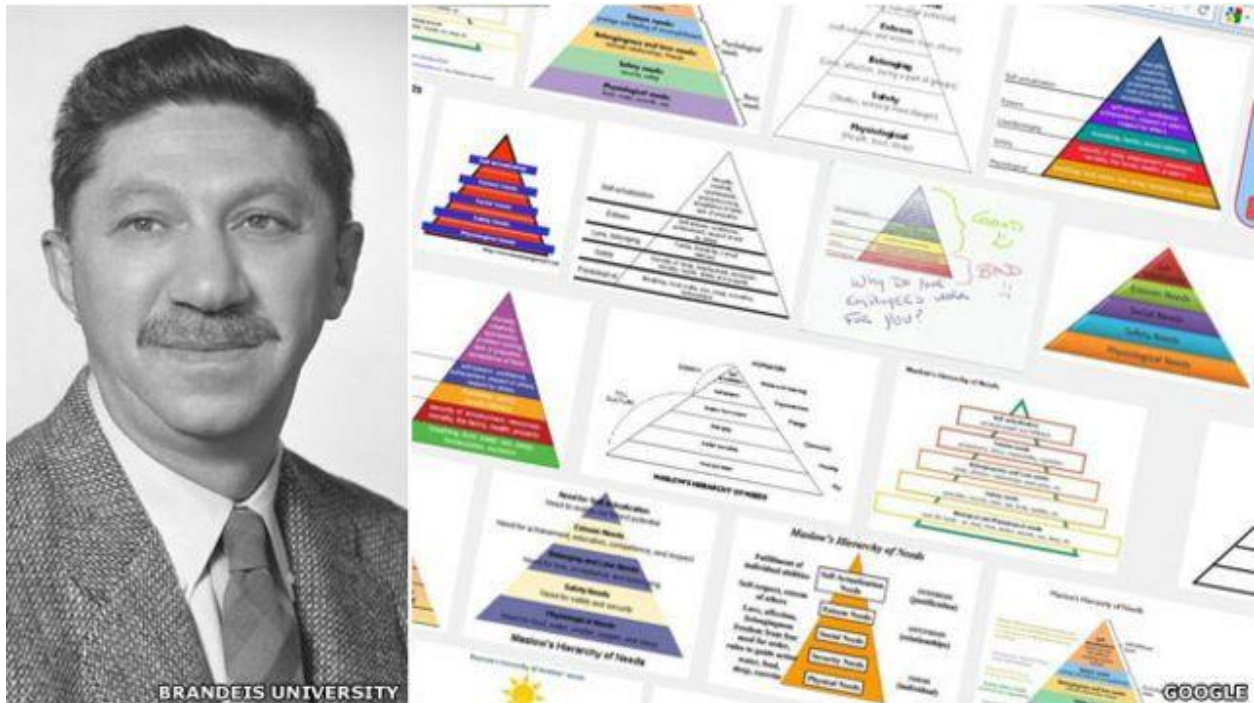


# Abraham Maslow, empirical spirituality and the crisis of values



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*Abraham Maslow was one of the most influential psychologists of the 20th century, who helped create humanistic psychology, transpersonal*

*psychology, and the human potential movement. He believed he'd forged an empirical spirituality which would save the world from the modern crisis of valuelessness and meaninglessness. He was an early example of the psychologist-as-moral-prophet, like Jordan Peterson, John Vervaeke, Brene Brown, Sam Harris, Ken Wilber, Roland Griffiths or Jonathan Haidt. But, as I will show, there are major logical and ethical problems with his attempt to create an empirical spirituality.*

Maslow was born in Brooklyn in 1908, the child of Jewish immigrants from the Ukraine. He had a miserable childhood, which he blamed on his psychotic mother. She was apparently a superstitious and cruel woman, who constantly told Abe he'd be punished by God for his misbehaviour. She was also violent, once destroying his record collection, another time killing two stray kittens he'd bought home, bashing their heads to the wall in front of him. He later said his entire philosophy was formulated against her.

Abe grew up with an inferiority complex, feeling like an ugly freak. He'd ride the subway alone to spare people the sight of him. He escaped into the world of books. One early 'peak experience' came from reading *Folkways*, by William Graham Sumner, which described the idiotic superstitions of different tribes around the world, and the rare rational elite capable of transcending culture and thinking for themselves. Maslow vowed he would become one of this rational elite.

He declined to join the family barrel business, and instead became a psychologist. His big break came when Edward Thorndike, one of the leading psychologists in the US, invited him to work at Columbia University. Thorndike was wowed by Abe's score in an IQ test Thorndike had devised. Abe scored 195, the second-highest-score ever recorded. Thorndike decided Abe was a genius, and told him he could research whatever he wanted, and Thorndike would, if necessary, personally support him his entire life.

This interview astonished Abe and flipped his self-estimation from inferiority to inflation. Maslow's biographer writes: 'he regarded his IQ as a mark of triumph. At parties and social gatherings, he liked to spark conversation by casually inquiring about someone's IQ and then volunteering his own.'

Thorndike, by the way, had used this IQ test to support his eugenic vision of psychology and politics, as a leading member of the Eugenics Committee of the United States, which campaigned to sterilize people with low IQ scores, and lobbied for anti-immigration policies. Thorndike believed selective breeding could be used to raise the general intelligence of the population, as in his graph below.

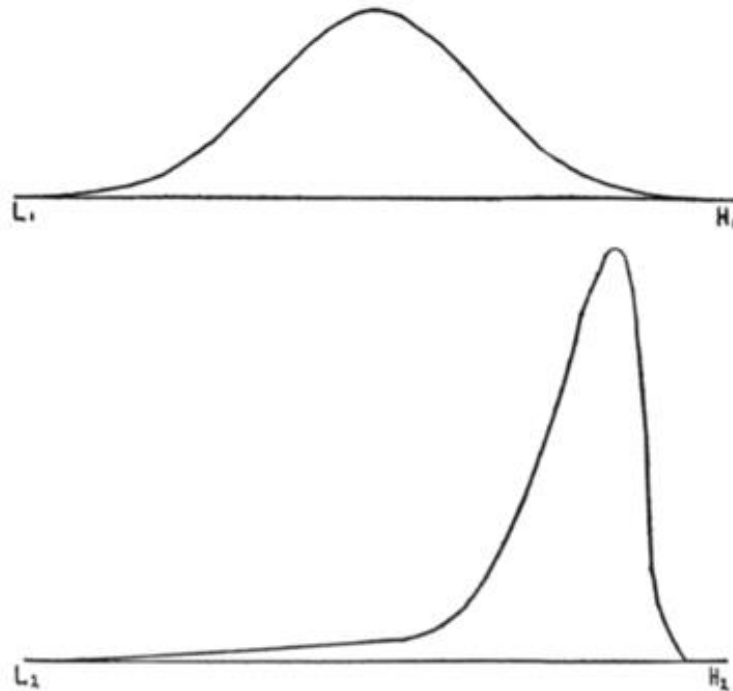


CHART 5. THE IMPROVEMENT POSSIBLE BY SELECTIVE BREEDING. The upper surface being taken to represent the existing distribution of Intellect, the lower surface represents what might be expected from, say, ten or twenty generations of breeding exclusively from the apparently best tenth of human Intellects.

Like many eugenicists, Thorndike thought eugenics could be the religion of the future (Columbia [changed the name of a hall](#) named after him last year when students complained about his views). He wrote:

*Ethics and religion must teach man to want the welfare of the future as well as the relief of the cripple before his eyes...Until the last removable impediment in man's own nature dies childless, human reason will not rest.*

In 1943, Maslow published his most famous paper, *A Theory of Human Motivation*. It called for a revisioning of psychology beyond

behaviourism's focus on humans' basic motivation towards food, sex and safety. Maslow suggested that, after the need for food and safety has been satisfied, higher needs emerge in a hierarchy — love, belonging, esteem, and finally self-actualization. He never described it as a pyramid, but he *did* think of it as a hierarchy, and he did think only a very few spent much time at the peak.



His theory of self-actualization was inspired by the holistic psychiatrist Kurt Goldstein, but there is also a strong Nietzschean flavour to his theory. Nietzsche had declared 'become what you are!' and Maslow likewise wrote: 'Do you want to find out what you ought to be? Then find out who you are! 'Become what thou art'. The description of what one ought to be is almost the same as the

description of what one deeply is.' (*The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*).

## **The self-actualized elite**

Maslow also rejected Freudianism's focus on mental pathology. He wrote: 'The study of crippled, stunted, immature, and unhealthy specimens can yield only a cripple psychology and a cripple philosophy...

*Certainly, a visitor from Mars descending upon a colony of birth-injured cripples, dwarfs, hunchbacks, etc., could not deduce what they should have been. But then let us study not cripples, but the closest approach we can get to whole, healthy men. In them we find qualitative differences, a different system of motivation, emotion, value, thinking, and perceiving.*

At the core of his psychology and his empirical spirituality is a focus on the 'self-actualized person'. At other times, he calls it the GHB — Good Human Being — or the 'self-evolving person, the responsible-for-himself-and-his-own-evolution person, the fully illuminated or awakened or perspicuous man, the fully human person...'

He had been interested in the 'self-actualized person' ever since meeting two intellectuals in New York — the anthropologist Ruth Benedict, and the co-founder of gestalt psychology, Max Wertheimer. They struck him as utterly superior to ordinary *homo sapiens*. 'It was

as if they were not quite people but something more than people.’ He tracked them like a zoologist, scribbling notes in his journal as he observed them at work and play. And then — a eureka moment — he noticed similarities in their characters. They were a superior *type*, practically a different species.

In the 1950s, he decided to try and investigate further. He began by trying to study the undergraduates at Brandeis University, where he was working, but he couldn’t find enough undergraduates that fit his criteria for self-actualization — only one in fact!

So he constructed his own list of people from history and the present day who he considered to be self-actualized: Albert Einstein, Abraham Lincoln, Jane Addams, Eleanor Roosevelt, William James, Spinoza. Later, after he met Aldous Huxley, he added him to the list.

He asserted that these self-actualized people all shared the same characteristics. They are all devoted to a higher goal, beyond self-esteem or money; they all see more clearly — both morally (they suffer less moral doubt than ordinary humans) and literally; they all feel compassion and pity for lesser humans; they are all trans-cultural figures who manage to take an Olympian, species-wide view of humanity; this Olympian and god-like perspective enables them to transcend suffering and evil and laugh at the world. They are both self-transcendent and, paradoxically, more fully themselves. They are the only humans who are really *fully* human. They are not better merely in one domain, but better at everything: ‘This simply means

that by any operational definition, such individuals tend to be better human beings’.

Later, he decided that self-actualized people also have more ‘peak experiences’. He explored this topic most fully in his 1964 book *Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*, partly through the influence of Aldous Huxley, and also after reading works by Aldous’ friends, Alan Watts and Jiddu Krishnamurti.

‘Peak experiences’ was Maslow’s term for mystical or spiritual experiences, when humans achieve ‘unitive consciousness’, when they feel connected to the cosmos and life feels good and full of meaning. They are ‘peak’ experiences because they’re the best life has to offer, and they seem to occur more to self-actualized people, who are at the peak of humanity and have fulfilled their lower needs.

Although peak experiences make you, as it were, temporarily superhuman — helping you fulfil your potentialities — they don’t connect to God. Maslow is more naturalistic on this than William James or Aldous Huxley. Rather, they connect to your deepest self. He describes the peak-experience as

*a self-validating, self-justifying moment which carries its own intrinsic value with it. It is felt to be a highly valuable — even uniquely valuable — experience... As a matter of fact, so many people find this so great and high an experience that it justifies not only itself but even living itself... They give meaning to life itself. They prove it to be worthwhile.*



*To say this in a negative way, I would guess that peak-experiences help to prevent suicide. [Religions, Values and Peak Experiences]*

Here he is talking about peak experiences:

Peak-experiences aren't just thrills, however. They also change a person. They take you from the world of 'D-values' (deficiency or lower-need values) to the world of 'B-values' — Being values. He wrote:

*As revealed in peak-experiences and exemplified in the lives of self-actualizing people, these 'B-values' are truth, goodness, beauty, wholeness, dichotomy-transcendence, aliveness, uniqueness, perfection, necessity, completion, justice, order, simplicity, richness, effortlessness, playfulness, self-sufficiency.*

## **Empirical spirituality and the value crisis**

Maslow thought 'the ultimate disease of our time is valuelessness'. Humans, especially Americans, were suffering from meaninglessness, amorality, anomie and ennui. The world was in a value-crisis because people, especially western baby boomers, no longer believed in traditional religion. He believed his psychology could be a new empirical religion or spirituality which would save the world from this crisis. He thought the world would be saved by psychology 'or it wouldn't be saved at all'. He wrote:

*We can no longer rely on tradition, on consensus, on cultural habit, on unanimity of belief to give us our values. These agreed-upon traditions are all gone. Of course, we never should have rested on tradition — as its failures must have proven to everyone by now — it never was a firm foundation. It was destroyed too easily by truth, by honesty, by the facts, by science, by simple, pragmatic, historical failure. Only truth itself can be our foundation, our base for building. Only empirical, naturalistic knowledge, in its broadest sense, can serve us now.*  
*[Religions, Values and Peak Experiences]*

But science was still stuck in the Weberian idea it had to be objective and value-free. ‘Such an attitude’, he wrote, ‘dooms science to be nothing more than technology, amoral and non-ethical (as the Nazi doctors taught us).’

Discussion about values became seen as ‘unscientific’, ‘and so they were turned over to poets, philosophers, artists, religionists, and other soft-headed though warm-hearted people...’ Unfortunately, there was *also* a value crisis in the arts and humanities:

*in recent years and to this day, most humanistic scholars and most artists have shared in the general collapse of all traditional values. And when these values collapsed, there were no others readily available as replacements...Which well-known artists or writers today are trying to teach, to inspire, to conduce to virtue? Which of them could even use this word ‘virtue’ without gagging? Upon which of them can an ‘idealistic’ young man model himself? [RVPE]*

What is to be done? Science — and specifically humanistic psychology — must step into the values breach and save humanity.

*the problems of values, ethics, spirituality, morals...are being taken away from the exclusive jurisdiction of the institutionalized churches and are becoming the 'property', so to speak, of a new type of humanistic scientist who is vigorously denying the old claim of the established religions to be the sole arbiters of all questions of faith and morals. [RVPE]*

We need a new 'normative biology', 'even if this calls into question the whole history and philosophy of science in the West'. This new values-inclusive humanistic science could be

*the religion of the nonreligious, the poetry of the nonpoet, the art of the man who cannot paint, the humour of the serious man, and the lovemaking of the inhibited and shy man. Not only does science begin in wonder; it also ends in wonder. [RVPE]*

How can science provide values? We have already seen — through the study of self-actualized superior specimens, peak experiences, and the cross-cultural perennial 'B-values' which one directly perceives from the Olympian peak of self-actualization. Thus the science of peak experiences and self-actualized specimens is a bridge across the Is / Ought divide, taking us to a new normative biology. Maslow writes:

*Facts create oughts! The more clearly something is seen or known, and the more true and unmistakable something becomes, the more ought-quality it acquires. The more 'is' something becomes, the more 'ought' it becomes — the more requiredness it acquires, the louder it 'calls for' particular action.*

## **Eupsychian society**

Maslow is nothing if not grand in his vision. He lays down not just a 'new image' for man, but a new model for society. It should become *Eupsychian* — a society geared towards the creation of self-actualized people.

He was interested in Eupsychian education, which meant a complete overhaul of western education to make its goal the creation of self-actualized people soaked in B-values. He was inspired by Aldous Huxley's vision of 'integrated education', and the Utopian model he laid down in *Island*, where citizens learn not just knowledge, but the art of good sex, good aesthetics, good dancing, good mystical experiences, even the art of dying.

He also saw promise in Esalen, the human potential movement founded in Big Sur, California, in 1962. He happened to stumble in, when he and his wife were driving down Route 1. They needed a place to stay so checked into a motel. When he signed in, the receptionist saw his name and said 'Maslow? *The* Abraham Maslow? Maslow! Maslow!' It turned out he'd checked in at Esalen, where all

the staff were grooving over his books. He returned and gave seminars throughout the Sixties, helping to formulate what became the human potential movement.

Here he is giving a talk on self-actualization at Esalen, which he described as a 'semi-permeable membrane, selecting out nice people'.

Such centres spread through the western world and still thrive today. As Maslow hoped, they really did become something like churches for the unchurched, disseminating a new ethic of authenticity — find the Real You, discover your vocation, follow your bliss.

Maslow was also interested in 'Eupsychian management' — how to help companies become places of self-actualization, where employees are treated as self-actualizing human beings who seek more than simply stability and money. He encouraged the importance of creativity, intimacy, vulnerability, and the sort of non-hierarchical intimate discussion known as the T-group or encounter session. His ideas remain hugely influential in management, especially his hierarchy of needs. You could say he helped to create what The Atlantic called [the religion of Workism](#), based on the idea that work should be a temple of self-actualization.

### **Problems with Maslow's empirical spirituality**

Maslow's culture is my culture. I am a follower of the 'empirical spirituality' forged by him, William James, Aldous Huxley, Esalen and others. But there are serious issues with it, specifically as he formulated it.

First, his empirical spirituality is not very empirical or scientific *at all*. The entire basis for it is his supposedly objective data on self-actualized people. But he simply picked a list. And there is little evidence he knew or studied the people on the list at all — he met Aldous Huxley once. There is a bizarre lack of data in his writing, not even biographical or literary data. It's just his moral assertions, and the implication there were boxes of data to support his assertions. There weren't.

He was asked, at an Esalen seminar, if he thought defence secretary Robert McNamara was self-actualized. He replied: 'It is dangerous to diagnose someone at a distance'. But that's exactly what his entire science does. He once said: 'I now think that it is possible for me to look at a person and clearly state without corniness: "That man is a sage to the degree of 14%.'

As he sometimes admitted, this non-scientific selection process meant he simply imported his own biases into the selection. He once did a study of 'good and bad paintings' and wrote in a footnote: 'Good paintings are defined here as paintings that I like'.

The basis of his empirical ethics is circular and tautological. What is good? Whatever the self-actualized superior person tells us is good. How can we tell if they are self-actualized? If they fit the values of the superior person. He wrote:

*My theory of metamotivation ultimately rests upon this operation, namely, of taking superior people who are also superior perceivers not only of facts but of values and then using their choices of ultimate values as possibly the ultimate values for the whole species.*

But this is not what he does in practice. He does not seriously or closely study the actual values of his handful of 'self-actualized people' and then embrace them. If he did, he'd have become a theist pacifist vegetarian, like Aldous Huxley. What he does is preach what *he* thinks is right, and then use his supposed empirical data on self-actualized people to prop up his moral authority. Thus homosexuality is deemed empirically unhealthy and not fully human. So is most modern art — he says it's an empirical fact that the music of John Cage never inspires peak experiences.

He envisages his empirical spirituality being embraced at every level of society. He writes:

*We wind up with a rather startling conclusion, namely, that the teaching of spiritual values of ethical and moral values definitely does (in principle) have a place in education, perhaps ultimately a very basic and essential place, and that this in no way needs to controvert*

*the American separation between church and state for the very simple reason that spiritual, ethical, and moral values need have nothing to do with any church. Or perhaps, better said, they are the common core of all churches, all religions, including the non-theistic ones. As a matter of fact, it is possible that precisely these ultimate values are and should be the far goals of all education, as they are and should be also the far goals of psychotherapy, of child care, of marriage, the family, of work, and perhaps of all other social institutions. [RVPE]*

Pope Abraham! Now I personally would love wisdom or well-being to be taught in schools. I've spent years advocating that and teaching it myself in schools, universities and adult education institutions. But as I have often said, this has to be done carefully and pluralistically, or empirical spirituality easily becomes an illiberal and coercive dogma. Science — and particularly Maslow's 'normative biology' — *can* be deeply coercive, illiberal and authoritarian, as the dark history of eugenics shows.

### **Eugenics in the Eupsychian society**

Maslow suggests that Nazi medical crimes emerged from a value-less science. That's not true. They emerged from a Nietzschean eugenic 'normative biology', which divided humans into superbeings and subhumans, into healthy specimens and 'cripples' (to use one of Maslow's favourite words) with 'cripple-science and cripple-religion, cripple-facts and cripple-values' (again, Maslow's words).



Maslow shows a similar Nietzschean elitism. He says: 'Only a small proportion of the human population gets to the point of identity, or of selfhood, full humanness, self-actualization'. [*The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*] Beneath that tiny percentage (which includes him obviously), 'it is perfectly true that the mass of society is still like a dead weight'.

He could be democratic, and say that every child is potentially a Beethoven or a Plato given the right environmental conditions. But, as he got older, he came to believe more and more in a 'biological elite' who should be given power. He wrote in his posthumously-published journals (quoted [here](#)):

*Humanistic psychology absolutely needs a doctrine of an elite, degrees of humanness, health and sickness, winners and losers, aggridants (whether by heredity or by learning), good specimens, no equal votes, non-equal weighting. The taste or judgment of one superior can and should outweigh 1000 or a million blind ones.*

*We keep alive many of the people whom nature left to itself would kill off. So we are hurting the human gene pool, which must be deteriorating. We can certainly continue to do this, to be compassionate with anyone living, but this right to reproduce might very well be limited. In the immediate future — within the next century — we must anyway cut hack the population of the world. The right to reproduce must surely become rather a privilege which is socially controlled and socially granted.... One could speculate that the*

*worsening gene pool is partly responsible for the large number of naysayers, death-wishers and born losers and schlemiels.*

*I find myself secretly entertaining all sorts of 'cold-blooded' possibilities... drug users are performing a kind of biologically unselfish act, a sort of noblesse oblige for the good of the species and voluntarily killing themselves 'for the good of the gene pool.' ... Sooner or later, after the catastrophes force us to pace the overpopulation, we'll stop with all the crap about more food, or better strains of rice {which just produce more people}. How can we give up on humanitarianism? But how can we not permit voluntary (or maybe involuntary) euthanasia and suicide? One day we'll have to talk about the exposure or killing of monster-babies, or even of healthy surplus babies.*

*As with some, nothing will work ultimately but shooting.*

He rarely said such things in public, but he did send a paper to the Salk Institute in California, which was launched by Jonas Salk, another eugenicist scientist. Maslow's 1968 paper, '[Humanistic Biology](#)', discusses the 'conceptual problem pertaining to a biological elite or aristocracy, or what one might even call a biologically, rather than socially, privileged class'. He says that the problem of the 'biological elite' has constantly concerned him as he sketched his Eupsychian society. He worries that, after the civil rights movement, 'when there is no longer social injustice to serve as an alibi or an excuse for one's own biological inadequacies, then there might well be a great increase of Nietzschean resentment or malicious envy of

those who are more successful in their achievements'. How, then, 'to protect the biologically gifted from the almost inevitable malice of the biologically nongifted'. He suggests:

*The only way I can see out of this dilemma in any future, one-world civilization is for the biological superiors (alphas or aggridants) to become a kind of priestly class to which is given less monetary reward and fewer privileges or luxuries than the average members of the overall population. The picture I have here is of the leaders of civilization — the sages, teachers, pioneers, and creators — composing something like the Grey Eminence figures of the past, like monks clad in the simplest garments and perhaps vowing to lead selfless lives of poverty.*

This is actually very close to the suggestion of previous thinkers in the early human potential movement — HG Wells for example, suggested there should be a new global monastic elite who steer the evolution of superbeings through eugenics (brutally, if need be, for the good of the species). Maslow imagined something similar:

*Even today, the issue of the possible existence of a biological elite is crucial for philosophically oriented biologists, because again and again the questions arise: Who is to judge how to evolve ourselves, which type of individual should be favored and selected, or who is to live and to die? Who is to decide the sex of our offspring, whether they shall be 7 feet tall, or the like? Will the decision makers be a federal commission,*

*a global board, or a special group of physicians, biologists, or other scientists?*

*The question of how to select the most adequate and wise, the best people to make these awe-full decisions must, therefore, be considered an urgent program...How shall we constitute a board or commission of sages to help humankind make its choices about how to evolve itself, toward which ideal type of human to move, and how to biologically select the good and wise?*

One notes, in passing, that Maslow planned to open his own Esalen-type centre on the East coast, which would include a dating and marriage service. I wonder if this was a plan to steer the reproductive choices of his self-actualizing clients in eugenic directions, like the Oneida community used to do?

### **The atomized religion of private experience**

More generally, empirical spirituality arrogantly dismisses the traditions of organized religion, but offers up instead a hollowed-out privatized religion of personal experience.

*In Religions, Values and Peak Experiences*, Maslow dismisses ‘all the paraphernalia of organized religion — buildings and specialized personnel, rituals, dogmas, ceremonials’ as ‘of doubtful value in relation to the intrinsic and essential religious or transcendent experience’. That experience is ‘a totally private and personal one’.

Indeed, he suggests that peak experiences happen more often to the non-religious and the unchurched than to the 'intellectual primitives' who are stuck in religious conventions.

But he came to realize, by the end of the Sixties, that a religion purely based on personal experience is not nearly enough. He wrote in 1969:

*peak-experiences are not a way of life, & you really can't build a style of life upon them exclusively. And it seems not to work when you try to get them regularly via LSD or weekend workshops at Esalen. [quoted in Future Visions]*

He realized that his book 'was too imbalanced toward the individualistic and too hard on groups, organizations, and communities...I can say much more firmly than I ever did, for many empirical reasons, that basic human needs can be fulfilled only by and through other human beings, i.e.,society. The need for community (belongingness, contact, groupiness) is itself a basic need. Loneliness, isolation, ostracism, rejection by the group — these are not only painful but pathogenic as well.'

When you dissolve the bonds of traditional communities and leave only privatized experience in its place, the market fills the place of the church. That's precisely what happened, with the market of human potential courses, the larger 'experience economy' offering you peak experiences every weekend, and an entire industry of

lifestyle marketing, launched by the Stanford Research Institute's Values and Lifestyles Survey — which was itself based on Maslow's psychology. The VALS survey identified a new breed of 'inner directed' people seeking self-actualization, and assured companies they could target this new demographic with products. That's where we are today, seeking authenticity and self-actualization through craft beer, iPhones, Instagram accounts and beanie hats.



Adam Curtis, by the way, explored the influence of Maslow's ideas on the VALS survey in his *Century of the Self*. Watch it 40 mins in here:

We have come to realize that peak experiences are not a reliable source of 'B-values'. They don't automatically make you a better, superior person. They can be unhealthy and even psychotic. Maslow

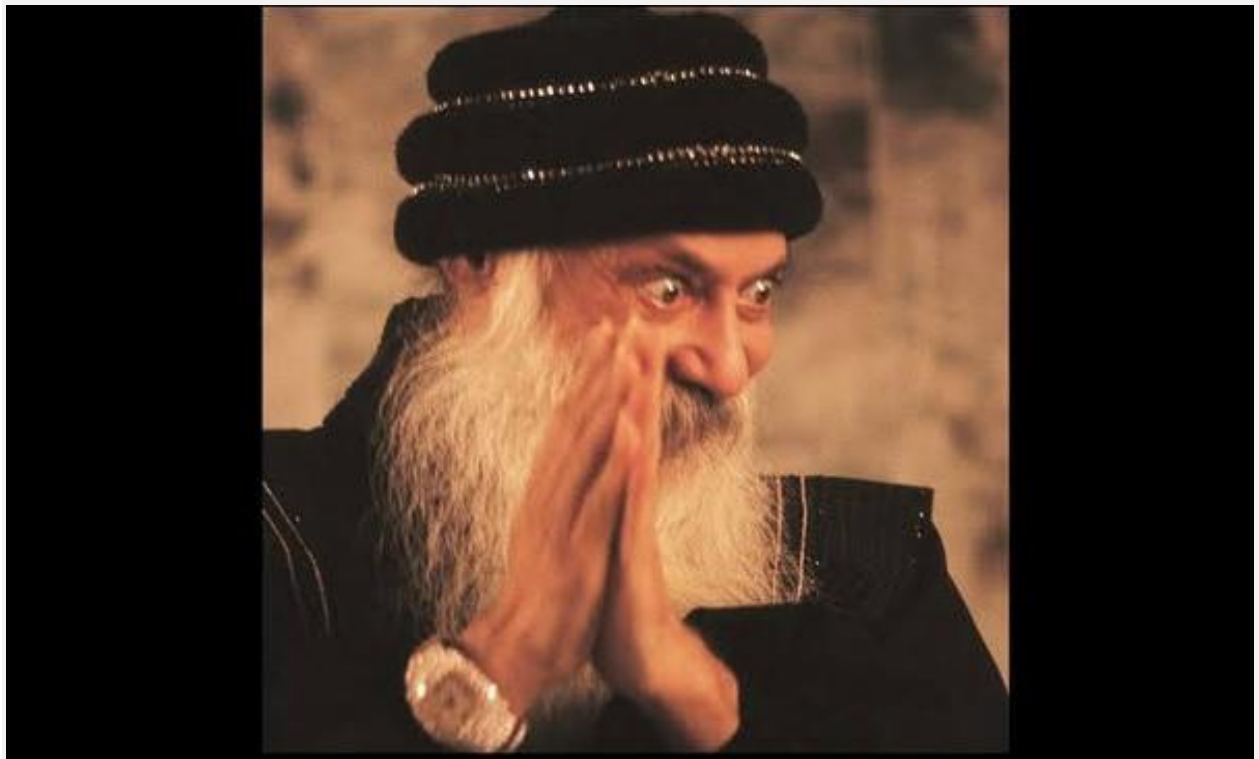
admitted: 'I must accept very frankly as a thus-far insoluble problem the present impossibility of distinguishing objectively between a healthy peak experience and a manic-attack.' What helps people not lose their minds when they dissolve their selves? Traditions — precisely what Maslow dismissed as unnecessary.

It is a noble goal to try and make education more 'integrated', more experiential, even more mystical. In practice, experiential and spiritual learning can be chaotic and anti-intellectual, it can promote emotion and experience over knowledge and expertise. Maslow lost patience with Esalen when the Gestalt therapist Fritz Perls disrupted one of his seminars, lying at his feet and wailing like a baby. He fumed: 'You know this place is seen as anti-intellectual? Why isn't there a library at Esalen?' His own attempt to run an Esalen-type course at his university didn't fare much better — a third of the students rejected his authority and set up their own encounter group. When he said they had learned nothing of humanistic psychology, one retorted 'who are you to tell us what's correct and what isn't?'

Maslow belatedly realized 'peak experiences' could actually make you a worse human being. He wrote:

*Out of the joy and wonder of his ecstasies and peak-experiences he may be tempted to seek them, ad hoc, and to value them exclusively, as the only or at least the highest goods of life, giving up other criteria of right and wrong. Focused on these wonderful subjective experiences,*

*he may run the danger of turning away from the world and from other people in his search for triggers to peak-experiences, any triggers. In a word, instead of being temporarily self-absorbed and inwardly searching, he may become simply a selfish person, seeking his own personal salvation, trying to get into "heaven" even if other people can't, and finally even perhaps using other people as triggers, as means to his sole end of higher states of consciousness. In a word, he may become not only selfish but also evil. [Farther Reaches of Human Nature]*



One thinks here of Osho, the bad-boy of the human potential movement, who ran an international criminal organization that lied, defrauded, stole, abused and tried to murder people, while claiming to build a spiritual utopia. But he was a 'self-actualized peaker' —



therefore a law unto himself, beyond good and evil. Who are we to hold him to account?

What the Nietzschean cult of supermen lacks, above all, is a sense of Christian charity and duty to others. Instead, your highest duty is to yourself, to follow your own bliss. This is not always a healthy philosophy. Maslow came to realize this, declaring at Esalen: 'I really don't care much about helping a privileged few to lead happier lives on the edge of catastrophe.'

In conclusion, I feel Maslow's story points to a deeper issue at the heart of empirical spirituality (i.e my culture). Psychology and empirical spirituality dismissed religious traditions and communities, and created free-floating rootless self-actualizers. It failed to create communities to replace churches — Esalen is the only long-lasting institution in the movement, and it's more of a country club than a church.

Empirical spirituality can create a form of scientific theocracy, with psychologists preaching homilies while pretending their doctrines are empirical fact, and therefore unanswerable. That can have very dangerous consequences, as we saw in the eugenic religion of the United States and Nazi Germany.

I *do* believe that psychology, moral philosophy and spirituality can engage in useful dialogues — look at psychology's dialogue with Stoicism, for example, or Buddhism, or Taoism, or indeed

Christianity, or at the dialogue between psychedelic science and older mystical traditions. But we need to be humble in this dialogue, careful when we venture from Is to Ought, sensitive to what our scientific models leave out, wary when we imply someone different to our model is somehow unfit or not 'fully human'. I am not arguing for relativism or the rejection of any ideas of 'good / bad', 'healthy / unhealthy'. I am saying we need a gentle ethics, a humble ethics, a humane ethics.

Maslow wrote:

*One of the most irritating aspects of positivistic science is its overconfidence, I might call it, or perhaps its lack of humility. The pure, nineteenth-century scientist looks like a babbling child to sophisticated people just because he is so cocky, so self-assured, just because he doesn't know how little he knows, how limited scientific knowledge is when compared with the vast unknown.*

Well said.

*Here's a page from Maslow's journal, from January 31 1970, where he discusses eugenics:*



NS  
 January 31 *Comment*

I haven't dared even to myself to accept some of the thinking-thru of taking our own evolution upon our own shoulders. But I find myself secretly entertaining all sorts of "cold-blooded" possibilities, & now it's precipitated by the full acceptance that we must evolve ourselves, as we take over from nature & natural selection, & be just as neutral & unfeeling & nonanthropocentric as nature is. I think back to that day in Washington Square with the Manuels when I saw the drug users as performing a kind of biologically unselfish act, a sort of *noblesse oblige* for the good of the species & voluntarily killing themselves "for the good of the gene pool." And the private political thoughts I have (& millions of others must have secretly) about "It's better *not* to give foreign aid to any country that won't start birth control." Or the lurking thought that wars & famines are after all doing nature's work, that the world would be better off if half the people alive died. Or my reluctance to abolish capital punishment for those who would hurt the gene pool, or even those who would culturally hurt their children. Sooner or later, after the catastrophes force us to pace the overpopulation, we'll stop with all the crap about more food, or better strains of rice (which just *produce* more people). How can we give up on humanitarianism? But how can we *not* permit voluntary (or maybe involuntary) euthanasia & suicide? One day we'll have to talk about the exposure or killing of monster-babies, or even of healthy *surplus* babies. How about selective breeding? Who dares mention it? What shall we do with the frustrated maternal impulse? Perhaps a *real* reason for multiple families is so that 6 or 8 people could share the one precious baby! How could I do without Jeannie? What would my life have been without Ann & Ellen? But come to think of it, they *were* shared, & that was OK & even desirable for everyone.

How about facing the problem of cutting down India's population whether they agree or not, e.g., by medicating the water supply? How about paying for sterilization?

This all ties in with the aggridant question, which I don't yet dare bring up publicly except with aggridants. If aggridance really is a *general* superiority (all desirable traits correlate positively), what then? If these are genetically better & worse, what to do about it? Anything? The genetic forces are so weak that it might be better to do nothing at all until social injustice (inequal opportunity) is abolished. But *then* it will certainly have to come up. Meanwhile I can keep my thought to myself & do battlefield surgery, i.e., what energy I do have goes to the strong ones rather than to