

*John M. Raftery*

# **Personal Growth and Human needs in Late Industrialism: Hieratic Pyramid or Vicious Circle?**

"Autonomy" was the catch-word of the 1960's . . . personal growth, self-actualization, individualism, freedom from social control and pressure, absence of cultural constraint . . . all these were seen as absolute goods, making each person bigger and better, a law unto himself.

But self-law was a narrow egotism, that in practice, often reduced simply to sloth, self-indiscipline, isolated hedonism, and self-pre-occupied fantasy.

And naturally, all these manifestations of "autonomy" were perfectly in line with mass production and consumption, with the military-industrial-advertising complex, - in short, with all the most illiberal and stunting forces of the status-quo. Talk-shops opened apace and did roaring trades, masses jumped onto the multiple bandwaggon which were painted with colours of "freedom".

Excuses, couched in psycho-jargon, for avoiding all social and political commitment, proliferated. In short, the AUTONOMY gospel became in reality, the AUTO-ANOMIE gospel, self-law meant self-lawlessness, an impulsive flight from responsibility.

And the consequences of anomie followed swiftly: the "encounter" group movement moved the superficial rigidities, bared its members souls, . . . and encountered "nothingness". The humanistic critics of behaviourism, operant conditioning and reductionism, made noises which found an eager market, oozed a flood of high-flown individualist rhetoric, and drowned in its own unrealized potential, dispirited by the demands of autonomy. The yogis, transcendental meditators, divine light missionaries, children of God, hari krishna dancers and the rest, stepped into the breach with the logical extensions of this "consciousness", and for those who made the necessary acts of faith and financial support, the anomie was reduced by Pure Knowledge.

Meanwhile, the erstwhile growers and cultivators of Self, slid into apathy: they left the marathon T-groups, with masks displaced, defences battered, images tarnished, alienated serenity smashed, - all in the Quest for Self and returned to the marathon of life which deals harshly with those whose character armour is in dis-array. Sadly, the world was not ready for such growth, and cut the selfists down to size. Reality seemed much more harsh than it had before. The "psychological amniotic fluid" which allowed "forward movement of a constructive sort" (Carl Rogers), proved effective and conducive to re-birth (to continue the metaphor), only in an aseptic social psychological

womb. Such fluid in the light of day was merely a puddle by the wayside, stagnant and slimy, a place for puerile, client-centred therapists to splash about, while prating of love, warmth and acceptance. Love the state, feel warm towards your oppressors, accept your class enemies . . . such was the humanistic advice to the pre-shattered client.

How might the autonomist advice of Rogers, which attempts to show "how one can, if helped by others, learn to disregard those pressures exerted from the outside and live to fulfill those desires which truly come from within and are one's own", appear to a Chilean in a concentration camp, a starving African, a New York heroin addict, or the masses, world wide, who are poor, unemployed, downtrodden and oppressed. In their cases, "the pressure exerted from the outside" are so brutally simple, so starkly all-consuming, that to counsel "disregard" is to suggest suicide, or minimally, a culture of silence. The "desires that truly come from within" require no feats of introspection and self-analysis to feel, so basic are they: food, shelter, clothing, and freedom to live unchained.

To advise such peoples to "learn to grow out of the conflicts engendered by abrasion between their own desires and those of others", is to throw one's whole weight behind the Juntas, the corporations, and the profit-greed of ruling élites. "But", one may well say, "the growth movement is meant to help only the daily happiness of the middle classes in modern industrial societies, and has no wider ambitions." The goal is only to help these people to "drop the mask and BE who they ARE", (implying that behind the mask, they are loving, warm, feeling-full, etc.).

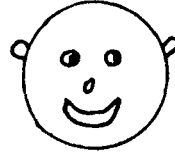
However, with or without the false faces, liberated by humanistic psychology or unliberated, these inward-looking, pampered consumers, are the very people who live on the backs of the third world, who (not through ill-will of course) in the societies they constitute, whip and scourge the human animals who extract their minerals, and carry their loads. Many of the growthists claim to know nothing of this, claiming that the dynamics of exploitation are complex and camouflaged! And when a glimmer of consciousness stirs in their stressed brains, as to their complicity in these global dynamics, the paraphernalia of nothing less than "consciousness-raising" comes to their assistance to stamp it out. Such help may of course, be necessary for daily happiness, helping one "to listen to oneself, to hear and feel what is going on within and then to live in accordance with it". Such is the ethic of "openness to own experience". But since our own experience has never been remotely similar to the experience of the wretched of the earth, such "openness" will cause no pain. In practice, this treasuring of personal experience, merely reinforces us in our blindness and past bigotries, and helps us to suppress guilt-ridden feelings about our complicity in global repression. Surely then, the therapy is indeed "client-centred".

"BE WHO YOU REALLY ARE" runs the dictum. You don't need to pretend, or be polite, or be "inauthentic", or have airs and graces, or give false impressions; you are fine as you are, and when you become as you are, then all

your profuse unique talents will flow, you will express your singular suchness and achieve transcendence.



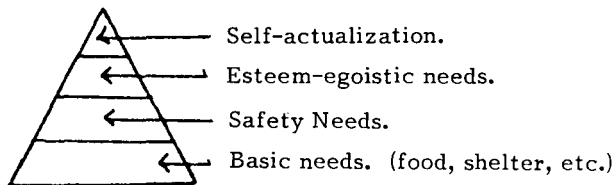
**Masked self-inhibitor**



**Unmasked self-actualizer.**

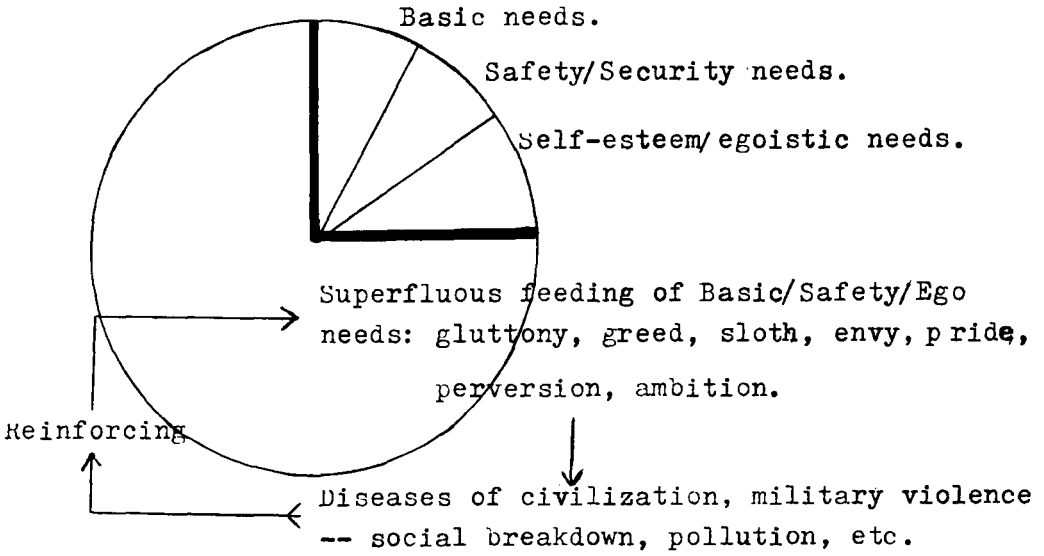
Such is the pious homily that procures salvation in our time. It reads well . . . against a background of carpeted boredom, concealed lighting, cocktail cabinets, colour televisions, and fashionable curiosity. It adds to the décor of life and distracts in time of stress. It is pleasing in such surroundings to be told of one's uniqueness, standardized tele/uni-vision notwithstanding; it is therapeutic to recline on one's gilt-edged sofa sipping cognac, and dream of a lazy easy transcendence, of a large pie in the sky which is baked by humanistic psychologists. It is all balm to tired and blasé ears that have had a surfeit of stereophonic, quadrophonic perfection, and so, like their skin-care lotion and their pre-shave cream, the affluent go out and buy this balm and massage it into their bored spirits. Thereafter, they can look at misery (or rather, sterile pictures and reports of misery) elsewhere, with benign complacency and a radiant heart-felt smile, and not feel compelled to pretend "sympathy". "Be as you are" in the over-affluent society, means "be uncaring and bored, petty and greedy, without guilt and without thought". This is authenticity; decorum no longer demands a mask or a show of piety. Let it all hang out, show how you feel, even if it be utter feelinglessness.

The celebrated humanistic psychologist, Abraham Maslow, popularised the concept of a "need hierarchy", drawn in a pyramidal form: the basic needs which are visceral and physiological, must be satisfied before the "higher" needs become important. Once basic needs are met, motivation to action is produced by the more sophisticated ones, so that "a satisfied need is no longer a motivator".



In the late industrial over-saturation, the "need hierarchy" must be re-drawn as the "need circle" of a particularly vicious variety. When the "higher needs" appear as manifestations of crass self-preoccupation, the intrinsic "superiority" of such needs become less and less tenable, and instead, they appear as therapeutic or escapist reflexes. The embodiments of a higher sanity in such societies, are then the ones who minimize their total needs and so their

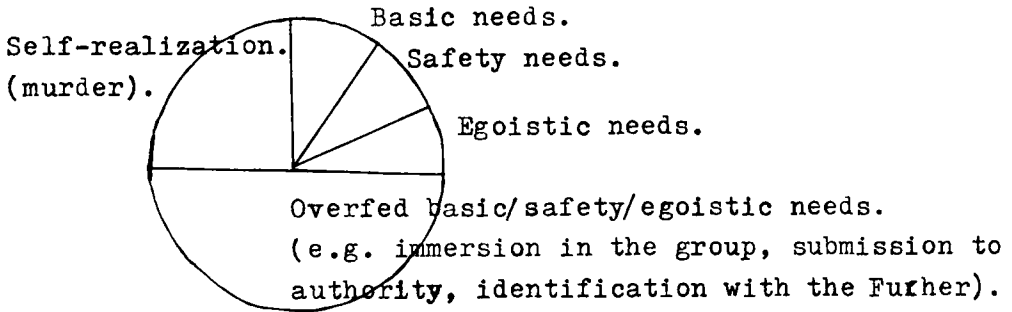
total consumption and waste, - not the ones who become what others tell them they potentially are, or should be.



**LATE INDUSTRIAL NEED CIRCLE**

Given the complex apparatus of domination in over-industrialized countries, the depth of ingression of advertising tricks into every psyche, the qualities which are cultivated through subjection to meaningless, treadmill work, the resentful hate for those who have consciously lowered their own need levels, - given all this, is it any wonder that "to become what one is potentially", is to become greedy, envious, and brutish, - despite all the apolitical platitudes of Third Force Psychology.

An individual's potentiality is a function of the enveloping culture, a background which consists of myriad components and dynamics. Different individuals and groups will be exposed to different elements and dynamics of their culture, and so will naturally possess variegated potential "potentials". Should an unfortunately-exposed group rise to primacy, as in the Nazi era in Germany, a murderous capacity is unleashed. It is not until this force is spent or conquered, that more life-affirmative capacities can re-assert themselves.



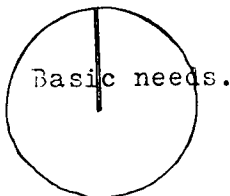
**The Nazi need-circle.**

Thus, in a hideously perverted way, we might imagine the Nazis as "realizing themselves" in and through genocide, as becoming, through over-feeding of their lower needs, what they potentially were.

Just as the Nazis realized their dark potentials through murder, it can be said that the self-gorging, insatiable and bloated addicts of super-industrial output, are realizing in turn, their own potentials, through suicide. This requires less active discipline, less identification with the group, but can be committed painlessly and individualistically, anaesthetized by the powerful concoctions of techno-science.

And co-existing with the Coca-cola, Fur-things first, market intensive growth in the Western World, are the millions of barely existing inhabitants of the East and South. No feats of theorizing, no Great Imaginative Leaps, are required to draw the Third World need circle. Food, shelter and heat, if available together, make life possible; in their absence, death is guaranteed.

Skin stretched tight against protruding bones, worms eating in their stomachs, chronic deficiency destroying teeth, eyes, hair, children, there remains no energy to feel unsafe, or to feel unloved, no matter how threatening the surroundings, or how inhospitable the group. For the tottering skeleton, safety and self-esteem are qualities of Nirvana, attainable only in an after-life that waits for him, three or four foodless days ahead. As for "self-actualization" and "openness to experience"! One who is at any moment going to collapse from starvation, will have few thoughts about the Unified Self within, waiting to be discovered and liberated.



**Third World need circle.**

When we superimpose the Western and Eastern need circles, the contrast which results, directly and severely shocks those with even a minimal amount of sensibility. The experience of obscenity is essentially a matter of scale and contrast, and is a prime ingredient in the motivation to action. Without a sense of the repulsive, the loathsome and the wretched, all appears flat and dull.

But in competitive late industrialism, the personal capacity to perceive such a reality, is being purged and stunted. The capacity to empathize itself, has been branded as subversive or neurotic. Such feelings would impede us in our rush to the market-place, in the scramble to our heavily-laden tables, in our scientific production of moon-rockets and neutron bombs, snacks and petit-fours, in our self-actualization around these products.

It is a condition of "growth" - personal and economic - that we centre our aspirations, energies and lives around instant aerosol whipped cream in fifteen different flavours, and as we squirt it over the sixth course which is shovelled towards our over-taxed livers, the obscenity of starvation is banished from awareness. Personal growth comes to mean the further distention of already vast abdomens on passive, burping beings, waddling between table and television, on the way to oblivion.

Economic growth and profit, means manufacturing for the rich, for those with "purchasing power", constantly expanding the boundaries of the late industrial need circle with every trick and ploy conceivable. The "service sector" devises a barrage of distractions from obscenity, ensuring that the political will for radical change will never emerge.

For the diseases of single vision and overfed needs, there can be no ad hoc reform, no quick technological fix. As Theodore Roszak observes: ". . . it is single vision that underlies the despair and the anomie, the irresponsible drift, the resignation to genocide, the weakness for totalitarian solutions, which make radical change in our society impossible".

Leaders will change nothing. The politics and economics of "over-satisfaction" are represented and promoted by an entrenched establishment which is working towards the self-realization of a system in eco-catastrophe, personal breakdown, and social disintegration. And this is an élite no less entrenched in third world countries, than in the west.

Only a popular movement which realizes that nothing humanly worthwhile can be achieved within the diminished reality of science and mega-technology, the reality within which we "progress" only towards technocratic élitism, affluent alienation, environmental over-saturation, and nuclear armageddon, can break from the vicious circle of need - tyranny.

---