

NEW INTRODUCTION: RELIGIONS,
VALUES, AND PEAK-EXPERIENCES
(New Edition)l

Abraham H. Maslow
W. P. Laughlin Foundation

Since this book was first written, there has been much turmoil in the world and, therefore, much to learn. Several of the lessons I have learned are relevant here, certainly in the sense that they are helpful supplements to the main thesis of the book. Or perhaps I should call them warnings about over-extreme dangerous and one-sided *uses* of this thesis. Of course this is a standard hazard for thinkers who try to be holistic, integrative and inclusive. They learn inevitably that most people think atomistically, in terms of either-or, black-white, all in or all out, of mutual exclusiveness and separateness. A good example of what I mean is the mother who gave her son two ties for his birthday. As he put on one of them to please her, she asked sadly, "And why do you hate the other tie?"

*standard hazards
for holistic
thinkers*

I think I can best state my warning against polarization and dichotomizing by a historical approach. I see in the history of many organized religions a tendency to develop two extreme wings: the "mystical" and individual on the one hand, and the legalistic and organizational on the other. The profoundly and authentically religious person integrates these trends easily and automatically. The forms, rituals, ceremonies, and verbal formulae in which he was reared remain for him experientially rooted, symbolically meaningful, archetypal, unitive. Such a person may go through the same motions and behaviors as his more numerous co-religionists but he is never *reduced* to the behavioral, as most of them are. Most people lose or forget the subjectively religious

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main thesis

experience, and re-define Religions as a set of habits, behaviors, dogmas, forms, which at the extreme becomes entirely legalistic and bureaucratic, conventional, empty, and in the truest meaning of the word, anti-religious. The mystic experience, the illumination, the great awakening, along with the charismatic seer who started the whole thing, are forgotten, lost, or transformed into their opposites. Organized Religion, the churches, finally may become the major enemies of the religious experience and the religious experiencer. This is a main thesis of this book.

*merely-behavioral
versus
merely-
experiential*

But on the other wing, the mystical (or experiential) also has its traps which I have not stressed sufficiently. As the more Apollonian type can veer toward the extreme of being reduced to the merely-behavioral, so does the mystical type run the risk of being reduced to the merely-experiential. 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 sale end of higher states of consciousness. In a word, he may become not only selfish but also evil. My impression, from the history of mysticism, is that this trend can sometimes wind up in meanness, nastiness, loss of compassion, or even in the extreme of sadism.

dangers

further dangers

Another possible booby trap for the (polarizing) mystics throughout history has been the danger of needing to escalate the triggers, so to speak. That is, stronger and stronger stimuli are needed to produce the same response. If the *sole* good in life becomes the peak-experience, and if all means to this end become good, and if more peak-experiences are better than fewer, then one can *force* the issue, push actively, strive, and hunt, and fight for them. So they have often moved over into magic, into the secret and esoteric, into the exotic, the occult, the dramatic and effortful, the dangerous,

"I have found it useful to differentiate the subjective and naturalistic religious experience and attitude from the Institutionalized, conventional, organized Religions by using lower case for the former (calling it "small r religion") and capitalizing the R in "big R Religion."

the cultish, Healthy openness to the mysterious, the realistically humble recognition that we don't know much, the modest and grateful acceptance of gratuitous grace and of just plain good luck—all these can shade over into the anti-rational, the anti-empirical, the anti-scientific, the anti-verbal, the anti-conceptual. The peak-experience may then be exalted as the best or even the *only* path to knowledge, and thereby all the tests and verifications of the *validity* of the illumination may be tossed aside.

The possibility that the inner voices, the "revelations," may be mistaken, a lesson from history that should come through loud and clear, is denied, and there is then no way of finding out whether the voices within are the voices Of good or of evil. (George Bernard Shaw's *Saint Joan* confronts this problem.) Spontaneity (the impulses from our best self) gets confused with impulsivity and acting out (the impulses from our sick self) and there is then no way to tell the difference.

*difficulty of
discrimination*

Impatience (especially the built-in impatience of youth) dictates shortcuts of all kinds. Drugs, which can be helpful when wisely used, become dangerous when foolishly used. The sudden insight becomes "all" and the patient and disciplined "working through" is postponed or devalued. Instead of being "surprised by joy," "turning on" is scheduled, promised, advertised, sold, hustled into being, and can get to be regarded as a commodity. Sex-love, certainly one possible path to the experience of the sacred, can become mere "screwing," i.e., desacralized. More and more exotic, artificial, striving "techniques" may escalate further and further until they become *necessary* and until jadedness and impotence ensue.

*dangers of
short cuts*

The search for the exotic, the strange, the unusual, the uncommon has often taken the form of pilgrimages, of turning away from the world, the "Journey to the East," to another country or to a different Religion. The great lesson from the true mystics, from the Zen monks, and now also from the Humanistic and Transpersonal psychologists—that the sacred is *in* the ordinary, that it is to be found *in* one's daily life, in one's neighbors, friends, and family, in one's back yard, and that travel may be a *flight* from confronting the sacred—this lesson can be easily lost. To be looking elsewhere for miracles is to me a sure sign of ignorance that *everything* is miraculous.

*sacredness
in the
ordinary*

The rejection of a priestly caste who claimed to be exclusive custodians of a private hotline to the sacred was, in my opinion, a great step forward in the emancipation of mankind, and we have the mystics—among others—to thank for this

*danger in
distortion of
valid insight*

achievement. But this valid insight can also be used badly when dichotomized and exaggerated by foolish people. They can distort it into a rejection of the guide, the teacher, the sage, the therapist, the counselor, the elder, the helper along the path to self-actualization and the realm of Being. This is often a great danger and always an unnecessary handicap.

To summarize, the healthily Apollonian (which means integrated with the healthily Dionysian) can become pathologized into an extreme, exaggerated and dichotomized compulsive-obsessional sickness. But also the healthily Dionysian (which means integrated with the healthily Apollonian) can become pathologized at its extreme into hysteria, with all *its* symptoms."

*a priori
rationality
versus
experience-based
rationality*

Obviously, what I am suggesting here is a pervasively holistic attitude and way of thinking. Not only must the experiential be stressed and brought back into psychology and philosophy as an opponent of the merely abstract and abstruse, of the a priori, of what I have called "helium-filled words." It must then also be *integrated* with the abstract, and the verbal, i.e., we must make a place for "experientially-based concepts," and for "experientially-filled words," that is, for an experience-based rationality in contrast to the a priori rationality that we have come almost to identify with rationality itself.

*best
helpers
are
most human*

The same sort of thing is true for the relations between experientialism and social reform. Shortsighted people make them opposites, mutually exclusive. Of course, historically this has often happened and does today still happen in many. But it need not happen. It is a mistake, an atomistic error, an example of the dichotomizing and pathologizing that goes along with immaturity. The empirical fact is that self-actualizing people, our best experiencers, are also our most compassionate, our great improvers and reformers of society, our most *effective* fighters against injustice, inequality, slavery, cruelty, exploitation (and also our best fighters *for* excellence, effectiveness, competence). And it also becomes clearer and clearer that the best "helpers" are the most fully human persons. What I may call the bodhisattvic path is an *integration* of self-improvement and social zeal, i.e., the best way to become a better "helper" is to become a better person. But one necessary aspect of becoming a better person is *via* helping other people. So one must and can do both simulta-

*bodhisattvic
path*

4tCollnWilson's "Outsider" series will furnish all the examples necessary.

neously. (The question "Which comes first?" is an atomistic question.)

In this context I would like to refer to my demonstration in the Preface to the revised edition (1970) of my *Motivation and Personality* that normative zeal is *not* incompatible with scientific objectivity, but can be integrated with it, eventuating in a higher form of objectivity, i.e., the Taoistic.

*higher form
of objectivity*

What this all adds up to is this: small r religion is quite compatible, at the higher levels of personal development, with rationality, with science, with social passion. Not only this, but it can, in principle, quite easily integrate the healthily animal, material and selfish with the naturalistically transcendent, spiritual and axiological. (See my "A Theory of Metamotivation: The Biological Rooting of the Value-Life," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1967, 7, 93-127.)

For other reasons also, I now consider that the book was too imbalanced toward the individualistic and too hard on groups, organizations and communities. Even within these last six or seven years we have learned not to think of organizations as necessarily bureaucratic as we have learned more about humanistic, need-fulfilling kinds of groups, from, e.g., the research in Organization Development and Theory Y management, the rapidly accumulating experience with T-groups, encounter groups and personal-growth groups, the successes of the Synanon community, of the Israeli Kibbutzim, etc. (See my listing of the Eupsychian Network, an appendix in the revised edition [1968] of my *Toward a Psychology of Being*.)

*organizations
not necessarily
bureaucratic*

As a matter of fact, 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. And of course it has also been known for decades that humanness and specieshood in the infant is only a potentiality and must be actualized by the society.

My study of the failure of most Utopian efforts has taught me to ask the basic questions themselves in a more practicable and researchable way. "How good a society does human nature permit?" and, "How good a human nature does society permit?" (For the implications of this way of

*basic
questions*

asking the questions, see my *Eupsychian Management: A Journal* [1965] and my paper "Some Fundamental Questions that Face the Normative Social Psychologist," *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1968, 8.)

*greater
considerations*

Finally, I would now add to the peak-experience material a greater consideration, not only of nadir-experiences, the psycholytic therapy of Grof,⁴ confrontations with and relieves from death, post-surgical visions, etc., but also of the plateau-experience. This is serene and calm, rather than poignantly emotional, climactic, autonomic response to the miraculous, the awesome, the sacralized, the Unitive, the Bvalues. So far as I can now tell, the high-plateau experience *always* has a noetic and cognitive element, which is not always true for peak-experiences, which can be purely and exclusively emotional. It is far more voluntary than peak-experiences are. One can learn to see in this Unitive way almost at will. It then becomes a witnessing, an appreciating, what one might call a serene, cognitive blissfulness which can, however, have a quality of casualness and lounging about it.

*comparison of
peak and
plateau
experiences*

There is more an element of surprise, and of disbelief, and of esthetic shock in the peak-experience, more the quality of having such an experience for the *first time*. I have pointed out elsewhere that the aging body and nervous system is less capable of tolerating a really shaking peak-experience. I would add here that maturing and aging means also some loss of first-time-ness, of novelty, of sheer unpreparedness and surprise.

Peak- and plateau-experiences differ also in their relations to death. The peak-experience can often meaningfully itself be called a "little death," a rebirth in various senses. The less intense plateau-experience is more often experienced as pure enjoyment and happiness, as, let's say, a mother sitting quietly looking, by the hour, at her baby playing and marveling, wondering, philosophizing, not quite believing. She can experience this as a very pleasant, continuing, contemplative experience rather than as something akin to a climactic explosion which then ends.

^fShortly after the publication of this edition, we were informed that a systematic account of Stanislaw Grof's psycholytic therapy will be published in Spring 1971 by Science & Behavior Books, Palo Alto, Calif.-Ed.

[&]This is a very brief anticipation of a more detailed study of "plateau experiences" (R. Johnson, Asrani), and the "Easy State" (Asrani), which I hope to write soon.

Older people, making their peace with death, are more apt to be profoundly touched with (sweet) sadness and tears at the contrast between their own mortality and the eternal quality of what sets off the experience. This contrast can make far more poignant and precious what is being witnessed, e.g., "The surf will be here forever and you will soon be gone. So hang on to it; appreciate it; be fully conscious of it. Be grateful for it. You are lucky!"

*aging and
peak experiences*

Very important today in a topical sense is the realization that plateau-experiencing can be achieved, learned, earned by long hard work. It can be meaningfully aspired to. But I don't know of any way of bypassing the necessary maturing, experiencing, living, learning. All of this takes time. A transient glimpse is certainly possible in the peak-experiences which may, after all, come sometimes to anyone. But, so to speak, to take up residence on the high plateau of Unitive consciousness, that is another matter altogether. That tends to be a lifelong effort. It should not be confused with the Thursday evening turn-on that many youngsters think of as *the* path to transcendence. For that matter, it should not be confused with *any* single experience. The "spiritual disciplines," both the classical ones and the new ones that keep on being discovered these days, all take time, work, discipline, study, commitment.

*conditions basic
to high-plateau
experiencing*

There is much more to say about these states which are clearly relevant to the life of transcendence and the transpersonal, and to experiencing life at the level of Being. All I wish to do here with this brief mention is to correct the tendency of some to identify experiences of transcendence as only dramatic, orgasmic, transient, "peaky," like a moment on the top of Mt. Everest. There is also the high plateau where one can *stay* "turned-on."

If I were to summarize both the book and my remarks in this Preface in a few words, I would say it this way: Man has a higher and transcendent nature, and this is part of his essence, i.e., his biological nature as a member of a species which has evolved. This means to me something which I had better spell out clearly, namely, that this is a flat rejection of the Sartre-type of Existentialism, i.e., its denial of specieshood, and of a biological human nature, and *its* refusal to face the existence of the biological sciences. It is true that the word Existentialism is by now used in so many different ways by different people, even in contradictory ways, that this indictment does not apply to **all** who use the label. But just *because* of this diversity of usage, the word

*flat rejection of
Sartre-type of
Existentialism*

*"project" is
to become
a man*

is now almost useless, in my opinion, and had better be dropped. The trouble is that I have no good alternative label to offer. If only there were some way to say simultaneously: "Yes, man is in a way his own project and he does make himself. But also there are limits upon what he can make himself into. The 'project' is predetermined biologically for all men; it is to become a man. He cannot adopt as his project for himself to become a chimpanzee. Or even a female. Or even a baby." The right label would have to combine the humanistic, the transpersonal, and the transhuman. Besides, it would have to be experiential (phenomenological), at least in its basing. It would have to be holistic rather than dissecting. And it would have to be empirical rather than a priori, etc" etc.

The reader who is especially interested in continuing developments along the lines of this book may be referred to the recently established (1969) *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* (P.O. Box 4437, Stanford, California 94305) and to the older weekly *Manas* (P. O. Box 32112, El Sereno Station, Los Angeles, California 90032).