

Eupsychian Theory I: Reclaiming Maslow and Rejecting the Pyramid –The Circle of Seven Essential Needs

In a certain sense, only saints are mankind [sic]. All the rest are cripples [sic]. **Abraham Maslow** (Hoffman, 1999b, p. 4395)

It is now quite clear that the actualization of the highest human potentials is possible-on a mass basis-only under "good conditions." Or more directly. good human beings will generally need a good society in which to grow. **Abraham Maslow** (1969, p. 7)

As I have gained knowledge and seen others share their visions with me, I conclude that our ancestors lived in a strange condition in which they were in touch with the spirits constantly, and I see that as a goal for our present activities. **Vine Deloria** (Deloria, 2003, p. xvii)

In 1943, Abraham Maslow presented a now widely accepted theory of human motivation. Later, he began to develop a theory of human development, a Eupsychian theory of human flourishing with his theory of needs at the center. This theory was shortly represented by the iconic Pyramid of Needs. Building upon the work of Abraham Maslow, this article rejects the pyramid of needs as an ideologically rooted, sanitized, and stripped-down version of Maslow's nascent Eupsychian Theory. Instead, the article proposes an Indigenous-rooted Circle of Seven Essential needs as the core of a sophisticated and integrative theory of human development, human potential, and human flourishing, a theory that Maslow was in the process of developing before his untimely death and that, given his known interest Indigenous communities, more in line with the direction of Maslow's early thinking.

Introduction

Holism is obviously true-after all, the cosmos is one and interrelated; any society is one and, interrelated; any person is one and interrelated" (Maslow, 1970, p. xi).

In 1943, Abraham Maslow published an article proposing a theory of human needs (Maslow, 1943a). Since its publication, Maslow's theory has become one of the "most impactful theories" in psychology and personality research (Christian Montag et al., 2020). It is a perpetually cited piece (Kuo-Shu Yang, 2003) that, despite its age, is "widely distributed, incredibly popular, and largely accepted." (McCleskey & Ruddell, 2020, pp. 6–7). There are thousands of pictures of the associated pyramid of needs, and millions of references to it on the internet (Peterson & Park, 2010). A simple Google image search on the keyword "needs theory" demonstrates how dominant the work is. Indeed, Maslow's theory continues to appear in textbooks on psychology, leadership, sociology, medicine, education, management, marketing, and organizational behaviour (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2019; Machado & Davim, 215 C.E.; McCleskey & Ruddell, 2020). It also continues to be deployed by psychologists, management theorists, developmental psychologists (Bland & DeRobertis, 2020), human resource employees, and others to understand and explain human behaviour and motivation (Anburaj Balraj, 2017; Crandall et al., 2020; Jie Guo et al., 2019; Lussier, 2019; Poirier & Devraj, 2019).

Positive psychology, for example, presumptuously claims a direct lineage from Maslow whom, “it is acknowledged,” was really developing a positive psychology (Joseph, 2015, p. 3). Maslow’s basic needs hierarchy continues to inform positive psychological approaches (Schulenberg, 2020) and positive psychologists continue to lean heavily on “self-actualization” as a basic requirement and ultimate goal of human happiness and human fulfillment (Kauffman et al., 2015).

Problems with the Theory

Is the penetration and continued popularity of Maslow’s aging original theory and its iconic pyramidal representation a problem? The answer to that is yes, and for several reasons.

Reason number one, the pyramidal representation itself is an incomplete representation of Maslow’s thinking. Not only does it omit important elements of Maslow’s later thinking, *it omits key aspects of his original thinking*.

On early omissions, the pyramidal representation we have today recognizes only half of Maslow’s original theory. In the original seminal articles (Maslow, 1943a, 1943b), Maslow included an additional hierarchy of cognitive needs.¹ In this second hierarchy, which has been completely ignored by the disciplines that purport to represent him, Maslow placed two critical needs, the need to know and the need to understand. Maslow defined the need to know as the need to “be aware of reality, to get the facts, to satisfy curiosity...to see rather than to be blind” (Maslow, 1943a, p. 385). Maslow defined the need to understand as the need to understand the reality that we came to know. According to Maslow, it was not enough just to know things, to accumulate mere facts. As he said, “...the facts that we acquire, if they are isolated or atomistic, *inevitably* get theorized about, and either analyzed or organized or both” (Maslow, 1943a). Maslow felt the need to know and the need to understand where driving, biological needs; as he said, “even after we know, we are impelled to know more and more minutely and microscopically on the one hand, and on the other, more and more extensively in the direction of a world philosophy, religion, etc” (Maslow, 1943a, p. 385). Maslow also felt that these needs were “either the most important or one of the most important characteristics of psychological health” (Maslow, 1961, p. 3).

In addition to omitting important aspects of his original thinking, extant pyramidal representations ignore later additions, like his addition of aesthetic needs (Maslow, 1970), the need for creative outlets (Hoffman, 1999b), the need for transcendence (Koltko-Rivera, 2006),² the need for power (Maslow, 1961) and a

¹Maslow was ambivalent about separating them into a second hierarchy. “We must guard ourselves against the too easy tendency to separate these desires from the basic needs... i.e., to make a sharp dichotomy between ‘cognitive’ and ‘conative’ needs. The desire to know and to understand are themselves conative, i.e., have a striving character, and are as much personality needs as the ‘basic needs’ we have already discussed” (Maslow, 1943a, p. 385).

²Although he struggled with the concept of transcendence (Maslow, 1969), nevertheless he set it at the core of his theory of needs. As he says in his notebook on Eupsychian management, “We must ultimately assume at the highest theoretical levels of *eupsychian theory*, a preference or a tendency to identify with more and more of the world, moving toward the ultimate of mysticism,

1 *third* hierarchy he added later, a theory of “meta needs” for beauty, justice, neatness,
2 love, honesty, orderliness, and serenity (Maslow, 1967, p. 101), needs which
3 Maslow felt emerge, incorrectly I feel, only after basic needs are satisfied (Maslow,
4 1967).

5 Except for the here-and-there inclusion of the need for transcendence,
6 representations of Maslow, in textbooks, scholarly discussions, and elsewhere,
7 remain grossly incomplete caricatures.

8 **The second reason** the persistent penetration of the pyramid is problematic is
9 that it does not take into account substantial criticisms (Cooke et al., 2005; Geller,
10 1982; Neher, 1991; Shaw & Colimore, 1988) that have been levelled against the
11 theory in the almost century since Maslow first presented it to the world. In that
12 time, it has been criticized for being internally inconsistent (Bouzenita &
13 Boulanouar, 2016), empirically weak (Soper et al., 1995; Wahba & Bridwell, 1976),
14 ethnocentric (Townsend & Wrathall, 1997), sexist (Nicholson, 2001), and elitist
15 (Aron, 1977). Some have suggested, quite correctly, that it is a form of western
16 cultural and scientific hegemony (Bouzenita & Boulanouar, 2016) that privileges
17 “individuality” and “individual improvement” over more family-oriented, socially
18 embedded, collectivist needs and values (Kuo-Shu Yang, 2003). Others have
19 suggested it has a neo-liberal bias, pointing out that the theory ignores social,
20 political, and economic conditions that might facilitate or impede needs satisfaction,
21 while relying for improvement “more on personal growth than on social reform.”
22 (Aron, 1977, p. 13). These are all substantial criticisms that should have triggered
23 alternate, or at least corrective, theorizations.

24 **A third reason** the continued presence of Maslow’s need theory, at least as
25 represented by “the pyramid,” is problematic is because in its current form the
26 theory is colonized and corrupted by capitalist interests. This becomes clear when
27 we learn that Maslow never suggested a pyramid as a visual representation of his
28 theory (Bridgman et al., 2019). The closest Maslow came to suggesting a geometric
29 symbol was his use of a metaphor of nested boxes, a metaphor he used to caution
30 against a simplistic listing of needs (Maslow, 1943b). In actual fact, the pyramid,
31 represented in figure one below, was suggested by Charles McDermid (1960) in a
32 business magazine entitled *Business Horizons*. This pyramid came to replace
33 alternative geometrical representations being discussed at the time, like steps
34 (Davis, 1957) and ladders (Wren, 1972), with a business-person’s spin, one
35 designed not to represent truths and understandings of humanity, but to help
36 “maximize” the “motivational impact of management initiatives” (McDermid,
37 1960, p. 99) in an organizational context—in other words, if I may, the pyramid was
38 designed to help manipulate people into working harder by, I presume, tying their
39 highest needs (according to McDermid) to organizational goals. The original
40 hierarchy is reproduced below in Figure One.

a fusion with the world, or peak experience, cosmic consciousness, and so on” (Maslow, 1965, p. 33: emphasis added).

The Hierarchy of Needs

McDermid's Hierarchy of Needs (McDermid, 1960)



A fourth reason this pyramid and its associated theoretical representation is inadequate is that it fails to properly contextualize and foreground, in fact, it arguably obscures, a *critical* aspect of Maslow's thinking, which is the notion of Eupsychia (Maslow, 1961), or the good society, and Maslow's ongoing concern for developing a psychology that could provide the foundations for that good society. To be clear, Maslow's seminal articles may have presented a simple theory of motivation; however, from the very start, Maslow was interested in much more than just a simple theory of human needs and motivation. In 1940, before he published anything on needs, Maslow has a vision for a Utopian psychology of the "peace table" (Hoffman, 1999a, p. 137), an advanced psychology that would provide a "Hierarchical-Integrative Theory of Needs," (Maslow, 1970, p. xvi), a Eupsychian theory (Maslow, 1965) with "utopian ends" (Dewsbury et al., 2012, p. 257) that he felt would form the foundation of a psychology that would "speak to human potential and wholeness (Ballard, 2006, p. 2) and that would provide normative suggestions towards the development of a "way of life, not only for the person himself within his own private psyche, but also for the same person as a social being, a member of society" (Maslow, 1968b, p. iii).

Let me repeat this so the reader is suitably attentive.

Maslow, and others at the time, were developing a new psychology that would provide a "new image of man [sic]" (Maslow, 1970, p. x), one that acknowledged our inherent goodness and that prioritized the development of healthy and fulfilled human beings (Maslow, 1961) motivated by higher needs (Maslow, 1967). His two primary statements of this are in his books *Motivation and Personality* and *Towards*

1 *a Psychology of Being*, both of which provide pieces of a much “larger theoretical
2 structure” (Maslow, 1968b, p. vii) than is represented by the grossly inadequate five-
3 level pyramid.

4 This larger theoretical structure which Maslow was working on developing was
5 part of two emerging psychologies, Humanistic Psychology and a “higher Fourth
6 Psychology” (i.e. Transpersonal Psychology), that would focus on human health,
7 well-being, and potential, and on humanity’s ultimate relationship to the cosmos.
8 Maslow felt these new psychologies would not only help resacralize an arid and
9 dehumanized science (Maslow, 1966), but would also specify exactly how to grow
10 up healthy, strong, whole and fully human. In other words, these new psychologies
11 would provide the basis for a Eupsychian Theory which would eventually birth a
12 **Eupsychian Psychology** that would contribute to a reconceptualization of “every
13 area of human knowledge: e.g., economics, sociology, biology, and every
14 profession: e.g., the family, education, religion, etc.” (Maslow, 1970, p. x) and
15 provide new systems of meaning where religion has so thoroughly failed (Maslow,
16 1964) and would

17 Maslow was explicit about his goals (Maslow, 1968b) and active in developing
18 curriculum (Maslow, 1968a). He was also clear that the work that had been done as
19 of 1970 was only the “bare beginning” (Maslow, 1970, p. xxi), nevertheless
20 progress had been made. In 1969 he writes that, “There is now available a new
21 conception, of a higher possibility, of the healthy society. There are tools now
22 available to judge and compare societies. One society can be judged to be better than
23 another society, or healthier or possessing more ‘growth-fostering-potential.’ We
24 can talk about the value of the society, or the function of the society-that is, the
25 greatest coming to fulfillment of the people in the society” (Maslow, A. H., 1969,
26 p. 7).

27 Unfortunately, as explained elsewhere (Elkins, 2009), Humanistic and
28 Transpersonal Psychology were disappeared of the scholarly map in the 1980s,
29 except for that oversimplified, ideological monstrosity offered to us by a business
30 thinker.

31 32 33 **Theorizing the Lacuna**

34
35 Considering just how long the simplified version of Maslow’s theory dominated
36 the psychological consciousness of this planet, one might reasonably ask a series
37 of “why?” questions. Why did psychology not discuss Maslow’s second pyramid,
38 or his third? Why was the pyramid accepted so quickly in the first place? Why is it
39 still used to represent and teach Maslow’s theory? The question is particularly
40 salient given there have been a handful of attempts to revise the model with
41 “architectural extensions” and alternative geometric representations (Bridgman et
42 al., 2019; Heylighen, 1992; Kaufman, 2020; Kenrick et al., 2010; Kuo-Shu Yang,
43 2003; Nevis, 1983), yet none of these stick.

44 We can identify a few possible reasons for the embarrassing persistence of this
45 pyramid.

For example, *psychological resistance* may be a factor. Maslow himself noted immediate resistance to the deeper aspects of his theory and suggested these were the outcome of a scholarly pathology that created depressed, cynical, malicious, cruel, and vengeful members “of the intellectual community” who used their control of the channels of communication to the educated public and to youth” (Maslow, 1970, p. x) to suppress innovative thinkers.

It is also possible that mainstream psychology was resistance to the *uncomfortable ontological* direction Maslow’s theory was heading, evidenced by his adoption of the word “transcendence,” a word with decidedly spiritual overtones, as a central theoretical term in his theory (Maslow, 1969). As has been noted, Western and westernized academic traditions are uncomfortable in this area (Habib, 1993). Therefore, persistence may be partially due to dismissive neglect.

There may also be *ideological resistances to change*, of various sorts. The pyramid is, after all, a fairly ancient reflection of one fairly obvious and critical feature of all systems of elite rule, ancient and modern, which is hierarchy. Those of us unfortunate enough to grow up in these systems (and that’s all of us) are forcefully engraved³ and embedded into multiple hierarchies, with certain people, genders, social classes, and races positioned at the top. This pyramid reflects, reinforces, and provides the deep neurological structures that build and reinforce hierarchical thinking. .

Finally, it may also be a question of **practical utility**.

The pyramid is user-friendly packaging (Lussier, 2019). It looks good, has face validity (Buttle, 1989) (it “feels” right), and is general usable (Loh et al., 2000). All this makes the pyramid and the stripped-down view of Maslow’s theory that it provides useful and attractive to multiple groups of people.

For example, the pyramid and the stripped-down theory has been useful to human resource agents seeking to generate “actionable insights” aimed at manipulating staff into working harder *and* to marketers seeking to exploit Maslow’s theory in order to manipulate the population into buying more things (Andrews, 2019, para. 1).

The pyramid has been useful to professionals, social workers, nurses, and healthcare providers as an assessment tool capable of imposing beliefs and judgments on those who cannot abide westernized views and standards.

The pyramid has also given apologists of the capitalist system an easy existential framing that allows them to counter “charges that corporations entailed numbing rationalization and standardization of individuals” and instead present capitalist organizations as sites “for self-actualization, personal fulfillment, and even pleasure” (Lussier, 2019, p. 320).

Finally, the pyramid has also been useful as an ideological gloss for neo-liberalism. Ideologically, the pyramid and the stripped-down version of Maslow’s theory it represents is completely concordant with Neo-liberal distortions of

³From the moment we enter the school system we are trained, primarily by the grading system, but also in various school sponsored extra-curricular, to exist within and accept hierarchies. By the time we graduate, “hierarchy” is permanently engraved as a way we think about, see, and experience reality.

humanity (Bridgman et al., 2019), particularly those rooted in narcissistic personal achievement myths, like the so-called “hero’s journey”(Campbell, 2004).

So, the pyramid sucks and we’ve held onto it far longer than is reasonably necessary. I think there are two steps forward here.

One, we need to reject the pyramid of needs outright. It is a parody (Kaufman, 2020), a caricature of Maslow’s thinking and, upon even this brief consideration we realize, an embarrassingly bad one.

Two, we need to develop a more nuanced and complete theory of human needs, one that takes into account the entirety of Maslow’s early thinking and also one that addresses various weaknesses identified over the decades.

Seven Essential Needs Theory

Based on a comprehensive reading of Maslow, additional readings, and various observations over the years, I suggest an alternative theorization of needs which we will call **Seven Essential Needs Theory** and an alternative visual icon to represent that theory, the **Circle of Essential Needs**.

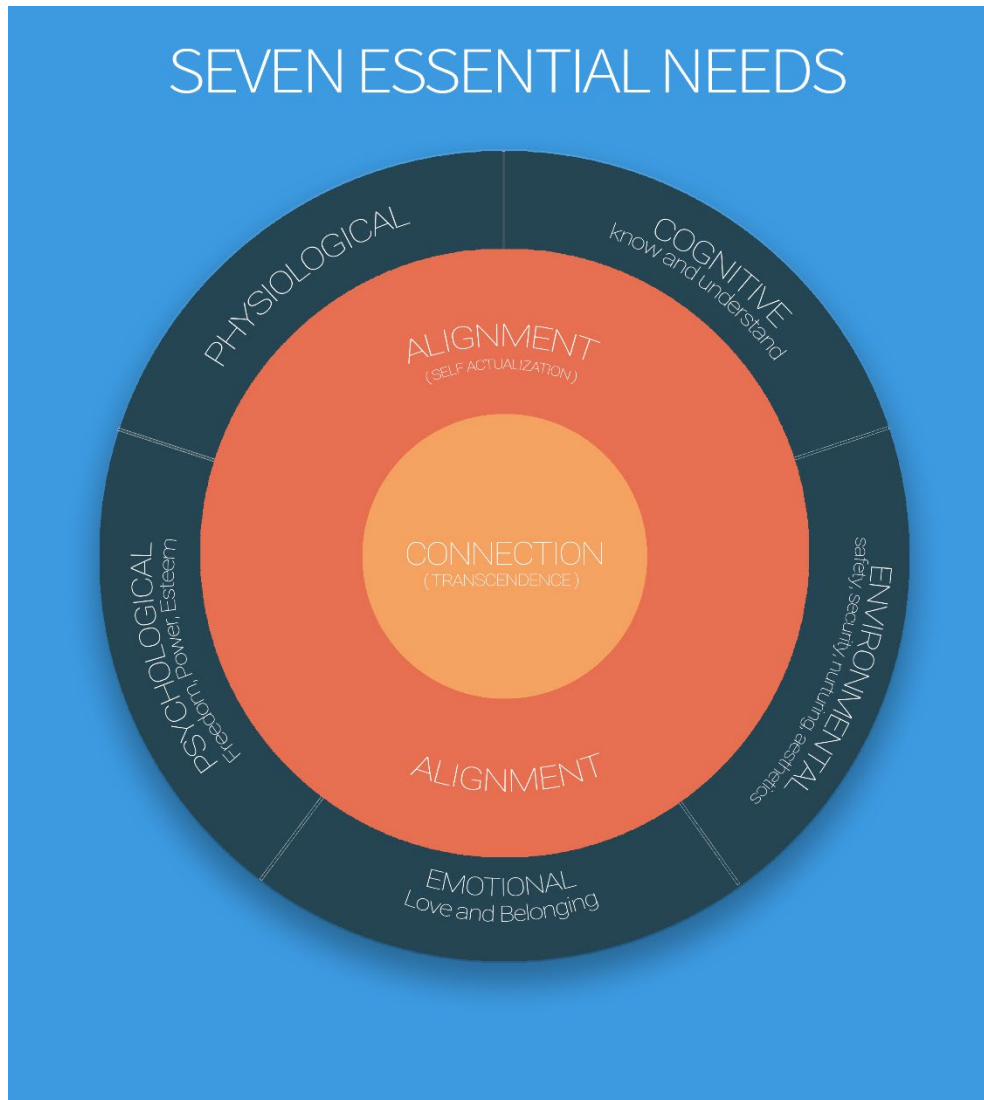
Let us start out our conceptualization by replacing the phrase “**hierarchy of needs**” with the phrase “**essential needs**.” We do this for two reasons.

On the one hand, we change from hierarchy to essential to reflect the basic biological reality that all our needs are essential. If any needs go unmet, growth is slowed or atrophied and health is undermined. We are no different than a plant, in this regard, except that we have more needs. If we want to be healthy, happy, and whole, we have to meet all those needs.

On the other hand, we swap out the word “hierarchy” for “essential” because, despite Maslow’s use of the word “hierarchy,” the phrase “essential needs” better reflects Maslow’s own thinking, which is that in order for humans to be healthy, happy, and “fully human” (Maslow, 1971, p. 27), all their needs must be met. As Maslow clearly indicated, “self-actualizing people are gratified in *all* their basic needs” (Maslow, 1967, p. 93: italics added) and the healthiest people are those who self-actualize and transcend (Maslow, 1968b, 2012). Note this does not mean that all needs must be fully gratified, a state of affairs that Maslow considered impossible (Maslow, 1943a, p. 388), only that they be “relatively well gratified” (Maslow, 1970, p. 39). What counts as relatively well gratified may differ based on personal predilections, cultural stipulations and other factors, and is a question for empirical investigation.

In addition to changing the conceptualization from hierarchy to essential, we also reject the pyramid and replace it with a circle. We do this for several reasons, which we will discuss in a few moments. First, let us introduce the Circle of Seven Essential Needs in Image One below and provide a few introductory comments.

Basic Needs



First of all, note that the circle is organized into three layers or rings, like the rings of life and experience we see in a tree stump. The outer ring represents an individual's basic needs. Here, basic needs are organized into five general categories. Here we retain Maslow's original categories of *physiological needs* but place safety and security needs into the category of *environmental needs*, love and belonging into the category of *emotional needs*, and needs for freedom, self-esteem, and power into the category of *psychological needs*. We also include Maslow's *cognitive needs* to know and understand in the basic circle. All told, the basic needs include five sets of needs, the *physiological*, *cognitive*, *emotional*, *psychological*, and *environmental needs*.

- 1 **1. Physiological Needs** – Physiological needs include the need for substances
2 (like food, water, vitamins, air), the need for physical activity (exercise), the
3 need to be free of pain and suffering, and so on. Meeting physiological needs
4 keeps the body healthy and gives it the physical foundations for growth,
5 actualization, and transcendence.
- 6 **2. Environmental Needs** – Maslow’s original theorization included needs for
7 safety and security; in other words, a safe and secure *environment*. Later,
8 Maslow noted that we needed aesthetically pleasing environments as well.
9 In order to incorporate Maslow’s later additions, we add a category for
10 *environmental needs*. We include in this category the need for a safe, secure,
11 nurturing environments, as well as the need for protective, nurturing, and
12 aesthetically pleasing environments in homes, workplaces, and social
13 settings that are calm and nurturing and warm. Note that safety includes the
14 absence of assault of any kind, including physical assault (e.g., spanking,
15 pushing, slamming objects, shaking etc.), emotional and psychological
16 assault (screaming, name-calling, racism, sexism, shaming, passive-
17 aggressive assaults) (Maslow, 1954, p. 40). Stability includes financial
18 stability, which removes anxiety about work and survival, but also the
19 emotional and psychological consistency of emotionally and
20 psychologically stable parents and stable familial relationships. As
21 Maslow said, ultimately, we need an environment that is safe, nurturing,
22 secure, calm, aesthetic and that encourages “pure spontaneity,” that is, the
23 “free, uninhibited, uncontrolled, trusting, unpremeditated expression of the
24 self” (Maslow, 1967, p. 197). We need this environment not only because it
25 helps the brain and body develop, it helps the brain and body function
26 properly as well. Our brains respond and function better when we can focus
27 on positive experiences as opposed to negative. Our brains simply do not
28 function that well in the unnecessary and normalized rigidity, violence, and
29 chaos that is our daily experience of colonized life.
- 30 **3. Cognitive Needs** – As per Maslow, humans have cognitive needs,
31 specifically a need to know and our need to understand the world. On the
32 need to know, Maslow said there is a “basic desire to know, to be aware of
33 reality, to get the facts, to satisfy curiosity, or as Wertheimer phrases it, to
34 see rather than to be blind” (Maslow, 1943a, p. 385). On the need to
35 understand, Maslow said this was the “desire to understand, to systematize,
36 to organize, to analyze, to look for relations and meanings” (Maslow, 1943,
37 p. 385). As noted above, Maslow originally suggested these needs into a
38 second hierarchy. We take this separate hierarchy as originally suggested by
39 Maslow and include this as a category in the circle.
- 40 **4. Emotional Needs** – As per Maslow, emotional needs include our love and
41 belonging needs (Maslow, 1943a). Emotional needs also include our need
42 for unconditional love, support, acceptance, and inclusion in family, friend
43 groups, and society. In line with circle thinking, Maslow indicated these
44 needs are no less important for physical health and well-being than
45 physiological needs, further underlining the need to jettison a hierarchical
46 representation of needs. As he said, “No psychological health is possible

unless this essential core of the person is fundamentally accepted, loved and respected by others and by himself” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 196).

5. **Psychological Needs** – Maslow’s original theory included esteem needs. According to Maslow, esteem needs contain two subsidiary sets of needs, “these are, first, the desire for strength, for achievement, for adequacy, for confidence in the face of the world, and for independence and freedom. Secondly, we have what we may call the desire for reputation or prestige (defining it as respect or esteem from other people), recognition, attention, importance or appreciation” (Maslow, 1943a, pp. 381–382). In order to better integrate Maslow’s thinking, we reconceptualize esteem needs as psychological needs. In the category of psychological needs, we include need for esteem, the need for self-esteem, the *need for power* (Maslow, 1961), and the need for *freedom* (Maslow, 1970). For the purposes of this circle, we define *freedom* as the need to explore, grow, and develop in line with one’s preferences and predilections. As Maslow says, we need to be free in environments where permission is granted “to gratify and to express” (Maslow, 1970, p. 276). We define the need for power as the phenomenological sense that one can change the world in accord with one’s desires. As Maslow said, power is “the feeling of having some control over fate, of not being a helpless tool, a passive object, a cork on the wave which is tossed here and there by forces out of control” (Maslow, 1961, p. 2).

Inner Needs

Alignment

Within the outer circle of basic needs are two inner circles. The first inner circle is self-actualization, which we rename as a need for **alignment**. By alignment, we mean alignment with the inner self, here equivalent to Maslow’s notion of actualization of one’s inner self but extend this to include, for reasons that I will go into at a later date, behavioural and moral alignment with what is proper, right and good in all areas of life. One aligns with one’s community, one’s ancestors, with ethical and moral systems of right thought, right action, and so on. Notably, implied here is responsibility and duty to the world, to society., emphasize social, esp with connection

Note, although I feel self-actualization does, in fact, reflect a part of a real process of actualizing/aligning with one’s “essential biologically based inner nature...” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 3), alignment is a better term for a few different reasons. For **one**, it is culturally neutral, whereas Maslow’s terms self-actualization is not, despite his claims (Maslow, 1968b, p. vi). The term “self-actualization” implies an individuality that has more to do with the biases of Western civilization and the labour force requirements of Western capitalism than what is actually inside needing to be actualized.

A **second** reason the term alignment is better self-actualization is that alignment is a nod in the direction of spiritual traditions like Christianity (St. Teresa of Avila,

2007), Islam (Boyce, 1996; Mernissi, 1991), Buddhism (Bodhi, 2005), Zen (Suzuki, 1994), Indigenous spiritualities (Broker, 1983; Lawlor, 1991), and certain spiritually oriented authors (Blavatsky, 1889; Bourgeault, 2015; Bucke, 2009; Carpenter, 1912; Iqbal, 2000; Philo of Alexandria, 2014; Swedenborg, 2016; Tolstoy, 2016), all of whom emphasize high morality, ethics, truth, just action, righteousness, compassion, authenticity, equality, alignment, and being “true to our inner nature,” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 7) not only as things (metamotivations/b-values) that emerge out of self-actualization and connection, as Maslow suggested, but as prerequisites to transcendence/connection. Maslow captures this normative aspect of alignment with his statements about “intrinsic conscience” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 7) and his comments on the “bodhisattvic path” (Maslow, 1964), both of which point in the direction alignment as a prerequisite, component, and outcome of human development.

Finally, renaming self-actualization to alignment, and incorporating it with the final needs category of connection, provides an avenue for opening up a productive dialogue between science and human spirituality, something that Maslow said would be a feature of fourth-wave psychology’s resacrilization of science (Maslow, A. H., 1969, p. 5). The resacrilization of science and the opening up of a dialogue between science and the spiritual side of life is something that authors have repeatedly called for over the years (Griffen, 1988; Laszlo, 2006; Maslow, 1964). It is long past due to open this conversation.

Connection

The last need in our circle of essential needs is the core of the human being, which Maslow would have called transcendence, but we rename specifically as connection. We rename transcendence to connection not only because the term transcendence is culturally, psychologically, and emotionally loaded, as Maslow clearly demonstrated (1969), but because transcendence is better understood as a step on the road to better connection, and not the actual endpoint. As Maslow himself suggested, we transcend ideology, “enculturation,” “deficits,” psychological trauma, the ego (Maslow, 1968b, p. 37), emotional blockage, and so on, in order to heal, strengthen and establish connection with “something more” than the atomistic ego. As Maslow says, when “the distinction between self and not-self has broken down (or has been transcended) [there is now] less differentiation between the world and the person because he has incorporated into himself part of the world...His self has enlarged enough to include his child. Hurt his child and you hurt him....[he has fused] with the non-self..[which includes]...not only...the world of nature...[but] other humans beings...[to the point that]...’selves overlap” (Maslow, 1967, p. 103).

Note that reconceptualizing transcendence to connection is more in line with traditional cultures, shamanic practices, Catholic mysticism, Aboriginal dream times, and research on modern mystical experiences, all of which indicate transcendence means transcendence of cultural, psychological, and emotional limitations in order to establish connection not only to other human beings, but to nature, the cosmos, “more than human” entities (Williams et al., 2022), and even to

divine union with “God” (Ernst, 1997; Kalisch, 2006; St. Teresa of Avila, 2007; Steeman, 1975; Underhill, 2002) or a “transcendental order.” Evelyn Underhill points directly to this need when she says that we have an “innate tendency...towards complete harmony with the transcendental order, whatever the theological formula under which that order is understood” (Underhill, 2002). William James reflects the notions of alignment and connection perfectly when he says “Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting [read aligning] ourselves thereto” (James, 1903, p. 53).

We realize there may be objections to including the concept of “spirit,” which we would simply conceptualize as consciousness independent of physical matter, in the discussion. If one is not prepared to take seriously what humans have known about and experienced for thousands and thousands of years, i.e., that there are realms of consciousness and aspects of reality that are non-material and beyond our day-to-day normal consciousness, and that the goal of human development is to connect with these realities (Deloria, 2003), one can reduce connection to activation of brain neurology and leave it at that (Carhart-Harris & Friston, 2010; Garrison et al., 2015; Newberg, 2006; Newberg et al., 2001). However, we would argue that failure to recognize this basic truth of human existence and experience embarrasses and hamstring not only psychology and psychiatry, but the Eupsychian project as well. How can we take seriously disciplines that reject even consideration of the possibility that there is more to life than the sparks generated by the brain. How can we build a proper psychology and psychiatry while its practitioners ignore the “farthest reaches” (1969).

And that is the Circle of Seven Essential Needs. In addition to comments on alignment and connection, we believe this circle and the attendant theory of needs is superior for several reasons.

1. The circle is far more inclusive than the pyramid. The categories are capable of capturing the full gamut of human needs into a single icon. The comprehensive arrangement obviates the need for multiple hierarchies, overloaded pyramids, or cute sailboats. It provides a better representation of the underlying theory and, perhaps most importantly, prevents individuals from ignoring those aspects of the theory, like transcendence or connection, which may not fit their materialistic, conservative, or neo-liberal predilections.
2. The circle is far more flexible than the pyramid. Associated categorizations (category of physiological needs, category of psychological needs, etc.) provide ample space for fiddling and fitting things in without requiring the icon to change. For example, new needs that may be recognized over time can easily be placed in one of the categories provided.
3. Associated categorizations also provide space for cultural variation while maintaining theoretical integrity. Individual variations in emphasis (what needs are most important to meet) and the way the various needs are satisfied may be accommodated by the circle without strain or stress to the

theory. For example, everybody has emotional needs for belonging, but exactly how these are satisfied (in corporations, in families, in friend groups, etc.) will vary from culture to culture to culture, economic system to economic system, and epoch to epoch. For example, how people in China meet their needs for self-esteem and belonging has probably changed in the past few decades. Similarly, how people met their needs under a feudal **Regime of Accumulation (ROA)** was vastly different than how their needs are met (or rather unmet) within a capitalist ROA.

4. In addition to the above core superiority, the circle better represents Maslow's own thinking. When we examine Maslow, we find that he himself was ambivalent about the notion of hierarchy, often speaking about his theory as representing the "profoundly holistic nature of human nature" (Maslow, 1970, p. ix). And this is not something he tacked on later as his thinking evolved. From the very start, Maslow saw humans as an "integrated, organized whole" (Maslow, 1943b, p. 85) and saw their needs as interdependent and fluid: "no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives" (Maslow, 1943a, p. 388). More to the point, the circle of "essential" needs captures the critical idea, stated by Maslow on numerous occasions, that all needs need to be sufficiently satisfied if an individual is to become "fully human," that "deficits...must ordinarily be fairly well satisfied before real individuality can develop fully." (Maslow, 1968b, p. 33). To be clear, the circle captures the Eupsychian idea of humans as an integrated and organized whole with needs that are essential, interdependent and fluid far better than the pyramid and the "hierarchy" ever could.
5. The circle, in particularly the inner needs of alignment and connection, provides a far less hierarchically charged, and far more sociologically sophisticated view of the self, one that places the individualized not as an isolated dot on a page, or at the tip of some ridiculous pyramid, but at the connected center of a family, community, economy, global village, etc (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2022).
6. The circle is easily integrated into Indigenous worldviews, particularly when we think of the circle as a tree stump. For a tree to grow healthy, it needs strong life cycles (yearly cycles). Also, we can see the historical stressors when we examine tree stumps, layers of earth – challenging events are recorded and embedded in all living things. Using the circle, we can easily step into a more Indigenous view that emphasizes not only interconnection and interrelation, but the importance of providing **strong cycles**.
7. Finally, the circle of essential needs is superior to the hierarchy of basic needs because, as already intimated, the circle can carry Maslow's Eupsychian ambitions, whereas the hierarchy cannot. In this context, we can quickly say that the circle of seven essential needs provides a basic visual statement of a Eupsychian framework which would state, at its core, that a) the ultimate goal of human development is the development of the capacity

for healthy and stable connection to something more than the atomized, individualistic, self, as well as b) a statement of the basic social infrastructure needed to actuate Eupsychian ambitions (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2022), which is of course to create awakened, empowered, fully functional human beings.

In a few moments I am going to suggest some theoretical propositions which might undergird the development of a proper Eupsychian theory and Eupsychian psychology. Before that I would like to foreground the Indigenous inspiration for the Circle of Seven Essential Needs and the underlying Eupsychian frame. The circle is, of course, a well-known central metaphor in Indigenous cultures (Blackstock, 2011; Cajete, 2000; Cross, 2007; Kapisi et al., 2022; Nelson, 1994; Pranis, 2005).

With that said, the theory.

Eupsychian Theory – Initial Propositions

1. **Full health and full human development requires reasonable satisfaction of all essential needs.** Satisfaction of basic needs ensures basic physiological, emotional, and psychological health. It provides the scaffolding that allows one to explore, develop, align, and connect. As Maslow repeatedly said, “The main path to health and self-fulfillment... is via basic need gratification rather than via frustration” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 199).” Satisfaction of physiological needs keep the body and mind healthy. Satisfaction of cognitive needs for truth and understanding provide the foundation for existing in and aligning with reality. Satisfaction of emotional and psychological needs give us the ego strength to operate in the world *and* pursue alignment and connection in an authentic fashion. An individual who struggles with self-esteem is more likely to connect with toxic groups when those groups offer protection, belonging, acceptance, etc. Someone with low self-esteem and diminished sense of power is more likely to “go along to get along” in order to get emotional needs for inclusion and acceptance met. Someone with low self-esteem may have a hard time dealing with powerful **connection experiences** (my term for peak experiences, transcendent events, mystical experiences, etc.). Finally, someone who lives in unsafe, chaotic, and filthy environments may spend more energy on defense (e.g., fending off parental assaults), offense (rebellious against unnecessary restrictions), and escape (self-medication, anesthetizing behaviours, distractions, avoidance) than on achieving alignment and developing connection.
2. **Satisfaction of human needs is inherently social, not individual,** As Maslow says, “Sick people are made by a sick culture; healthy people are made possible by healthy culture.” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 6). Or “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” (Maslow, 1964). In order to satisfy physiological needs, we need farmers, carpenters, electricians, engineers, and so on. In order to meet emotional and psychological needs, we need nurturing parents, caregivers, teachers, and other professional helpers. In order to meet cognitive needs, we need authors, scholars, scientists, teachers, etc. Even our higher needs for alignment and connection require the assistance of others.

3. **Proper and sufficient satisfaction of human needs is difficult** and requires careful and sustained support from families and institutions if the “delicate task” of creating “good growth” is to be achieved (Maslow, 1954, p. xviii). As Maslow said, we need a society that “approves of human nature and therefore actively fosters its fullest growth.” (Maslow, 1967, p. 115). We need a society that recognizes that the inner nature is “not strong,” but “weak and delicate and subtle and easily overcome by habit, cultural pressure, and wrong attitudes toward it” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 4). In line with this, we should note that fully satisfying human needs in a “good society” is a massive task. It is not something that just one person, like a mother or a friend, or a teacher, can do. Meeting all the essential human needs requires the participation of every single adult and every single institution on the planet. It takes a healthy and developed planet with advanced political and economic forms to properly raise a child. In other words, it takes a global advanced village (Sosteric & Ratkovic, 2022).
4. **Satisfaction of human needs prevents psychopathology and “evil.”** As a Humanistic psychologist, Maslow was concerned with the problem of psychopathology and evil. Why do people become mentally ill? Why do they engage in “evil” acts? For Maslow, psychopathology and evil resulted from the frustration, corruption, or violent suppression of our essential needs (Maslow, 1970, p. 1969). Maslow speaks quite clearly on this, so we’ll let him speak for himself: “A basically thwarted man may actually be defined as a ‘sick’ man” (Maslow, 1943a, p. 395). “In our society, the thwarting of these needs is the most commonly found core in cases of maladjustment and more severe psychopathology” (Maslow, 1943a, pp. 381–383). “Destructiveness, sadism, cruelty, malice, etc., seem so far to be not intrinsic but rather they seem to be violent reactions against frustration of our intrinsic needs, emotions and capacities” (Maslow, 1968b, p. 3). “We do know, however, that out of the search for fulfillment of a basic need—take love in the child for example—can come evil. The child, wanting his mother’s exclusive love, may bash his little brother over the head in hopes of getting more of it. What we call evil or pathological may certainly arise from, or replace, something good. Another example is the little squabbles among children; all the fighting they do about who should do what, about dividing up the chores, ultimately can be seen as a distorted expression of a very powerful need—fairness and justice” (Maslow, 1961, p. 8). Given the above, it may be fair to say that for Maslow, failure to satisfy our essential needs is the root of all human evil.
5. While “modern” societies are capable of providing for satisfaction of some human needs, particularly physiological and environmental needs, modern

capitalist societies struggle to provide conditions conducive to the satisfaction of all essential needs. Without going into the complicated details here, this is because modern societies organize around private accumulation of wealth. Societies that prioritize private accumulation of wealth deploy **Toxic Socialization** processes designed to create compliant and disempowered suitable for insertion into an accumulation regime (i.e., Regime of Accumulation) (Sosteric, 2016). In this process, human needs are neglected or actively subverted and human development and flourishing is sacrificed in the interests of this accumulation. In systems such as this,

1. needs and their satisfaction are subverted and distorted, undermining development and leading to psychological, emotional, physical, and spiritual atrophy, decline, and decay and
 2. psychological, emotional, cognitive, and spiritual pathology caused by toxic distortion and subversion of needs grows and deepens over time until
6. **The satisfaction of essential needs is a dynamic, synergistic, and non-linear process.** While the circle model rejects a rigid hierarchy, it does not propose that all needs are pursued equally at all times. Instead, needs interact in a complex web of synergy and mutual reinforcement. For example, the satisfaction of emotional needs (e.g., a sense of belonging) can provide the psychological security required to take intellectual risks, thereby facilitating the satisfaction of cognitive needs. Conversely, the satisfaction of cognitive needs (e.g., understanding one's environment) can enhance one's sense of power and control, contributing to psychological need satisfaction. Periods of stress or deprivation in one area (e.g., environmental safety) may temporarily increase the salience of that need, but the ultimate goal of Eupsychian development is the progressive and simultaneous cultivation of all need categories, where progress in one area fuels progress in others.
7. **Human needs can be subverted through 'Toxic Gratification,' a process that creates the illusion of satisfaction while undermining true development and connection.** Capitalist and consumerist societies are adept at offering distorted substitutes for essential needs: the need for connection is funneled into brand loyalty and social media metrics; the need for self-esteem is tied to material acquisition and status competition; the need for freedom is reduced to consumer choice. These pseudo-satisfactions do not lead to alignment or connection but instead foster addiction, perpetual dissatisfaction, and reinforcement of the very system that prevents genuine need fulfillment. A core task of Eupsychian psychology is to distinguish between authentic need satisfaction and its toxic, commercially-driven counterfeits
8. **A Eupsychian society and the well-being of its members can be assessed by developing metrics for the collective and individual satisfaction of the seven essential needs.** This moves beyond simplistic measures like GDP to create a 'Eupsychian Index' that evaluates a society's health based on its capacity to provide food security (Physiological), safe and aesthetic public spaces (Environmental), access to education and truth (Cognitive),

strong social support networks (Emotional), opportunities for agency and self-determination (Psychological), support for ethical development (Alignment), and facilitation of communal and spiritual experiences (Connection). At the individual level, diagnostic tools can be developed to identify which essential needs are thwarted or toxically gratified, guiding more effective and holistic therapeutic and social interventions.

9. It is the task of a modern Eupsychian psychology to provide guidance on human health, human development, and what we need to do to create conditions for human flourishing, i.e., the development of a healthy, fully actuated (fully aligned) and full transcended (fully connected) human beings, just like Maslow said we needed to do (Maslow, 1961)

Eupsychian Theory – Next Steps

For those interested in moving forward, I would suggest the following theoretical next steps.

Step one, develop a proper circle-based Eupsychian theory of human health. The theory would not be complicated at root. It would essentially revolve around the circle of seven essential needs. As Maslow said, to create healthy, fully developed humans, we need to meet all their needs. It would, however, be complicated in the details. Just how do we reorganize our societies in a way that meets all human needs? And how do we do it quickly? These are meta-disciplinary questions that are going to require the input of a lot of people.

Step two, develop a proper, circle-based Eupsychian theory of human mental, emotional, and spiritual distress and dysfunction we see all around us. Again, not complicated. As Maslow said, disorders are caused by thwarted needs. What will be complicated is wrapping our head around the extent of the extensive damage (Sosteric, 2025) and all the profound and debilitating ways that damage works itself into our brains, our nervous systems, and our lives.

Step three, once we have identified the extent of the damage, find ways to heal that damage. This is going to be a challenge not only because it is going to require a complete rethink of current healing modalities, and as scholars we all know how resistant to paradigmatic change we can be (Kuhn, 1962), but also because it will require, in my view, the sophisticated deployment of copious amounts of non-commercialized, Indigenous rooted psychedelic-assisted healing.

Number four, we have to take all the knowledge we develop and apply it to transform all our institutions in **Eupsychian Institutions**, institutions designed to support full human development and not the regime of accumulation. Given the accelerating planetary polycrisis (Albert, 2024), we need to do it fast. We have a small window of opportunity here to begin our transformation. If we don't open and pass through, will miss it, and this will be the end.

Conclusion

This brings us to the end of our Maslowian journey. We began by examining the iconic pyramid of needs, only to find it a corrupted and restrictive symbol, incapable of containing the grandeur of Maslow's true ambition: a Eupsychian vision of human flourishing. In its place, we have proposed a new icon—an Indigenous-inspired Circle of Seven Essential Needs—with five basic and two inner-directed need categories, organized not as a hierarchy but as concentric circles, like the rings of a tree. We have embedded this circle within a Eupsychian framework that honors Maslow's original intent while updating it for the 21st century, presenting it as the foundational blueprint for a global, civilizational transformation.

Let us be clear: the complete transformation called for here is not impossible. With adequate funding and global cooperation, it is an achievable goal. As a species, we possess the talent, productive capacity, administrative skill, and labor power necessary. The advent of AI could even simplify the logistics of this great transition. Yet, one formidable obstacle remains: not a lack of money, but a catastrophic failure of priority.

The problem is not a scarcity of resources. Trillions flow through global markets; a request for \$35 million to seed a Eupsychian institution is, to some, a trivial sum. The true impediment is a deep-seated addiction to money and power (Sosteric, 2018), driving a globally organized **accumulating class** to prioritize unfettered profit above all else. This addiction sustains a system of institutional, social, and economic distortions—war, manipulative marketing, and social control—that actively subvert the very needs this paper identifies as essential.

What is needed now is for this class to awaken to a simple, biological truth: we are all in the same ecological boat. If it sinks, we sink as a species. While some may survive a collapse, the survivors will not be chosen by class; the rich are vulnerable to pandemics and ecological, particularly pandemic. The centuries of brutal struggle required to rebuild would be a tragic irony, arriving just as we stand at the cusp of a potential global utopia.

So, we are left with an open question, the answer to which will define our future: Will the accumulators awaken and use their resources to reshape reality, or will they succumb to their addictions and deliver more of the same? We will know soon enough. Until then, stay safe, and good luck. The coming years will be decisive.

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