



Self-Actualisation: Reaching Full Potential

Self-actualisation represents the pinnacle of human development—self-fulfilment, realisation of one's potential, and creative expression in its fullest sense. However, not everyone with satisfied esteem needs automatically progresses to this level.

During the 1960s, Maslow observed that many students had all lower needs gratified yet didn't become self-actualising. The key difference was embracing B-values (Being-values) such as truth, beauty, justice, and other transcendent principles.

Self-actualising people become fully human, expressing basic needs naturally without cultural suppression. They maintain self-esteem even when scorned or rejected, becoming independent from lower-level needs that gave them birth.

Beyond Basic Needs: Aesthetic, Cognitive, and Neurotic



Aesthetic Needs

Not universal but present in every culture—the need for beauty and aesthetically pleasing experiences. Deprivation causes illness similar to frustrated conative needs.



Cognitive Needs

Desire to know, understand, solve mysteries, and be curious. Knowledge is necessary to satisfy all five conative needs. Frustration leads to skepticism and cynicism.

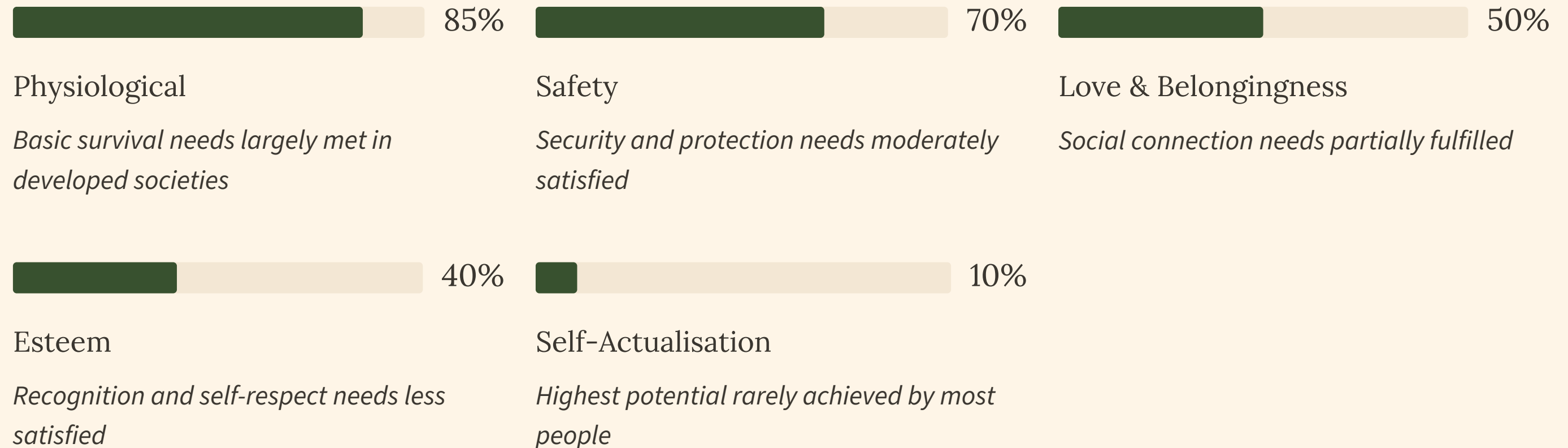


Neurotic Needs

Nonproductive needs that perpetuate unhealthy lifestyles. Usually reactive, serving as compensation for unsatisfied basic needs. Lead to pathology whether satisfied or not.

Understanding Need Satisfaction Percentages

Progression up the hierarchy isn't all-or-nothing. Maslow estimated the hypothetical average person satisfies needs at these approximate levels:



Self-actualising individuals would show higher percentages across all levels, with perhaps 55% satisfaction in self-actualisation needs. Deprivation of self-actualization needs also leads to pathology, or more accurately, metapathology. Maslow (1967) defined metapathology as the absence of values, the lack of fulfillment, and the loss of meaning in life.

Key Insights and Lasting Impact

Maslow's holistic-dynamic theory revolutionised psychology by focusing on human potential rather than pathology. His hierarchy of needs, whilst sometimes oversimplified in popular culture, provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and development.

Instinctoid Nature

Basic needs are innately determined but can be modified by learning and culture

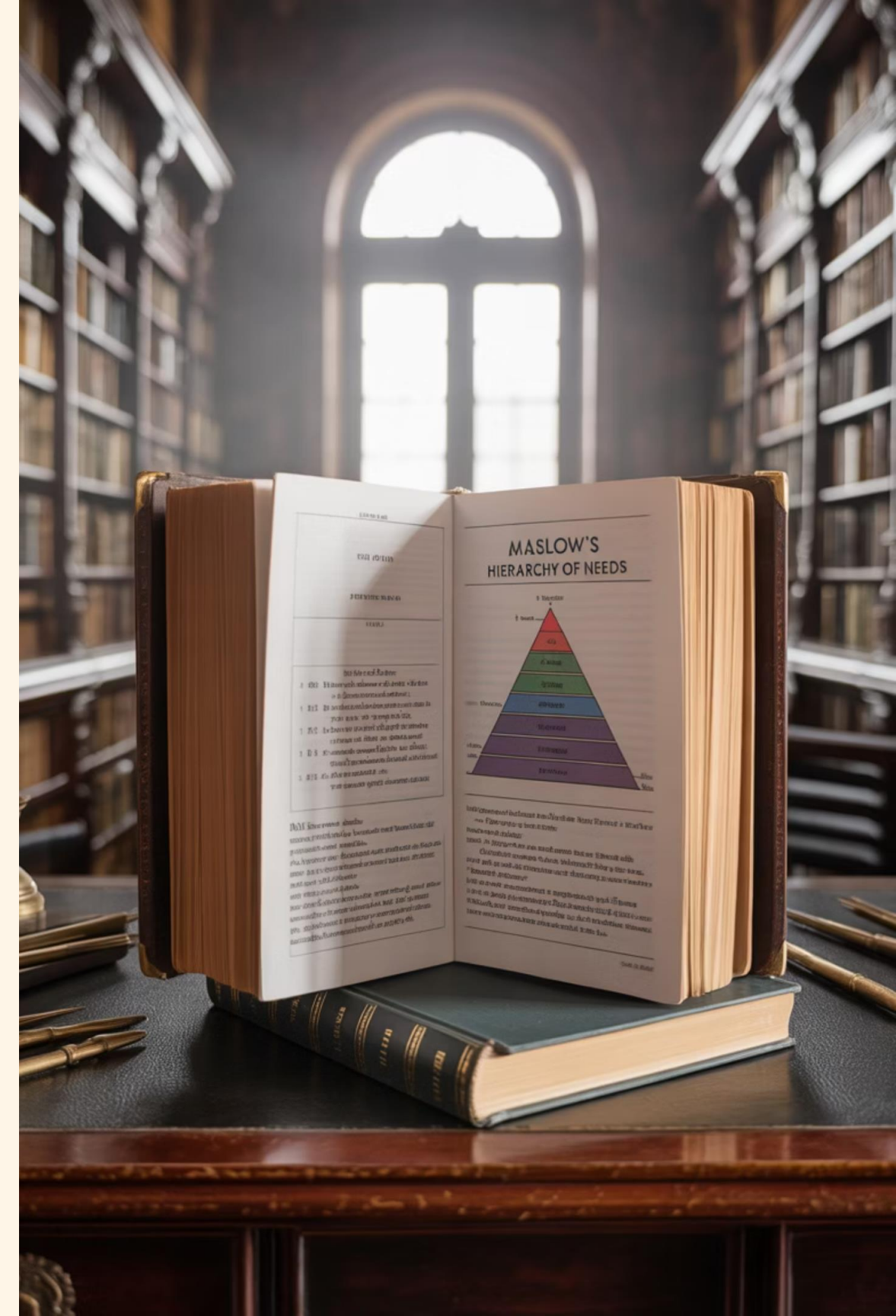
Expressive vs Coping

Behaviour can be unmotivated expression or motivated coping with environmental demands

Higher vs Lower Needs

Higher needs produce greater happiness, appear later in development, and are more subjectively desirable

Maslow's legacy extends far beyond psychology, influencing business, education, healthcare, and our fundamental understanding of human flourishing and self-actualisation.



Self-Actualization: Maslow's Quest for Human Excellence

Abraham Maslow's revolutionary theory began with a simple observation: two of his teachers, anthropologist Ruth Benedict and psychologist Max Wertheimer, were extraordinary human beings who represented the highest level of human development. This sparked his lifelong quest to understand what he called "self-actualization" - the pinnacle of human potential.



The Search for the "Good Human Being"

01

Initial Observation

Maslow began taking notes on Benedict and Wertheimer, hoping to identify what made them exceptional "Good Human Beings".

02

Student Disappointment

Young college students volunteered but none matched his teachers' qualities, leading Maslow to question whether 20-year-olds could be self-actualising.

03

Older Candidates

Older individuals showed promise but interviews revealed they were "well-adjusted but had no flame, spark, excitement, or dedication".

04

Key Realisation

Emotional security and good adjustment were not reliable predictors of self-actualisation.



The Breakthrough Question

From "What Makes Them Special?"

Maslow initially asked what made Wertheimer and Benedict self-actualising, but this approach led to frustration and limited findings.

To "Why Are We Not All Self-Actualising?"

This revolutionary shift in perspective changed Maslow's entire conception of humanity and expanded his understanding of human potential.

Rather than viewing self-actualising people as extraordinary, he began to see them as ordinary people with nothing taken away - suggesting that self-actualisation is our natural state when basic needs are met.



The Scientific Method Behind Self-Actualisation

1

Identify Syndrome

Developed criteria for psychological health and selected potentially healthy individuals for study.

2

Study & Refine

Carefully studied selected individuals, refined definitions, and adjusted criteria based on findings.

3

Reselect & Repeat

Applied refined criteria to new groups, continuing the cyclical process until achieving scientific precision.

Maslow continued this rigorous process through multiple selection groups until he transformed a "vague, unscientific concept into a precise and scientific definition of the self-actualising person".

Four Essential Criteria for Self-Actualisation

Freedom from Psychopathology

No neurotic or psychotic tendencies, though some psychosomatic illnesses were acceptable. This distinguished true self-actualisers from those with mental health issues who might share similar traits.

Hierarchy Progression

Had progressed through all lower needs - living above subsistence, feeling safe, experiencing love, and possessing well-rooted self-worth.

Embracing B-Values

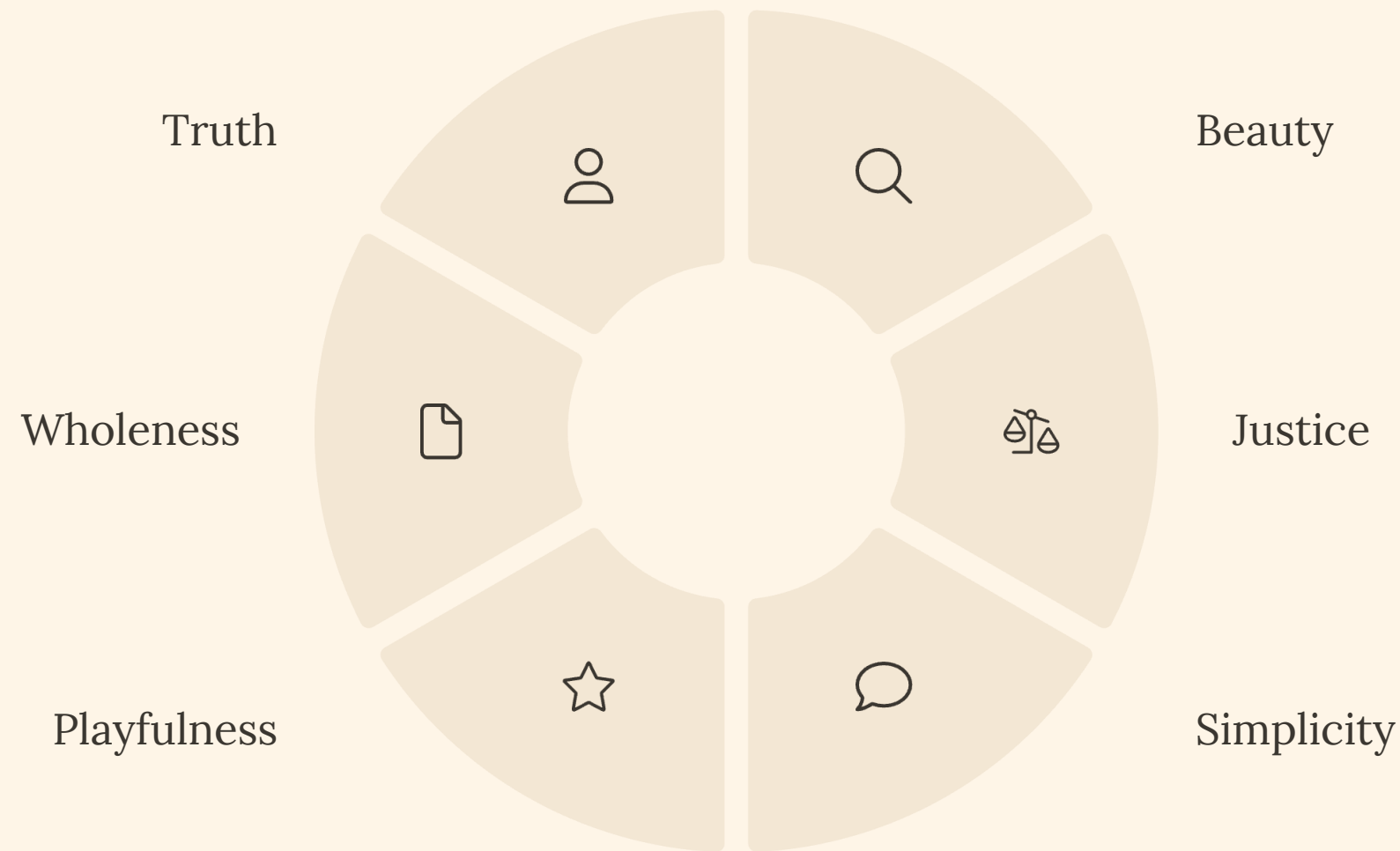
Felt comfortable with and demanded truth, beauty, justice, simplicity, humour, and other "Being" values that indicate psychological health.

Full Potential Realisation

"Full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities" - becoming everything one is capable of becoming.

The B-Values: Eternal Verities of Self-Actualisation

Self-actualising people are motivated by what Maslow called "Being" values or B-values - the ultimate level of human needs that distinguish them from those motivated by deficiency needs.



These 14 B-values ultimately become one unified whole. When people's metaneeds are not met, they experience existential illness - a lack of meaningful philosophy of life. Maslow distinguished between ordinary need motivation and the motives of self-actualizing people, which he called metamotivation.

The Rarity of Self-Actualisation

*Despite everyone having the potential for self-actualisation, Maslow estimated that only the psychologically healthiest **1% of the adult population** in the United States would be self-actualising.*

To reach this level, people must not only satisfy their basic needs regularly but also embrace the B-values. Most people remain blocked at lower levels of the hierarchy, struggling for food, safety, love, or esteem throughout their lives.

This rarity makes self-actualising individuals particularly valuable for understanding human potential and what we might all become under optimal conditions.





Efficient Perception of Reality

Detecting Authenticity

Self-actualising people easily detect phoniness in others and can discriminate between genuine and fake in people, literature, art, and music. They see through facades to underlying traits.

Embracing Uncertainty

They have greater tolerance for ambiguity and actively seek it. They welcome doubt, uncertainty, and problems with no definite solutions - making them ideal philosophers, explorers, and scientists.

Clear Value Perception

They perceive ultimate values more clearly than others, are less prejudiced, and see the world as it is rather than as they wish it to be.

Acceptance and Spontaneity

Self-Acceptance

Self-actualising people accept themselves as they are, lacking defensiveness and phoniness. They have healthy appetites for food, sleep, and sex without undue anxiety or shame.

- *Not overly critical of shortcomings*
- *Free from self-defeating guilt*
- *Comfortable with their human nature*

Acceptance of Others

They accept others without compulsive need to instruct or convert. They tolerate weaknesses and aren't threatened by others' strengths.

- *No expectation of perfection*
- *Realistic about human suffering*
- *Accept nature as it is*

Natural Spontaneity

Unconventional but not compulsively so. They behave conventionally when appropriate but can be uncompromising when situations warrant it.

- *Simple, unpretentious lives*
- *Express emotions freely*
- *Child-like naturalness*

Problem-Centring and Mission in Life



External Focus

Self-actualising people are interested in problems outside themselves, unlike non-self-actualisers who are self-centred and see all problems in relation to themselves.



Vocational Calling

Their occupation is not merely a means to earn a living but a vocation, a calling, and an end in itself - extending their frame of reference far beyond self.



Philosophical Foundation

They adopt solid philosophical and ethical bases for handling eternal problems, distinguishing clearly between important and unimportant issues in life.



Privacy, Autonomy, and Independence

Need for Privacy

Self-actualising people have a quality of detachment allowing them to be alone without loneliness. They feel comfortable both with people and in solitude.

1

2

Inner Peace

Once confident they are loved unconditionally, they no longer depend on others for self-esteem. This gives them serenity and makes them undisturbed by criticism or unmoved by flattery.

3

Autonomous Growth

They depend on themselves for growth, though they previously received love and security from others. No one is born autonomous - it develops through satisfactory relationships.

Continued Freshness of Appreciation

"Self-actualising people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naively, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy."



Unlike others who take blessings for granted, self-actualising individuals see with fresh vision everyday phenomena such as flowers, food, and friends. They maintain constant awareness of their good fortune.

- *Keenly aware of physical health*
- *Grateful for friends and loved ones*
- *Appreciative of economic security*
- *Value political freedom*
- *Don't waste time complaining about boredom*

The Peak Experience

Maslow discovered that many self-actualising people had mystical experiences that gave them feelings of transcendence. Though initially thought exclusive to self-actualisers, he later found that most people have peak experiences of varying intensity.



Natural Transcendence

Peak experiences are natural parts of human makeup. Long-distance runners often report transcendence and loss of self during their activity.



Unexpected Moments

These experiences cannot be willed but often occur during ordinary moments or when viewing nature's grandeur, bringing intense pleasure and satisfaction.



Universal Unity

During peak experiences, people see the universe as unified and clearly understand their place within it, feeling both humble and powerful simultaneously.



Social Interest and Deep Relationships

Gemeinschaftsgefühl

Self-actualising people possess Adler's concept of social interest - a caring attitude toward humanity. Though they may feel like aliens, they identify with all people and genuinely want to help others.

Selective Deep Friendships

Their close friendships are limited to a few but are quite deep and intense. They choose healthy people as friends and avoid intimate relationships with dependent individuals.

Misunderstood but Loved

They are often misunderstood and sometimes despised, yet many are greatly loved and attract admirers. They prefer mutual relationships over one-sided veneration.

Democratic Values and Moral Clarity

Democratic Character

All self-actualising people possess democratic values, being friendly and considerate regardless of class, colour, age, or gender. They seem unaware of superficial differences among people.

They have desire and ability to learn from anyone, recognising how little they know relative to what they could know. They remain respectful and humble before others while fighting against evil behaviour.

Clear Moral Compass

Self-actualising people have clear sense of right and wrong with little conflict about basic values. They focus on ends rather than means and can distinguish between the two.

What others consider means (eating, exercising), they often see as ends in themselves. They enjoy activities for their own sake, making routine activities into enjoyable experiences.

Philosophical Humour and Creativity

Non-Hostile Humour

Self-actualising people possess philosophical, non-hostile sense of humour. Unlike typical comedy that's hostile or sexual, their humour serves purposes beyond making people laugh - it amuses, informs, and points out ambiguities.

Universal Creativity

All self-actualising people are creative in some sense. Not all are talented artists, but all are creative in their own way. Maslow noted his mother-in-law's creative soup-making was more valuable than second-rate poetry.

Truth and Beauty Foundation

Their creativity stems from keen perception of truth, beauty, and reality. This forms the foundation of true creativity, whether expressed through art, cooking, or any other medium.

Resistance to Enculturation



Self-actualising people have sense of detachment from surroundings and can transcend particular cultures. They're neither antisocial nor consciously nonconforming, but autonomous - following their own standards rather than blindly obeying others' rules.

They don't waste energy fighting insignificant customs like dress codes or traffic laws. However, on important matters, they become strongly aroused to seek social change and resist society's attempts to enculturate them.

This makes them "less enculturated, less flattened out, less moulded" - more individualised and heterogeneous than others. Self-actualisation means becoming everything one can become, making people more unique rather than homogeneous.

The Jonah Complex: Fear of Our Own Greatness

Why do we run away from greatness?

Fear of Success

The Jonah complex represents fear of being one's best, found in nearly everyone. Like the biblical Jonah fleeing his destiny, we often run from our potential for greatness and self-fulfilment.

Physical Limitations

The human body isn't strong enough to endure ecstasy of fulfilment for extended periods. Intense emotions accompanying perfection carry shattering sensations of "This is too much."

Grandiosity Defense

When comparing ourselves to great achievers, we're appalled by our own ambition. As defense against "sinful pride," we lower aspirations and adopt self-defeating approaches.

False humility stifles creativity and prevents self-actualisation. Even Maslow, with an IQ of 195, was only an average student and experienced panic when delivering talks.



Modern Research and Measurement

Since the 1970s, researchers have developed several instruments to measure self-actualisation, moving from Maslow's subjective observations to empirical assessment.

1974: Personal Orientation Inventory (POI)

Shostrom's first measure assessed time competence and support orientation. Interestingly, Maslow himself scored in the self-actualising direction when he completed it.

1

2

1986: Short Index of Self-Actualization (SISA)

Jones and Crandall created a more manageable 15-item version borrowing from the POI, making assessment more practical for research.

3

2018: Characteristics of Self-Actualization Scale (CSAS)

Kaufman's latest measure empirically tested Maslow's 17 characteristics, refining them into 10 reliable dimensions with 30 items, showing strong correlations with well-being measures.



The Enduring Legacy of Self-Actualisation

Maslow's vision of human potential continues to inspire positive psychology and our understanding of what it means to live a fully realised life. His insights remind us that we all possess the capacity for greatness.

1%	14	15
Population Achieving Self-Actualisation	B-Values	Key Characteristics
<i>Maslow's estimate of those reaching full potential</i>	<i>Being values that motivate self-actualising individuals</i>	<i>Tentative qualities identifying self-actualising people</i>
<i>"Self-actualising people are not ordinary people with something added, but rather ordinary people with nothing taken away. What a man can be, he must be."</i>		

Maslow's Theory: A Critical Evaluation

Abraham Maslow's holistic-dynamic personality theory revolutionised our understanding of human motivation and self-actualisation. However, his later speculative work, unsupported by empirical evidence, opened doors to significant criticism despite his disregard for orthodox scientific methods.



Research Generation and Falsifiability

Research Generation

Rated slightly above average. Self-actualisation remains popular with researchers, and various tests facilitate investigation of this elusive concept.

Limited Scope

Metamotivation, hierarchy of needs, Jonah complex, and instinctoid needs receive less research attention than self-actualisation.

Falsifiability Issues

Rated low. Maslow's self-actualising subjects refused testing, making verification impossible. Lack of operational definitions hampers replication.

Practical Applications and Consistency

Therapeutic Practice

Highly useful for practitioners. Psychotherapists must address safety needs before love and belongingness. The theory provides clear guidance for treatment progression.

- *Secure environment for threatened clients*
- *Progressive need satisfaction*
- *Structured therapeutic approach*

Business Applications

Personnel managers can motivate workers effectively. Pay increases alone cannot satisfy higher-level needs beyond physiological and safety levels.

- *Increased responsibility and freedom*
- *Creative problem-solving opportunities*
- *Recognition for achievements*



Internal Consistency and Parsimony

01

Language Challenges

Maslow's arcane and unclear language creates ambiguity and inconsistency in important theoretical components.

03

Deceptive Simplicity

Five-step hierarchy appears simple but reveals complex underlying model. Theory rates as moderately parsimonious overall.

02

Logical Progression

The hierarchy of needs follows logical progression with universal order, though certain reversals are acknowledged.





Concept of Humanity: Optimistic Potential

"There seems no intrinsic reason why everyone should not be this way. Apparently, every baby has possibilities for self-actualisation, but most get it knocked out of them."

Maslow believed all humans possess tremendous potential for being Good Human Beings. Self-actualising people aren't ordinary people with something added, but ordinary people with nothing taken away. When basic needs for food, safety, love, and esteem aren't blocked, people naturally move toward self-actualisation.

Evil stems from frustrated basic needs, not essential human nature. Though optimistic about human potential, Maslow recognised that most people remain "doomed to wish for what they do not have," struggling for lower-level needs throughout their lives.

Evolutionary Perspective and Human Nature

Evolutionary Progress

Humans gradually become more motivated by metamotivations and B-values as evolution progresses.

Free Choice vs Determinism

Lower-need behaviour is externally determined; self-actualised behaviour involves free choice.



Biological-Social Synergy

*False dichotomy between biology and society.
Both shape individuals inseparably.*

Conscious Awareness

Self-actualising people are more aware of their actions and motivations than others.

Self-actualised individuals experience wonderful synergy among biological, social, and spiritual aspects, enjoying deeper physical pleasures, richer relationships, and spiritual qualities like beauty, truth, and justice.