



FUTURE

VISIONS

**The Unpublished Papers of
Abraham Maslow**

**Edited by
Edward Hoffman**

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FUTURE

VISIONS

*To my parents,
whose lifelong devotion
to education inspired this project*

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Foreword

I think it significant that in more than a quarter of a century since Maslow's death, there has been no sign of a decline in his reputation, whereas Freud's and Jung's are heavily bullet scarred. This, I believe, is because there is a sense in which Maslow has *still* not come into his own. His significance lies in the future and will become apparent in the 21st century.

In my book on Maslow, *New Pathways in Psychology* (1982), I describe a letter I received from him in 1959 explaining that he had read a book of mine called *The Stature of Man* and that my idea that modern literature was debilitated by what I called "the fallacy of insignificance" resembled an idea of his own that he called "the Jonah Complex." He has once asked his class, "Which of you believe that you will achieve greatness?" When they stared at him blankly, he asked, "If not you, *who* then?"

He enclosed some of his papers, and I was immediately impressed by the one on the peak experience. It was obvious to me that he had taken an enormous step beyond Freud, Jung, and Adler—although Adler's concept that we possess a "will to health" came close to it. I replied, and we began to correspond. In due course (in 1966, I think) we met when he invited me up to Brandeis, when, like everyone else, I was captivated by his gentle charm. Unfortunately, we never met again, for I was back in England for most of the remainder of the 1960s. But we remained in touch by mail.

I cannot now recall which of us proposed a book about him—or whether the suggestion came from a publisher—but I remember that we both thought it an excellent idea. Abe died while I was still working on it, but by then he

due to sexual problems. Reich took a step in the right direction by recognizing that these sexual needs are somehow connected to our highest aspirations and that through the sexual impulse, we have an almost mystical glimpse of what we might become. Jung went further still in stating that “man has a religious function,” an obscure need for transcendence.

But when Maslow stated emphatically that all healthy people have “peak experiences,” and that these are *not* “mystical” experiences but a normal part of everyday life, he was offering a new vision of human nature. In stating that humans have a “hierarchy of needs,” ranging from food and security and sex and self-esteem to self-actualization, he was recognizing that the root of neurosis was the fundamental human need to achieve some kind of creativity.

I hasten to add—what Abe knew as well as I do—that creativity need not involve writing symphonies or poems. The anthropologist Edward T. Hall noted in his book *The Dance of Life* that “for the Quiche, living a life is somewhat analogous to composing music, painting, or writing a poem. Each day properly approached can be either a work of art or a disaster.” This is something that Maslow had also learned from his time among the Blackfoot Native Americans.

In other words, self-actualization lies in a certain attitude of mind. It can be experienced by a Michelangelo or by a retired carpenter putting ships in bottles or even a housewife tidying her new home. But it involved a *flow* of creative energy, which in turn brings not only satisfaction but mental (and probably physical) health.

In Maslow’s view, people have not only a fundamental “will to health,” but also—to put it as provocatively as possible—a will to do good to others. I am not speaking of simple altruism, for the music of Arnold Schoenberg and the logical demonstrations of Kurt Godel also qualify. Shaw, speaking of philosophy, said, “Our minds are nothing but this knowledge of ourselves, and he who adds a jot to such knowledge creates new mind as surely as any woman creates new men.” One of Shaw’s worst plays, *The Shewing Up of Blanco Posnet*, is on the same theme: a criminal who gives up his old ways because he recognizes that he has a deep inner drive to do good rather than evil, to be unselfish rather than selfish.

It seems to me that this was Maslow’s greatest contribution: to recognize that *all* human beings possess a “higher nature” and that fulfillment depends on acknowledging the existence of this higher nature. In making this recognition the basis of his psychology, Maslow was turning is back on more than

two centuries of the opposite assumption. After Newton and Descartes, philosophy set out to liberate itself from the old religious notions about God and the Devil. The result was the philosophy of human nature that claimed to be realistic because it dismissed goodness, unselfishness, and altruism as sentimental delusions. Charles Lamb remarked that nothing is more delightful than to do good by stealth and have it found out by accident. The sentiment behind this witticism—the implication that we cannot help acting selfishly even when we are “doing good”—was given scientific justification by Darwin’s doctrine of the survival of the fittest.

So Freud’s demonstration that all human impulses must be reduced to the lowest common denominator was an expression of an opinion that was held by most intelligent people in the late 19th century. Jung describes how he protested Freud’s view that all art and “spirituality” is merely an expression of repressed sexuality, pointing out that it would “lead to an annihilating judgment upon culture,” and how Freud replied, “Yes, and that is just a curse of fate against which we are powerless to contend.”

At this point, I must add that I have always found it incomprehensible that Maslow always expressed respect and admiration for Freud and even described himself as a “Freudian.” Was it because he was afraid that open rejection of Freud would make his position as a psychologist untenable and he decided that a certain protective coloration was necessary? He certainly disagreed with Freud even more basically than Jung or Adler did, and his own belief in “higher ceilings of human nature” was simply an open contradiction of everything Freud stood for. Or perhaps it was a kind of artistic appreciation of the sheer power and coherence of Freud’s life and work, which certainly makes a compulsively readable story. Of course, we have to remember that when Maslow was a young psychologist, Freud had been placed on a scientific pedestal alongside Darwin, Rutherford, Einstein, and Planck and remained the dominating force in American psychology throughout the 1940s and 1950s.

Whatever the reason, I suspect that if Maslow were still alive today—and he would be only 87—he might well take a less charitable view of Freud.

It certainly seems to me a tragedy that Maslow died at the age of 62, just as his work was beginning to achieve widespread appreciation. This present volume shows that his restless mind was always attacking new problems. One of his last essays, on “Biological Injustice and Free Will,” is almost theological in its implications, particularly this sentence: “The individual does not have to be victorious to be accepted by the gods.” Maslow is here asking

whether people who are born with some awful defect are not a living disproof of his optimistic view of human nature. His answer—that whatever happens, we possess free will—echoes Sartre’s assertion that even a man dying of cancer can decide when he gives in to the pain. Again and again, as I read Maslow, I believe that he belongs to the great Jewish tradition of the “wise man,” the tradition to which Spinoza and Moses Mendelssohn belonged. (And both, of course, were “biologically disadvantaged.”)

I suspect that if Maslow had succeeded in living out the normal human life span, he would have devoted an increasing amount of time to pulling together his many insights into a coherent whole. I am not, of course, suggesting that his work is incoherent. But anyone who reads this volume—surely as important as anything he published in his lifetime—will see that it is full of marvelous ideas that seem to demand exploring in a wider context. He speaks, for example, of counseling a young man who said, “If that car had hit me, all my troubles would not be over,” and pointing out “all the lovely problems,” all the “pleasant tortures of life” the young man would have missed. What seems to be demanded here is some wider recognition that the most basic of our human problems is a kind of tunnel vision that traps us in the present moment, like a person lost in some huge city where high buildings continually block the view; what we need here is clearly the equivalent of a city map, with a list of streets. Anyone who experienced as many flashes of insight as Maslow would have been the ideal person to settle down to drawing such a map.

I continue to feel that there was a sense in which Maslow had solved the basic problem to which all his work was addressed and that he still failed to recognize it. For example, the essay on “The Psychology of Happiness” begins by mentioning the need for a wider definition of happiness than the notion of having pleasure without pain. He goes on to speak of the “grumbles threshold” and mentions my own concept of the “St. Neot’s margin,” or indifference threshold. I had noted that there seems to be an area of consciousness that is indifferent to pleasant stimuli but that *can* be jarred into perception of values by some threat or prospect of disaster. Maslow asks perceptively whether it is possible to be happy and not know you are happy—and, of course, the answer is that we do it all the time. But how could we learn to *perceive* this when we are bogged down in the present moment with its trivial problems?

It has always seemed to me that the human problem can be simply expressed. We are at our best when faced with interesting or exciting chal-

lenges. Everyone longs for a more creative, a more productive way of life. Yet when external problems vanish, we tend to sink into a kind of sloth.

So we seek out “purposes,” which usually means interesting complications, to keep us satisfied. But it is all too easy to find a purpose that keeps you interested but basically wastes your life—let us say, for example, giving endless dinner parties and inviting other people to yours until you never spend an evening alone.

So human beings find themselves faced with a not particularly helpful choice: being pleasantly “involved” but condemned to waste whole slabs of valuable time or being “uninvolved” but paralyzed by boredom and lack of purpose.

Yet there is a third possibility. Human beings differ from the animals in that they do not lead a wholly physical existence. They have learned to use their minds and imaginations and can spend hours alone, yet totally fascinated by ideas or even fantasies. (While Tolstoy was writing *War and Peace*, he obviously spent weeks or months in a world inside his own head.)

It seems to me that humanity has reached a point in its evolution where the most urgent necessity is to learn the trick of plunging into a state of “fascination” (i.e., mental involvement) while remaining alone and personally uninvolved. H. G. Wells remarked, “The fish is a creature of the water; the bird is a creature of the air; man is a creature of the mind.” But until we learn that trick of plunging into these “inner” states at will, this will remains untrue; we will remain creatures who are enslaved to the external world.

Now it seems to me that Maslow came closer to solving this problem than anyone I can think of; he did this by recognizing the importance of the peak experience.

My favorite Maslow anecdote is of the young mother who was watching her husband and children eating breakfast when a beam of sunlight came in through the window, and she thought, “My God, aren’t I lucky!” and went into the peak experience. (I have a vague feeling that Maslow didn’t mention the beam of sunlight in the published version. If so, I see why not. A trigger *can* be useful, but it isn’t necessary. We can acquire the knack of triggering ourselves.)

The point is that she was lucky *before* the beam of sunlight came in, but she didn’t *realize* it. This, in turn, makes us aware that we all have a thousand reasons for feeling lucky; yet we can feel bored or even depressed, merely because we fail to *focus* on them.

But how can we acquire the knack? Again, Maslow found the answer. He describes how he got his students to describe peak experiences they'd had in the past and then forgotten about. In other words, they took the experiences for granted, as something pleasant but not all that important. Then as they began to describe peak experiences and listen to those of others, an interesting thing happened: They began having peak experiences all the time. Merely focusing on peak experiences, and regarding them as a normal and necessary part of life, did the trick.

I do not know whether Maslow recognized the immense significance of what he had stumbled on. But it seems to me that whether he did or not, he had stumbled on the secret of the next step in human evolution.

And here, although space is running out, I must mention briefly another discovery that strikes me as being of comparable significance. The Chicago psychologist Eugene Gendlin has developed a technique that he calls "focusing." He persuades patients to try to descend inside themselves and verbalize *precisely* what they think is worrying them. His basic assumption is that "unfocused anxieties tend to spread, as if they had been injected into the psychic bloodstream. To focus them precisely causes them to retreat back to their own small localized area. We all know how a small stone in the shoe can spoil a pleasant walk or how some minor problem can keep you awake all night, generating increasing cycles of anxiety. On the other hand, when you have some agonizing itch and you scratch it, the sheer relief creates an odd sense of control and purpose, *of ceasing to be passive and becoming active*. (This, indeed, is the essence of Freud's "talking cure," but he missed its significance by getting sidetracked into his sexual obsession.)

This is the heart of the matter. Human beings keep switching back into the passive mode. And the passive mode is like a piece of laboratory gelatin used for culturing bacteria: anxieties spread and multiply. Focusing, as Maslow's young mother did, causes us to switch back into the active mode, and the problems just seem to evaporate—or at least are seen as solvable with a little effort.

I should add that another psychologist who understood all this was Pierre Janet, who called the process "funneling." I continue to believe that Janet is perhaps the greatest underrated psychologist of all time.

I would argue that the key to the next step in humanity's evolution is the clear recognition of the "two modes" and that the passive mode (what I once called the "passive fallacy") is responsible for most of our problems.

Shaw once said, "I have solved every major problem of our time, and people still go on propounding them as if they were unsolved." I suspect he was probably right. But I do not have the slightest doubt that Shaw's claim applies, in full force, to Abraham Maslow. Reading *Future Visions* has only deepened this certainty.

—COLIN WILSON

Preface

In researching Abraham Maslow's biography several years ago, I was excited to discover that he left behind many significant unpublished writings. Ever since, I have been eager to share these papers with others inspired by his unique vision of human potential and achievement. Maslow had always been an essentially intuitive and interdisciplinary thinker, and these pieces were truly wide-ranging in scope, encompassing motivational psychology, counseling and psychotherapy, managerial theory and organizational development, and even wider concerns such as politics, government, and global peace.

In editing this volume, I have selected those articles that seemed most timely and relevant for contemporary audiences. Aside from providing descriptive titles for each piece, my task has mainly involved enhancing Maslow's style for readability and correcting various errors in syntax and spelling. To place all these papers in the wider context of Maslow's evolving career, I also have written appropriate introductions and a glossary of his technical terms.

If this book sheds new light on Maslow's unpublished projects and additionally helps to reawaken interest in his important, overall legacy, my hopes will have been fulfilled.

—EDWARD HOFFMAN

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