

THE GREAT IDEAS ONLINE

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Philosophy is Everybody's Business

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If there is some end of the things we do . . . will not knowledge of it, have a great influence on life? Shall we not, like archers who have a mark to aim at, be more likely to hit upon what we should? If so, we must try, in outline at least, to determine what it is. —Aristotle

THE IDEAL OF HAPPINESS IN THE PRESENT

V. J. MCGILL

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Contemporary philosophers have not been concerned to develop new theories of happiness, though they have contributed valuable criticism and fresh substantiation of parts of the old theories, some examples of which have already been cited. Their energies have been devoted to other subjects. Popular books about happiness, which might be called “philosophical,” it is true, appear with predictable frequency. They offer advice as to how to achieve happiness, which may be helpful to some people but do not provide anything like a general grounded theory of human nature and choice in relation to opportunities. They sometimes show insights and perspectives, but they are not systematic and do not seem to contribute much to our subject.

In the meantime, the social sciences, psychology, and psychotherapy have undergone great expansion, and are giving more systematic attention to goals and normative considerations. Anthropologists who study societies in which standards are very different from each other and from our own are eventually tempted to make comparative value judgments of a sort implying that one conception of the good life is truer than another. If they are willing to see the gifts of Western civilization—including medicine—transform the values of technologically backward societies, they can scarcely take the view that diverse ideals of a successful life are incomparable, or that the scientist, as scientist, can make no value judgments.

The historian, the sociologist, and the psychologist also are confronted with the same problem. They sometimes announce a program of sticking to facts and eschewing all valuations. Does this mean that, as scientists, they are willing to devote their knowledge and skills to any task the authorities assign and pay for? In effect, this would be anything but value-neutral. In some areas of psychology and the social sciences, at any rate, value-judgments appear to be unavoidable. A view of the good life is implied, or sometimes explicitly elaborated.

In this final chapter we shall confine our attention to the most important current development of the theory of the good life, i.e., the good-enough, the better, and the best or ideal life. The disciplines that are obliged, more than any others, to say what they mean by an improvement of the individual's general condition, and hence what they mean by a satisfactory or ideal life, are personality theory and psychotherapy. Both are concerned with undesirable symptoms and their removal, but their interest often goes beyond this negative result to a positive conception of "mental health," which is close to what we have been discussing under the name of "happiness." The fact that this conception is logically connected with medical therapy or with objective tests and controlled studies gives it a significance lacking in earlier theories.

We shall begin with a review of the ideas of leading psychologists and psychotherapists who represent what is called the "self-actualization" theory of personality development and the aim of psychotherapy. We shall see that some of these authors use "happiness" as an equivalent of self-actualization, that others apparently hesitate to do so because there is a tendency, especially in English-speaking countries, to equate happiness with hedonism, and that, in all cases, their description of self-actualization resembles, significantly, the description of happiness given by Aristotle and by self-realization authors (see Chapter 7). Next, we briefly note objections to the self-actualization theory and the defense that can be made. Alternative theories of the aim of psychotherapy also will be mentioned. It is contended that, whatever technical advantages they may have, they are concerned only with partial goods or with therapeutic means to full self-actualization. At the end, we shall summarize a number of respects in which the three theories—eudaemonism, self-realization, and self-actualization—appear to agree.

THE CONCEPT OF SELF-ACTUALIZATION

Kurt Goldstein, who was the first to employ the term "self-actualization," carries to a holistic extreme a tendency found in all

self-actualization authors. They all reject the mechanistic idea that personality is wholly the product of successive linkages of responses into larger and larger wholes, by conditioning or any other piecemeal process; and insist that it acts more or less as an integrated whole. Goldstein, however, maintains that the only drive “is to actualize the individual capacities as fully as possible.” The reflexes, local responses, and separated drives that are supposed to interact to form the unity of the organism or of personality are wholly incapable of doing so. These part-processes either are artifacts of the laboratory or else arise in a catastrophic situation where personality breaks down and is disorganized. “The concept of different separate drives,” Goldstein says,

is based on observation of the sick, of young children, and of animals under experimental conditions—that is, on observations made under circumstances in which some activities of the organism are isolated from the whole. This is the case in pathology; it is the case in children because the organism of the child lacks a center; and it is the case in experiments with animals because of the experimental conditions. . . . The impression that there are separate drives arises easily . . . when the organism is living under inadequate conditions. If the human being is forced to live in a state of hunger for a long time, so that he is forced to relieve this feeling, it disturbs the actualization of his whole personality. Then it appears as if he were under a hunger drive. The same may be the case with sex. A normal organism, however, is able to repress the hunger feeling or the sex urge if it has something very important to do, the neglect of which would bring the whole organism into danger.

The unity of personality is not imposed on it by external stimulation, in Goldstein’s view. To a great extent, normal integration or “ordered behavior” is self-produced, suggesting at times that an Aristotelian entelechy is at work, and, indeed, Goldstein calls the governing principle “actualization” or “self-actualization.” The organism, he says, “is determined by the . . . tendency to come to terms with the requirements of the outer world in the best possible condition of the whole.” The influence coming from the outer world “does not occur by direct causation,” but “by way of the functional organization of the whole.”

It is easy to see that, though ordered or integrated behavior of the whole person is, for Goldstein, the mark of normality and success, the integration is for the sake of “self-actualization.” All the “instinctive” and voluntary actions by which it comes to terms with its environment successfully “make possible the organism’s actualization of its capacities.” The only drive “is to actualize individual capacities as fully as possible.”

Intermediate between the holism of Goldstein and the atomistic behaviorism of Dollard and Miller is the integrative theory of G. W. Allport. He is far from reducing all drives to one, as Goldstein does, and he also avoids the reduction of drives to the biological, which characterizes Freudian and behaviorist theories. His conception of “functional autonomy,” as we have noted in connection with J. S. Mill’s similar theory, explains how cultural and social drives may become independent of biological needs. His theory is mainly genetic. “Integration,” he says, “means that from disparate units of behavior larger and more exclusive integers are formed.” The units of integration vary in scope and complexity, forming a hierarchy, viz.: conditioned reflexes, habits, traits, “selves” (in James’s sense of plural selves belonging to a normal individual), and total personality. Simplest of all are the conditioned reflexes, and most complex is the all-embracing total personality, which is never completely integrated; the intervening structures are progressively larger in scope and complexity.

For Allport, however, the integration is only a part of “growth,” only one aspect in the development of personality. Other aspects are “self-esteem,” “functional autonomy,” “extension of self,” “self-objectification: insight and humor,” and “personal Weltanschauung.” He points out, too, that it may be achieved at the expense of richness of personality and suggests that it would be better to go on growing, though embroiled in conflict, than to be a well-integrated mediocrity. “Growth motives,” he points out in another book,

maintain tension in the interest of distant and often unattainable goals. As such they distinguish human from animal becoming. By growth motives we refer to the hold that ideals gain upon the process of development. Long range purposes, subjective values, comprehensive systems of interest are all of this order.

Like Goldstein, Allport rejects pleasure as the key to motivation. Pleasure, he states, in good Aristotelian fashion, is “the glow which attends the integration of the person while pursuing or contemplating the attainment of goals. ... It is not a motivating force but a by-product of otherwise motivated activity.” And, again like Goldstein, Allport sees integration—the hallmark of normality—as a phase of the over-all process of growth or actualization of capacities.

Another variant of self-actualization is expressed by Nevitt Sanford, when he says that “the psychological approach to personal problems . . .

rests upon the psychology of personality development and seeks to conceptualize the goals of such development—differentiation, wholeness, autonomy, utilization of potentialities, and the like. Psychological well being, from this point of view, does not mean absence of disease but rather a state of relatively advanced development. Psychological maladjustment is conceived of as a relative failure with respect to diverse goals of development. Psychological analysis ... is an attempt to assess the developmental status of the individual with particular attention to the potentialities for and the obstacles to further growth. ... In his practice of psychotherapy, the psychologist seeks, most essentially, to further the growth of the individual, to help him to become what he can.

Opposing the drive-reduction theory that man acts only to reduce tensions, and the view that he acts only to restore an equilibrium that has been disturbed, Sanford argues that there are dynamic higher needs as well. “Growth and development,” involving “expansion and increasing complexity,” he says, “are certainly the best candidates for the status of natural tendencies.” Sanford also emphasizes the contrast between the state of stable integration, which on a simple level of development may be free from conflict, with the process of continual growth and enterprise, which cannot escape conflict. The latter gives a more reliable measure of health and soundness, since a growing person can bear the strains and assimilate the rapid changes of modern life, while the person of stable integration is comparatively inflexible and without many resources.

Lawrence S. Kubie practically defines mental health as high resistance to stress and “freedom and flexibility to learn through experience, to change and to adapt to changing circumstance,” and we find the same emphasis in many prominent psychologists and psychotherapists. The keynote for some is “ability to learn,” for others it is “continuous growth” or development of the “whole man,” “productiveness,” or “actualization,” but their idea of soundness or excellence in human activity seem to widely overlap or merge.

Robert W. White contends that the popular ideals of mental health, adjustment, and emotional maturity have not “been derived from the contemplation of successful life-patterns. They all spring from the mental hospital and psychiatric consulting room, from studies of sick aspects of sick people. For the most part they are simply the logical opposites of the things that are troubling people, things like dependence, inferiority, competitiveness, a harsh superego.” These ideals consequently get expressed in abstract formulae, which do not relate to the concrete exigencies and decision-points of an adult life. A finding that an individual has complete faith in himself, for example, gives ‘little hint of the problems involved in being happy

and creative in one particular life-pattern with its enduring commitments and inescapable restrictions as well as its rewards and its changes.”

“It is now generally recognized,” White says, “that emotional disorders can be traced to blocks in the learning process. . . . These blocks are produced by defenses against anxiety so that development can be resumed. It is implicit in this account that normal growth signifies unblocked learning, a process of continuous change.” The “growth trends” that characterize “the process of natural growth,” in White’s view, have some resemblances, as Sanford notes, to the phases of normal personality development in Allport’s account. They are: The Stabilizing of Ego Identity—the finding out who you are and what your role is—The Freeing of Personal Relationships—the overcoming of anxiety and defensiveness, which enlarges the ability to form friendships—The Deepening of Interests—the growing capacity to become absorbed in and fascinated with external objects on their own account, or disinterestedly—The Humanizing of Values—increasing awareness and activation by human values.

A. H. Maslow has written widely on motivation and personality, and is known especially for his efforts to give cognitive and other higher needs due place in psychological explanation. He agrees with Goldstein that there are powerful human urges to upset and go beyond a present equilibrium as well as to restore an equilibrium that has been disturbed. His emphasis on the distinction between “coping” behavior, which is “instrumental, adaptive, functional, purposive,” and “expressive” behavior, which is nothing of the sort, is especially important for our theme. To overlook or slight the expressive side of our activity in psychology is to leave out the consummatory phase and all forms of enjoyment. Unfortunately, Maslow says, contemporary psychology has been far more concerned with practical results and technology, with means, than with ends.

It has notoriously little to say . . . about beauty, art, fun, play, wonder, love, happiness, and other ‘useless’ reactions. It is therefore of little or no service to the artist, the musician, the poet, the novelist, to the humanist, the connoisseur, the axiologist, the theologian, or to other end—or enjoyment-oriented individuals. [It] offers little to the modern man whose most desperate need is a naturalistic or humanistic value system.

Maslow sets himself to fill the gap and, as a matter of fact, is able to cite many allies—psychologists who are going in the same direction.

“Various recent developments,” Maslow says, “have shown the necessity for the postulation of some sort of positive growth or self-actualization tendency within the organism, which is different from its conserving, equilibrating, or homeostatic tendency, as well as from the tendency to respond to impulses from the outside world. This kind of tendency to growth or self-actualization, in one or another vague form, has been postulated by thinkers as diverse as Aristotle and Bergson, and by many other philosophers. Among psychiatrists, psychoanalysts, and psychologists it has been found necessary by Goldstein, Rank, Jung, Horney, Fromm, May, and Rogers.” Under Maslow’s direction, a study was made of the healthiest 1% of a college population, negatively selected on the basis of standard tests, and positively, by indications of self-actualization. This “syndrome” was, roughly and tentatively: “the full use and exploitation of talents, capacities, potentialities, etc.” People of this sort “seem to be fulfilling themselves and to be doing the best that they are capable of doing, reminding us of Nietzsche’s exhortation, ‘Become what thou art!’ They are people who have developed or are developing to the full stature of which they are capable.” Many of these potentialities are peculiar to individuals, but others are shared by the group. It would seem, however, that much more clarity is needed in drawing this distinction.

The headings under which the group of self-realization students are described, which often overlap, and need at least a catchword of explanation, are: More Efficient Perception of Reality and More Comfortable Relations with It—perceiving what is given, rather than one’s own hopes, anxieties, etc.; and hence—Acceptance (Self, Others, Nature)—relative lack of guilt, shame and defensiveness, etc.; Spontaneity—motivation rooted in the need for “character growth and character expression”; Problem Centering—centered on problems rather than on the ego, with wide frame of reference; The Quality of Detachment; The Need for Privacy; Autonomy; Independence of Culture and Environment—rewards, status, honors are less important than “self-development and inner growth”; Continued Freshness of Appreciation; The Mystic Experience—ability to detach oneself momentarily from the noise and struggle; *Gemeinschafts-gefühl*—the feeling of sympathy and identification with human beings as such; Interpersonal Relations—deeper feelings of the sort; Democratic Character Structure—humility and honest respect for others; Discrimination Between Means and Ends—generally seeks ends, and is not confused about the distinction; Philosophical, Unhostile Sense of Humor; Creativeness; Resistance to Enculturation—ability to keep a little aloof from the culture in which one is enclosed.

We have reviewed all these particulars because Maslow’s account

of the self-actualizing man is the most complete one we know, and because it illustrates best the tendency of the picture of the normal man to become a picture of the ideal man, even if this is not the author's intent. The gratifications of the self-actualizing man, it might be added, tend to the maximum on all levels of actualization, and it is clear that the ideal man is a "happy" man too. But not in the sense of hedonism at all. The ideal belongs in the broad tradition of eudaemonism and the self-realization theory. Without access to Maslow's materials, it is a little difficult to see how all the traits he lists, of which some indication has been given above, fit together with plausible consistency. The self-actualizing person, for example, is said to be centered on objects and problems rather than on the ego, and yet he is more concerned to achieve self-development or personal growth than anything else. Perhaps what is meant is that he cares for objects that will, in fact, enable him to grow, for to take self-development as thematic, as the end-in-view, might well impair efficiency, which requires absorption in the object, as Maslow himself clearly implies.

Like the other self-actualization authors we have discussed, Erich Fromm rejects hedonism. "Pleasure cannot be a criterion of value," he says, "since some people derive pleasure from submission and not from freedom . . . from hate and not from love, from exploitation and not from productive work." In its place he elaborates a humanistic ethics, in which actualization of man's potentialities—realization of his productive power to create material things, works of art and science and especially, to create and recreate himself—is the same as virtue. Fromm says:

Productiveness is man's ability to use his powers to realize the potentialities inherent in him. If we say we must use his powers we imply that he must be free and not dependent on someone else who controls his powers. We imply, furthermore, that he is guided by reason . . . that he knows what they are, how to use them, and what to use them for. Productiveness means that he experiences himself as the embodiment of his powers as the "actor"; that he feels himself one with his powers . . . that they are not masked from him.

In self-actualization theories, there is a natural tendency for the normal to become the ideal; since to be normal means to become oneself, to realize one's true worth, and this cannot be much less than the accomplishment of happiness. According to Fromm, "happiness is an achievement brought about by man's inner productiveness and not a gift of the gods. Happiness and joy are not the satisfaction of a need springing from a physiological or psychological lack; they are not the relief from tension but the accompaniment of all productive activity, in thought, feeling, and action." While joy belongs to a single act, happiness may be regarded as "a

continuous or integrated experience of joy.” In realizing his potentialities the individual spends his energies while increasing them; he “burns without being consumed.” Happiness does not exclude pain and grief, but only depression and a sense of worthlessness; it can grow from the former as it is destroyed by the latter. “*Happiness is the criterion of excellence in the art of living, of virtue in the meaning it has in humanistic ethics.*”

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Hello Max,

I now have an iPad that always goes where ever I go. What I find very useful is to open up the weekly journal in iBooks, which then automatically stores the essay. I now have issue 601 to the current on my iPad to read and reread whenever I have a moment or in some waiting room. I don't mind waiting around any more since I can always put the time to good use.

All the best,

Herminio

Hi Max!

I am loving my study of the Great Books! I have a buddy who lives not too far from me who has been into them for ages!!!! we have been getting together for discussion once a month for the last 4 months. His wife is a gourmet cook. That coupled with good, solid argument and discussion makes for a very profitable and enjoyable evening. We are getting thru the *Apology* and *Crito*, by application and reference. We will be making our way to *Republic I & II* soon. Is there a way to get the great books online so as to be able to print out the readings in order to mark them up? The last thing I want to do is to deface my books!!!!

Thanks again for a great website and for your kindness to me.

Your friend,

Alfonse

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