

# Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Abraham Maslow was one of the founders, in 1962, of what has become known as humanistic psychology. He conceived 'a positive theory of human motivations' organized hierarchically into a sequence of five salient needs, each of which rises in turn to dominate the organism and then falls away in proportion to its satisfaction. Thus the early and primitive human organism must first satisfy the needs for food, drink and exercise before any other concerns can become important. When physiological needs gain some measure of gratification, a second stage arises, a need for security, order and protection. One thinks of Eliza Doolittle's song in the musical *My Fair Lady*, 'Wouldn't it be Lovely', where she imagines a room, a fire, an armchair and plenty to eat. Later in the same song she imagines a third set of needs, for belongingness and love, of someone gentle who would 'take good care of me'. In the fourth stage, the need for self-esteem, prestige, status and acknowledgement arises – all of which are appealed to in the course of teaching Eliza to speak like a lady.

Finally, we seek self-actualization, the desire to be everything we are capable of becoming. Maslow made a special study of self-actualizing persons in history and contemporary society. He found them to be more efficient in perceiving reality, more accepting of themselves and others, more spontaneous in their relationships, with a tendency to centre on problems and their solution; to have a quality of privacy and detachment, an autonomy from cultural influences, a freshness of appreciation, a capacity for transcendence and oceanic feelings, a deep identification with humanity, more profound human attachments, a humorous and democratic character structure, and a rare capacity to resolve moral dichotomies and dilemmas.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs appears to reconcile Freud with his disciples: while Freud stressed physiology and security in the early years, Reich stressed love and attachment, Adler the need for self-esteem and Jung the search for self-fulfilment. Similarly, the schema also makes sense of many neurotic disturbances: compulsive overeating, bed-wetting, *anorexia nervosa* all appear as confusions of need levels, while complexes become buried 'lower needs' never sufficiently satisfied and impeding the need being consciously sought. Personality disturbance can be regarded as the maladjustment of needs. The authoritarian personality acts as if even more status and authority can assure his belongingness and security. Psychotherapy may be seen as a 'regression in the service of the hierarchy' as the patient's early concerns with security, belongingness and esteem are reconstructed and reaffirmed in an ascending relationship to the therapist.

The later Maslow was increasingly concerned with synergy, the process by which one need (or person) can combine optimally with another (see Map 42). The fundamental principle of the need hierarchy must therefore be synergistic. The self-actualizing person seeks fulfilment in a way that keeps other needs (and other persons) optimally satisfied. Developing persons do not, therefore, 'outgrow' or become 'superior' to lesser needs and less developed persons, rather, life is organized to satisfy all needs save the one which is insatiable, and which is given full head, that is the need to reach beyond oneself to the very frontiers of possibility and realize unknown potentials.

Unluckily for Maslow, his ideas became caught up in the counter-culture of the sixties in the United States and were interpreted in the tradition of 'positive thinking' and 'spiritual technology'. The man himself told the hippies who came to see him to find some challenging work to do. Self-actualization, he explained, was a description beyond themselves.

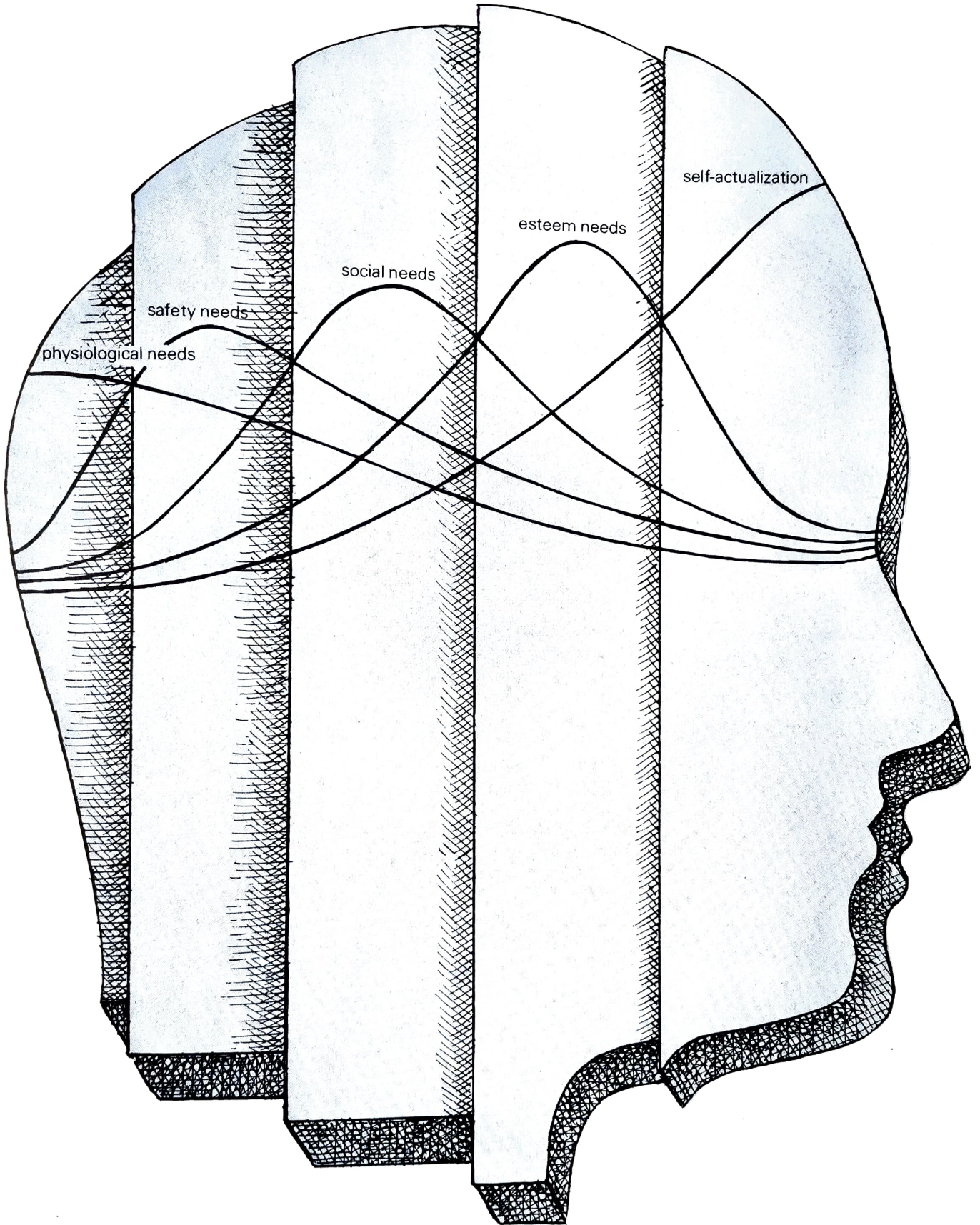
*As part of the process of psychosocial development, Abraham Maslow envisages man as growing through a sequence of five stages each dominated by a particular set of needs. Firstly, by Physiological Needs such as those for food, drink or exercise; secondly by Safety Needs (security, order, protection); thirdly, by Belonging Needs (sociability, acceptance, need-love); fourthly by Esteem Needs (status, prestige, acknowledgement); and fifthly by Self-actualization Needs (personal fulfilment and growth). The peak of the earlier stage must be passed before the next and 'higher' need emerges to dominate the organism. This sequence characterizes not only growth from childhood to maturity, but the growth of cultures from subsistence to free self-expression. For this reason an individual's stage cannot be used as an automatic value judgement on personal worth, but is rather indicative of a benign social environment.*

*It is important to note that all needs are simultaneously present (or latent) in all persons at all times. The sequence refers to the strength of the need within the conscious purposes of the mind. Sudden emotional or physical deprivation will cause 'lower' needs to reawaken. Maslow's approach can include many psychologies, from behaviourism, which has anchored itself in physiological drives, to the more humanistic approaches concerned with creativity and self-fulfilment.*

## MAP REFERENCES

Hierarchical view, 21, 38, 41, 47, 55; Humanistic psychology, 2, 10, 13, 35, 38, 42, 47, 51, 58–60; Self-actualization, see also consensual validation, confirmation, 34–7, 51, 59–60; Synergy, 42–3, 51, 58–60.

NUMBER, VARIETY AND RELATIVE SALIENCY OF WANTS



PSYCHOLOGICAL DEVELOPMENT →