

Retelling Our Stories through Social Science: Abraham Maslow, Religion and Human Transcendence

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Abstract

This article offers an overview and integration of perspectives of humanist social psychology, linked with social policy action on behalf of stressed and oppressed groups struggling to achieve *morphogenesis*, the dialogue of emancipation and change. This approach draws on the discipline of humanist scholars, outlined in the work of Erikson, Dabrowski, Said, Bhaskar and in particular that of Abraham Maslow whom we regard as a leading scholar of this intellectual movement 50 years after his death. We follow Kaufman's recent exposition of Maslow's work through the discipline of telling and sharing "our stories", which is linked through qualitative methodology based on critical realism, towards dialogue for social change. We illustrate this approach from work with nurses facing the challenge of COVID care. We argue that this humanist approach is linked to the Maslowian ideals of self-actualization and self-transcendence, in which spiritual values, religious discipline and experience can have important roles.

Keywords

Humanist Psychology, Critical Realism, Religious Humanism, Religion & Health, Abraham Maslow, Barry Kaufman, Nurses & COVID, Self-Actualization, Self-Transcendence

1. Introduction

This article draws in part on the final chapter of a book by Adam-Bagley, Abubaker, & Sawyerr (2023a), *Developing Social Science and Religion for Liberation and Growth*. We offer a value-based social science derived from contrasted

religious and secular approaches (Secular Humanism, Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Islam, Hinduism, Daoism and other world religions), using a Critical Realist approach to value-based social science research (Adam-Bagley & Abubaker, 2019; Adam-Bagley et al., 2023b). Earlier chapters in this book focused on struggles against the exploitation of girls and women in contrasted cultures, drawing on our previously published research in Bangladesh, Pakistan, the United Kingdom, and North America, and on economic struggles and intermittent warfare involving Israel and Palestine (Abubaker et al., 2022). We offer below intellectual analyses which draw on the final chapter of our book, an approach which emphasizes the importance of key scholars who have analysed humanism's ethical and epistemological approach to social science methodologies, and to social and policy and action in the past 35 years.

We follow Plummer (2021) in defining humanism as a coherent collection of philosophies and ideals which have as a central focus *human beings* and their multiple activities: Critical humanism:

"...engages with (and tells the stories of) the perpetual narrative reconstructions and conflicts over what it means to be human. Ultimately it does this with the goal of building on these contested understandings to find pathways into better futures and worlds. Critical humanism is an emerging project to make sense of all this. Even as it will raise many problems, it enables us to ask questions about what kind of world we want to live in, what kind of person we want to be in that world, and how it needs to be transformed." (Plummer, 2021: p. 7)

Humanism focuses on *all* individuals, acknowledging individual differences and talents, with the underlying and connecting philosophy that all individuals wish to make the best of themselves through supporting an implicit social contract in which (for example, in Bhaskar's *ubuntu* principle): "I am because you are." (Bhaskar, 2008)

2. Beginning with Edward Said...

In the preface to his study on ethnocentric perceptions of non-European cultures, titled *Orientalism*, Edward Said (2016) wrote that

"...humanism is the only – I would go so far as saying the final – resistance we have against the inhuman practices and injustices that disfigure human history...my arguments...based on a humanist position that places the well-being of the historical, embodied human struggling for a better world at the heart of its analysis: it puts our species to the forefront of critical thinking. Humanism is the world philosophy that considers what it means to be a human being across the globe. It sees that the world we live in is a human world: it is created through human beings, organized and disorganized by human beings, and ultimately transformed by human beings. It is people doing things together that make states, economies, institutions happen. It is people together who change the world and make it a better or lesser place... Humanistic research starts with the people around the world living their daily lives of difference. At the core of our

concerns lies the talk, feelings, actions, bodies, vulnerabilities, creativities, moralities, sufferings, joys, and passions of people as they share communities and social worlds, create human bonds, and confront the everyday constraints of history and a material world of inequalities and exclusions.” (Said, 2016: p. 1)

Edward Said was born a Palestinian Christian, but his intellectual bond with the secular humanists on whom [Plummer \(2021\)](#) focuses his magisterial book, is clear. Muslims too acknowledge the thrust and integrity of Said’s scholarship ([Aruri & Shuraydi, 2021](#)) Said was for many years a leading critic of the Western world’s islamophobia and its biased and prejudiced portrayals of Muslim cultures. Like his fellow-Christian Yasser Arafat, Said also advocated peaceful solutions for relations between Israel and Palestine. In his autobiography Said tells his life’s story, of being a wandering intellectual whose dispossessed identity gave him powerful insights into both epistemology and peace-making; and in the uncovering of Western cant and prejudice regarding Islam, and Palestine ([Said, 2016](#)).

There is prescience too of the constructive survival of human civilizations in the writing of [Ken Plummer \(2019, 2021\)](#) who offers a masterful account of recounting stories to redeem ourselves and others. As Christians, Muslims, Jews and Secularists seem to agree: if you can save one life, it’s as if you have saved the whole world. Think big, start small, and go on from there. For example, the “stories” from Israel and Palestine recounted by [Baron-Cohen \(2011\)](#) and [Izzeldin Abuelaish \(2011\)](#) add moral force to this dictum, of pacifist strength in the face of military aggression.

The life-stories of “ourselves” in relation to “others” have two elements: the humanist adoption of common values through emotional bonding; and the shared critical rationality embedded in stories. Our stories must be true, loving and humane (i.e. humanist in character) showing how in this sharing we can help one another. If you help your neighbour in both dialogue and action, you are on “the straight path” to mending the world. As [Keltner \(2009\)](#) advises, “focus on the moral beauty of others”. This may be part of [Margaret Archer’s \(2017\) morphogenesis](#), remaking ourselves and others through dialogue, through the telling of stories

The most powerful stories are those which stem from suffering, but develop great optimism and profound spirituality in the telling. This is the case in particular with the stories of death-camp victims and survivors, such as Anne Frank, Etty Hillesum, Elie Wiesel, Eugen Heimler, Primo Levi, Viktor Frankl and other brave souls who faced the most dreadful assault upon human civilization, but emerged with dignity, love, transcendence, and the advocacy of restorative justice ([Adam-Bagley, 2023](#)). This is also the social movement advocated and sponsored by [Todorov \(2010\)](#). Searching for “the keys to kindness” is a way of healing oneself, and a broader network of social relationships and their implicit cultural values (which is how the social contract, the implicit but powerful dynamic of the civilized society works) ([Hammond, 2022](#)).

3. Varieties of Religious Experience: Their Purpose and Meaning

3.1. William James and Modern Research on Religious Experience

*“We can experience union with something larger than ourselves and in that union find our greatest peace.” (James, 1982, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, p. 204)*

The father of modern humanistic psychology, William James (1893) in his *Principles of Psychology*, is also well known for his work on *Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) in which he mapped and described different kinds of religious and transcendental experiences which humans can achieve: suffice to say, his intellectual heir Abraham Maslow’s peak experiences and self-transcendence can take a variety of forms, both philosophical and experiential.

According to Butler-Bowdon (2005):

“For William James...spiritual ideas should be judged on three criteria: 1) immediate luminousness; 2) philosophical reasonableness; and 3) moral helpfulness. Put simply, do they enlighten us, do they make sense, are they a good guide to living?” (Butler-Bowdon, 2005: p. 10)

James’ ideas have stimulated much research in the field of “religious sociology”, and in reviewing and synthesising this work Yaden and Nuberg (2022) borrow James’ title and update his themes in their book *The Varieties of Spiritual Experiences: 21st Century Research*. They find that about 30 percent of people in a variety of cultures report having had some kind of “spiritual experience”. While some neurological correlates of such experience have been established, it has proved impossible to predict when such an experience might occur. Around 80 percent of those having a spiritual experience regarded it as positive or enlightening, although only some ten percent of these individuals had experiences of a divine presence.

3.2. Benefits of Being Religious?

Some neuroscientists and philosophers such as Eccles and Popper (2014) on *The Self and Its Brain*, and Beauregard and O’Leary (2007) on *The Spiritual Brain* have argued that the “urge to be spiritual” is embedded in the human neuro-system. In these arguments “being spiritual” may be part of both human goodness, and of human survival.

These ideas have resonance with Robson (2022) on how being religious (or at least, having an active religious affiliation) can benefit personal life although it’s not clear how many people are religious merely because of social and health benefits. Robson gathers together two decades of social science research which shows that individuals actively associated with a church, chapel, mosque, synagogue, temple or other religious venue (in physical, emotional or social ways) live, on average about 5 years longer than the “non-religious”. They have lower rates of heart disease and cancer, are less likely to be psychiatrically depressed or anxious, less likely to be suicidal, or hypertensive. Why should this be so?

The most likely reason seems to be that religious people are less likely to use or misuse alcohol or drugs; less likely to practise unsafe sex; less likely to smoke; they are less socially isolated: and in economic difficulty may be supported by their religious communities. Furthermore, the acts of being helpful to others, and praying for others (as well as for oneself) seems to bring health benefits. In reaching these conclusions Robson cites studies from North America Europe, The Philippines, Hong Kong and elsewhere (Kwok et al., 2014; Galvez et al., 2021).

4. Abraham Maslow: The Scholar of Transcendence, both Secular and Religious

4.1. Maslow's Short but Productive Life, 1908 to 1970

After a rather miserable childhood in New York City, where his Jewish parents had settled following emigration from Russia, Maslow studied law at university. He quickly abandoned this “dry” topic for what he hoped would be the more warm-blooded discipline of psychology. In this too he was disappointed, being directed in his doctoral work into studies of sexual dominance in imprisoned primates (Maslow, 1936). Maslow moved in a radical direction, teaming with noted anthropologists Ruth Benedict and Margaret Mead in using new, qualitative methodologies in describing how people survive often wretched childhoods, to become fulfilled individuals making “the best of themselves”, becoming good citizens in terms of the implicit social contract, and finally (for some) achieving self-transcendence (Maslow, 1971). His work is now widely cited, and productively used in many settings including clinical psychology, social work practice, industrial psychology, and management.

Maslow's work resonates with new generations of scholars and practitioners in the fields of health care, counselling and management (e.g. Bridgman et al., 2019) and his ideas have been taken forward in fresh thinking, evidenced by Kaufman's (2020) *Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization*.

“Abraham Maslow was always looking at the ‘big picture.’ Whereas most social scientists of his day seemed to wear blinders that riveted their attention to narrow concerns, Maslow's own vision was far-reaching. His lifetime of discoveries in motivation and personality transcended academic psychology, and extended into the major business fields of management and marketing.” (Hoffman, 2011: p. 4)

Maslow's view of the world, and of the role of psychology in creating a new world which transcends the evils and the cruelties of the past world is lyrically expressed in his 1956 essay (Hoffman, 2011, 2020).

“I believe that the world will either be saved by the psychologists or it won't be saved at all... All important problems of war and peace, exploitation and brotherhood, hatred, love and sickness and health, misunderstanding and understanding, the happiness and unhappiness of humankind will yield only to a better understanding of human nature... Hard science is a means, not an end. The

end is human fulfilment, human betterment, growth and happiness... By psychologists I mean all sorts of people, not just the profession of psychology... I include some sociologists, linguists, anthropologists, educators, philosophers, artists, publicists, linguistics and business people.” (Maslow, 1956: p. 19)

In this model, psychology “should have an intrinsic value commitment: the meaning and betterment of human endeavour in all spheres of society... Psychology and philosophy *must* go hand in hand in focussing on and speculating about human actions and endeavours, and moral and behavioral choices.” (Maslow, 1956: p. 20) Psychology should, in this model, not offer generalisations from a large, anonymised group of “subjects”: it should present a series of linked case studies which enable “John Smith” to be the “best John Smith in the world.”

4.2. In the Master’s Footsteps

The Blackfoot nation, living in what is now Southern Alberta, Canada (part of the Plains Cree civilization) is also known in Northern Montana as the Blackfeet people. North and south of the border, they are part of the same nation, whose traditional land was arbitrarily cut by the 49th Parallel which the colonial powers used to divide Canada from the USA.

Soon after one of us (CAB) arrived in Calgary, Alberta to join the Faculty of Social Welfare at the University there, he was introduced to a meeting of elders of the Blackfoot Nation, in 1981. As a naïve newcomer having lunch with an Elder, and searching for a topic of conversation he ventured the opinion that Moose were stupid animals, since they stood on the highway without moving, staring the car down. “No,” the Elder replied. “They are wise. The Great Creator has given them to us as sustenance which is easy for us to harvest”. This first lesson in theology of the First Nations began a fruitful intellectual and moral journey for CAB.

CAB later worked with the Blackfoot as a social work consultant doing “expert witness” assessments of Native children removed from their homes by social services and placed with white foster parents. This also involved an assessment of Native children adopted by “white” foster carers, and he was able to show that this cultural mismatch often proved harmful to children’s psychosocial development (Adam-Bagley, 1991a).

CAB was treading in the footsteps of the human-centred psychologist Abraham Maslow who in 1937 came to Calgary to begin work on the psychological anthropology of The Blackfoot Nation, on behalf of the anthropologist, Ruth Benedict. Abraham Maslow was a refugee from the seemingly barren experimental work that his doctoral studies had involved, and he sought intellectual sanctuary with the well-known social anthropologist Ruth Benedict (who lived from 1887 to 1948), and who sent Maslow to Alberta to undertake qualitative work on understanding the psychological embodiment of culture in an indigenous First Nation, the Blackfoot of Southern Alberta. Maslow’s understandings of the culture and social psychology of an indigenous people stimulated the development of his now famous writings on self-actualization, and synergy in self and

culture (Benedict, 1940; Maslow, 1937; Maslow & Honigmann, 1970; Maslow, 1951; Maslow, Honigmann, & Mead, 1970; Takaki et al., 2016; Feigenbaum & Smith, 2020).

For North American Native peoples, synergy (giving support and praise to others, and receiving similar support and praise in return, in relation to both functional and overarching goals); and unity with the natural world within a metaphysical system of animism - are fundamental ethical behaviours. The Blackfoot still retaining their original language, with strong vestiges of traditional culture and leading a full and culturally-contained life, achieved a mental contentment which in elders Maslow described as “self-actualization”, concepts which he developed in his later writing. Kaufman (2020) also acknowledges the Blackfoot experience of Maslow in developing the important concept of synergy, in which “virtue pays”, in the traditional medicine wheel of aboriginal culture.¹

In postscript to the ideas of synergy and actualization embedded in Native people’s social structure and values, it is clear that Canada’s colonial policies of attempting to suppress Native language and culture through removal of children into notorious residential schools, where many died (TRC, 2015; Austin, 2023) has meant that Native cultures have struggled to survive intact. Alcoholism became common, giving social workers a reason to remove children from parents, even though a member of the extended family was almost certainly available to provide child care (Adam-Bagley, 1991a; Adam-Bagley et al., 1994).

Our thesis that high recorded suicide rates in Native peoples reflected levels of poverty was borne out in research in Alberta (Adam-Bagley, 1991b) which showed that when oil was discovered on tribal lands in the 1960s, the welfare and mental health of Band members improved, and suicide rates diminished. When prosperity returned through oil revenues, so did a resurgence in traditional Native culture and values.²

5. Maslow’s Well-Known Pyramid of Human Needs and Their Achievement

Most text-books for professionals in the fields of human service, and management psychology reproduce the well-known pyramid which details develop-

¹David Peat (2002) a quantum physicist visited and absorbed Blackfoot culture for several years: “... hitherto having spent all of my life steeped in and influenced by linear Western science, I was entranced by the Native world view and, through dialogue circles between scientists and Native Elders, I began to explore this in greater depth... I offer a “Blackfoot Physics” through a synthesis of anthropology, history, metaphysics, cosmology and quantum theory... I compare the medicines, the myths, the languages, indeed the entire perceptions of reality of two peoples, Western and Indigenous. What became apparent was the amazing resemblance between Indigenous teachings and some of the insights that have emerged from modern science...a congruence that is as enlightening about the physical universe as it is about the circular evolution of man’s understanding.”

²Writing on management applications of his models, Maslow wrote some 35 years after his field-work with the Blackfoot: “For a Blackfoot Indian to discover a gold mine would make everyone in the tribe happy because everyone would share benefit from it. Whereas in modern society, finding a gold mine is the surest way of alienating many people who are close to us.” (Maslow, 1998: p. 30). When Blackfoot people discovered not gold, but oil on their land, wealth from revenues was in fact shared, and the communities grew and prospered, and alcoholism and suicide greatly diminished with newly found prosperity (Adam-Bagley, 1991b).

mental challenges and achievements. We don't reproduce it here since Maslow never designed such a pyramid – it was recreated after his death by interpreters of his published writing (Koltko-Rivera, 2006; Bland & DeRobertis, 2020).

Although widely used in education of human service professionals, the “pyramid” of human needs does not include the setting in which children spend “15,000 hours” of their lives (Rutter, 1979; Sawyerr & Adam-Bagley, 2017), namely their secondary schools. Good education is crucial for healthy emotional and cognitive development and must build upon the earlier stages of development in Maslow's (1987) model. That is why we've added Educational and Leisure Needs in the model which we offer in tabular form, in **Table 1** below. We add two final stages to Maslow's initial model: self-transcendence (Maslow, 1971) drawing on the more recently developed “collective-transcendence” from the work of Viktor Frankl (1988).

We begin at the first level beginning at the earliest stages of development and its challenges, rather than inverting the developmental model of needs as the pyramid does. This seems more logical in developing schema for understanding and promoting basic human needs. We also add to the model by inserting “educational fulfilment” as an important developmental stage. Education for every citizen should not merely enable the acquisition of knowledge: it should enable the learner to explore and enjoy their environment with an inquisitive mind, seeking knowledge and refreshment in nature, in sport, in exercise, and in intellectual and social exploration. Thus Kaufman (2020) in his presentation and re-framing of Maslow's ideas comments:

“Imagine if schools weren't only places to learn standardized academic material but were also places full of wonder, awe, and self-actualization – as well as hope for humanity.” (Kaufman, 2020: p. 229)

At “the peak” of the popular pyramid is “self-actualization”, making the most of one's talents in enjoying a successful life, stressors and checks at previous levels having been overcome. But in his final writings (Maslow, 1971, 1987, 1996, 1998, 2022) he identified a final stage *beyond* self-actualization, which he termed “self-transcendence”, in which the individual seeks to focus on a cause or goal which is beyond the mere maximization of an individual's talents. It involves a communion beyond the boundaries of the self, through “peak experiences” which lead to great satisfaction for selfhood in achieving the maximum of potential goals. This may, but certainly not always, involve religious or spiritual experiences.

The model in **Table 1** retains all of the elements in the original model, including the very important goal of self-actualization:

“Self-actualization does not mean a transcendence of all human problems. Conflict, anxiety, frustration, sadness, hurt, and guilt all can be found in healthy human beings; on the other hand, with increasing maturity, one's focus shifts from neurotic pseudo-problems to the real, unavoidable existential problems.” (Maslow, 1987: p. 230)

Table 1. Adaptation, expansion & restatement of Maslow's "Pyramid" of universal needs & achievements.

1. Basic Physical Needs:	<i>Being born alive, and healthy, from a pregnancy which maximises maternal health; good infant nutrition; adequate warmth and shelter; close bond with a loving caretaker; toileting cared for; sound sleep.</i>
2. Safety Needs	<i>Security of body; safe schooling and employment, with stability & security; and adequate reward from work. Consistency of caregiving in family; developing freely chosen sexual intimacy & pregnancy; affordable, high quality health care; affordable & comfortable dwelling place.</i>
3. Love and Belonging Needs	<i>Love of partners in sexual fulfilment; good friendships and peer support; warm and fulfilling family life; engagement with supportive value and/or religious mentors and peers.</i>
4. Educational and Leisure Needs	<i>Affordable access to high quality basic and higher education; availability of aesthetic and leisure pursuits, in music, art and movement; access to sports as participant & spectator; access to horticulture and to the world of nature.</i>
5. Esteem Needs	<i>Good self-esteem from interaction with parents, & peers; self-concept supported by local culture and national values; achievement of confidence and respect in the wider, non-discriminating society; development of talents, fostered and esteemed by cultural values; being respected as a unique and free citizen.</i>
6. Self-Actualization	<i>Successful achievement of a life guided by chosen moral values; achieving creative excellence and spontaneity; acceptance of fulfilment of self-identity in social relationships; understanding of the meaning of one's personal life; pleasure in the achievements of family, children and others.</i>
7. Self-Transcendence	<i>Seeking to serve a cause "beyond the self", with an experience of communication beyond the boundaries of the self, through "peak experiences"</i>
8. Collective-Transcendence	<i>Self-transcendence takes place within a community of peers who share the same beliefs and goals, sometimes as part of a shared religious identity; or a shared value commitment to offer service, or achieve social change.</i>

Maslow emphasized that the ability to adapt to circumstances beyond one's control in constructive ways, remaining calm when faced by crisis, treating setbacks as opportunities for growth did depend *to a certain extent* on experiencing some success in having earlier Safety and Esteem needs met: "The child with a good basis of safety, love, and respect-need-gratification is able to profit from... frustrations and become stronger thereby." (Maslow, 1987: p. 220). Maslow (1996) also accentuated that tragedy is often conducive to growth insofar as it

“confronts [individuals] with the ultimate values, questions, and problems that [they] ordinarily forget about in everyday existence” (p. 56).

Maslow (1996) identified several interrelated qualities of self-actualizing people. They have:

“...clearer, more efficient perception of reality; more openness to experience; increased integration, wholeness, and unity of the person; increased spontaneity, expressiveness, full functioning, aliveness; a real self, firm identity, autonomy, uniqueness; increased objectivity, detachment, transcendence of self; recovery of creativeness; ability to fuse concreteness and abstractness; democratic character structure, ability to love...” (Maslow, 1996: pp. 172-173)

In our adaptation of the Maslowian stages in **Table 1**, Stages 2 to 5 often influence individual feelings and actions (in memory at least) but in parallel in the individual’s psychological scheme, their current self-concept; they are *mutually reinforcing* factors in healthy psychosocial development, as we ponder on and retell our life’s story, to ourselves and to others. Maslow (1996) commented that “...the ability to be aggressive and angry is found in all self-actualizing people, who are able to let it flow forth freely when the external situation ‘calls for’ it” (p. 216). Such individuals are accepting of the full range of human impulses without rejecting or mentally suppressing them in the interest of reducing tension.

Viktor Frankl (1988) working independently of Maslow developed a rather similar idea of “self-transcendence” (responding to the God or the spirit within oneself). This idea has been taken forward by Wong (2017) who, melding the ideas of Frankl and Maslow, develops the idea of “cultural transcendence”, which involves various motivations including spiritual response, but may also reflect ideological commitment to higher order value (Llanos & Verduzco, 2022). This idea of cultural transcendence is added as the final phase in the Maslowian model of the ideal pathway in human development and achievement.

5.1. Maslow and “Peak Experiences”

In studying stories, histories and accounts of *peak experiences* in a variety of individuals, Maslow (1965, 1971, 2022) identified forms of thinking concerning self-reflection, personal achievement and values which he termed “Being-cognition” (or “B-cognition”), which is holistic and accepting of self, and which is contrasted with an evaluative dimension termed “Deficiency-cognition”. The B-values, which often describe the “self-transcendent” person in Maslow’s case studies, are characterized by people who frequently manifest:

- 1) *Commitment to Truth*: reaching for the values of honesty, reality, simplicity; richness of thought and aesthetic interests, which recognise beauty; development of personal values which imply a moral purpose in one’s life; and the search for a completed and fulfilled life.
- 2) *A Search for Goodness*: seeking “oughtness” and moral obligations; seeking justice for oneself and others; being forthright and benevolent.
- 3) *A Search for Beauty*: finding richness in simplicity; finding wholeness,

completion and perfection in the moral beauty of humans.

4) *Finding Wholeness*: integration of complexities in a unified form; interconnectedness; simplicity in organization and structure of organizations.

5) *Sense of “Being Alive”*: spontaneity combined with self-knowledge and self-regulation.

6) *Being Unique*: idiosyncrasy; individuality in personhood and enterprise.

7) *Seeking Perfection*: completeness through achievement of just goals; getting things in the right order, to achieve a sense of completeness.

8) *Achieving Completion*: achieving a sense of ending tasks and endeavours; finding justice for others; accepting fulfilment through “fate”.

9) *Achieving Justice*: seeking fairness; orderliness; lawfulness; seeking and defining “oughtness”.

10) *Finding Simplicity*: finding honesty in the abstract being of people and their institutions.

11) *Finding Richness*: finding both complexity and intricacy in people and their institutions.

12) *Achieving Effortlessness*: developing a life which lacks strain, striving or difficulty; finding grace, perfection and beauty of functioning in self and others.

13) *Being Playful*: enjoying fun, joy, amusement, sport and exercise, gaiety and humour in enjoying life, and exuberant interaction with others.

14) *Being Self-sufficient*: achieving autonomy and independence through self-determination, enabling environment-transcendence in oneself; achieving “personal separateness” and uniqueness, living by one’s own values.

This fascinating account of “ideal types” of personhood is at once both simple and complex. Some of these ideal types overlap, sometimes they slightly contradict one another, but mostly they reinforce one another as the bedrock of humanistic personality psychology. Achieving these goals is part of both self-actualization and transcendence (personal and cultural).

5.2. Maslow, Personality Theory and “the Big Five” (OCEAN) Dimensions

Personality theory has by and large developed separately in mainstream psychology, with Maslowian humanistic psychology models, and “hard science” behaviourist approaches being addressed in “parallel” academic streams (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). But an important study has linked Maslow’s model with the “Big 5” personality profiles, the latter now being widely used in personnel and counselling psychology (Montag et al., 2020). The 5-factor personality dimensions (OCEAN) measure: *Openness to Experience*, *Conscientiousness*, *Extraversion*, *Agreeableness*, and *Neuroticism*, and their polar opposites (since these profiles are fitted to a normal curve when measured, many people, up to 50%, fall into the middle range of these five personality profiles).

Montag and his colleagues (2020) found that Neuroticism was *inversely* linked to successful achievement of life satisfaction (including self-actualization) on Lester’s (2013) measure which operationalized success or otherwise in meeting

the challenges of the Maslowian “stages”, into a standardized questionnaire. All of the other Big 5 dimensions had statistically significant links to success at each stage of the Maslowian levels of development. But the data also showed that the successful achievement of Maslowian stages occurred *simultaneously* (at the point of data collection), and not sequentially. This is important, since it contradicts the assumption of some practitioners who argue that successful achievement of one Maslowian stage (in the supposed pyramid) is crucial before the next stage can be achieved. However, [Lester's \(2013\)](#) work shows that individuals in the Maslowian development model frequently review their life's progress, and come to terms with the past (according to personality strengths, such as those measured by the OCEAN dimensions), in making an onward journey of success in life, moving towards “self-actualization”.

This implies that the developmental schema of other psychologists should also guide our knowledge of how individuals overcome earlier life hazards, and incorporate them into a meaningful, ongoing identity. [Webb \(2008\)](#) explains that Dabrowski and Maslow were collaborative colleagues in developing models of identity achievement ([Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977](#); [Mendaglio, 2008](#); [Piechowski, 2008](#)). Simultaneously with achievement of basic needs, there is a struggle faced by all individuals in the form of “dis-integration”, a review of self-characteristics leading to “re-integration” before the achievement of “making the best of oneself” finally emerges ([Table 2](#)). The actual numbers in any population who actually achieve this higher level of integration is a challenge for future social science research to establish.

[Kaufman \(2020\)](#) integrates both Loevinger's and Erikson's ego-development models in his rewriting of Maslow's “stages” model, and has developed a research instrument in order to identify morally creative and soul-full individuals. This is a challenge for a much larger study to estimate levels of “goodness” in human populations. Another excellent example of how individuals face challenges, including Eriksonian “identity crises” in achieving long-term happiness and transcendent old age, comes from the Harvard longitudinal studies ([Malone et al., 2016](#); [Waldinger & Shultz, 2015, 2016](#)).

Maslow's (1971) developmental model does suggest that longitudinal studies of the type pioneered by [Waldinger and colleagues \(2016\)](#) over a 40-year period, should be an ongoing research agenda:

“The idea that...if one need is satisfied, then another emerges...might give the false impression that a need must be satisfied 100% before the next need emerges. In actual fact, most individuals are partially satisfied in all their basic needs and partially unsatisfied in all their basic needs at the same time. A more realistic description of the hierarchy would be in terms of decreasing percentages of satisfaction as we go up the hierarchy of prepotency... The emergence of a new need is not a sudden phenomenon, but rather a gradual emergence by slow degrees.” ([Maslow, 1971: pp. 27-28](#))

[Anne Smith \(2013\)](#) used the Maslow-Dabrowski schema to great effect in enabling refugees in London to re-achieve “lost identities” through drama and

story-telling, recreating their lives in a new environment, in the direction of self-actualization. Dabrowski's model seems to merge with Erikson's (1993), Erikson and Erikson (1998) eight stages of development, with a tension or struggle between ideals and achievements at each stage: in the final stage is the struggle between "wisdom" and "stagnation". Dabrowski's idea of individuals recreating themselves with fresh, onward identities as they review their development and face new tasks, is described as "a personality theory for the 21st century", which parallels and supports the model of Maslow (Piechowski, 2008). The hierarchy of Dabrowskian personality challenges is outline in Table 2, above.

6. Big Five Personality Profiles: Occupational Success, Maslowian and Religious Ideals

The Big Five model reliably predicts some of the success in employment and work experienced by individuals across time, and *Openness to Experience* (which portrays individuals as being ingenious, inquisitive, and novelty seeking - McCrae & John, 1992) is the strongest of the OCEAN dimensions in predicting an individual's success. This personality trait includes "...being inventive, cultivated,

Table 2. Summary of Dabrowskian developmental levels (based on Dabrowsi & Piechowski, 1977; Piechowski, 2003, 2008; Smith, 2013).

LEVEL I: PRIMARY INTEGRATION

- Individuals are governed by the "first factor" of developmental needs and are primarily influenced by heredity, basic impulses, and/or social, environmental forces.
- This level is marked by selfishness and egocentrism; individuals often seek self-fulfilment through "ends justify the means" behaviour.

LEVEL II: UNILEVEL "DIS"-INTEGRATION

- This level is characterized by a lack of inner direction, submission to the values of the group, socially accepted values and beliefs, with the emergence of ambiguities about "popular" and "moral" courses of action.
- This "Second factor" serves as the organizing principle of social factors, and individual conformity to social system groups.

LEVEL III: MULTILEVEL 'DIS'-INTEGRATION

- Within this level, individuals begin to get a sense of the ideal, of moral concerns, and of the existence of conflicting values within themselves.
- The individual's inner tension between "What is" and "What ought to be" is responsible for the process of an unfolding "positive maladjustment" or "creative psychoneurosis".

LEVEL IV: DIRECTED MULTILEVEL "DIS"-INTEGRATION

- The individual begins to move towards self-actualization and holds a strong sense of responsibility concerning others' well-being, through personal inner growth.
- This becomes the primary motivator of growth, spurring individuals to work towards agreement between their actions and their ideals.

LEVEL V: SECONDARY INTEGRATION (SELF-ACTUALIZATION)

- The "personality ideal" is achieved, and individuals experience harmony and are at peace with themselves. Lower forms of motivation have been surpassed and are replaced by higher forms of awareness, insight, empathy, autonomy, and "self-compassion".

questioning, unusual, forward-thinking, intellectual and imaginatively complex. Individuals with a high degree of openness appreciate new concepts and viewpoints, and create new ideas, both practical and spiritual... Such successful individuals tend to be exceptionally accountable, trustworthy, tough-minded when necessary, and prompt in meeting deadlines.” These individuals are also often highly *Conscientious* people, and are result-focused, enthusiastic and task-focused (Templer, 2012).

The Big 5 (OCEAN) personality profiles have validity and application across a wide range of world cultures (Saroglou, 2010). But in for example, the Islamic world there have been challenges to the idea of abstracting personality traits from the whole person: rather, the individual is treated as a unique individual following a straight path on their particular journey to enlightenment. Thus Maslow’s “global” ideal of self-actualization is seen as being appropriate for describing success in employment in a Muslim culture (Zakaria & Malek, 2014).

A comparison of Maslowian and OCEAN profiles in predicting personal success has been usefully addressed by Abdullah et al. (2019) in a study of personnel in four Islamic banks in Malaysia. By far the strongest personality profile predicting occupational success was *Openness to Experience*, which the authors link to the Maslowian profile of Self-Actualization. In another important Malaysian study Saeednia & Nor (2013) found that individuals were able to achieve self-actualization even though their “lower” needs in the Maslowian “hierarchy” had not been fully met. In other words, adults through an act of will, and with the help of others, are often able to overcome early disadvantage. This is an optimistic conclusion, since it suggests that individuals may be constantly “reinventing” themselves, through G.H. Mead’s (1964) “I-Me” self-dialogue, healing their identities (as both Maslow and Dabrowski suggest), as part of the natural will of humans to survive, and make the best of themselves. In joining with others in this task, this identity-remaking is part of *morphogenesis* in Archer’s critical realism (Archer, 2017).

How do the OCEAN profiles link to self-disciplined religious journeys? Saroglou (2010) answers this question by further analysis of previous data sets (from 71 samples in 19 different countries, including 21,715 individuals) in which questions about religiosity and religious observance were also asked. Results were consistent across gender and age groups, for every type of religion studied (Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism, Daoism et al.): high scores on A (Agreeableness) and C (Conscientiousness) predicted *becoming* religious. Religious affiliation or socialization did not seem to cause these character traits. Rather, individuals took advantage of existing religious institutions to become more fully committed people, sharing with others the doing of good deeds. Others high on Agreeableness and Conscientiousness in these cohorts were committed ethical humanists without any particular religious affiliation.

These interesting results bring into focus the question of *intrinsic* versus *extrinsic* commitment to religious values, a dilemma identified in humanist psy-

chology by Gordon Allport (Allport & Ross, 1967; Gorsuch, 2019) *Extrinsic* attachment to religion involves affiliating with a religion for reasons of social prestige, self-aggrandisement, or conforming to strictures of social control. Most “national” religions permit affiliation of this type. In England the state church, the Church of England is used by many as a matter of convenience for baptisms, weddings and funerals by individuals who rarely if ever, attend the parish church for devotional reasons. In contrast, the minority of the population who have an *intrinsic* commitment to religious worship and values may lead more spiritually disciplined and ethically committed lives. Allport & Ross (1967) argued that individuals who scored highly on measures of prejudice would be more likely to treat religion as a matter of convenience, part of the armamentarium of social capital. We confirmed this view in studies of Dutch attitudes to minorities, based on types of religious affiliation and commitment (Adam-Bagley, 1973).

7. Developmental Pathways: Overcoming Early Disadvantage in Achieving Self-Actualization and Beyond

The quotations from Maslow show that he was keenly aware of how emerging successfully from each stage of developmental challenge (in the “pillar” in **Table 1** above) often involves struggle and setback: we need the help, counsel, advice and support of others in making these steps as we develop, grow and age (Dabrowski & Piechowski, 1977). The first five levels are crucially important, and need policy and practice guided by child-centred humanism, outlined earlier. The work of Bowlby (1982) and Rutter (1998) is important in showing the kinds of parenting, family environment and social structure which enables healthy psychological and neurological development, with the crucial bonding to a caring figure in the development of good levels of self-esteem and adjustment. These developmental psychology pathways fit neatly within the Maslowian stages. British research continues to show that disrupted, cruel or abusive experiences in childhood often have an adult sequel in violent or other maladaptive behaviour (Sawyer & Adam-Bagley, 2023).

Erik Erikson (1993) like Maslow, observed that healthy development involves not only the meeting of the child’s basic needs, but also involves their ability to withstand some level of deprivation that enables individuals to “cope with later deprivation because they have been made secure and strong in the earliest years,” which enables their psychological strength and emotional security when faced with later challenges, as adolescents and adults (Maslow, 1987: p. 27). On physiological needs, Erikson (1993) suggested, like Maslow, that a key developmental task for infants is to establish confidence in caregivers. Thus, secure interactions between parent and child mediate the relationship between low socioeconomic status and healthy development (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). As Kaufman (2020) in his exposition of Maslow’s psychological schema (which stems from the work of Erikson and others) observes: “We can work on multiple needs simultaneously.” (p. xxix)

8. Scott Barry Kaufman's Transcend: The New Science of Self-Actualization

In the Master's Footsteps...

Kaufman dedicates this remarkable book "...to Abraham Maslow, a dear friend I've never met." Kaufman's scholarship (2018 to 2022) has received multiple positive reviews from scholars, counsellors and activists such as (on Kaufman, 2020) "This splendid book is a twofer. It's a retelling of the life of Abraham Maslow woven through an insightful updating of Maslow's theory" (Martin Seligman, 2018). We can't summarise the contents of this 390-page book here, but certainly recommend scholars, social scientists and theologians to read it. We begin a brief overview by referring to Kaufman's earlier journal articles which are woven into the text of his book.

Kaufman (2022) begins his introduction to the search for human goodness ("the Light Triad") with this quotation from the diary of Anne Frank, the Dutch Jewish girl who was hidden in Amsterdam, trying to escape transportation to a death camp: "I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart." (Anne Frank, 2010: p. 332). Kaufman bonds intellectually and emotionally, with the victims and survivors of the Holocaust who transcend these experiences with enlightened world views, and psychological and social therapies based on the transcendent intuition that the spirit and practice of goodness, appealing to the best in every individual, must be the only way forward that civilization can proceed.

Kaufman follows directly Maslow's footsteps in offering us a lyrical mixture of social science analysis and ethical advocacy, in studying "self-actualizing people in the 21st century, together with an integration with contemporary theory and research on personality and well-being." (Kaufman, 2020: p. 7) This enterprise begins with Kaufman et al.'s (2019) development of measures of a concept called the *Light Triad*, the search for a measure of human motivation that identified

"...a loving and beneficent orientation toward others ("everyday saints") that consists of three facets: Kantianism (treating people as ends unto themselves), Humanism (valuing the dignity and worth of each individual), and Faith in Humanity (believing in the fundamental goodness of human beings)." (Kaufman, 2018: p. 4)

Individuals with high scores on this measure

"...reported more satisfaction with their relationships, competence, and autonomy, and they also reported higher levels of secure attachment style...in their relationships...the light triad was related to being primarily motivated by intimacy and self-transcendent values. Many character strengths correlated with the Light Triad, including curiosity, perspective, zest, love, kindness, teamwork, forgiveness, and gratitude... Individuals scoring higher on the LTS also reported higher self-esteem, authenticity, and a stronger sense of self...unlike the Dark Triad, the Light Triad was uncorrelated with bravery or assertiveness." (Kaufman, 2020: pp. 121-122)

Kaufman's (2020) book is shot through with the energetic epistemology of optimism, drawing on and reframing Maslow on synergy, self-actualization, and peak experiences – such experiences may just happen to us; but also, through Kaufman's advocacy we can discipline ourselves to achieve them, share them with others, and work for a spiritually-enhanced betterment not only of ourselves, but of our entire civilization:

*"It's time for us to take responsibility for the society we live in, and to help create the conditions that will help all people not only self-actualize, but also transcend. We can simultaneously work on making the good society and making **ourselves** better. Improving the good society starts from **within**, as we shift our own perspective on human nature. In so doing we can even transcend our own physical experience, impacting future generations long after we've gone."* (Kaufman, 2020: p. 333)

While Kaufman expands on William James' ideas of peak experiences (James, 1982), he is not an advocate of any particular religious approach. His model should appeal to both secular and religious humanists. But for Kaufman (2020) as for Maslow, "heaven", the immanence of spiritual goodness, keeps breaking through into our lives, in ways which overcome the elements of basic evil in our natures:

"Heaven, so to speak, lies waiting for us through life, ready to step into for a time and to enjoy before we have to come to our ordinary life of striving. And once we have been in it, we can remember it forever, and feed ourselves on this memory to be sustained in time of stress." (Maslow, 2022 in *Toward a Psychology of Being*, p. 120)

9. Interpreting Maslow's Ideas for Human Service and Management Professionals

It is noteworthy that American capitalism, for all its brusque and aggressive search for profit, has in some significant ways humanised itself through accepting many of Maslow's ideas. Maslow responded to radical critics by writing several articles specifically intended as guides for how businesses might conduct themselves, and serve both customers and employees in ethical ways. Scholars have gathered together these writings (Maslow, 1998), and this scholarly-based advocacy has served to guide public service, health management, and business organisations.

Succinctly, Maslow and his colleagues wrote:

"This business of self-actualization via a commitment to an important job and worthwhile work...could be the path to human happiness...the happy people I know are the ones who are working well at something they consider important...enlightened economics must assume good will among all of the members of an organisation, rather than rivalry or jealousy... We need a culture in which what is beneficial for the individual is beneficial for everyone... Assume that there is a "natural" trend towards self-actualization, the freedom to effectively

realise one's own ideas, being and nature... Assume that everyone can enjoy good teamwork, friendship, good group spirit, good belongingness, organizational loyalty, and group love... People can always do better: trust them... Enable workers to do their best, to maximise their talents, to self-actualize... Assume that growth occurs through delight, and through avoiding boredom... Work should involve a zest for life... Managers, identify every worker and their needs and aspirations, talents and goals... Charisma of leadership is crucial.” (Maslow, 1998: pp. 6-87).

Maslow's philosophy of management in which he elucidates principles of fairness, justice and creativity for employees, clients and customers from the perspective of his humanist social psychology, seems to us to be an inspirational text. But Maslow (unlike his contemporary George Mead) was careful to avoid any kinds of political advocacy or affiliation (although he had written that “Marx...was the first thinker who saw that the widespread realization of the universal can only occur together with social changes which lead to a new and truly human economic and social organisation of mankind.” (Maslow, 1996: p. 81).

There are numerous expositions and evaluations of applying Maslow in the world of business, and we won't review them here. But we must mention Chip Conley's (2017) book: *Peak: How Great Companies Get Their Mojo from Maslow* which gives important examples of how Maslowian principles are applied in practice. Two themes *energy* and *optimism* characterise these enterprises, themes which have lessons for politicians, entrepreneurs, leaders of all kinds, and all of us in the human service professions.

Applying Maslowian Principles in Human Service and Health Care

Maslow's ideas which have influenced how “public servants” (politicians, civil servants, teachers, health care workers, and administrators) maximise benefit for the people they serve, have been carried forward by Simon Stretton (1994). Stretton first advocates the application of Maslowian principles (including fulfilling all of the needs in the well-known hierarchy) for employees' security and welfare, as a basis for applying Maslowian principles of ensuring how the psychosocial needs of clients, pupils and patients may in Maslowian terms also be met, with movement towards self-actualization. These themes are taken forward and applied in the research and programme development described by Benson & Dundis (2003), and Castro-Molina (2018).

Inspired by Maslow, we have undertaken longitudinal research on the career achievements and stresses of a group of English nurses, examining how they have managed to cope with the challenges of covid pandemic nursing (Adam-Bagley et al., 2019, 2021a, 2021b). These studies (based on interviewing each nurse several times over three years) was undertaken within a critical realist model, in which we framed the reality of nursing within the emotional life of nurses, and the stories they told about their identity and coping strategies, iden-

tifying “absences” or critical but unacknowledged challenges and stressors, in order to create a coherent story of the challenges of nursing.

We can best summarise progress in this research through citing the summary of the most recent publication on this research:

“...these findings are from a 2020 follow-up study of 159 senior hospital nurses involved in the front-line care of COVID patients in urban centres in Northern England, prior to the “second wave” of COVID patients in November, 2020. A typology of nurses from measures based on interviews in 2018 identified four types: a. ‘Soldiers’; b. ‘Professionals’; c. ‘Highly Stressed Nurses’; d. ‘High Achievers’.

In 2020 further measures of adjustment stress (including PTSD), and self-actualization were added to earlier measures of personality, adjustment, work-life stress, and career intention...analyses identified three main types in the 2020 follow-up cohort: ‘Actualizing Professionals’ (N = 59); ‘Strong Professionals’ (N = 55); ‘Highly Stressed Nurses’ (N = 30). Highly stressed nurses identified in 2018 had mostly left nursing, so the 30 highly-stressed nurses in 2020 were a newly-identified group, who included all nurses identified as having PTSD symptoms. The research model driving this research is that of Critical Realism which identifies the process of morphogenesis which creates a constructive dialogue for social change on behalf of nurses, who often faced almost overwhelming stress in caring for COVID patients. We have identified two types of dedicated nurses with a hardy personality style which has helped them face severe stress in emerging as psychologically strong, self-actualizing individuals, dedicated to the higher values of nursing.” (Adam-Bagley et al., 2021b: p. 125)

Nursing is a value-based vocation, in which humanistic values enable professionals to give dedicated service under difficult and often highly stressful conditions. We are pleased to have identified a group of successful nurses who have achieved self-actualization, and based on their personal or religious values, are also often achieving self-transcendence within the shared energy and ethic of nursing.

10. Conclusion

We have turned to the spiritual power of humanism, religious and secular, impressed and inspired by scholars writing about a “post-holocaust” world in which both spiritual excellence and social harmony seem attainable. If we treat our children well, there is hope for all of humankind. Through stories, humanist case studies of adversity, struggle, triumph and transcendence, we share values and critical rationality, a form of morphogenesis, the remaking of ourselves. Evil still lurks, in the telling of false and malicious stories that beget hatred and violence (Adam-Bagley, 2023). It is therefore essential that *our* stories must focus on “the moral beauty of others” (Keltner, 2009).

“Religious experience” enervates humankind, giving us awe and transcendence. Being religious brings many unexpected benefits in physical and emo-

tional health. Evidence shows that the sharing of religious bonds and rituals helps rather than hinders the survival of humankind, in constructive ways. An *intrinsic* commitment to religion is important, as well as the sharing of our “religious stories” with one another (Plummer, 2019, 2021; Said, 2012; Kaufman, 2020).

We honour the great scholar Abraham Maslow, ostensibly a secular Jew, but whose psychology nevertheless has much spiritual healing power for those of all religions, as well as for secular humanists. This humanism, of treasuring the worth in each other human regardless of ethnic or religious origin, is in our judgement, the only way forward for the social contract of a civilized world.

Maslow’s model of development has much overlap with and support from the developmental models offered by Dabrowski, Loevinger and Erikson. All of these models show us pathways along which all of humanity can transcend evil in “the making the best of ourselves”. This synergy is part of the universal social contract, in which the two of us relating creates a third force, a metaphysical goodness in which goodwill begets goodwill, with a growing synergy. Martin Seligman’s (2018) positive psychology movement is an excellent example of how humanist psychology increasingly informs mainstream psychological research and practice.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

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Appendix: Further Important Studies by Abraham Maslow Which Have Informed Our Understanding of Humanist Psychology

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