

# Maslow Lecture

## Slide 1

Hello, everybody, and welcome to our lecture on Abraham Maslow, the first of our two humanistic psychologists that we'll look at. Maslow called his theory self-actualization because really that encapsulates his perspective. The focus is all on becoming the best "us" we can, the kind of "being all we can be" of self-actualization. Before we dive into Maslow's theory, and I suspect you're very familiar with it already, or at least partially familiar with it in terms of that hierarchy, I just want to lay out some...

## Slide 2

...assumptions that Maslow makes about human nature. Maslow and Rogers are both humanists, they differ with regard to this in that Maslow is a little less radical. When we talk about Rogers in our next lecture, we will point out his assumptions as well. But Maslow made the assumption that human beings are basically good, or at the very least, neutral one way or the other. This is an assumption which is kind of important and differs with what most of human history in terms of philosophy and religion taught, which a variation of original sin is, in other words that human beings are basically born bad. For instance, children need to be trained to be good, goodness isn't innate, rather badness is innate and you have to train goodness into them. Maslow says human beings are born good or born neutral and therefore, because they're born good, we want to, if you will, encourage human flourishing and development without all of this kind of training. Maslow, unlike Rogers, we will see in our next lecture, does believe that there's an ultimate set of moral values in there. Why is that important? Maslow does accept the fact that there are things that are right and things that are wrong, regardless of whether *I* believe they're right and wrong. He's not saying what that is, he's just simply saying an ultimate standard of moral does exist and Rogers, who comes along in our next lecture, is going to disagree, and he's going to say no, there is no such thing as an ultimate right and wrong. It's right and wrong for *you*, not right and wrong, period. And as with the name of his theory, the third of his assumptions is that all of us has human beings have an ultimate goal, and that goal is to reach our full potential, to be all that we can be, to become self-actualized.

## Slide 3

Maslow states we all have 2 different sets of needs, deficiency or basic needs on the one hand, and meta or growth needs on the other.

## Slide 4

Maslow says that all of us have these needs, deficiency and growth needs, and all human beings set out to meet these needs. The problem, though, is the society or culture we live in may not be helpful in allowing us, in freedom, to pursue meeting our own needs. In other words, that in the culture, society, time, community I live in, there is going to be more or less opportunities for me to freely pursue "being all I can be." For large numbers of human beings, they have no choice to pursue being all they could be because they were serfs or slaves or bound in some way—you're the son of a farmer, so you're a farmer; if you want to be a physicist or you want to be a shepherd, you can't. A farmer's sons farm. There was very little freedom. So Maslow just wants to point out in order to maximize every human being's goal, we want to have a society or culture which is set up and designed to encourage everybody's maximum growth. What this means is we want to have the maximum amount of freedom to make choices, freedom of movement, freedom of thought, freedom of speech, the more freedom you can have, then the more you and I can make choices for ourselves that allow us to be all that we can be. Now, we have to be careful because too much freedom can go into anarchy so there's a fine line between having as much freedom as possible and yet still having a society in which there's fairness and justice, ordered civility. So, while I'm free to drive here and there, I'm not free to drive here and there going 120 miles an hour simply because exercising that freedom puts *other* people in danger and if I hit them in an accident, I've prevented them from being all they could be because they'd be dead. So Maslow's just trying to point out that societies have this responsibility to keep this balance between maximum individual freedom without making it anarchy, with keeping civility in order and rules that benefit everybody, and making sure that there's equal opportunity and fairness and, indeed, justice for all.

## Slide 5

We've come to Maslow's need hierarchy and here's what it looks like. I'll just present it to you and then we'll go over each of these stages one at a time. At the very bottom is physiological needs, then safety, belongingness and love, or what Maslow called psychological needs, esteem needs and self-actualization needs. And at the top maybe you could put peak

experiences. Maslow's theory is that as human organisms, we need to put energy into the lower levels before we're free to pursue our needs at the higher levels. If I'm starving to death and I have no food, I don't really care about beautiful art or about learning math or about writing a symphony. I want food and my attention is going to be focused on getting or procuring food for myself and my loved ones. So let's say I have food and shelter and water, then I need to be safe. Again, if I feel threatened every moment of every day, it's going to be hard for me to pay attention if all the way to school I'm getting beat up and harassed. I'm going to be so worried about going from school to home and getting beat up that it's going to be hard for me to pay attention to math and social studies and whatnot. So physiological first, then safety, then psychological needs, then esteem needs, *then* I can pursue being all I can be, and then these peak experiences. Let's begin at the bottom.

## Slide 6

Physiological needs are straight-forward: in order to survive, what do I need to procure? Again, food, fluid, sleep, shelter. You might imagine why is sex at the bottom level? Because certainly you could survive without sex, people have survived their entire lives and never had sex. We put sex in the category because it's not only the survival of me as an individual, it's the survival of the species that is in view here. And even with all of our technology, in vitro and so on and so forth, 99.9 percent of us still got here by our parents having sex. So sex is a physiological need, it's one of those basic ones, it's very, very motivating, and, indeed, it's one of those basic things that drives not only human beings but, of course, most species of animal, so we put sex into that category. Once these basic physiological needs are more or less taken care of, obviously we have to do it in an ongoing way...

## Slide 7

...free to pursue, if you will, safety needs. Not just safety in terms of I don't want to get shot or beat up, but think about safety as a general sense of security, I feel protected, I don't feel vulnerable, there's rules, laws, order, there's limits on other people's freedom to harm me, I'm not constantly anxious, I'm not in chaotic situation. So safety is both physical safety but also psychological safety. I may not actually ever get attacked but if I live in a situation where I spend all of my day worrying about being attacked or worrying about being abused, my energies are not going into being all I can be, but they're going to go into worrying about staying alive. So safety needs become very important right after my physiological needs.

## Slide 8

Then the biggies of belongingness and love. Wow, as human beings it's such a big thing to be loved and to give love, and to belong to a group or a family, or to have connection with other people. Belongingness and love needs are powerful, but quite frankly, if I'm starving to death, I'm not mostly worried about fitting in with the group, I want to get food so they really do take, can I say, two back seats to physiological needs and a backseat to safety needs. Maslow talks about that there are really two kinds of love, one which he calls Deficiency love which would be in this category. This is the kind of love that we all have. It's the kind of love that is worried about getting what we want out of a relationship. Let's be honest, we love people but we want something from them and when they don't give it to us, sometimes we consider getting rid of that person and getting another person. So when we say it's selfish, it's not necessarily bad, it's the kind of love which looks out for oneself. It's a need, it's a needy love and we all have that. However, Maslow points out that there is something called B-love, which stands for being love, which isn't the deficiency need, it's more up in the growth needs. This is the kind of love which we write poetry about, which we rightly honor, for instance, when a soldier sacrifices him- or herself for their colleagues by throwing him- or herself on a bomb and saving their colleagues. It's a love which is selfless. We might think of the most common place this shows up is a mother's love for her children. It's not so worried about getting as in giving. So Maslow wants to point out that while love is a *need* we have, it's also much rarer, it also shows up in this kind of meta kind of love, this being love which isn't all about what have you done for me lately, am I getting anything out of this relationship that I'm putting in, kind of thing. But it selflessly gives without thought for payment or for reciprocity. Once our love needs are basically taken away, and again, we do this in an ongoing way, then we're free to pursue...

## Slide 9

...our esteem needs. Esteem needs are, as it says, feeling good about ourselves, and there are two types. I have esteem needs for myself—I want to feel good about myself and my judgment—and also, let's face it, since we're social beings, we want to impress others and we want to be praised and honored by others as being particularly this or particularly that, or good at this or good at that. So esteem needs are not as we say to kids, don't care what anybody else thinks of you, are you happy with your job. Well, that's kind of good advice but it's not very realistic because as human beings, we're

always going to be a little concerned, a little sensitive to, if you will, how we're playing to the larger crowd. So two types of esteem needs.

## Slide 10

Lastly is the self-actualization need. Self-actualization, defined by Maslow, is "the process of moving toward the realization of one's potentials" and, of course, depending on what one's potentials are, self-actualization can look very, very different from person to person to person. I could be self-actualized by being the best ditch digger that ever lived because I see my goal in life is to be an excellent ditch digger. Another person may win the Nobel prize in literature; another person may want to be the best possible nurse or doctor taking care of sick or ailing people; another person may want to be a good athlete or a good musician. So self-actualization looks different for every other person. It's just really pursuing the best "you" you can possibly be; and since we are not all the same and we're gifted differently, and we have different skills and talents, it's going to look different from person to the next. Maslow talks about what he called "the Jonah complex which is his answer to why is it that more of us don't seek out the best in ourselves? Why are a lot of us content to get to a pretty good part of ourselves and say "okay, I'm just going to hang out here. Why put all the energy and effort to be the best?" So he calls this the Jonah complex after the Old Testament prophet Jonah (you may remember the story) who was told by God to go to Nineveh and tell the Ninevites that they were going to be judged if they didn't repent. Jonah didn't like the Ninevites because they were the enemies of his people and so he wanted God to wipe them out. So instead of going to Nineveh, he gets in a boat and goes towards Spain, the opposite way, and, you may remember the story (which I always got confused with Pinocchio when I was a kid), there's a storm, they throw everything overboard, they're about to go under, and Jonah says, "Hey, I'm the problem, throw me overboard," so they do and a whale comes along and swallows him. He's in the belly of this fish or this whale for a few days and prays there and God gives him a second chance. The whale vomits him up, I guess he takes a quick bath to get that whale vomit off of him, and then he finally goes to Nineveh and preaches there and lo and behold, to his great sadness, he is a successful preacher. The Ninevites all repent, God doesn't destroy them, and Jonah goes out on the edge of the city and complains to God, "I knew that you would do this. I knew you would be kind and loving." It's a great story, I love that book in the Old Testament. So Jonah, as Maslow uses him, the Jonah complex is that we fear our best side and finest impulses because we don't want to deal with the changes that come, we don't want to deal with the increased responsibility. If I could overshare with you here on this lecture: I'm in my mid-fifties, I've had many opportunities to go on and become a college administrator, I say many, three or four, to become a dean or something like that, and I've always resisted and I've been told, "Listen. You should do it. You've got to keep moving up the ladder." But I guess I have the Jonah complex big time because I think, "I don't want to be a dean. Then you have to go to meetings all the time and make decisions, and it's all administrative. I just want to be a professor, I want to teach my classes, I don't want anybody bothering me. I'm perfectly good staying right where I am. I'm loving my own Jonah complex here. I have no desire to aspire to any higher goal. I just want to stay what I'm doing. So that's the Jonah complex. You can think about your own application to that.

## Slide 11

If you can think of right up here where we think about peak experiences. And he's simply saying that there are these rare times in life where we have these "aha" moments in which we're not judging, we're not evaluating, we're just experiencing, we're overwhelmed; this can be a religious experience, Maslow says. I love looking at cathedrals wherever I travel and there's not many great ones in the United States but in Europe; and not just cathedrals but any temples or mosques. And these temples, mosques and cathedrals are designed to give you a sense of awe, a sense of the divine, a sense of metaphysical reality out there. So these peak experiences can be religious, they can involve nature—standing at the top of a mountain, the so-called "mountain top experience," at the edge of the Grand Canyon, looking out at the ocean—they can be drug induced, Maslow says, sometimes. In most religions people fast, some people take drugs, you can have a peak experience with a sexual experience; it can be a near death experience, anything. It's almost like your life pauses for a second and your perspective after that moment has somehow changed. They're called peak experiences because they happen rarely and you have to come down from the peak into normal life and live here, you can't just stay up there. Maslow says they can be any number of things but they often are special moments in which the being all we can be takes on this kind of experiential profound moment in time.

## Slide 12

Now the last thing, and I'm going to go through them quickly because I'm going to let you read about this, Maslow says that there are what he calls these "B-values." People that are more self-actualized than others, he says, are more likely to have these kind of character traits or values that they live life by, and I just put them in alphabetical order. *Aliveness* is

Maslow's word for a person that's engaged with life. They don't live in the past, they don't live in the future, they're present. They're paying attention. They're smelling the roses, so to speak. They look at the sunset as they walk outside in the early evening. They're just engaged with life. They're autonomous. They have a healthy kind of dependence but they're willing to make their own decisions for themselves. They want to exercise their freedom to be all they can be and they do that. They're not so worried about how other people are going to judge them, or think less of them. Their attitude is "well, whatever. I've got to do it my way." They love beauty. They appreciate beauty. Not conventional beauty, not beauty that we're socialized to believe on television or in the media we've got to look like this or you're not beautiful. No, they look for beauty everywhere. They see aesthetic beauty everywhere. A couple weeks ago, I was in California and my son and I went hiking at Joshua tree national park. I don't know if any of you who are listening have ever been there, but it's in the desert and it's a kind of beauty which is very different from a lush garden or a jungle. It's rocks and desert and cacti, there's just this kind of spare, surreal beauty—anyway, you get the sense. Just looks for beauty in everything, in fact, these people see beauty in just about everywhere they look. They're the kind of people who see beauty in what other people see as ugly. They see the thing about it which is beautiful.

## Slide 13

These people that finish what they begin, they start something, they're not quitters, they want to see things complete. Effortlessness doesn't mean these people don't work hard. What he means by effortlessness is B-value people try to deal with life in a simple, straightforward manner, they don't over complicate things. They want to simply fix whatever the problem is without making a big, dramatic production out of it. That's what he means by effortlessness. They're not expending a lot of useless energy screaming, freaking out, they're just "okay, what's the problem here? Let's fix it."

## Slide 14

They're good, which of course is straightforward. And what he means by good is they have a tolerance for everybody and a belief that every human being is worthy of respect and dignity. They have a sense of humor. Not a sense of humor that is sarcastic and puts other people down; a sense of humor which is ironic, which is able to laugh at oneself, which is able to see the craziness of things, to step back and say "I'm nuts." It's a humor which makes things easier, doesn't put down other people. They believe in justice. They're committed to fairness, to equal opportunity, democracy. That's their commitment.

## Slide 15

They are not perfect people but when they do something, they desire to do a good job, not just do a half-baked job. If they start something, they finish it; and if they start something they do, they finish it well. As we were talking about effortlessness, their preference is for simplicity over complexity. Remember that Maslow's writing in the '60's when there was this movement – live in communes, the hippie kind of movement, not pretentious and materialistic, but rather a genuine, authentic kind of lifestyle. They...

## Slide 16

...are not egotistical. They see themselves in their context. If they're in a group, they don't insist upon "I've got to do it my way," rather "I'm one of a group of five. Maybe I do it my way one out of every five times." They not "it's all about me;" they're democratic this way. And they're committed to the truth. Not necessarily the truth as it's been taught. In other words, they really want to know what's true with a capital "T," not just "my teacher said it so it must be true." They're really open to pursuing novel ways of coming at things, they're creative, and because truth with a capital "T" can be a little grey and less black and white, I hope you know what I mean by that, they don't necessarily need to make the greys all black and white, they can tolerate ambiguity.

## Slide 17

They are willing to be different from everyone else. They are willing to embrace their uniqueness. They don't have to be in fashion. They don't feel they have to keep up with what everybody else is doing this year. They're on their own path, they're perfectly comfortable with that, and if they seem odd or quirky, so be it. To be all you can be, you have to be all *you* can be, not all you can be to please other people. And lastly, they're committed to a holistic view. They know they have good qualities and bad, and they know if they can accept their good qualities and bad and that other people are going to have good qualities and bad, so why do I reject other people with less than ideal qualities when I myself have less than ... Their sense of wholeness is self-acceptance and a tolerance of others. You know, you take the good with the bad, you

work on the bad and that's it. So this is the B-values. Hope this has been interesting and of value to you and we'll see you in the next lecture.