



Written by [Sam Blumenfeld](#) on August 2, 2012

## Humanistic Psychology in the Schools

The cultural upheavals of the 1960s saw the rise of a so-called Third Force in American education. The leading figures of the Third Force were humanist psychologists Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. Maslow had worked on sexological research under the auspices of Edward L. Thorndike from 1935 to 1937. Thorndike had developed the purely behaviorist teaching method of SR, or stimulus-response, which reduced education to a form of animal training. But eventually Maslow rebelled against such pure behaviorism. As for his sexological research, feminist Betty Friedan believed that Maslow's findings helped advance the feminist approach to psychology. Maslow, trained in behavioral psychology, began to moderate it with his own theory of self-actualization.



Maslow, born in New York of a Jewish immigrant family in 1908, rejected religion early in life because he associated it with a mother he detested. He wrote in later years:

I always wondered where my utopianism, ethical stress, humanism, stress on kindness, love, friendship, and all the rest came from. I knew certainly of the direct consequences of having no mother-love. But the whole thrust of my life-philosophy and all my research and theorizing also has its roots in a hatred for and revulsion against everything she stood for.

Utopianism, which is a departure from reality in favor of some fantasy of a perfect world, has done more damage to America than any of us can calculate. Mark Levin, in his book *Ameritopia*, writes (page 4):

Utopianism is irrational in theory and practice, for it ignores or attempts to control the planned and unplanned complexity of the individual, his nature, and mankind generally. It ignores, rejects, or perverts the teachings and knowledge that have come before — that is, man's historical, cultural, and social experience and development. Indeed, utopianism seeks to break what the hugely influential eighteenth-century British statesman and philosopher Edmund Burke argued was the societal continuum "between those who are living and those who are dead and those who are to be born."

And that is why the public schools teach history in the perverted way they do, to break the student's connection with his nation's past. The reason why the Jews have lasted as a people for over 2,000 years of dispersal is that they treasured the Bible, which is the history of their past. But American students barely understand their nation's history, and thus can be led into a false future by the utopians.

By the time Maslow was a teenager he regarded all religion as nonsensical. To him religious observance attracted only the naïve and hypocritical. Later, in high school, a teacher introduced him to the novels of Upton Sinclair, which turned him into a socialist. Eugene Debs, Norman Thomas, and other



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prominent American socialists became his heroes.

In 1928, Maslow chose psychology as his career after reading several essays by John B. Watson, the father of American behaviorism. "I suddenly saw unrolling before me into the future," he wrote, "the possibility of a science of psychology, a program of work which promised real progress, real advance, real solutions of real problems. All that was necessary was devotion and hard work."

Watson's anti-religious outlook strongly appealed to Maslow, who shared Watson's faith in rationality as the means to a better society. He was particularly taken in by Watson's optimistic belief in the malleability of human nature. Change the environment and you can change human nature, argued Watson.

However, it was through his fieldwork with the Blackfoot Indians in Montana in the 1930s that Maslow began to revise his behaviorist views. He wrote: "It would seem that every human being comes at birth into society not as a lump of clay to be molded by society, but rather as a structure which society may warp or suppress or build upon. I am now struggling with a notion of a 'fundamental' or 'natural' personality structure."

But it was the birth of his daughter in 1938 that made Maslow reject behaviorism altogether. As he watched his little daughter assert her wants and dislikes, the idea that a child could be molded into anything the psychologist wanted through behavioral conditioning became untenable. He wrote: "Becoming a father changed my whole life.... It made the behaviorism I had been so enthusiastic about look so foolish that I couldn't stomach it anymore."

In 1943, Maslow formulated his own theory of human motivation. He centered his theory on what he called the hierarchy of human needs. He contended that every person is born with a set of basic needs, such as food, safety, love, and self-esteem. But when these basic needs are satisfied, there is a higher need that cries for satisfaction: self-actualization.

He wrote: "A musician must make music, an artist must paint, a poet must write, if he is to be ultimately at peace with himself. What a man can be, he must be. This need we may call self-actualization."

Maslow had rejected Freud's pessimistic view of human nature and the behaviorists' animalistic view of man. He had come up with a third view of his own. He was more interested in human success than in human failure. Maslow's biographer, Edward Hoffman, writes:

The issue was no longer "What makes for a genius like Beethoven?" but "Why aren't we all Beethovens?" Slowly and unexpectedly, Maslow's self-actualization research had become the basis for an entirely new vision of psychology with the premise that each of us harbors an innate human nature of vast potential that usually becomes blocked or thwarted through the deprivation of lower needs. This inner potential, Maslow believed, had not been taken into account by any existing school of psychology....

He emphasized that true fulfillment in life comes from satisfying our higher needs, especially the need for self-actualization. The more we pursue and realize our loftier needs, Maslow contended, the happier and even physically healthier we will be.

Maslow himself wrote: "I think of the self-actualizing man not as an ordinary man with something added, but rather as an ordinary man with nothing taken away. The average man is a human being with dampened and inhibited powers."

In short, Maslow had come up with another secular recipe for human happiness and perfectibility, in



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complete contradiction to the biblical view of man's fallen nature. It is said that Maslow had a messiah complex with a great personal mission to change the human condition. He said in 1955:

I am also very definitely interested and concerned with man's fate, with his ends and goals and with his future. I would like to help improve him and to better his prospects. I hope to help teach him how to be brotherly, cooperative, peaceful, courageous, and just. I think science is the best hope for achieving this, and of all the sciences, I consider psychology most important to this end. Indeed, I sometimes think that the world will either be saved by psychologists — in the broadest sense — or else it will not be saved at all.

But toward the end of his life, Maslow became quite disillusioned with his theory of self-actualization. The disrespectful, affluent students in his Brandeis University classroom, whose basic needs were more than adequately satisfied by their parents, showed no great desire for self-actualization. They were more interested in self-indulgence and self-satisfaction.

And so, now there were two conflicting psychologies competing for use by educators: behaviorism, that is, stimulus and response, and humanistic psychology with its elitist concept of self-actualization. Both atheist psychologies simply added to the confused state of mind that most students experienced in the public schools. Apparently, there were many varieties of paganism for the educators to choose from.



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