

We all have needs. That's another thing we all have in common. Due to my lack of knowledge about psychology, but also for the sake of familiarity, I now wish to discuss Maslow's hierarchy of needs, if only to improve upon our conception of the person through something that is fairly well known. It's not really important for our purposes what may be the causes of these needs.

There are, according to Maslow, eight levels of needs. The first four levels he calls deficiency needs, and these needs are generally pretty straightforward:

First, there are physiological needs. Every single animal needs to eat. We are animals. We need to eat. There are some serious implications of this which I will describe in a while. We also need to drink. If we do neither, we will die. We also need to sleep. I don't know if we can die if we don't sleep, but we'd probably go crazy at least. We might do crazy things like try to molest adolescent witnesses to the murders we're supposed to be investigating, or we may hallucinate and create an alternate personality, who *isn't* a murderer.¹ More than likely, we'd sleep before we'd die of sleeplessness, despite what insomniacs might think. Apparently, insomniacs' dreams are so vivid they don't know when they sleep. This need for sleep implies that we need shelter, as well. Because shelter lets us sleep, silly. Especially in our country. No doubt homeless people have more trouble sleeping than I do. But insomniacs really don't know what's going on. Incidentally, insomnia is at least partially tied to our bedding itself. Is it comfortable enough? It is clean enough? And the like. Shopping time.

Maslow lists sex in this list, and I think I may have to disagree with this one. Speaking as one who gets very little – sex that is...it's a moral choice – I have not died, and I have only experienced very mild bouts of insanity, which I can usually keep under control. Now I can't speak for the ascetics – who *are* crazy. Maybe going without it completely, if You know what I mean, makes us totally crazy, like sleep-deprivation. Not doing something about this need, or not giving into this instinct (depending on Your favourite psychologist) may indeed cause enough problems that we can no longer function as

¹ Translator's Note: These references are to then minorly successful films that Hass stupidly assumed would transcend their era. The fact that the lay person cannot recognize the plot descriptions shows how wrong he was.

members of society. Still I am somewhat skeptical that it deserves the same ranking as eating, drinking and sleeping. We are talking about the release here, by the way, not about relationships as such. Just meaningless sex. However, I can say that it is good for us to get some, and that is a trait of the entire species. It is certainly as natural as anything else, and those who seek to repress it or put it down are ridiculous. As I see no reason for denying that we are biological creatures with limits in other areas, I see no reason for denying it here, despite our rather Victorian scruples about it. But more on that later. I have jumped ahead of myself.²

How did we come up with these 'base urges,' anyway? I mean it's crap like this that makes Nietzsche appealing; I hope everyone understands that. I mean, if our instinctual desires are bad, are sinful, are base, are low, are whatever, shouldn't we all just die? I mean, how is hunger not one of these instinctual desires? Of course it is. But man cannot live by earthly bread alone...and a prophet starving himself for a ludicrous amount of time – in a desert – is a good example for people to follow. What if someone took that literally? But if hunger is okay to satisfy, maybe then we can satisfy other things, like the urge to fuck something. We can't just say 'instincts are bad, overcome them and ignore them,' or 'control them to a ridiculous, ascetic degree;' as much as we can say 'our instincts are wonderful, follow all of them all the time.' Both of those things probably lead to death very quickly. If not my death, than someone else's.

We also have safety needs, he says. I am partially inclined to rank safety needs above sexual needs, but that's just my personal inclination, and Maslow, no doubt, knew more about this than me.³ I also think lumping personal security (that is to say, physical) with material security seems a little dubious. Physical security is no doubt the priority. We all at least want to feel safe most of the time, even if some of us like adrenaline. If we had adrenaline pumping through our veins the whole time we would not be very happy. Or we might never be excited again. Certainly, constant danger, or constant fear, is not a state anyone wants (though that isn't to say that people on this planet don't live with it).

² Translator's Note: Figuratively!

³ Editor's Note: He may have suffered from the obsession with sex that, quite naturally, defined the work of his time.

“For all we share with other humans is the same thing we share with all other animals – the ability to feel pain” (Rorty 1990, 177).⁴ And from this comes fear. Material security is nice, but it isn't as basic a need, in my book. And this is my book. It is nice to have stuff, and this 'need' is amplified by our particular situation in this society. I guess I would slowly deteriorate if I didn't know where I was going to live tomorrow, or whether I could still access my precious collections. I mean, maybe I would experience a severe mental breakdown if I suddenly didn't have any more Neil Young records. It's possible.⁵

We also have very strong needs to belong. If we think about how badly some developing humans behave during adolescence if only to fit in, we can see that it is very important. In fact, at that age, and at many others, the need to belong more often than not overrides ethical notions. High school is like a lab, in this way. It lets us see what we are like when we are most concerned about belonging. We are so worried about hiding from others the stuff that is happening to us, which we selfishly think is unique and even weird, that all we think about is conforming. I managed to resist that pull for the most part but I still managed to lose childhood friends over it. And that isn't something anyone should be proud of.⁶

Not only do we want to be part of “the group” but we also want to be part of big events. This is perhaps another explanation for the supposed “death-impulse” some people have claimed to identify. We want to be a part of history, to not just have another meaningless life. The big events of history are often disastrous, or in any case involve great calamity for somebody. Sometimes I catch myself thinking, “what would happen if...” (insert whatever disaster you want). I can't help it. I think about blackouts, storms, plagues, and the like in a positive sense. Of course they wouldn't be positive. But I catch myself thinking about how nothing “big” has happened recently (I don't count whatever the 24-

⁴ I have stolen a lot from Rorty. I didn't realize I was doing it until it was too late. I am sorry, Richard. That doesn't mean you're right about everything! Don't get any ideas...Only I can be right about everything, because I am scientific, I know the meaning of history.

⁵ I don't need to find out. Don't rob me. I have written an as yet unproduced short film about this so you really don't need to rob me.

⁶ Except me, because I am above regret.

hour news media⁷ is on about this week, swine flu,⁸ as big, just because they can't stop covering it) and wanting something “big” to happen, if just to be present for it. So perhaps we long to be witness to something terrible, if not part of it, or the instrument of it. And this is part of our need for legacy, I guess. Perhaps. In any case, it's not actually part of Maslow's hierarchy, so don't think it is!

We need friends, though the quality of these friends doesn't always seem to be so important. Especially when we're younger and trying to belong: many different people will do. We need sexually intimate relationships with others, though this is not life-threatening if we don't have it – I am still alive...at least as far as I know. We need a supportive family or, lacking that, friends we feel familial with. I think that having two of these often compensates for lack of a third or other release, to an extent at least. It helps, anyway.

We have esteem needs, which operate at a less conscious level than belonging needs, apparently. This has more to do with how we feel about ourselves, on our own, I guess. Obviously all these things are related, but this seems more to do with feelings about ourselves, and fitting in comes first. Even when we've gotten over adolescence, many people still spend most of their time trying to fit in. I hear people I know say things like, “You might think I'm weird but I really like Toby Keith/Backstreet Boys/something-that-used-to-be-really-popular-but-isn't-quite-as-popular-now.” I don't think they're weird. I think they're boring and the epitome of unthinking normality, and just because that artist / group / band / whatever isn't popular at this minute, or recently fell out of favour, doesn't make the fan strange. I may think they have terrible taste in music, but I don't think they're weird. But that's what people say. And they say it because they are worried that no one else listens to or likes what they like, regardless of how mainstream and accessible it might be. We really, really like to fit in.

⁷ Maybe people aren't reacting to the “amount” of death and misery in modern news. Maybe they are just reacting to the coverage. Maybe the problem really does relate to the media more than anything else. Maybe we all need to replace our TVs with lizards that change colour.

Editor's Note: One of the problems with having a nationally based 24-hours news media is that local issues are elevated to issues of national importance, merely because the channel must fill time. A fire in a house somewhere is now national news. Thus we have hours of coverage of a single assault in Seattle, and endless debate about whether it was a hate crime or not. Not to trivialize the assault, but such coverage makes the assault equal to a federal budget, or the war in Iraq that's important to more than just the victim, his or her family, and the immediate neighbourhood.

⁸ In the first draft it was that bridge collapse in Minnesota. That's so far out of the picture now that I deleted the reference.

That's all the deficiency needs. I can't help but think some of them to be less significant than others, but I guess that's why there're layers. Then we have cognitive needs. These are less significant in terms of our survival. We might not always call them needs. Geuss, for example, describes these as “a system of wants that is structured, organised, and nested” but this system is not “closed, conscious and fully articulated” (Geuss 2001, 23). I don't know how organized and structured our 'systems' actually are, though he doesn't necessarily mean, 'structured, organised, and nested' *by us*. I tend to be a little skeptical of that kind of claim. But it's an alternative view that isn't way off. The list continues with the sixth position on the scale.

Sixthly, we have growth needs. The need to feel we are changing for the better, over our life. This definitely fits in with the fact that we are all going to die. We would like to die more accomplished than how we were born.⁹ Well, we don't want to die. But when we accept death – *if* we accept death – we want to die with few regrets and we want to feel like we improved our situation, both materially and spiritually. We want to think we're wise in our old age. And so on.

According to Maslow, we need to feel that we have self-actualized. I take issue with his notion of self-actualization. His eighth or top layer – self-transcendence – strikes me as far more important. If this means the need for legacy, I personally see this as up there with self-esteem. It's pretty important. Just look at how people behave. If it is for religion, then I say that's probably true, but not for all. Definitely, some people need something beyond existence. I'm not sure this is universal.¹⁰ Some of us bravely break off the shackles of that oppression. Or perhaps the cognitive need and this need are at war. Or something like that. I haven't articulated this very well. Help me. Northrop Frye, the linguist, helps me. He puts it better: “But there's also a desire to bring a social human form into existence: the form of cities and gardens and farms that we call civilization. Many animals and insects have this social form too, but man knows that he has it: he can compare what he does with what he can imagine

⁹ Hopefully, everyone has accomplished something more than being born, by the time they die...

¹⁰ Unlike a shit or a shower. I think we can all be united over the love of showers. The shower is a bond that can never be broken. It should be the same way with numbers 1 and 2. I mean, we all do it. And we all enjoy not feeling full, whether of liquid or of foodstuffs.

being done” (Frye 1963, 7).

In addition to Maslow's needs, Konrad, our biologist friend, has a few obstacles for what prevents us from knowing ourselves – and being able to comprehend and fulfil our needs, perhaps... hmmm? I guess if these get in the way, we might have a problem self-actualizing. We don't like admitting we come from monkeys. We think it's somehow crude. Second, we like applying causes to everything else, but not to our own biological instincts. We like to promote free will as something completely separate from our realities as biological organisms. And then there's the kicker: idealistic¹¹ philosophy's division of the world into thought and world, or essence and existence. “Humanity defends its own self-esteem with all its might, and it is certainly time to preach humility and try seriously to break down all obstructions to self-knowledge” (Lorenz 1966, 192).

We all have these needs. The deficiency ones belong to us all equally. But the “higher” ones are in each of us in different strengths. And there will never be any kind of harmonious conjunction. “By the very fact that they can never achieve perfect satisfaction, human needs can increase and expand indefinitely, and thereby the clashes between them are inevitable” (Kolakowski 1978, 138).

¹¹ “Every idealist, as soon as he knocks his head against reality, he assumes at once that there's some horrid trick behind it.”
- Dostoevsky