# THE NATURE OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

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“To be what we are, and to become what we are capable of becoming, is the only end of life.” R. L. STEVENSON

A major criticism of goals such as self-actualization is that they are too general, broad, and amorphous to be useful. The behaviorists, particularly, ask for operational definitions in terms of specific behaviors. This is a legitimate question. If a concept is significant and pertinent, it can, at least in principle or eventually, be reduced to specific, objective, or measurable variables. However, the process of doing so may require considerable time and effort. It is indefensible to reject out of hand, as the behaviorists sometimes do, any concept or objective that cannot be immediately, easily, and objectively measured. Simplicity, or ease of measurement, is not an appropriate criterion. To refuse to be concerned with anything that cannot now be objectively measured is to rule out of consideration many potentially significant and important concepts and to delay progress in attempts to define, objectify, and measure them.

Some progress has already been made in defining and objectifying the concept of self-actualization. This chapter is concerned with the results of efforts in this direction. First, however, it is desirable that we consider the theoretical background from which the concept of self-actualization has developed.

## THE NATURE OF HUMANS

What is the nature of the human being? A number of different theories have been offered on this topic, some supporting more than others the concept of self-actualization as our ultimate goal. Here I will focus on four assumptions that support this concept: (1) Humans are active as well as reactive beings; (2) humans are inherently good (3) humans have a single basic motivation; and (4) humans are social beings.

### *Humans Are Active as Well as Reactive Beings*

Allport has described three concepts or images of human beings. (1) The first concept is that of humans as reactive beings. We are objects, biological organisms, responding to stimuli in the environment. Our behavior is determined by the stimuli to which we are exposed. Past stimuli have made us what we are. Our present and future are determined by past stimuli and the potential stimuli that we will encounter. Thus, we are not free to determine our own behavior. Our behavior is reflective, reactive, or responsive to external stimuli, rewards, or reinforcements. Though it may exist, consciousness--thinking and feeling--is irrelevant in the study of our behavior. This is the traditional or "scientific" approach to humans, the view of stimulus-response psychology and of the behaviorists, exemplified by J. B. Watson and B. F. Skinner.

The second concept is that of humans as reactive beings in depth. We are a result of our past experiences, and our past as well as present and future are determined by our internal drives or instincts. Chief among these drives or instincts are sex or libido and death or aggression. This is the view of depth psychologies, chief among which is psychoanalysis.

Allport contrasts a third concept of humans with these two, which he calls beings in the process of becoming. This model sees people as proactive, as personal, conscious, and future-oriented. We are in control of our behavior and of our destiny (within limits, of course). This is the model of existentialism and humanistic psychology.

These three concepts or images of humans can be reduced to two apparently opposing models. The first two concepts are similar, presenting humans as reactive beings, whether in response to the environment or to instincts and drives. We react to stimuli from without and from within. Thus, in the first model, humans are controlled by stimuli, victims of the environment and innate drives. The second model, of beings in the process of becoming, reverses this view. We are determiners, not determined; we are not controlled but control, both the environment and ourselves. We have something to say about what we shall do or become.

Human behavior is less controlled by instinct than is any other animal's. Rather than being manipulated by the environment, we manipulate the environment for our own purposes. We are not creatures of instinct or of environmental stimuli alone-of the past and of the present alone. Unlike the animals, we have a future and are forward-looking, influenced by anticipation, expectation, and foresight. In fact, we create, to some extent at least, our own environment, our own world. We are free, within limits, of course, and since we are free, we can and must make choices. And since we are free to choose, we are responsible for our choices and behavior.

These two models are in conflict. They appear to be antithetical, so that one is compelled to choose one or the other. The prevailing view, the one that is fostered by our current scientific approach, is that of humans as reactive beings, as determined. The concept of freedom appears to be inconsistent with the assumption of determinism. Moreover, there is overwhelming support in psychology for the view that humans are reactive beings. We cannot reject or deny this view. But must we then, as the behaviorists insist, reject the existentialist or humanistic view?

The difficulty is in stating the problem as an either/or choice. It is not necessary to accept one view and reject the other. The solution is to recognize that neither model alone is a complete or accurate model. Each, by itself, gives us only a partial view. The reactive model is a limited one, a "nothing but" model. But people are this and something more. This "something more" is significant, even crucial, in understanding people and their behavior and in developing an adequate theory of human behavior. The danger of the reactive model is not that it is true, but that it is regarded as the whole truth. If people are treated as nothing but reactive objects, they will in fact become objects.

A major difficulty in accepting the humanistic view is the freedom-determinism dilemma. Philosophy has never resolved-and may never resolve-this dilemma, and it is not possible here, nor necessary, to go into its philosophical aspects. Science has accepted determinism-at least at this point it appears to be a necessary assumption. But science, especially psychology, must

recognize and deal with human experience. A major aspect of human experience is the influence of beliefs-or assumptions-on human behavior. There are two factors related to the freedom-determinism dilemma that must be recognized. The first is the fact of the psychological existence of the feeling or experience of freedom and choice in the individual. This feeling or experience must be recognized and included in any theory of human behavior. Second, and of perhaps more importance, is the fact that beliefs exert an influence upon behavior. It makes a tremendous difference in our conception of human beings and in the way we act and in the way we deal with each other whether the assumption of determinism or of freedom is accepted. To view people as free means that we treat them differently than if we view them as completely determined, and our different treatment leads to different behavior on their part.

To accept the existence of freedom does not necessitate rejection of the existence of causation, or control, or order. Freedom would be meaningless without the existence of control. Freedom is not an absolute, but a matter of degree. Freedom in the psychological sense is the introduction of the individual as a causal or controlling factor in his or her behavior.

The behaviorists emphasize that the environment, through its rewards, selects and molds the individual's behavior. Yet, from another point of view, it is the individual who selects the responses that produce what to him or her is rewarding or desirable. And this is often done in a conscious manner, with the experience of choice. The term instrumental response carries this connotation of choice and purpose. This view is represented by the cartoon of the rat in a Skinner box pressing a bar to receive pellets. The caption read (if my memory is correct) something like this: "Look how I've got him conditioned. Every time I press this bar he gives me a pellet." The way the behaviorists insist that everything is externally determined while at the same time talking about the control and creation of environments also illustrates the paradox, or the importance of the point of view one takes. Behavior is determined, but not entirely by the environment. Human beings are also determiners of their own behavior.

People are living, active beings, not inactive objects waiting to be stimulated. We search for stimuli and seek experiences. We organize stimuli and the environment, the world, in terms of our needs, or actually in terms of the single basic need, the preservation and enhancement of the self-self-actualization.

*Humans Are Inherently Good*

Many, if not most, religions view human beings as innately depraved. Freud was pessimistic regarding human nature. He believed that the individual's instincts were antisocial and must be controlled by culture or society:

It does not appear certain that without coercion the majority of human individuals would be ready to submit to the labour necessary for acquiring new means of supporting life. One has, I think, to reckon with the fact that there are present in all men destructive, and therefore anti-social and anti-cultural, tendencies, and that with a great number of people these are strong enough to determine their behavior in society. (2)

People are not only antisocial but actually hostile to other people, according to Freud:

Civilized society is perpetually menaced with disintegration through this primary hostility of men toward one another.... Culture has to call up every possible reinforcement in order to erect barriers against the aggressive instinct of man. (3)

Aggression has long been considered an instinct. Adler originally proposed that aggression was the single basic human motive or instinct. (4) The strength and practical universality of aggression argue for its innateness. However, many have questioned its innateness or instinctiveness. Anthropologists have found societies with little trace or evidence of aggression. (5) Ashley Montagu writes:

My own interpretation of the evidence, strictly within the domain of science, leads me to the conclusion that man is born good and is organized in such a manner from birth as to need to grow and develop his potentialities for goodness.... [The view that aggressiveness is inherited] is not scientifically corroborated. In fact, all the available evidence gathered by competent investigators indicates that man is born without a trace of aggressiveness. (6)

He refers to Lauretta Bender's finding that hostility in the child is a symptom complex resulting from deprivation in development. Charlotte Buhler in her studies of infants also found that there is "evidence of a primary orientation toward 'reality' into which the baby moves with a positive anticipation of good things to be found. Only when this reality appears to be hurtful or overwhelming does the reaction become one of withdrawal or defense." (7) Maslow also declares that impulses of hate, jealousy, hostility, and so on are acquired. "More and more," he writes, "aggression is coming to be regarded as a technique or mode of compelling attention to the satisfaction of one's need." (8) There is no instinct of aggression that seeks expression or discharge without provocation or without regard to circumstances.

In other words, aggression is not primary but is a reaction to deprivation, threat, or frustration. This is the frustration-aggression hypothesis put forward in 1939 by the Yale anthropologist Dollard and his psychologist associates. (9) A more general term for the stimuli that provoke aggression is threat. Aggression is universal because threat, in some form or other, is universal. The psychoanalyst Bibring, in criticizing Freud's theories, questions "whether there are any phenomena of aggression at all outside the field of the ego-preservative functions" and notes "the empirical fact that aggressiveness appears only or almost only when the life instincts or the ego instincts are exposed to harm."(10) A popular novel purporting to demonstrate the innateness of aggressiveness in man inadvertently supports the view that aggression is the result of threat, since the development of aggression in the group of castaway boys occurs under conditions of fear and feelings of being threatened. (11)

There is evidence that people are inherently good in the continual striving toward an ideal society, with the repeated and independent development of essentially similar religious and ethical systems whose ideals have withstood the test of time. In spite of deprivation, threat, and frustration, these ideals have been held and practiced by many individuals. Humans have developed systems of government and law that, though imperfectly, especially in their applications, represent these ideals.

It might actually be argued that goodness or cooperation has a survival value (12) and that innate aggression would be selectively eliminated by evolution. If there were not an inherent drive toward good, or if aggression were innate, it is difficult to understand how the human race could have continued to survive. The potential for good has survived in the face of continued threat and frustration. When we can reduce deprivation and threat, the manifestations of good will increase and aggression will decrease. It is important to add that aggression does not include assertive behavior, initiative behavior, nor even much of competitive behavior. The confusion of these kinds of behavior with aggression has perhaps contributed to the belief that aggression is innate. Emotional disturbance, an important manifestation of which, in many people, is -aggression, is the result of the frustration of the drive toward self-actualization by a threatening, depriving, or misunderstanding social environment.

*Humans Have a Single Basic Motivation*

In Chapter 2 I stated that the single basic motivation of all human beings is the actualization of one's potentials. A number of psychologists have reached this conclusion, apparently independently, including Goldstein, Angyal, Rogers, and Combs and Snygg. Angyal defines life as a "process of self-expansion" and adds that "the tendency of the organism is toward increased autonomy," or toward self-determination. He also refers to self-realization as being the intrinsic purpose of life. (13) Lecky, impressed by the integration and organization of the self, felt that a need for self-consistency and its preservation is the single basic need of the organism. (14)

Self-actualization is a part of Rogers's general organismic actualizing tendency: "The organism has one basic tendency and striving to actualize, maintain, and enhance the experiencing organism." (15) Rogers also uses terms such as independence, self-determination, integration, and self-actualization. Thus, although writers use different terms--self-enhancement, self-fulfillment, self-realization, self-actualization--to designate the single basic motivation of all human beings, they all seem to be referring to the same concept or phenomenon. People are by nature engaged in the process of actualizing their potentials.

Combs and Snygg have perhaps developed the unitary theory of motivation most extensively:

> From birth to death the maintenance of the phenomenal self is the most pressing, the most crucial, if not the only task of existence....Man seeks not only the maintenance of a self.... Man seeks both to maintain and enhance his perceived self. (16)

The use of the terms preservation and maintenance along with enhancement and actualization poses the question of whether there aren't actually two motives. Maslow perhaps was influenced by some such consideration in his concepts of efficiency motivation and growth motivation. (17)

But preservation or maintenance, and enhancement or actualization, may be seen as two aspects of the same motive operating under different conditions. Adler recognized the different expression of the same motive in neurotics and normals. The neurotic, threatened and compensating for deep feelings of inferiority, reacts to preserve or restore self-esteem, or to overcome inferiority with superiority through a striving for power. The normal individual, on the other hand, free of threat and without feelings of inferiority, can strive for completeness or

perfection. (18) For the unhealthy, disturbed, or abnormal individual under stress and threatened, enhancement or positive striving is impossible. He or she must defend against attack or threat, and strive to safeguard, defend, or secure what he or she is or has. Energies are absorbed in preservation. Goldstein has made the same point. He considers the drive for self-preservation a pathological phenomenon. The drive for self-actualization, he suggests, undergoes a change in the sick (or threatened) individual, in whom the scope of life is reduced so that he or she is driven to maintain (or defend) a limited state of existence. Preservation or maintenance of the self is thus the pathological form of self-actualization, the only form of self-actualization left to the disturbed or threatened individual (or, in Goldstein's work, the brain-damaged individual (19)).

A more serious question about the concept of a single basic motive is raised by those who contend that man has many motives and propose various hierarchical orderings of them. Maslow's hierarchy is the most widely known proposal of this kind. It starts with the basic physical needs, which are prepotent and take precedence, when they are unmet, over all other needs. When these basic needs are met, the safety needs emerge. Then come the belongingness need, the love need, the esteem need, and then the need for self-actualization. (20) The problem is that the order is not invariant, as Maslow himself recognized. It is not always true that the lower, more basic physiological needs take precedence over the higher, less prepotent needs. A person may sacrifice life for honor. We need, therefore, some organizing principle to explain this apparent inconsistency.

The concept of self-actualization as the single basic need provides this organizing principle. It clarifies, or eliminates, the confusion we face when we attempt to understand and order, or integrate, the multiplicity of often contradictory or opposing specific drives or motives that are attributed to human beings. There is no need to attempt to order drives or needs in a hierarchy. There is no hierarchy in the sense that certain needs always take precedence over other needs. All the specific needs are subservient to the basic tendency for the preservation and enhancement of the self. The individual's specific needs are organized and assume temporary priority in terms of their relationship to the basic need for self-actualization. At any one time, the most relevant specific need assumes priority or prepotence or, to use Gestalt terminology, becomes the figure against the ground of other needs." When it is satisfied, the next most relevant need in terms of self-actualization assumes prepotence or becomes the figure, while the others recede into the background. All are organized by the basic need for self-actualization, and their significance or relevance is determined by this basic need.

*Humans Are Social Beings*

Human beings need others to actualize themselves. Humans are, as Aristotle noted, social animals. Because of our prolonged infancy, humans learn to become dependent on others and remain dependent on others for affection. Humans become persons and develop a self only in a society or a group.

In most societies most people typically want to receive a maximum degree of warmth and tenderness from another person and to express such feelings toward another person. When man is unable to develop intimate relationships with others, he is miserable and his physical well-

being is threatened. Children can be permanently damaged if they have no intimacy. Even if they receive adequate nourishment and shelter, infants who have no contact with loving adults become ill. (22)

Occasionally, reports are published about the discovery of a child, or even an adult, who has been extremely neglected, isolated from human contact, and treated worse than an animal. Such persons, if they have been treated this way for a long time, are barely human. There are stories, some of them documented, of children who though lost for a long time have managed to survive. But when they have been found, they are no longer human. The "wild boy" of Aveyron discovered in a forest in France in the early 1800s never became human, though the French physician Itard spent much time and effort with him. While it is suspected that he was mentally retarded, his dehumanization went beyond his supposed mental deficiencies. Patients in mental institutions often deteriorate when they are not treated as real persons or human beings. Persons confined in prison become "stir crazy" from lack of human relationships.

It would seem to be clear that one cannot be a self-actualizing person except in a group or society. The condition for self-actualizing persons is a facilitative relationship with other persons. People contribute to each other's self-actualization in a group or society characterized by such relationships. These relationships are reciprocal. Rogers notes that the enhancement of the self "inevitably involves the enhancement of other selves as well.... The self-actualization of the organism appears to be in the direction of socialization, broadly defined. (23)

## THE SELF-ACTUALIZING PERSON

A number of writers have contributed to the description and definition of the self-actualizing person, sometimes using other designations for such a person. Combs and Snygg discuss the characteristics of the adequate person, the person who has developed an adequate self. Adequate persons perceive themselves in positive ways: they have positive self-concepts, they accept themselves. The adequate person also accepts others:

We are so entirely dependent upon the goodwill and cooperation of others in our society that it would be impossible to achieve feelings of adequacy without some effective relationship with them. The adequate personality must be capable of living effectively and efficiently with his fellows. (24)

In addition, adequate persons are aware of and able to accept all their perceptions without distortion. From a behavioral point of view, adequate persons are characterized by efficient behavior, since they are not handicapped by defensiveness and are more open to experience. They are spontaneous and creative because, being secure, they can take chances, experiment, and explore. Being secure and accepting themselves, they are capable of functioning independently; they find their own feelings, beliefs, and attitudes adequate guides to behavior. Finally, adequate persons are compassionate. They can relate to others with concern rather than with the hostility and fear of defensiveness.

In discussing the actualizing tendency, Rogers notes that it leads to or is manifested by growth and motivation, differentiation, independence and autonomy, and self-responsibility. Rogers's

concept of the fully functioning person is similar to the adequate-person concept of Combs and Snygg. Rogers describes three major characteristics of fully functioning persons: (1) They are open to experience, to all external and internal stimuli. They have no need to be defensive. They are keenly aware of themselves and the environment. They experience both positive and negative feelings without repressing the latter. (2) Fully functioning persons live existentially. Each moment is new. Life is fluid, not fixed. They are changing, in process, flexible, and adaptive. (3) Fully functioning persons find their organism "a trustworthy means of arriving at the most satisfying behavior in each existential situation." (25) Their behavior is determined from within; the locus of control is internal. Since they are open to all experience, they have available the relevant data on which to base behavior. Behavior is not always perfect, since some relevant data may be missing. But the resulting unsatisfying behavior is corrected on the basis of feedback. Such a person is a creative and self-actualizing person.

Earl Kelley describes the fully functioning person in similar terms. Such persons think well of themselves and feel able or competent while being aware of limitations. They also think well of others, recognizing their importance as opportunities for self-development. Fully functioning persons develop and live by human values rather than by external demands. They are creative. A characteristic not mentioned by Rogers or Combs and Snygg is the ability of the fully functioning person to recognize the value of mistakes as a source of learning and to profit from them. (26)

These descriptions of the self-actualizing person were developed through observation, experience, and, in Rogers's case, research in education and psychotherapy. Maslow, in a study devoted to self-actualization, lists these same characteristics as well as some others and so provides a comprehensive picture of the self-actualizing person. (27) Maslow used an accepted and sound method in his study of self-actualization. He selected a criterion group of persons (living and dead) who, on the basis of professional judgment, were deemed outstanding self-actualizing persons. Included among the historical persons studied were Lincoln, Einstein, Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt, William James, Whitman, Thoreau, Beethoven, and Freud (living persons were not identified). As a general definition, Maslow used the following:
[Self-actualizing people are characterized by] the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc. Such people seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing. They are people who have developed or are developing the full stature of which they are capable. (28)

The subjects were studied intensively to ascertain the characteristics they had in common that differentiated them from ordinary or average people. Fourteen characteristics emerged.

1. *More efficient perception of reality and more comfortable relations with it.* This characteristic includes the detection of the phony and dishonest person and the accurate perception of what exists rather than a distortion of perception by one's needs. Self-actualizing people are more aware of their environment, both human and nonhuman. They are not afraid of the unknown and can tolerate the doubt, uncertainty, and tentativeness accompanying the perception of the new and unfamiliar. This is clearly the characteristic described by Combs and Snygg and Rogers as awareness of perceptions or openness to experience.

2. Acce*ptance of self, others, and nature.* Self-actualizing persons are not ashamed or guilty about their human nature, with its shortcomings, imperfections, frailties, and weaknesses. Nor are they critical of these aspects of other people. They respect and esteem themselves and others. Moreover, they are honest, open, genuine, without pose or facade. They are not, however, self-satisfied, but are concerned about discrepancies between what is and what might be or should be in themselves, others, and society. Again, these characteristics are those that Kelley, Rogers, and Combs and Snygg include in their descriptions.

3. *Spontaneity. Self-actualizing persons are not hampered by convention, but they do not flout it.* They are not conformists, but neither are they anti-conformist for the sake of being so. They are not externally motivated or even goal-directed-rather, their motivation is the internal one of growth and development, the actualization of themselves and their potentialities. Rogers and Kelley both speak of growth, development and maturation, change and fluidity.

4. *Problem-centeredness*. Self-actualizing persons are not ego-centered but focus on problems outside themselves. They are mission-oriented, often on the basis of a sense of responsibility, duty, or obligation rather than personal choice. This characteristic would appear to be related to the security and lack of defensiveness leading to compassionateness emphasized by Combs and Snygg.

5. *Detachment; need for privacy*. Self-actualizing persons enjoy solitude and privacy. It is possible for them to remain unruffled and undisturbed by what upsets others. They may even appear to be asocial. This is a characteristic that does not appear in other descriptions. It is perhaps related to a sense of security and self-sufficiency.

6. *Autonomy, independence of culture and environment.* Self-actualizing persons, though dependent on others for the satisfaction of the basic needs of love, safety, respect, and belongingness, "are not dependent for their main satisfactions on the real world, or other people or culture or means-to-ends, or, in general, on extrinsic satisfactions. Rather they are dependent for their own development and continued growth upon their own potentialities and latent resources." (29) Combs and Snygg and Rogers include independence in their descriptions, and Rogers also speaks of an internal locus of control.

7. *Continued freshness of appreciation.* Self-actualizing persons repeatedly, though not continuously, experience awe, pleasure, and wonder in their everyday world.

8. *Mystic experiences, oceanic feelings.* In varying degrees and with varying frequencies, self-actualizing persons have experiences of ecstasy, awe, and wonder with feelings of limitless horizons opening up, followed by the conviction that the experience was important and had a carry-over into everyday life. This and the preceding characteristic appear to be related and to add something not in other descriptions, except perhaps as it may be included in the existential living of Rogers.

9. *Gemeinschaftsgefuhl.* Self-actualizing persons have a deep feeling of empathy, sympathy, or compassion for human beings in general. This feeling is, in a sense, unconditional in that it exists along with the recognition of the existence in others of negative qualities that provoke occasional anger, impatience, and disgust. Although empathy is not specifically listed by others (Combs and Snygg include compassion), it would seem to be implicit in other descriptions, including acceptance and respect.

10. *Deep interpersonal relations*. Self-actualizing people have deep relations with others. They are selective, however, and their circle of friends may be small, usually consisting of other self-actualizing persons, but the capacity is there. They attract others to them as admirers or disciples. This characteristic, again, is at least implicit in the formulations of others.

11. *Democratic character structure.* Self-actualizing persons do not discriminate on the basis of class, education, race, or color. They are humble in the recognition of what they know in comparison with what could be known, and are ready and willing to learn from anyone. They respect everyone as potential contributors to their knowledge, but also just because they are human beings.

12. *Discernment of means and ends.* Self-actualizing persons are highly ethical. They clearly distinguish between means and ends and subordinate means to ends.

13. *Philosophical, unhostile sense of humor.* Although the self-actualizing persons studied by Maslow had a sense of humor, it was not of the ordinary type. Their sense of humor was the spontaneous, thoughtful type, intrinsic to the situation. Their humor did not involve hostility, superiority, or sarcasm. Many have noted that a sense of humor characterizes people who could be described as self-actualizing, though it is not mentioned by those cited here.

14. *Creativeness.* All of Maslow's subjects were judged to be creative, each in his or her own way. The creativity involved here is not the special-talent creativeness. It is a creativeness potentially inherent in everyone but usually suffocated by acculturation. It is a fresh, naive, direct way of looking at things. Creativeness is a characteristic that most would agree characterizes self-actualizing persons.

The description of the self-actualizing person is a description of the kind of individual who functions at a high level, using his or her potentials and experiencing personal satisfaction. He or she is also a desirable member of society. In fact, it can be said that, unless there are enough individuals possessing to a minimal degree the characteristics of the self-actualizing person, society cannot survive. These characteristics, in Skinner's terminology, are the conditions that lead to the "ultimate strength of men."

> If a science of behavior can discover those conditions of life which make for the ultimate strength of men, it may provide a set of 'moral values' which, because they are independent of the history and culture of any one group, may be generally accepted. (30)

Historically, self-actualizing men and women have been the major contributors to the development of civilization, and where societies have disintegrated or disappeared, it was probably because of the lack of enough such people.

The characteristics of self-actualizing people can be defined and stated in ways that permit their being evaluated and measured; they are observable. In fact, we observe and evaluate them continuously in our everyday interpersonal relationships. At the very least, they can be rated by judges on the basis of observation of a person's behavior. In fact, some of these characteristics can be measured by instruments now available. We shall consider these measurements in our discussion of the nature of the therapy relationship.

It is interesting to compare the description of the self-actualizing person with that of the young child. Young children are naturally self-actualizing, providing evidence for the innateness or naturalness of this state. The infant and young child are curious and exploratory of their environment. They don't have to be stimulated to be active. As Skinner says, "No one asks how to motivate a baby. A baby naturally explores everything he can get at, unless restraining forces have been at work. . . ." (31) Young children are naturally open, generous, spontaneous, honest, trusting, accepting, creative. Their behavior is positive, cooperative, and loving, rather than negative, competitive, or aggressive--until they are taught the latter.

## CRITICISMS OF THE CONCEPT OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Self-actualization is an integrating concept in terms of both the goals of psychotherapy and human motivation. Yet objections have been raised against the concept. These objections appear to be based upon some misconceptions or misunderstandings concerning the nature of self-actualization.

One objection appears to be the belief that self-actualization is inimical to individuality. In this view, the self-actualizing person appears to be a collection of traits that are the same for all persons and that manifest themselves in standard, identical behaviors. It is true that, as the model indicates, self-actualizing persons have many common characteristics or behaviors. But since what is actualized is the individual self, there is allowance for different interests and different potentials. Maslow makes the point, quoted earlier, that “self-actualization is actualization of a self, and no two selves are altogether alike." (32)

A second, and opposite, widespread misconception is that a self-actualizing person is antisocial, or at least asocial. Salvatore Maddi, criticizing self-actualization as the good life, writes that this view holds that

> actualization will tend to take place without the aid of socialization. Indeed, society is usually regarded, in this view, as an obstruction, because it forces individuals into molds, roles, conventions that have little to do with their own unique potentialities. The best thing society can do is impinge upon the individual as little as possible. (33)

In another place Maddi writes:

> According to Rogers.... what blocks individuals is society, in the form of persons and institutions reacting with conditional positive regard and therefore being too judgmental to be facilitative of self-actualization.... The definition of the good life involved emphasizes spontaneity rather than planfulness, openness rather than critical judgment, continual change rather than stability, and an unreflective sense of well-being. Enacting this, one would more likely live in the woods than enter public life." (34)

This involves a subtle misrepresentation by quoting out of context, using clever comparisons and making unjustified inferences and extrapolations from statements by Rogers.

The idea that the self-actualizing person is--or can be--antisocial has been expressed by Williamson. Pointing out that human nature is potentially both good and evil, and that "man seems to be capable both of becoming his 'best' bestial and debasing self, as well as those forms of 'the best' that are of high excellence," he contends that it cannot be accepted that "the nature or form of one's full potential and self-actualization will thus be the 'best possible' or the 'good' form of human nature." (35) While one could contend that psychotherapy would provide the conditions for the actualizing of one's "best" potential, Williamson questions the "implicit assumption that the 'best' potentiality will be actualized under optimum counseling relationships." (36) He appears to believe that counseling or psychotherapy, by accepting self-actualization as its goal, is in danger of encouraging "growth through demolishing all barriers restricting free development in any and all directions, irresponsibly and without regard for the development of others." (37) He questions the assumption that "any and all forms of growth contain within themselves their own, and sufficient, justification," and asks, "Do we believe that the fullest growth of the individual inevitably enhances the fullest growth of all other individuals?" (38) Again, note the use of extreme statements and the straw-man approach.

M. Brewster Smith also appears to accept this view of self-actualization as including undesirable, or antisocial, behaviors: "The problem of evil remains: people may realize their potentialities in ways that are humanly destructive, of others if not themselves." Indeed, some people may exercise their potentialities in antisocial ways, but (by definition) they are not self-actualizing people.

Even the eminent Harvard psychologist Robert White sees self-actualization as self-centered or selfish. Recognizing that Maslow included "focusing on problems outside oneself and being concerned with the common welfare" in his concept of self-actualization, he questions its inclusion: "To call working for the common welfare 'self-actualization' instantly falsifies it into something done for one's own satisfaction." (40) Thus, it is apparent that he views self-actualization as self, or selfish, satisfaction. "I ask readers," he continues, "to observe carefully whether or not self-actualization, in its current use by psychological counselors and others, is being made to imply anything more than adolescent preoccupation with oneself and one's impulses." These remarks seem to reflect the equating of self-actualization with the ego-centered "culture of narcissism" of the "me decade" of the 1970s so widely popularized by writer Tom Wolfe and historian Christopher Lasch.

These are serious misconceptions or misunderstandings, if not misrepresentations, of the concept of self-actualization as it is used by Maslow, Rogers, myself, and others. The implicit assumption in these criticisms is that there is an inevitable conflict between the individual and society, and that the full development or self-actualization of individuals is inimical to the self-actualization of other individuals.

The formulation by Rogers of the self-actualizing person deals with this issue. Individuals live, and must live, in a society composed of other individuals. The person can actualize only in interaction with others. Selfish and self-centered behavior does not lead to experiences that are self-actualizing or satisfying in nature. The self-actualizing person "will live with others in the maximum possible harmony, because of the rewarding character of reciprocal Positive regard." (41) "We do not need to ask who will socialize him, for one of his own deepest needs is for affiliation and communication with others. As he becomes more fully himself, he will become more realistically socialized." (42) The self-actualizing person is more mature, more socialized in terms of the goal of social evolution, though he may not be conventionally or socially adjusted in a conforming sense.

> We do not need to ask who will control his aggressive impulses, for when he is open to all his impulses, his need to be liked by others and his tendency to give affection are as strong as his impulses to strike out or to seize for himself. He will be aggressive in situations in which aggression is realistically appropriate, but there will be no runaway need for aggression. (43)

The self-actualizing person needs to live in harmony with others to meet his or her own needs to love and to be loved-in short, in order to be a self-actualizing person. Thus the self-actualizing person provides the conditions for the self-actualization of others, rather than being a negative social influence. A corollary of this is that the therapist must be a self-actualizing person if he or she is to facilitate the self-actualization of his or her clients.

## THE NATURE OF EMOTIONAL DISTURBANCE

If the goal of psychotherapy is the development of self-actualizing persons, then it follows that the problem, or the "pathology," for which psychotherapy is the remedy is the inability of the client to become a self-actualizing person. As indicated in Chapter 1, clients fail at this task because they have not had and/or do not now have the personal environment that allows and encourages them to be self-actualizing. Specific problems are aspects of, indications of, or symptoms of this failure to be self-actualizing. Anxiety, guilt, and aggression are results of the frustration of the drive toward self-actualization. The discrepancy between what persons are and what they are capable of being is the source of anxiety and guilt. Persons who are not self-actualizing are lacking in some or all of the characteristics of self-actualizing persons. They do not accept themselves; they have low self-esteem. They are not open to their environment and the experience of their organism and their senses; their relationships with reality are disturbed. They do not accept or respect others, and are disturbed in their interpersonal relationships. They are self-centered rather than problem-centered (in the sense of devoting themselves to a problem or cause outside themselves). They are dependent, inhibited rather than spontaneous, and wear a

mask or facade rather than being real and genuine. Their creativity is suppressed, so that they are unable to utilize and develop their potentials.

This concept of self-actualization as the goal of psychotherapy-, and of life, and of its frustration as the source and nature of emotional disturbance, avoids the problems connected with the term mental hygiene and the nature of "good" or "positive" mental hygiene. We start with the positive, with a goal inherent in the nature of human beings, so that its lack, its frustration, or its blocking is the problem or the "pathology."

Perhaps it should be reiterated here that many things can impede the development of self-actualizing persons. Impediments can include physical deprivation, physical illness, and lack of education, training, experience, and opportunities for the development of one's potentials. Psychotherapy is concerned with a particular class of impediments to self-actualization-the lack of or inadequacy of the appropriate personal environment or personal or psychological conditions for self-actualization, what might be called emotional deprivation. Other kinds of treatment or help are appropriate for dealing with other kinds of impediments to self-actualization. Counseling or psychotherapy is the specific treatment for the lack of self-actualization resulting from emotional deprivation.

## SUMMARY

This chapter began with a consideration of the nature of human beings as background for developing a description of the self-actualizing person. People are active as well as reactive beings. They are inherently good rather than bad. Aggression is a reaction to threat rather than an instinct expressed regardless of conditions in the environment. People have a single basic motivation, the preservation and enhancement of the self, or the drive toward self-actualization. People are by nature social beings; they become human only in a group or society of other persons. They are able to actualize themselves most adequately in a society of other self-actualizing persons as a result of reciprocal influence.

The characteristics of the self-actualizing person were explored, drawing heavily from the research of Maslow. Among other characteristics of the self-actualizing person is the ability to develop good interpersonal relationships. This involves acceptance of and respect for others, understanding or empathy with others, and openness, genuineness, or honesty in interpersonal relationships. Self-actualizing persons accept themselves and their human nature with its fallibilities. They are secure and thus do not have to be defensive; they are not easily threatened. They are in close touch with their environment, being sensitive and aware of stimuli. Their locus of control is internal rather than external, so that they are autonomous, independent, and develop their own value systems.

These characteristics are observable and thus in principle can be defined operationally so that they can be measured. In fact, it is now possible to measure some of them.

It is the inability to become a self-actualizing person because of a deprived social and emotional environment that constitutes emotional disturbance or psychological pathology. It is this disturbance, or this source of the frustration of the drive toward self-actualization, to which

counseling or psychotherapy is directed and for which it is the specific treatment.

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