

A Personalistic Appraisal of Maslow's Needs Theory of Motivation: From “Humanistic” Psychology to Integral Humanism

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Abstract Abraham Maslow's needs theory is one of the most influential motivation theories in management and organizational behavior. What are its anthropological and ethical presuppositions? Are they consistent with sound business philosophy and ethics? This paper analyzes and assesses the anthropological and ethical underpinnings of Maslow's needs theory from a personalistic framework, and concludes that they are flawed. Built on materialistic naturalism, the theory's “humanistic” claims are subverted by its reductionist, individualistic approach to the human being, which ends up in a needs-based ethics that understands goodness, virtue, and rights in instinctual, subjectivistic, and relativistic terms. Its moral imperative, “Be yourself!,” is either the materialistic fiat of genetic drives or the voluntaristic command of unbridled will. Significant implications for business educators, managers, and organizations are discussed, along with recommendations. Managerial theories and approaches that reduce personality to individuality are inconsistent with proper anthropological and ethical business principles. Adopting those individualistic theories may ultimately undermine organizational effectiveness, and the very essence of business as human activity and of management as human calling. Instead, personalistic anthropology and virtue ethics, rooted in Aristotelian–Thomistic thought, soundly

account for properly human nature and the good life. Business educators and practitioners are encouraged to embrace this integral, truly humanistic framework for motivation, and management theory and practice.

Keywords Abraham Maslow · Business or management ethics · Humanism or humanistic psychology · Individualism · Personalism · Virtue

Introduction

By their senior year, some business majors may have forgotten what an externality is or how to calculate the current ratio. Almost invariably, however, they distinctly remember Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs. Convinced of this theory's robustness and utility, they—as well as many business practitioners—appeal to it whenever such topics as needs or motivation are discussed. Should they?

Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943, 1954/1970) is a staple of introductory management, organizational behavior, marketing, and other business courses and texts (Maddock and Fulton 1996; Wahba and Bridwell 1976). It appears to be one of the best, if not the best, known motivation theories among managers as well (Koontz and Weihrich 2010, p. 289; Mosley et al. 2011, p. 199; Plunkett et al. 2012, p. 43). Now, after the 60th anniversary of Maslow's *Motivation and personality* and the 70th of his classical article “A theory of human motivation,” the needs theory's psychological outlook and catchy terms—*hierarchy of needs*, *self-actualization*, *peak experience*, *synergy*, *deficiency needs*, *being-needs*—are still popular and influential (Geiger 1971, pp. xvff; see also, Bennis 1998; Goud 2008; Hoffman 2004).

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The theory's popularity has been ascribed to its simplicity, the ease with which it can be taught or explained, and its intuitive pitch (e.g., Dye et al. 2005; Soper et al. 1995). Perhaps the pyramidal imagery associated with it has an archetypal appeal. Some have praised Maslow (1908–1970) as a “philosopher of science” (Geiger 1971, p. xx) and a “visionary” whose influential work is full of “vitality” (Leontiev 2008, pp. 451, 453). Maslow's impact has spread even further by way of his influence on the following thinkers: Clayton Alderfer (ERG theory), Frederick Herzberg (motivator-hygiene or two-factor theory), Douglas McGregor (Theory X and Theory Y), Peter Drucker (who called Maslow “the father of humanistic psychology”), Roberto Assagioli (psychosynthesis), and Martin Seligman (positive psychology) (Goud 2008; Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi 2000, p. 7; see also, DeRobertis 2013, p. 424; Froh 2004; Hoffman 2011; Milton 2002). The *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, cofounded by Maslow and first published in 1961, and the Association of Humanistic Psychology, which held its first conference in 1963, are still active (Milton 2002, p. 57; Van Belle 2012). Maslow has been “found to be the 14th-most-frequently cited psychologist in introductory psychology textbooks” and the “10th most eminent psychologist of the 20th century” (Koltko-Rivera 2006, p. 302). Warren Bennis claims that Maslow “remade psychology” (1998, p. xi). The hierarchy of needs “has now stood the test of time for more than 60 years, and no alternative conception of human motivation seems likely to overturn it” (Hoffman 2004, p. 137).

This essay, however, does not explore the reasons for the needs theory's popularity. Neither does it revisit the well-known critiques regarding the model's lack of empirical support (e.g., flawed experimental design such as the extant studies' small, atypical and convenience sampling, their lack of control groups, and social desirability¹) and the inadequate operationalization of its concepts (e.g., measurement of *need*, *need satisfaction*, and *psychological well-being*). Fitzgerald (1985), Garrison (2001), Kohn (1999), Neher (1991), Rowan (1999), Saunders et al. (1998), Vitz (1977), and Wahba and Bridwell (1976), among others, have discussed these issues at length. Some researchers have concluded that the needs theory may not be verifiable or even testable (e.g., Kohn 1999; Maddock and Fulton 1996; Soper et al. 1995; Wahba and Bridwell 1976, p. 234). Others have argued that Maslow's hierarchy of needs is ethnocentric or disregards cultural differences (Hofstede 1984, p. 396; Gambrel and Cianci 2003;

Hoffman 2008b, p. 456; Kermally 2005; Pearson and Podeschi 1999). Even some of those who enthusiastically praise the contribution and influence of Maslow's work acknowledge its limitations (e.g., Hoffman 2004; Lowry 1999).

Maslow was aware of many of these shortcomings (e.g., 1962/1968, pp. 145, 170; 1971/1976, p. 41). He admitted, for instance, that his studies' samples were inadequate and that he had made generalizations out of his own choice of “certain kinds of people” “selected with all kinds of built-in biases.” Maslow also recognized that his “confidence” in his “rightness” was not a “scientific datum” but rather what his “smell told him,” and that his definition of *self-actualization* was, consequently, “unreliable” (pp. 41–42; 1965/1998, p. 71).

Moreover, toward the end of his life, Maslow was troubled by some of the outcomes of his needs theory (Dye et al. 2005, pp. 1379ff; Hoffman 2008a, p. 442). The fact that many youths were pursuing self-actualization “stupidly and inefficiently and incapably and they want it now” disturbed him (Frick 2000, p. 137; Maslow 1965/1998, p. 9). He also realized that, instead of happiness and an “improved mankind,” need fulfillment could end up in feelings of “cynicism and nihilism,” a “destructive type of anarchism,” “anomie, hopelessness and pessimism of a kind that produces apathy and then perfectionism,” especially in young people (Frick 2000, pp. 130, 139–140). In a December 14, 1967 journal entry, Maslow confided: “The university world can now, I think, be essentially characterized as value-confused, value-mistrusting, counter-valuing, value-hating. They don't know right from wrong and maybe don't even believe it's *possible*, or that there are any such things. Result of Marxism, Freud, cultural relativism, pseudo-anthropology, the abdication of the philosophers, the physicalism of the psychologists, the value-free sociologists, etc. [*sic*]” (Maslow 1982, p. 218). That his own theory may have contributed to this bleak state of affairs did not escape him (Frick 2000, p. 130). Rollo May acknowledged that he, Maslow, and Rogers were “partially to blame for failing to incorporate evil into humanistic psychology,” thereby rendering this approach “simplistic and naïve” (Hoffman 2009, p. 485). He added that Maslow “had not sufficiently recognized that even self-actualizing people could commit evil and then find a way to rationalize or justify it.” In several interviews late in his life, Maslow expressed an avid interest in exploring the nature of evil (Frick 2000; Hoffman 1992), a goal that he would not live to accomplish.

The aforementioned research critical of Maslow's needs theory has been mainly conducted in the field of psychology. Apart from a few references (e.g., Guillén et al. 2015; Melé 2003; Wahba and Bridwell 1976), however, the theory has not been evaluated in the business and

¹ When Maslow explained the peak-experience phenomenon (1962/1968, 1964/1970) to his students, most “claimed to have had peaks, too”; yet, when he later interviewed Eleanor Roosevelt, “she declared brusquely that she had no idea what he was talking about” (Milton 2002, p. 53; see also, Frick 2000, pp. 142–143).

management literature and textbooks, thereby enabling its unabated influence in this area. In particular, the theory's philosophical undercurrents have not been adequately appraised. It is urgent to determine whether we—as business educators—have been espousing a model that is inconsistent with the proper humanistic principles that must inform business and management. This essay studies these questions, which are especially pressing given the needs theory's influence and overarching claims well beyond the domain of empirical psychology.

This paper analyzes and assesses the anthropological tenets, the ethical implications, and, briefly, the religious undertones of Maslow's needs theory from a personalistic framework. This appraisal follows an overview of personalism, rooted in Aristotelian–Thomistic thought, as a sound philosophical basis upon which to conduct the inquiry. It concludes that the needs theory's anthropological and ethical underpinnings are flawed. Significant implications for business educators, managers, and organizations are discussed, along with recommendations. Managerial theories and approaches that reduce personality to individuality are at odds with properly humanistic anthropological and ethical business principles. Adopting those individualistic theories may ultimately undermine organizational effectiveness and the very essence and purpose of management and business. This paper urges business educators and practitioners to embrace a personalistic approach that, grounded on sound philosophical anthropology and ethics, provides a truly humanistic basis for motivation, and management theory and practice. Instead of the reductionist needs pyramid, the wheel serves as apt metaphor for this integral account of distinctly human nature and the good, virtuous life.

Overview of Personalism

This section outlines key attributes of personalism that are relevant for the assessment that follows. Further insights into personalism and its Aristotelian–Thomistic roots (Maritain 1947/1972; McNerny 1997; MacIntyre 1981/2007; Melé 2003; Williams 2004; Williams and Bengtsson 2013; Wishloff 2009) will be discussed, as necessary, throughout the rest of the paper.

Personalism is a philosophical framework that underscores “the significance, uniqueness and inviolability of the person, as well as the person's essentially relational or communitarian dimension” (Williams and Bengtsson 2013). More specifically, it stresses “human consciousness, intentionality toward ends, self-identity through time, value retentiveness, openness to community building, and, above all, the dignity of every human being” (Melé 2009, p. 229).

Rooted in metaphysical realism, or the real order of things, personalism provides a sound basis for philosophical anthropology and, accordingly, for ethics (Acevedo 2012; Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Grassl and Habisch 2011; Sandelands 2014; Wishloff 2009). Unlike materialistic naturalism, personalism does not limit reality to the material and empirically accessible, but also considers other realms of being and value. Metaphysics, religion, ethics, and aesthetics are not illusory, meaningless, or irrational memes, but intelligible, reasonable sources of real meaning and value. In theocentric personalism, human dignity and freedom are firmly grounded on the human being's true nature, origin, and end as creature contingent on the loving and sustaining act of God (Maritain 1947/1972, p. 42). Their transcendent, extra-natural, and teleological freedom and rational nature confer upon human persons a unique and exclusive perfectibility not limited to naturalistic psychological, materialistic, or deterministic categories.

The human person is part of the natural world and interacts with it, but is neither reducible to nor determined by it. Whereas animal groups are made of *individuals*, human societies are communities of human *persons* (Maritain 1947/1972, p. 47; Melé 2012). The human being is not simply an interchangeable individual of the human species, but an irreplaceable, unique, irreducible human person. Human spirituality is neither unbridled will nor a set of particular psychological needs or self-defined values, but human intellect and rational will. Insofar as rational, it is “necessary that man have a free-will”; human acts are “not from a natural instinct, but from some act of comparison in the reason, therefore he acts from free judgment” (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, I, q. 83 a. 1, 1920/2008). It is the singular human person as body and soul unity (q. 76 a. 1)—neither solely material organism, disembodied intellect, nor autonomous will—who knows, deliberates, decides, loves, acts, and interacts with the world. Unlike determinism, materialism, idealistic intellectualism, or voluntarism, personalism posits a realistic, integral, and integrated account of the human being.

By stressing the intrinsic dignity of every human person, personalistic anthropology provides a firm, objective foundation for universal human rights, moral virtue, and common good defined in terms of properly human ends (Acevedo 2012; Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Grassl and Habisch 2011; Melé 2009; Sandelands 2009; Sison 2007; Wishloff 2009). *Personality* or personhood is neither merely need satisfaction or self-fulfillment, nor an aggregate of individual mental, affective, and behavioral traits, as often conceived in the field of scientific or empirical psychology. Therefore, human dignity and flourishing, and the concomitant virtues, human rights, and common good are neither reducible to separate biological, psychological,

or non-relational projects, nor to particular preferences, feelings, or sensory data. Instead, they are anchored in the realm of being and the properly human vocation. Personality “requires a dialog in which souls really communicate” in knowledge and love (Maritain 1947/1972, pp. 41–42).

Insofar as human persons, human beings are distinctly rational and spiritual, and hence perfectible by the intellectual and moral virtues associated with their happiness (Argandoña 2011; Hartman 2011; MacIntyre 1981/2007; Melé 2009; Solomon 2003; Whetstone 2001; Wishloff 2009). Virtue “not only confers the faculty of doing well, but also causes the good deed done” (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 61 a. 1). Reason, perfectible by wisdom, “holds the place of commander and mover, while the appetitive power is commanded and moved” (qq. 60 a. 1, 58 a. 5, 113 a. 3). From a theocentric standpoint, acquired virtues dispose human beings to the infused theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which order them to God, the greatest good, and ultimately toward perfect happiness, the beatific vision. Moreover, “without the aid of grace” to “illumine” human intellect and to “strengthen” human will, achieving the “natural good in anything but an imperfect way” is improbable (McInerny 1997, pp. 67, 119; Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, qq. 62, 65, 113).

Because of its sound metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical grounds, personalism has been found to be a necessary foundation for a true, integral humanism (Acevedo 2012; Arnaud and Wasieleski 2014; Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Melé 2003, 2009; Sandelands 2009, 2014; Sison 2007; Whetstone 2002; Williams and Bengtsson 2013; Zúñiga 2001). Accordingly, it provides the right philosophical framework within which to conduct this paper’s analysis and assessment.

Philosophical Underpinnings of Maslow’s Needs Theory

This section identifies the needs theory’s anthropological and ethical presuppositions. After a brief summary of the theory, it lays the philosophical groundwork that will be subsequently assessed from a personalistic standpoint.

Maslow’s psychological theory of motivation presents a set of five innate needs, running upward from the basic “deficiency” or “D-needs” (physiological, safety and security, love and belongingness, and esteem) to “being” or “B-needs” (self-actualization). Although not necessarily so, these stages typically follow a hierarchical progression of prepotency in which higher needs emerge once the lower are satisfied (Maslow 1943, 1962/1968, pp. 26, 30, 153; 1954/1970, pp. 35ff). In general, “higher needs will not even appear in consciousness until lower, prepotent needs are gratified” (p. 70).

Introductions to the needs theory generally follow the previous outline (Dye et al. 2005, p. 1378; Koltko-Rivera 2006, p. 306). They seldom discuss the desires to know and to understand, covered in Maslow’s original 1943 article (see also, 1954/1970, pp. 48–51), or the “higher” stages that he later addresses, such as self-transcendence (1964/1970; Koltko-Rivera 2006). These revisions, however, share the original theory’s basic anthropological and ethical tenets.

Anthropological Basis

For Maslow, *human nature* is the biologically or genetically based “shadowy bone structure of instinctoid tendencies and capacities” (1954/1970, pp. 273, 101ff, Preface; 1962/1968, pp. 3–4). “Capacities, organs and organ systems press to function and express themselves and to be used and exercised”; “such use is satisfying, and disuse irritating” (p. 201). *Capacities* are needs or “intrinsic values” that “cease their clamor only when they *are* well used” (p. 152). Otherwise, the related skill or organ “can become a disease center or else atrophy or disappear, thus diminishing the person” (p. 201). In an often-quoted passage, Maslow states that “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. He must be true to his own nature” (1954/1970, p. 46).

Consequently, the defining capacities of *humanness*—such as grammatical language, abstraction, love, knowledge, and holding values—are “conative, a part of our primitive and animal nature” (Maslow 1971/1976, p. 28; 1954/1970, p. 101). “Creativeness, spontaneity, selfhood, authenticity, caring for others, being able to love, yearning for truth are embryonic potentialities belonging to his species-membership just as much as are his arms and legs and brain and eyes” (1962/1968, pp. 160–161; 1954/1970, pp. 103–104). Any “dichotomy” between conative and cognitive is “useless and must be discarded” (p. 101).

Human nature, however, is not resilient but “extremely malleable” by “habit, cultural pressure, and wrong attitudes” (Maslow 1954/1970, p. xviii; 1962/1968, p. 4). Its “instinctoid” determinants, though persistently “pressing for actualization,” are not the strongest (p. 171). External forces such as “culture and environment” cannot “create or increase” natural human capacities but can easily “kill off altogether or diminish” them (1954/1970, p. xviii). According to Maslow, “most” human beings lose their creativeness with enculturation (pp. 170–171). Instead of “controlling and policing human instinctoid impulses,” culture should “foster universal self-actualization” (1962/1968, pp. 159, 211). Culture should be “basic need-gratifying rather than need-inhibiting” as well as “tolerant” of

self-actualizers' "inner autonomy and outer acceptance" (1954/1970, pp. 102, 174).

To know human nature is "to be natural and spontaneous, to know what one is, and what one *really* wants" (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 273). Only self-actualizers, since "more spontaneous, more natural, more human," succeed in this "difficult" and "rare" undertaking (pp. 171, 273; 1962/1968, pp. 190ff). Self-actualization, however, is not a fully attainable end state (pp. 97, 189–214). Therefore, although commonly used interchangeably, the term *self-actualizer*, suggesting a process, is more appropriate than *self-actualized* as final state.

Self-actualizers and ordinary people have radically different motivational patterns. Self-actualizers "are primarily metamotivated (i.e., by metaneeds = B-values)" (Maslow 1971/1976, p. 301). These *metaneeds* or *Being-values*, to be discussed later, are expressed in terms of "character growth, character expression, maturation, and development" (1954/1970, p. 159). Self-actualizers "behave as though, for them, means and ends are clearly distinguishable" and are "more likely to appreciate for its own sake, and in an absolute way, the doing itself" (p. 169; 1962/1968, p. 31). Ordinary or non-actualized people, on the other hand, are primarily motivated by basic needs that they "strive" to satisfy from external resources (p. 213; 1971/1976, p. 301). For "real individuality" to "develop fully," basic needs must be "fairly well satisfied" (1962/1968, p. 33).

Maslow claims that his conception of "man" "has much in common" with Aristotle's "good life" as "living in accordance with the true nature of man" (1954/1970, pp. 269–270). Yet, he criticizes Aristotle for studying "human beings only on the surface," thereby ending up with a culture-contingent, "static conception of human nature" that accounts only for human "actualities" but not for human "potentialities" (pp. 270–271). Maslow rejects Aristotle's "hierarchy of human capacities" topped by reason because, "at odds with man's emotional and instinctoid nature," it cannot attain self-actualization by itself (p. 271). Psychotherapy shows that "rationality, emotionality, and the conative or wishing and driving" "are not necessarily antagonistic but can be cooperative and synergic" and, therefore, must be "respected equally." Maslow concludes that psychoanalysis has uncovered the "shortcomings" of Aristotelian thought by providing a "greatly increased understanding of man's motivations, especially of his unconscious motivations," and "of psychopathology" and its origins (p. 270).

Ethical Basis

The needs theory claims that "a descriptive, naturalistic science of human values" is possible, just as we "study the values of ants or horses or oak trees" (Maslow 1962/1968,

p. 167). That is, the *facts* of human biology inherently entail *ought* or value (p. 205; 1971/1976, pp. 26ff).² "Facts create oughts! The more clearly something is seen or known, and the more true and unmistakable something becomes, the more ought-quality it acquires. The more 'is' something becomes, the more 'ought' it becomes—the more requiredness it acquires, the louder it 'calls for' particular action" (p. 115). Consequently, the "mutually exclusive contrast between 'what is' and 'what ought to be'" is, partly, "false" (1962/1968, p. 167). "*Is* becomes the same as *ought*. *Fact* becomes the same as *value*" (1971/1976, p. 105).

Accordingly, most normative ethics and "conventional" morality are just "epiphenomen[a] of nonacceptance or dissatisfaction" (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 177). They are "by-products of the pervasive psychopathology of the average" because they "deny," "frustrate," or "twist" "man's essential nature" (pp. 177, 269–270). Their "neurotic should," "often extrinsic, arbitrary, *a priori*, perfectionistic—in a word, unrealistic" (pp. 176–177; 1971/1976, p. 105), denotes "insufficient knowledge of psychopathology and psychotherapy" (1962/1968, p. 165).

The concept *ought* is, simply, "intrinsic" or "actual potentiality" awaiting fulfillment, and hence is essentially another term for "need." Basic needs and metaneeds "are *not*, in themselves, dangerous or evil or bad" (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 158) but "either neutral, pre-moral or positively 'good'" (p. 3) and, therefore, should be "encouraged" rather than "suppressed." "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." Consequently, "needs" must be conceived as "rights" because "membership in the human species constitutes *ipso facto* a right to become fully human, i.e., to actualize all the human potentials possible" (1954/1970, p. xviii).

The *good* is "anything that conduces" to the "actualization of the inner nature of man"; the *bad* or *abnormal*, "anything that frustrates or blocks or denies" this nature (Maslow 1954/1970, pp. 269–270). Guilt, equivalent to anxiety or sadness, arises from "discrepancies between what is and what might very well be or ought to be" (p. 157; 1962/1968, pp. 194–195). Such discrepancies between actualities and potentialities occur when there are "improvable shortcomings (e.g., laziness, thoughtlessness, loss

² "The study of the human being by science or by self-search can discover where he is heading, what is his purpose in life, what is good for him and what is bad for him, what will make him feel virtuous and what will make him feel guilty, why choosing the good is often difficult for him, what the attractions of evil are. (Observe that the word 'ought' need not be used. Also such knowledge of man is relative to man only and does not purport to be 'absolute.')" (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 205).

of temper, hurting others),” “stubborn remnants of psychological ill health (e.g., prejudice, jealousy, envy),” “habits, which, though relatively independent of character structure, may yet be very strong,” and “shortcomings of the species or of the culture or of the group with which they [healthy people] have identified” (1954/1970, pp. 156–157).

Self-actualizers “tend spontaneously to choose the true rather than the false, good rather than evil, beauty rather than ugliness, integration rather than dissociation, joy rather than sorrow, aliveness rather than deadness, uniqueness rather than stereotypy”; that is, they choose the “B-values” (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 168). Their value system is founded on the “philosophic acceptance of the nature of his self, of human nature, of much of social life, and of nature and physical reality” (1954/1970, p. 176). This “relative lack of overriding guilt” underlies all other attributes of self-actualizers, both at lower (they are “heartily in their appetites and enjoy themselves without regret or shame or apology”) and higher stages (they “accept the work of nature rather than to argue with it”) (pp. 155ff). For them, “virtue is its own reward in the sense of being enjoyed in itself. They spontaneously tend to do right because that is what they *want* to do, what they *need* to do, what they enjoy, what they approve of doing, and what they will continue to enjoy” (1962/1968, p. 159). Moreover, they “can choose better than bad choosers what is better for the bad choosers themselves” (p. 151). The “good person,” then, is this “responsible-for-himself-and-his-own-evolution person, the fully illuminated or awakened or perspicuous man” (1971/1976, p. 18).

Ordinary people, on the other hand, entangled by lower, deficiency needs, are incapable of self-knowledge and philosophical reflection. Their procurement of need satisfaction may be chaotic, ignorant, unexamined, and, probably, immoral. “For the basically deprived man the world is a dangerous place, a jungle, an enemy territory populated by (1) those whom he can dominate and (2) those who can dominate him” (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 178).

Personalistic Assessment of Maslow’s Needs Theory

The needs theory’s philosophical underpinnings are now appraised from a personalistic standpoint. Religious aspects, insofar as related in significant ways to questions of being, meaning, and value, are also covered briefly at the end of this section.

Anthropological Approach

The discussion starts with the needs theory’s materialistic, naturalistic, and deterministic underpinnings, upon which

its reductionist view of human beings as fragmented individuals—whether as aggregates of needs or as voluntaristic selves—is based.

Materialistic Naturalism and Determinism

Maslow’s pragmatic empiricist outlook stems from his “impatience with philosophy, at all the talking that didn’t get anyplace” (1968 interview, Frick 2000, p. 130; Maslow 1979, p. 635). He chose the concept of *identity* or *self* “as the basic one partly because I understand it better than terms like essence, existence, ontology and so on, and partly because I feel also that it can be worked with empirically” and for its “experiential knowledge rather than from systems of concepts or abstract categories or a prioris” (1962/1968, p. 9). In addition, his early (1943) studies on animal (chimpanzees and gorillas) behavior may explain, in part, the needs theory’s underlying biological determinism of evolutionary or Darwinistic bent (1954/1970, p. 104; Kohn 1999; Milton 2002). In it, the difference between animals and human beings is not a distinctly rational or spiritual principle, but simply quantitative: “The important difference between man and all other beings is that his needs, his preferences, his instinct remnants are *weak* and not strong, equivocal not unequivocal” (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 273; 1967).

Maslow’s scientific convictions also underlie the needs theory’s naturalistic anthropological premises. Accordingly, human nature can be studied “scientifically and objectively” (1962/1968, p. 191) “without the necessity of recourse to authority outside the human being himself” (pp. 149, 167). Extra-natural or immaterial metaphysical assumptions are neither necessary nor elucidating. Even the highest “spiritual or philosophical” needs are innate, biological, “instinctoid,” or “related to the fundamental structure of the organism itself” (1971/1976, pp. 31, 22; 1954/1970, p. 101; 1967). In unabashed trust in the breadth and possibilities of science, Maslow states: “In principle, at least, science should be capable of generating normative psychologies of psychotherapy, of personal development, of eupsychian or utopian social psychology, of religion, of work, play, and leisure, of esthetics, of economics, and politics, and who knows what else?” (Maslow 1966/2002, Preface). In another scientific and psychologistic overstatement, he claims: “We know how to criticize the old theories; we know, even though dimly, the shape of the theories to come, and most of all, we know where to look and what to do in order to fill in the gaps in knowledge, that will permit us to answer the age-old questions, ‘What is the good life? What is the good man? How can people be taught to desire and prefer the good life? How ought children to be brought up to be sound adults? etc.’” (1962/1968, p. 149). According to Maslow, “science can be the

religion of the nonreligious, the poetry of the nonpoet, the art of the man who cannot paint [...]" (Maslow 1966/2002, p. 81).

Maslow's outright rejection of metaphysical reflection because of his feelings and background, consistent with his theory's individualism, may have introduced a biased starting point into his work. Though unavowed as such, that naturalistic dismissal is in itself a philosophical assumption which, in turn, influences the observer's or researcher's outlook and objectives. Instead of wise stewardship, and the humble and loving beholding of *being*, their main focus is commonly on achieving *outcomes* or mastering the *object* or *organism* through measurement, inspection, experimentation, and manipulation as typical study modes. Pride and hubris may attend their inquiry, instead of the philosopher's wonder and gratitude.

Furthermore, Maslow's scientific attribution to *sola* psychology of the domains of religion, ethics, aesthetics, philosophical anthropology, cosmology, education, and even prophecy is unfounded. Although valuable sources of human knowledge, empirical psychology and science by themselves cannot answer all human questions; for example, the origin, nature, freedom, and end of the human person, or the meaning of human dignity, human flourishing, and the good life. Philosophical reflection is necessary to adequately address these questions and to examine those fields' underlying presuppositions. Paradoxically, the fact that the needs theory has not been sufficiently tested and may not even be verifiable goes against its very claims as "science."

Human Beings as Material, Fragmented Individuals

As will be further discussed later, Maslow defines the term *needs* in various, hardly interchangeable ways that confound descriptive and normative senses. For him, *needs* are "human goals or desires" (1954/1970, p. 22), "capacities" (1962/1968, pp. 152, 201), "rights" (1954/1970, p. xiii), and "values" or "intrinsic values" (1962/1968, pp. 152–153). However, are all desires and capacities "needs"? Are all "needs" necessarily "rights"? Is self-esteem, for instance, a need, a desire, a value, or the outcome of fulfilling other needs? Is it innate or culturally bred? That the same "need" can be construed as "deficiency" or as "being-need," depending on the person's "intelligence," poses additional inconsistencies. For example, attaining knowledge could be regarded as either satisfying safety needs for "ordinary" people or as self-actualization for "intelligent" ones (1954/1970, p. 48).

Contrary to Maslow's assumption, "needs" are better conceived as "hypothetical constructs" rather than as empirically "ascertainable facts" (Fitzgerald 1985, pp. 104–105). "Self-actualization," for example, is not

directly observable, but inferred from self-reports that may likewise be labeled self-esteem, self-confidence, assertiveness, or even pride. Maslow acknowledges that self-actualization and creativeness are indistinguishable (1971/1976, pp. 55ff) and may refer to other states such as "self-realization, integration, psychological health, individuation, autonomy, productivity," or "becoming fully human" (1962/1968, p. 153). Self-actualization could simply imply "openness" (Mittelman 1991).

The needs theory's claim of an essential *human nature* is undermined by its depiction of two radically different motivational patterns: the "more fully evolved" nature of self-actualizers and the under-evolved nature of ordinary people (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 156; 1971/1976, pp. 9–10). The "motivational life of self-actualizing people is not only quantitatively different but also qualitatively different from that of ordinary people" (1954/1970, p. 159). Self-actualizers are their "own main determinant" owing to their "ease of penetration to reality," "superior awareness of their own impulses, desires, opinions, and subjective reactions," and willingness to "resist enculturation and maintain a certain inner detachment from the culture in which they are immersed" (pp. 158, 171–172; 1962/1968, p. 193). They "passionately" feel "swept along" by their "B-work" or "work at the level of being," which defines their identity (1971/1976, pp. 46, 291, 294; 1967). They are a "new kind of human being," "divorced" from their past as well as from moral, social, or divine enjoinders or interventions (1971/1976, p. 95). Since self-actualizers are "integrated, organized wholes" (1954/1970, p. 19), their "heart and head, reason and instinct, or cognition and conation" are not opposed but "synergic" (p. 179). Their "desires are in excellent accord with reason" (1962/1968, pp. 91, 154, 208).

Ordinary people, on the other hand, are disintegrated, ignorant, resentful, fearful, numb, and dependent on external satisfiers (Maslow 1954/1970, pp. 160ff; 1962/1968, p. 213). Their value system is "of necessity, like that of any jungle denizen, dominated and organized by the lower needs, especially the creature needs and the safety needs" (1954/1970, p. 178). Higher needs "generate idiosyncratic values," but deficiency needs are "shared values" "common to all mankind" (1962/1968, pp. 33, 152).

The motivational structures just described are linked, then, to substantial intellectual, cognitive, affective, social, cultural, moral, and "evolutionary" differences. Rather than an *essential* human nature, they virtually amount to two needs-contingent "natures": the "self-made nature" of the superhuman species of self-actualizers and the "instinctually determined nature" of the subhuman species of ordinary people. Furthermore, whereas the difference between humans and animals is merely "quantitative"

because human beings are simply animals with weaker instincts (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 273), the difference between the enlightened and the deficient human castes is “qualitative” as well (p. 159). In the needs theory, therefore, “essential human nature” is neither “essential” nor “human,” since it overlooks defining, distinctly spiritual, principles.

Consequently, contrary to Maslow’s claim, his needs theory’s psychologistic *individuality*-based anthropology diverges from Aristotle’s overarching philosophy of the human *being*. Far from Aristotle’s teleologically anchored four causes framework—the final, the efficient (source of change), the formal (pattern or structure), and the material—the needs theory is, fundamentally, materialistic and reductionist. For Maslow, the “process of becoming a person” is contingent either on instinctual drives or on autonomously determined, subjective individual choices, instead of on goods ordered to a metaphysical final cause or a real end, purpose, or *telos* that may be rationally grasped (DeCarvalho 1991; MacIntyre 1981/2007, pp. 58–60, 148; Veatch 1962, p. 116; Wild 1948, p. 90). The needs theory replaces Aristotle’s entelechy, the “impulse of an organized body or organization to become what it is,” by sheer directionality (Van Belle 2012). Whereas entelechy rests on teleological metaphysics and free personal intentionality, the needs theory’s account of “self-actualization” or “becoming a person” is naturalistically determined mechanistic and atomistic movement. For Aristotle, unlike Maslow, essence is “the principle or structure of the concrete thing in contrast to a physicalistic or materialistic understanding of reality” (Robb 1969, p. 9). In the case of human nature, this principle is its spiritual, rational being, upon which the common good and objective moral law are grounded (p. 13; MacIntyre 1981/2007; Maritain 1947/1972; Veatch 1962; Wild 1948). Human reason does not merely acquiesce passively either to materialistic instinctual demands or to the voluntaristic dictates of unfettered will. It is an intelligence that actively enables us to know properly human goods and end, and informs the will as to right means. *Human flourishing* presupposes this true human essence, goods, and end, the fulfillment of which it entails.

Actually, it is untenable to purport a psychological theory as valid or important unless justified by some distinctly human end. Without this basis, terms such as *need*, *fulfillment*, and *flourishing* are equivocal and, ultimately, meaningless. Even assuming that “vital needs” are defined according to whether “the needing being can continue in being, unharmed, if not met” (Reader 2006, p. 340), their content, order, and strength are not confined to naturalistic categories. A “hierarchy”—or a hierarchy “of needs”—cannot be constructed out of purely physiological and psychological conditions that lack teleological referents

upon which to ground its concepts and priorities (Fitzgerald 1985, p. 101). A “hierarchy of needs” consistent with the view of human beings as biologically determined, highly evolved animals or individuals differs from one in which they are conceived of as free rational, social persons capable of knowing and loving. The latter points to a hierarchy of potentialities or perfectibilities governed by a spiritual core, rather than to simply a gene-based hierarchy of needs. The next section explores these ideas further.

Needs Theory: A Reductionist Humanism

Maslow claims that his concept of the self-actualized or “psychologically healthy (eupsychic) man” is better and more advanced than previous “failed myths” such as the Middle Ages’ “spiritual man,” Renaissance’s “intellectual man,” capitalism’s and Marxism’s “economic man,” and fascism’s “Nietzschean heroic man” (1954/1970, p. 269). Yet, in the construction of its own myth of the radically autonomous self, the needs theory stands on some of these reductionist, voluntaristic, or subjectivistic shoulders. It betrays, for example, a Nietzschean quality (Hunt 2003, pp. 144ff; MacIntyre 1981/2007, p. 114; Valiunas 2011) in its displacement of spirit by unfettered will, of personality and being by individuality and self-creation, and of objective morality by the superman’s or overman’s (self-actualized individual’s) subjective choices. It also betrays a deterministic—physiological and psychological instead of Marxist economicist—bent. In effect, the needs theory recreates Rousseau’s Romantic answer to the Renaissance’s “intellectual man”: the utopian idealistic and subjectivistic view of the “natural man” as free, savage (instinctual, animal-like), self-sufficient, and inexorably wise and good, facing society (e.g., culture, civilization, tradition) as an antagonistic, stifling, corrupting force (Buss 1979, p. 106; Garrison 2001, p. 93).³ Maslow’s “self-actualized individual” considerably merges Rousseau’s “natural man” and Nietzsche’s “heroic man.”

The needs theory’s materialistic, individualistic approach to the human person shortchanges the core agent of its “humanistic” psychology: the human being. Although claiming to be “holistic” (Maslow 1964/1970,

³ Further discussion of other possible influences on Maslow’s theory, humanistic psychology, and related work—such as the thought of Bacon (empiricism, scientism), Descartes (dualism, idealism, subjectivism), Hume (radical empiricism, emotivism), Darwin (biological determinism, natural selection), Schopenhauer (motivation by desires, voluntarism), Comte (scientism), and Sartre (subjectivist existentialism)—though promising as topic for future research, is beyond the scope of this article. I thank the anonymous *JBE* reviewers who pointed out two key antecedents of the attack on organized religion: Auguste Comte (who saw himself as high priest, and positivism as substitute religion) and, much earlier, the Reformation. Maslow’s disdainful attitude toward organized religion will be discussed later.

pp. 3–4), the theory's atomistic and mechanistic "humanism" limits *personality* to *individuality*, whether willfully self-constructed or biologically and psychologically determined. By reducing human rationality and spirituality to either voluntarism or higher animality, it limits the very possibilities of the creativeness and self-actualization that it praises. Its inordinate emphasis on pragmatic outcomes over theoretical inquiry overlooks what the human person really *is* (Melé 2003, p. 80). The needs theory's "humanism" is undermined by its fragmented and limited approach to the human being as individual summation of disconnected, conflicting, and ambiguously defined needs (p. 78; Martin 2011, p. 91) whose only commonality is that they are instinctual, gene-based, and generally awaiting gratification. Lacking a teleological ordering and structure, concepts such as *need fulfillment*, *fully human*, and *self-actualization* remain empty.

An adequate concept of the human person cannot be derived solely from an empirical collection of separate needs or of vignettes by self-styled self-actualizers, each of whom may be experiencing different phenomena. What would make the so-depicted self, the "real" self (Vitz 1977, p. 50)? That self-description may be the result, for example, of self-delusion, self-deception, or pretense. Absent teleological grounds, choosing among multiple "human natures" and competing "self-evident varieties" of the self is a matter of tautology, indeterminacy, fluctuation, or indifference. Unlike personalism's realistic teleological metaphysics, the needs theory's materialistic and deterministic naturalism ends up in an individualistic anthropology that inadequately accounts for the human person and, consequently, provides a poor basis for the good human life, the topic that follows.

Ethical Implications

The needs theory's ethical implications are assessed next, starting from their naturalistic, empirical basis to their individualistic understanding of moral *good* and *evil*, *virtue*, *human rights*, and the *common good* in materialistic, voluntaristic, subjectivistic, and relativistic terms.

Moral Good and Human Rights as Naturalistic, Instinctual, or Empirical Facts

The needs theory conflates the descriptive with the normative. In it, truth, goodness, and beauty have no transcendent reality, but are simply facts of natural reality (Maslow 1971/1976, p. 104) or "human constructs" with no "external referent" (Garrison 2001, p. 94). They have no ultimate meaning, being, or value, but are contingent on either genetic fact or subjective experience. Maslow asserts that the needs "for truth, for love," and "for beauty" are as

"animal" as "the need for food" (1954/1970, pp. 101–102). Furthermore, the "true, the good and the beautiful do correlate some, but only in healthy people *do* they correlate strongly" (1962/1968, p. 160). So, transcendental goods ultimately depend on genetic needs or self-actualizers' idiosyncrasies.

Claiming that "*human* beings have a *right* to be human *in the same sense* that *cats* have a *right* to be cats" (Maslow 1954/1970, p. xiii; emphasis added) betrays the materialistic naturalism underlying the needs theory. Similarly, "man demonstrates *in his own nature* a pressure toward fuller and fuller Being, more and more perfect actualization of his humanness in exactly the same naturalistic, scientific sense that an acorn may be said to be 'pressing toward' being an oak tree" (1962/1968, p. 160). Hence, "a baby is only potentially a human being, and must grow into humanness" (1954/1970, p. xviii). Whereas self-actualizers can profess to be "fully" human, the masses of ordinary people are "only potentially" human. That the latter may be the case out of conditions beyond their control—such as disabilities, illness, age—raises further questions. If *human rights* are merely "needs" (p. xiii), their claim to equality and inalienability is untenable because needs vary depending on the individual.

From a personalistic standpoint, human rights are not simply based on physiological or psychological facts, but rather on the unique spiritual origin and calling of the human person. They "are rooted in the vocation of the person (a spiritual and free agent) to the order of absolute values and to a destiny superior to time" (Maritain 1943/2001, p. 78). Human persons are not reducible either to animals of equivocal, weaker instincts (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 273; 1967), or solely to their separate materialistic potentialities. That persons have distinctly human faculties or potentialities does not imply that, if these are not "fully developed," the person is "only potentially a human being" or that the corresponding rights are so contingent. A materialistic, naturalistic account may suffice for "oakness" or "catness," but not for "humanness" and fundamental human rights.

Since, in Maslow's theory, needs or drives are merely biological or psychological facts, the enjoinder to satisfy them lacks sufficient support. They are neither intrinsic moral goods nor inherently instrumental to properly human ends. That the self is morally considerable and human dignity intrinsically worthy cannot be derived from purely empirical data. A mere statement of needs does not define who ought to satisfy them, why, or how (e.g., when, with what) (Reader 2006, p. 343). Just as the actualization of physiological potentialities is not indifferent as to junk or wholesome foods, the actualization of psychological potentialities is not indifferent as to base or ennobling means. Yet, self-actualizing as mafia boss, master hacker,

virtuoso musician, or altruistic missionary, insofar as fully expressive of the self, may be essentially equivalent as regards the needs theory.

Two radically different and inconsistent value systems—one of higher gratifications and one of necessity—emerge from the motivational patterns of self-actualizers vis-à-vis ordinary people (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 178). The self-actualizer's voluntaristic assertion is the sole criterion for considering one set of values as “truly ethical” and the other as “largely conventional” (p. 158). Values are construed by appealing to the authority of self-actualizers, who replace the wise philosopher or the holy sage as moral paragons (p. 160). The good or “truly ethical” choice is that which pleases self-actualizers and hence has their approval. “If the facts are fully known, they will guide us and tell us what to do”; we must “listen” to them in a “noninterfering, receptive” way (1971/1976, p. 120). Insofar as the “best experiencers,” “cognizers, and perceivers” of reality, self-actualizers are necessarily the “most compassionate” and “most effective fighters against injustice” (p. 5; 1964/1970, Preface). In contrast, those who are unable to meet their lower needs, whether out of their own making or not, are destined to remain imprisoned in the “average,” “conventional” morality of “dissatisfaction” (1954/1970, pp. 174ff). Like “jungle denizens,” they are trapped in the value system “of necessity,” “dominating” and “dominated” by food and safety needs (p. 178).

Further inconsistencies emerge. Hedonism, for instance, “does work for healthy people; it does not work for sick people” (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 160). Self-actualizers “are simultaneously very much alike and very much unlike each other” because they are “more completely individual” and “more completely socialized” than ordinary people (1954/1970, p. 178). For them, there is no “dichotomy between selfishness and unselfishness” “because in principle every act is *both* selfish and unselfish” (p. 179; 1962/1968, p. 91). In self-actualizers, “duty and pleasure,” “work and play, self-interest and altruism, individualism and selflessness” converge (p. 163). Only they may responsibly be told: “Do as you will, and it will probably be all right” (p. 164). Since “less than 1 %” of people become self-actualized or “fully human” (pp. 204, 156), being a good person is the domain of just a few.

In the needs theory, consequently, ethical norms are neither consistent, universal, nor communicable, but precariously shut into the individual's “private psychological world” (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 178). Moral *good* is not what *everyone ought to will*, but what *self-actualizers desire*. Ethical fickleness, relativism, and even solipsism ensues (Milton 2002, p. 51; Hitchcock 1982; Robb 1969; Vitz 1977). Empirical “facts”—self-actualizers' perceptions, cognitions, opinions, preferences, or choices

(Maslow 1971/1976, pp. 7, 9; 1954/1970, pp. 158ff)—are the only possible “reasons” for the goodness of an act or character. Self-actualizers' “good” or “spontaneous” choices imply that their basic needs have been satisfied, but those very options, in turn, define *good* choice. This circularity can only be resolved by appealing to the non-naturalistic criteria that the model overlooks. In the absence of objective normative referents or criteria apart from the needy self, the meaning of *good act* remains groundless, private, arbitrary, indifferent, or equivocal.

Moral judgment is not reducible to the raw, chaotic data of genetic drives or subjective individual experience. It implies adducing right reasons whose ultimate basis is a universal account of distinctly human flourishing (MacIntyre 1981/2007; Maritain 1947/1972; Veatch 1962). To determine whether a human act is *good* requires an evaluation of its moral object and circumstances, and the person's intentions (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 18 aa. 2–4; McInerny 1997, pp. 77–89). As regards its object or kind, the act “has so much good as it has being” because “good and being are convertible” (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 18 a. 1). Accordingly, “from the goodness of the will the goodness of the exterior action is derived, and vice versa, *as one is ordered to the other*” (q. 20 a. 3, emphasis added; McInerny 1997, p. 86). These distinctions are crucial for an adequate definition of both *good* and *evil* human act, a matter to be discussed later.

Virtues as Subjective, Relative Values

In the needs theory's non-teleological materialistic framework, *virtues* are reducible to subjective *metaneeds* or *B-values*. Contrary to the theory's claim, these fourteen “intrinsic” “ultimate values”—wholeness, perfection, completion, justice, aliveness, richness, simplicity, beauty, goodness, uniqueness, effortlessness, playfulness, truth, self-sufficiency (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 83; 1971/1976, pp. 9, 42–43, 121–142; 1964/1970, Appendix)—are neither all intrinsically good, morally equivalent, nor equally praiseworthy. For instance, playfulness is not as morally significant as justice, aliveness as goodness, effortlessness as truth. The B-values list contains a mix of moral virtues (e.g., justice, goodness) and purely instrumental values (e.g., aliveness, effortlessness), of necessary goods and subsidiary goals of variable worth. Moreover, since they are the “free choices” of healthy people when “feeling at their best and strongest” (1962/1968, p. 168), those ill-defined B-values are contingent on caste, individual, and situation.

From a personalistic standpoint, *virtues* are not sets of “values” grounded on the individual, whether as self-actualizer or as ordinary self. Virtues are “precisely those qualities the possession of which will enable an individual

to achieve *eudaimonia* and the lack of which will frustrate his movement toward that *telos*" or "specific good" "at which human beings characteristically aim" (MacIntyre 1981/2007, p. 148; Hartman 2011; Melé 2009; Solomon 2003; Whetstone 2001; Wishloff 2009). *Eudaimonia*, generally translated as happiness, "is the state of being well and doing well in being well, of a man's being well-favored himself and in relation to the divine" (MacIntyre 1981/2007, p. 148; McNerny 1997, pp. 16, 20).

For virtue, "it matters not only what a man does, but also how he does it"; that is, doing it "from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion" (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 57 a. 5). Right choice requires "due end and something suitably ordained to that due end." *Prudence* is the intellectual virtue that perfects reason, making it "suitably affected towards things ordained to the end." In order to be so "rightly disposed to particular things to be done," the human being "needs to be perfected by certain habits, thanks to which it becomes connatural, as it were, to man to judge rightly concerning the end" (q. 58 a. 5). Therefore, prudence requires moral virtue that "perfects the appetitive part of the soul by directing it to good as defined by reason" (q. 59 a. 4; IaIIae, qq. 47–56). *Justice* is the moral virtue that "directs man in his relations with others," "a habit whereby a man renders to each one his due by a constant will" (qq. 58 aa. 1–2; 57–122). The moral virtues of temperance and fortitude are concerned with mastering the passions or sense appetites: the concupiscible such as desires, pleasure, and pain, and the irascible such as anger, despair, and fear, respectively (qq. 123–170). Whereas *temperance* moderates the passions "so as to keep them within bounds," by *fortitude* "the soul is strengthened for that which is in accord with reason, against any assaults of the passions" (IaIIae, q. 61 a. 4). Following Aristotelian–Thomistic thought, these four virtues are essential or "cardinal" (from the Latin *cardo* "hinge," "that upon which something depends") for the real flourishing of the human person (q. 61 a. 3; McNerny 1997). Moreover, "no strictly true virtue is possible without charity" because it refers "to the final and perfect good" (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 23 a. 7). The virtue of *charity* or friendship as "love which is together with benevolence," willing the good of the beloved (q. 23 a. 1), is thus part of a virtue ethics consistent with personalism (Argandoña 2011; Melé 2009; Van Dierendonck and Paterson 2015; Wishloff 2009).

In the needs theory, love and friendship are linked neither to the virtue of charity nor to generosity or beneficence but, at best, to feelings of belongingness or sympathy; at worst, they might become tools for using human beings solely as means (Valiunas 2011). For Maslow, love is best expressed by non-judgment and detachment, by "leaving alone" the beloved from whom nothing is demanded

(1971/1976, p. 17; 1962/1968, pp. 92–93). This individualistic description of love is inconsistent with charity as well as with the moral virtues of justice, fortitude, and temperance. It is inimical to personality, which requires solidarity, compassion, communion, community, benevolence, and true friendship (Maritain 1947/1972; Williams and Bengtsson 2013; see also, Argandoña 2011; Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Martin 2011; Melé 2009, 2012; Sandelands 2014). Love is not simply biological drive, fanciful feelings, instrumental value, indifferent tolerance, or convenient separation. It entails willing the proper human good of the beloved for his or her own sake, and acting accordingly (Argandoña 2011, p. 80). Personalism provides a basis for understanding love as gift of oneself, which calls for a committed engagement with the mutual pursuit of properly human flourishing, selflessness, and sacrifice. So, for both lover and beloved to behold each other as unique, irreplaceable human persons, love must be anchored in intellectual and moral virtue.

According to Maslow, self-control arises either out of "psychic fear," the necessity to keep the psyche organized, or the "Apollonizing controls" that "*enhance* pleasure by organizing" the actualized self (1962/1968, pp. 197–198). Asceticism and self-denial "produce a diminished, stunted or crippled organism" (p. 199). Although Maslow acknowledges that "higher needs may occasionally emerge, not after gratification, but rather after forced or voluntary deprivation, renunciation, or suppression of lower basic needs and gratifications," he associates these practices with "Eastern cultures" (1954/1970, pp. 59–60). On the contrary, he generally insists that "the easiest technique for releasing the organism from the bondage of the lower, more material, more selfish needs is to gratify them" (p. 61). Since "man's higher nature rests upon man's lower nature," it does not hinge "upon instinctual renunciation, but upon instinctual gratification" (1962/1968, p. 173). Restraint and self-denial are "neurotic" and "crippling" (pp. 197ff). They might be, at best, "pleasure enhancers" for self-actualizing individuals.

The needs theory overlooks that self-mastery, embodied in the virtues of temperance and fortitude, is freeing. Need deprivation is not merely a side effect, but may be sought purposefully in order to develop one's personality (Neher 1991). The artist who sacrifices physical comfort to achieve virtuosity, the zealous missionary who strives to assist the famished, and the mystic who undergoes physical and emotional distress for the sake of spiritual perfection come to mind. An adequate description and assessment of these properly human acts goes beyond a strictly instinctual, empirical, or voluntaristic account.

The needs theory celebrates the voluntaristic freedom of the spontaneous, uninhibited self. It encourages autonomous individuals to make themselves anew, free from

social strictures, religious commandments, or ethical norms (Vitz 1996, p. 16). Self-actualizers have “inner freedom” because they “are independent of the approval and disapproval of other people, and seek rather *self*-approval” (Maslow 1954/1970, pp. 278–279).

Paradoxically, when so conceived in terms of number and variety of unfettered choices, freedom may be vulnerable to perceptual biases, momentary feelings, and external manipulation. From a personalistic standpoint, freedom entails self-mastery (Maritain 1947/1972). It thus requires abiding by the moral natural law that prescribes “all acts of virtue” and whose general principles—the first of which is that “good is to be done and pursued and evil is to be avoided”—are “unchangeable” and the “same for all, both as to rectitude and as to knowledge” (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, qq. 94, 91 a. 2). Ordered to the true human goods, such freedom is a necessary condition for moral responsibility and good will, virtue, human rights, and the common good (MacIntyre 1981/2007, p. 159). Ultimately, “freedom from sin is true freedom which is united to the servitude of justice, since they both incline man to that which is becoming to him” (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 183 a. 4). Human beings “are said to be beginners, proficient, and perfect, not in relation to any occupation whatever, but in relation to such occupations as pertain to spiritual freedom or servitude.” Accordingly, whereas the needy, egocentric, or voluntaristic self is enslaving, the virtuous person is free even when confronting dire circumstances.

Evil as Unease or Displeasure

The needs theory lacks a coherent underlying concept of *evil*, as Maslow himself acknowledged (Frick 2000; Hoffman 1992). In it, “evil,” like “good,” is an equivocal term of moral and non-moral meaning. The “good” is psychological health; “evil,” disease (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 165; 1971/1976, pp. 117, 120). Since all human needs and potentialities are assumed to be necessarily “good,” their repression or curtailment is “evil” (Vitz 1977, pp. 41ff). Whereas the good or “eupsychic” individual is the “natural” human being (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 269), the “evil” one is, simply, blind or “frustrated.” Evil is “a product of not seeing the world whole and unified,” and, therefore, equivalent to “pain or threat” (1962/1968, p. 82).

The characteristic self-acceptance of self-actualizers eradicates any feelings of guilt. Virtuous acts ensue from that lack of “crippling shame, and of extreme or severe anxiety” (Maslow 1954/1970, pp. 155ff) as well as from self-actualizers’ “far less doubt about right and wrong” (1971/1976, p. 9). Yet, such emotions may just express a smug, complacent, or even callous voluntarism. They may be connected with choices that are, at best, materially beneficial but lacking good will. Some of these options

might be merely non-moral; for instance, pleasant, stress or anxiety-free, or carefree. Moreover, they may be perceptually “good” but, objectively, ethically questionable (1962/1968, p. 99) or blameworthy, as demonstrated by an anecdote from Maslow’s days as graduate student (1971/1976, pp. 116–117). While conducting studies in hypnosis, he says, “I did not mind lying or stealing or hiding. I just did what had to be done because I was absolutely certain that it was the right thing to do” (p. 116). Self-actualizers follow an “autonomous and individual” morality; their behavior is “independent of the opinions” of others (1954/1970, pp. 158, 168, 175). Consequently, they may be sympathetic or unsympathetic, caring or uncaring, “boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed,” extremely arrogant, and even “capable of an extraordinary and unexpected ruthlessness” (p. 176).

Within a personalistic framework, an *evil* act “gives preponderance to the individual aspect of our being” (Maritain 1947/1972, p. 43). Individuality, the very basis for goodness in the needs theory, in reality paves the way for evil. In an evil act, *individuality* outweighs or overrides *personality*. Realizing that, whether of commission or omission, an evil act has been done hurts the good person in ways that surpass mere “unease.” Furthermore, neither is its evil defined by individual discomfort nor its guilt by the degree or extent of unpleasant material or psychological outcomes for the particular self. The habitual self-actualizing liar or swindler may not feel any guilt, shame, or distress; an inordinately scrupulous person may experience severe anxiety over insignificant moral transgressions. The threshold of psychological self-acceptance is not a reasonable criterion for moral evil. Prioritizing voluntarism or willfulness overlooks that reason “provides a needed corrective to the mistaken judgments of the emotion” (Wild 1948, p. 90). A teleological understanding of distinct human nature reveals the objective and universal goods for the human person and, accordingly, the intellectual and moral virtues required for human flourishing. Evil deprives these properly human goods (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 18 a. 1; McInerney 1997, p. 69). Since “through his will man has dominion over his actions,” evil “renders them worthy of blame” (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 21 a. 2). Evil “and guilt are one and the same thing” in such voluntary acts. Therefore, guilt signifies true moral culpability that calls for repentance and reparation, rather than simply feelings of frustration or unease to be assuaged by rationalization or self-validating therapy.

The Common Good as Individual Needs Satisfaction

An ambivalent, conflictive view of culture and society emerges out of the needs theory’s individualism. Since culture “is created not only for human needs but by them,”

these require protection "against education, against learning—in a word, against being overwhelmed by the environment" (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 103). Culture and society are called to cater for the particular needs of the two-caste system: to duly sustain ordinary people's D-needs and to tolerantly refrain from inhibiting self-actualizers' B-needs (p. 174). The theory does not explain how culture and society, thus understood in terms of individualistic needs, may reconcile and achieve both competing goals. For instance, how can self-actualizers, divorced from education, learn the proper ways to growth and autonomy? How can the ordinary masses orderly and steadily secure their basic needs? Moreover, underneath the seemingly benevolent culture that promotes "universal self-actualization" (Maslow 1962/1968, pp. 159, 211) may lurk a dictatorial stream that, out of expediency, represses the "inferior" masses (1979, pp. 631–632).⁴ The self-actualizers' utopian anarchistic regime is at odds with the authoritarian paternalism required to supply the deficiencies and control the unruliness of the "primitive" majority.

Contrary to the preceding individualistic account, society and culture make personal dialogue, friendship, solidarity, compassion, and communion possible. Interaction with "other self-transcendent contexts such as nature and society" and family (Garrison 2001, pp. 92, 96–97) is necessary for overcoming self-absorption and developing personal authenticity (Marcel 1951; Maritain 1947/1972; Royal 1990; Rutledge 2011; Trigg 2004; Vitz 1977). From a personalistic standpoint, therefore, the *common good* and *personality* imply each other (Maritain 1947/1972, pp. 49, 28ff; see also, Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Grassl and Habisch 2011; Melé 2009; Sandelands 2009; Sison 2007; Wishloff 2009). The common good sustains personality and has priority over individual or private interests and goods. Since defined in terms of the true ends of the human person (Maritain 1947/1972, pp. 30, 48), the common good "includes within itself as principal value, the highest access, compatible with the good of the whole, of the persons to their life of person and liberty of expansion, as well as to the communications of generosity consequent

upon such expansion" (pp. 50–51). Human persons need society and culture to complement them and to fulfill the deficiencies that stem from their "material individuality" (pp. 47–48, 60ff). Furthermore, in their quest for perfection, they seek the "communications of knowledge and love which require relationship with other persons" (p. 47). The common good includes moral, intellectual, and spiritual goods (pp. 52ff), as well as material and social goods such as work, property, and public security.

Self-actualization: An Individualistic Ethics

Maslow's humanistic psychology claims to be a positive psychology, a third force between behaviorism and Freudian psychoanalysis (Neher 1991, p. 110). Yet, despite its more optimistic human outlook, it shares their materialistic, naturalistic, and deterministic assumptions which ultimately sanction individualism and obliterate moral responsibility. By overlooking the spiritual calling of the human person, relationally known and freely embodied, those reductionist underpinnings uproot the basis for human dignity, its perfectibility by virtue, and the common good (Martin 2011, p. 90; see also, Garrison 2001, pp. 98, 100; Guillén et al. 2015; Harter 2006; Maritain 1947/1972; Reader 2006, p. 345). Far from Aristotelian–Thomistic human psychology as the metaphysical study of the rational soul, its properties and relation with the body, those "psychological" theories disregard that which is distinctly human.

The needs theory's "is-ought" equivalence overlooks the distinctly rational and spiritual in human persons, their proper goods and end.⁵ It thus confounds *personality* with *individuality*. The human being is neither a sum of genetic material nor some abstract construct of autonomous ego, but a rational human person steeped in value-rich extranatural and natural realities—religious, ethical, aesthetical, intellectual, social, and cultural. In the human person, the spiritual orders and raises the lower needs from their animal, primitive status. The prudent person "is called wise, inasmuch as he directs his acts to a fitting end" (Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 1 a. 6). Rather than the autonomous self-actualized individual, it is the prudent, virtuous person who sees reality clearly, wills the good, and freely and rightly acts accordingly. As vividly depicted in the 1987 Oscar-winning Danish film *Babette's Feast*, even the need for food is not solely a mechanistic manifestation of some beastly,

⁴ "how tough I'd be with the rioters (I'd shoot them if necessary, even to kill if unavoidable — but only, of course, if the society were behind this & could take it in the political sense). I'd jail & punish all the civil disobedients [*sic*]. And for the ones who plume themselves on being arrested, I'd have *real* punishment, anything that they would fear & that would deter them, even if I had to change the laws about cruel & unusual punishment. [...] This is prepotent to 'liberties,' to rights, to *anything*. [...] As for unemployed loafers today, in a time of shortages of help, I'd simply be willing to let them starve ultimately. [...] Being authoritarian at the lower need levels of society (most of the 'new nations') instead of politically democratic [*sic*]. [...] But for highly developed & economic democracies, I'd push toward philosophical anarchism" (May 25, 1966 journal entry, Maslow 1979, pp. 631–632).

⁵ The fact-value or *is-ought* problem, and the related naturalistic fallacy, has been covered at length in the moral philosophy literature (e.g., Frankena 1939; MacIntyre 1981/2007; McNerny 1997; Tollefson 1995). Its further discussion is beyond the scope of this article. Suffice it to stress that, absent the proper teleological metaphysical and anthropological basis, Maslow's rendition of the "is-ought" connection is open to the naturalistic fallacy criticism.

prehuman physiological instinct, but may be the occasion for a palette of ethical, aesthetical, social, and religious intentions and meanings. Instead of deterministically specified, human actions are voluntary; they “proceed from a deliberate will” or rational appetite (Aquinas, *ST*, IaIIae, q. 1 a. 1; McNerny 1997, pp. 60–76). Consequently, an adequate account of human action is not reducible to atomistic gestures of physiological or psychological need fulfillment, but considers the act’s object, circumstances, and a wealth of personal purposes and intentions.

Spirituality, rather than “instinctoid tendencies and capacities” (Maslow 1954/1970, p. 273), is the key to human freedom, free will, and unique human flourishing. As Guillén et al. (2015) point out, the needs theory’s physiological and safety drives are, following Aristotle, “useful” goods, whereas esteem, belongingness, and self-actualization are “pleasant” goods (i.e., produce enjoyment). Intrinsic “spiritual” and “moral” goods (virtues) should also be part of motivation theories lest these continue to reinforce the concept of human beings as “self-interested, amoral, and non-spiritual” (pp. 803, 813). A spiritual good motivates behavior because it is “any intangible human good regarding transcendence and a deep sense of meaning that requires some sort of faith in its origin, given that it goes beyond human rationality” (p. 810).

The needs theory’s individualistic “Be *yourself*!”—either the materialistic fiat of genetic instincts or the voluntaristic command of unbridled will—is a fragmented, self-enclosed, and hollow imperative. Its categorical moral law, “Become what thou art!” (Maslow 1971/1976, p. 108), is a purely psychological, idiosyncratic norm that, lacking properly ethical content (Melé 2003, p. 80), may be filled at will. Insofar as silent or indifferent as to right means, it may sanction the righteous and the wicked alike. Since it wrongly assumes that needs gratification is necessarily always a good (Reader 2006, p. 342), it may feed a heightened sense of entitlement and self-indulgence (Hitchcock 1982, p. 71) or a narcissistic mentality (Bergman et al. 2010), with negative repercussions for the agent and society. Radically detached from metaphysical realities, and from moral, religious, and social norms and traditions, it precludes an adequate account of virtue and good action, human rights, evil and guilt, freedom, self-mastery and self-control, friendship and love, and the common good. The needs theory’s individuality-based imperative is thus an alienating, nihilistic dismissal of true morality as unrealistic, coercive, or inhibitive of human nature. Conversely, the personalistic imperative “Be *virtuous*, be *truly human*!,” grounded on sound teleological metaphysics and anthropology, is being-based, integral, reasonable, communicable, really freeing, and content-full. It renders human flourishing and happiness both intelligible and

genuinely attainable. Personal “authenticity” and “growth” have significance and worth only if imbued with intellectual and moral virtue.

Religious Outlook

According to Maslow, self-actualizers are characterized by “religious ideals” such as “the transcendence of self” and the moral categories often associated with religious values (1962/1968, p. 158). “Transcendence” does not presuppose a supernatural dimension, but is limited to the natural; “transcendent nature” is part of the individual’s “essence, i.e., his biological nature as a member of a species which has evolved” (1964/1970, Preface). Maslow claims that terms such as “sacred,” “divine,” “holy,” “sin,” “prayer,” “thanksgiving,” “worship,” “piety,” “salvation,” and “reverence” merely refer to “subjective happenings in human beings without necessarily implying any supernatural reference.” Accordingly, atheists may also be thought of as “religious” (1954/1970, p. 169).

In Maslow’s naturalistic outlook, faith in “something which has no empirical support” (e.g., a divine being, revelation, eternal life) “rests upon *lack* of faith in the human being” (March 24, 1962 journal entry, Maslow 1979, p. 146). In it, faith in God becomes faith in the actualized self, “the transcendence of self, of self-consciousness, and of selfishness,” “the condition of the fullest homonomy” or “full autonomy” (1962/1968, p. 212). Heaven “lies waiting for us through life, ready to step into for a time and to enjoy before we have to come back to our ordinary life of striving” (p. 154; 1971/1976, p. 108). The “transient” “euphoric,” “ecstatic” *peak experience* (pp. 46, 101ff; 1964/1970)—unique to self-actualizers and “intrinsically valid,” “only good and desirable,” “perfect, complete,” “sufficient to itself,” “good as it *should* be,” “sacred” (1962/1968, p. 81)—supplants both heaven and mystic communion (Vitz 1977, pp. 129ff).

Maslow views organized religion with contempt. “It’s possible now to make a completely coherent & comprehensive psychological & naturalistic theory of religion—far more clear & real than any theology or religion has ever been. [...] I think we can save everything worth saving in religion, everything real & true, without swallowing any of the crap. A new, *true* religion would certainly change things. Something really good to harness all the good impulses now wasted on nunneries & churches & Bibles [*sic*]” (March 12, 1959 journal entry, Maslow 1979, p. 6). He considers organized religion to be the “enemy” of “religious experience and the religious experiencer” (1964/1970, Preface); at best, it is a refuge for the uneducated: “educated people need ‘churches’ far less than average & low-IQ people. Maybe morons *need* rules, dogmas, ceremonies, etc.” (1979, p. 711). Since “the

sacred is in the ordinary," "to be looking elsewhere for miracles is to me a sure sign of ignorance that everything is miraculous. The rejection of a priestly caste who claimed to be exclusive custodians of a private hot line to the sacred was, in my opinion, a great step forward in the emancipation of mankind" (1964/1970, Preface).

Maslow concludes that most people need a psychologist to reveal to them their potentialities, which they would otherwise ignore (1962/1968, p. 153). For the psychologist, "that which the person *is* and which the person *could be* exist simultaneously," "thereby resolving the dichotomy between Being and Becoming" (p. 160). How psychologists, themselves self-actualizing individuals, can reach such godlike wisdom and understanding is puzzling. In Maslow's scientific framework, psychotherapy and humanistic psychology become secular religions, with psychotherapists and self-actualizers as high priests and enlightened legislators of the moral law. In it, "selfism" or the "cult of self-worship" replaces worship of Divine Being (Vitz 1977, p. 105; Garrison 2001, p. 91; Hitchcock 1982, p. 71).

In the personalistic approach, religion is not belittled but acknowledged as a domain of being, meaning, and value. Theology and real religious experience such as asceticism, devotion, and mysticism, among other expressions of self-transcendence and worship, are not thought to be antagonistic or incompatible with the human condition and aspirations, but as legitimate, reasonable, and lofty human pursuits of ultimate Being, Truth, and Good. The philosophical work of Christian personalists, such as Étienne Gilson, Gabriel Marcel, Jacques Maritain, John Henry Newman, Dietrich von Hildebrand, and Karol Wojtyła, attests to the consistency of theocentric personalism with the affirmation of the intrinsic worth and dignity of the human person, of human freedom and rights and, consequently, of a notion of virtue and the common good understood in terms of properly human ends (Crosby 2014; Grassl and Habisch 2011; Marcel 1962; Maritain 1947/1972; Williams 2004; Williams and Bengtsson 2013; Zúñiga 2001). Moreover, it offers further support for personalism as a sound philosophical framework within which to elucidate and justify those anthropological and ethical principles in business and management (Acevedo 2012; Guillén et al. 2015; Melé 2012; Sandelands 2009, 2014; Whetstone 2002; Williams and Bengtsson 2013; Wishloff 2009). Since "our being bears the image of God so far as it is proper to us, and excels that of the other animals" "insofar as we are endowed with a mind" (Aquinas, *ST*, I, q. 93 a. 7), a theocentric personalism ennobles human beings by underscoring their true origin and calling, their uniqueness and irreplaceability, in the order of things.

Self-transcendence is not constricted to the person's own self but "directed, to something, or someone, other

than oneself" (Frankl 1959/1985, p. 133). The term *sacred* "loses its meaning, it degenerates into a vague adjective, once we stop admitting that it refers to a reality which transcends absolutely the level of simple psychological dispositions" (Marcel 1962, p. 36). When restricted to the individual self, the contemplation of Truth, the delight in Beauty, or the joy in the Good do not have transcendent significance, but might just be another exalted immanent experience, self-delusion, hypnotic suggestion, or drug-induced hallucination. So, "transcendent values such as love, justice, truth, and beauty only make sense as intentions directed to real goals beyond the self" (Garrison 2001, p. 96). The enclosed world of anthropocentric self-actualization overlooks these realities, thereby shortchanging human flourishing, true happiness, and, ultimately, the very human person it purports to uphold.

Implications and Recommendations for Managers and Business Educators

The foregoing personalistic appraisal has explored the needs theory's troubling philosophical underpinnings. Their implications for managerial and business practice and education are covered next, along with recommendations. As with similarly grounded management and business theories and approaches, the needs theory's seemingly "humanistic" shell may have in reality served as Trojan horse introducing havoc and potential defeat for the unsuspecting.

Management Practice

The view of organizational members as merely individuals in pursuit of need satisfaction raises many questions. Is it conducive to a vibrant organizational culture? How can the organization as paternalistic purveyor of D-need satisfiers be reconciled with one that celebrates self-actualizers' unfettered freedom and creativity? How may managers, needy individuals as well, prioritize and balance conflicting particular needs in decisions ranging from the everyday to policy and strategic? Since the "good" is determined by self-actualizers' perceptions and choices, what would deter self-actualizing despots, fraudsters, liars, and cheaters, other than the possibility of severe external penalties? Since, in the needs theory, "good" choices are ultimately instinct-grounded, what basis is there to assign moral responsibility, moral praise or blame? Apart from the self-actualizer's own sanction, why should those decisions be accepted as ethically right rather than as rationalization or even license for objectively reproachable conduct?

The book *Maslow on management* (1998), based on his journals and originally published as *Eupsychian management*

(1965), explores the managerial applications of the needs theory. In *eupsychia*, the “ideal society,” *B-followers* have the ability “to detect factual superiority,” “to choose the most efficient leaders,” and to “admire” and follow them “with a minimum of antagonism and hostility” (pp. 182, 154ff). *B-leadership* or *functional leadership* entails leader-job (function) fit. Leadership policy is thus mainly determined by “the objective requirements of the particular situation,” “task,” or “problem” (p. 152). The *B-leader*, moreover, should “have the ability to give orders without feeling guilty” (p. 163). “If his job is to give out life sentences or death sentences, then he must be able to do this too without falling apart,” heeding “the objective requirements of the situation without fussing too much about the delicate sensitivity of the followers or of the employees.” In typical materialistic, naturalistic vein, Maslow draws a parallelism between William Dove’s (1935) experimental “superior in everything” “aggridant chickens (bigger, stronger, dominant)” (pp. 102, 167ff) and the “superior in everything” manager (p. 168). These enlightened managers promote “synergic” B-values (pp. 108ff) once stringent “preconditions” have been met, such as the procurement of sufficient D-need satisfiers and the removal of fear or anxiety-causing agents (p. 53). Otherwise, these “regressive” forces may breed “passive” followers who feel “resentful,” “hopeless,” “helpless,” “inferior,” or “overwhelmed” (pp. 53–54, 181).

The *eupsychic* or “healthy” organization that “fosters universal self-actualization” (Maslow 1962/1968, p. 159; 1965/1998, p. 74) is, however, both unworkable and ethically amiss. Since, according to Maslow, less than one percent of the population is self-actualized, “good” organizations of B-leaders and B-followers are virtually impossible. Most people are just “ordinary” or “potential human beings.” Consequently, securing the necessary “preconditions,” some of which may be beyond the leader’s purview, is a daunting task. The description of the B-leader’s superior “aggridant” “constitution, heredity, and biological endowment” (p. 168) offends democratic sensibilities and poses obvious difficulties in terms of personnel selection, recruitment, training, and development. Moreover, these metamotivated self-actualizers, outside the influence of external motivators, may resent organizational goals as impositions that curtail their freedom. They may blatantly defy or recreate those goals at will. Widespread rejection of higher authority, along with political coups and an ingrained sense of entitlement, is a likely scenario. Absent proper ethical criteria, why and how should B-leaders harness their “superior” powers and seek the advancement of others? Why and how should B-followers refrain from envy and eagerly agree to follow? Why and how should B-leaders and B-followers control any “antagonism and hostility” despite their respective insensitivity and resentment? The needs theory’s assumption that their

harmonious and mutually self-actualizing interactions evolve spontaneously (pp. 180ff) is unrealistic.

The presence of “ordinary” people does not improve that bleak organizational picture. Even if possible to motivate them, should the “preconditions” be met, employees laden with basic needs might be deemed to be costly “burdens” or “liabilities.” Physical or mental impairment, whether real or perceived, can only aggravate this branding. If extrinsic satisfiers are insufficient, or the sources of stress and anxiety uncontrollable, those “potentially human” workers may, as predicted, become “resentful,” “helpless,” and “passive.” This is hardly the foundation for a prosperous organization.

In either case—an aggregate of ordinary dependent individuals, and/or of self-sufficient self-actualizers—the likely result is an undermining of other competing, but legitimate, organizational goals. An organization made up of needs-driven, satisfaction-seeking agents is a managerial nightmare. The eupsychian dream (Maslow 1966/2002; 1965/1998) may eventually entail anarchistic dis-organizations or despotic dystopias, with disturbing aftershocks for society. As other blaringly proclaimed worldly utopias, it is ultimately unattainable and self-defeating. Their promises of the “new individual,” and the earthly heaven, can only bring alienation and self-destruction.

In the needs theory, human dignity is not grounded on the reality of the human person but conceived as a “feeling” of “controlling one’s own life, of being one’s own boss” (Maslow 1965/1998, p. 61). Influencing the employees’ “feeling of dignity, of respect and of self-respect” “costs little or nothing” because “it’s a matter of an attitude, a deep-lying sympathy and understanding which can express itself almost automatically in various ways that can be quite satisfying, since they save the dignity of the person in the unfortunate situation” (p. 63). Thus, managers need not affirm human dignity as a good in itself but may manage it as if simply another resource, as mere means for image-building or profit. Saving face may suffice when, instead, personal affirmation is called for. Moreover, if human dignity is just a manageable “feeling,” it is liable to perceptual bias, pretense, condescension, or manipulation.

In reality, an employee “stands before his employer in a relationship of justice and as an adult person, not as a child or as a servant” (Maritain 1943/2001, p. 89). Workers are “spiritual beings to behold and cherish” (Sandelands 2014, p. 67). In the Maslovian framework, however, employees might be objectivized in I–It transactions rather than affirmed in I–Thou relationships (Buber 1937/1958). They may be viewed as bearers of instrumental value and treated accordingly as weak, vulnerable, needy children or, at best, as useful pawns. Other stakeholders might be approached in a similar manner: the consumer deceived, the investor

misled, the taxpayer forced to bail out corrupt companies or the citizen to suffer from negative externalities. Basic human freedoms and rights—ultimately grounded on the human being's distinct spirituality—are at stake when self-actualization replaces virtuous character as moral imperative.

Defining best management policy as that "which will *work best*" in terms of "pragmatic success and productivity" (Maslow 1965/1998, pp. 93, 103, 170) reduces management to expedient technique. The ideal of managers as virtuous persons is more inspiring, enduring, and edifying than that of managers as "born aggridents" or as needs-satisfying agents. Mainly by means of their own example, they are "committed to honoring the dignity of [their] followers and their freedom to participate in a true community of solidarity" (Whetstone 2002, pp. 388–389), rather than to simply meeting the material and psychological needs of either dependent or overbearing individuals. Instead of the precarious power emanating from the capability to satisfy lower needs or to tolerate self-actualizers' hubris, managerial authority would stem from, and be firmly grounded on, intellectual and moral character or integrity. Virtuous—prudent, just, courageous, temperate, charitable—leaders are not just "managers of resources" but "servants of persons" (Greenleaf 1977; Van Dierendonck and Patterson 2015). Their work is "a sacred ministry to persons" (Sandelands 2014, p. 66), a "mission," "calling," or "vocation" (Acevedo 2012, p. 216).

Management and business as human endeavors are built on weak foundations if organizations are conceived of as groupings of *individuals* rather than as associations or communities of *persons* (Melé 2012) in pursuit of "truly human goods linked to human personality and relationality" (Acevedo 2012, p. 212; Fontrodona and Sison 2006; Melé 2003). An individualistic concept of organizations contradicts business acumen and even common sense. Organizational effectiveness depends on many competitive, technological, investment, and other financial and non-financial factors whose skillful management is philosophically charged. Anthropological and ethical outlook impacts the ends and means by which those forces are considered, balanced, and managed. Besides managerial and leadership character, this philosophical stance impinges upon a wide range of organizational goals and processes, from strategic and policy decisions to operational and everyday practice. All areas of organizational activity are thus influenced; for instance, personnel, marketing, operations, reward and control systems, organizational design and structure, organizational development and change, stakeholder relations, political activism, corporate philanthropy and governance, environment, and globalization (Acevedo 2012, pp. 213ff). The success stories of person-oriented leaders and companies are evidence of the positive link between the personalistic approach and organizational effectiveness (e.g.,

Hoivik and Melé 2009; Melé 2005; Sandelands 2014; Sison 2007; Udani and Lorenzo-Molo 2013; Zúñiga 2001).

Business Education

This paper's personalistic appraisal of the needs theory poses major implications for business educators. Several years ago, Sumantra Ghoshal famously indicted business schools for "propagating ideologically inspired amoral theories" that have "freed their students from any sense of moral responsibility" (2005, p. 76). This charge remains pertinent. We must reflect on whether we—as business educators—have been, however unwittingly, reinforcing anthropological and ethical stances that are inconsistent with properly humanistic and ethical business principles. It is time to mull over our possible complicity in advancing reductionist, individualistic perspectives. It is urgent, moreover, to undertake corrective and positive action. This is particularly pressing with theories and approaches that have proven to be popular and highly influential, such as Maslow's needs theory. Clearly, it would be absurd to blame it for every business school malady or managerial misconduct. Yet, the negative attitudinal and behavioral outcomes previously described are consistent with the needs theory, and altogether possible, as Maslow himself acknowledged (e.g., 1954/1970, p. 175; 1965/1998, p. 9; Frick 2000, pp. 130ff). At the very least, the needs theory may have legitimized the individualistic, materialistic, voluntaristic, relativistic, or self-serving ideologies that commonly underlie such misconduct.

The impact of theories and their worldviews, especially those bearing a scholarly imprimatur, must not be underestimated. The anthropological and ethical underpinnings and implications of the theories discussed in our classrooms influence the intellectual and moral character of students and, consequently, organizations and society (Donaldson 2002; Ghoshal 2005; Guillén et al. 2015; Shareff 2007). If deficient and limiting, they potentially impoverish personal and professional lives and organizations; if sound and inspiring, they stand to promote properly human ends and fruitful human organizations. We fail the higher intellectual and moral aims of a university education—and the very purpose, legitimacy, and role of business education and practice—when we advance theories that, though perhaps expedient in the short term, are primarily sets of arbitrary conjectures, disconnected sound bites, or individualistic dogmas at odds with an integral view of the human person and the good life.

Management and business theories and approaches—to leadership and power, group dynamics, stress and conflict management, communication, organizational culture, organizational development, globalization and environmental issues, among others—should espouse a well-grounded and

coherent concept of the human person and ethical integrity, thereby advancing a cogent philosophy of the good personal and professional life, and of the good business organization. Further research is necessary to identify, unpack, and carefully assess those theories' philosophical undercurrents. Researchers are also strongly encouraged to develop elucidating and edifying metaphors and mental pictures that, appealing to the imagination and the heart as well as to the intellect, serve the aforementioned goals.

Sound business philosophy and ethics are not solely taught by means of stand-alone courses or dedicated modules, but must be resolutely and consistently reinforced by a fertile academic environment and curriculum aimed at the good human life rather than merely the skillful performance. Accordingly, our teaching, research, consulting, counseling, college and community service, and personal lives should also unequivocally exemplify and promote personalistic principles and outlook.

The Wheel as Metaphor of Human Motivation

Human motivation can be aptly represented by an anthropomorphic wheel that, unlike its mechanistic counterpart, embodies the personalistic approach. Like human potentialities, its spokes of possibilities radiate from a central hub that is governed and controlled by its spiritual driving-shaft. The wheel is not a self-defined, fragmented object; i.e., it is not solely separate rim or sum of discrete spokes. It creates neither its distinctive purpose, nature, nor coming into being, but depends on causes outside itself for its proper end, meaning, structure, origin, and existence. The wheel is not an isolated thing but must heed topographical, climatic, roadwork, and other external conditions. It can reasonably make speed, exercise, maintenance, and related decisions within those metaphysical, physical, and social realities.

A "good" wheel is defined according to its teleology-based distinct nature. It will be a good wheel if it fulfills well the purpose for which its crafter made it, upon which its structure, meaning, and worth are based; otherwise, it will be wicked. The good wheel—like the good person—prudently, justly, and charitably advances orderly and steadily toward that real end outside itself but instructed by it. Irrespective of how "self-actualized" it may regard itself, it is not a "good" wheel if it imprudently keeps its spokes idle, rusty, or out of joint, if it recklessly races over rugged terrain or cowardly shuts itself in the shed, or if it intemperately overindulges in oil. Neither is it a good wheel if, contrary to justice, it tramples its kin, children, birds, or flowers, or derails itself; or if, contrary to charity, it neglects the downtrodden lying by the wayside.

The wheel metaphor roughly encapsulates the basic metaphysical, anthropological, and ethical tenets of

personalism; in particular, its teleological and realistic metaphysics, integral philosophical anthropology, and virtue ethics. Unlike the reductionist needs pyramid, it considers all aspects of reality and proper human nature, goods, and end. It depicts the knowing, understanding, deliberating, ordering, willing, loving, and deciding faculties of the human person's spiritual center. The human person is not an isolated gene-determined or self-constructed individual made out of sole matter, mind, or will, but a unique body and rational soul unity. Human choices do not atomistically result from purely instinctual, sensorial, intellectual, or voluntaristic powers, as if separate or discrete. Neither are they divorced from significant realities both natural, such as family, community, society, culture, and environment, and extra-natural. Even everyday human acts are impressed by the distinctly human spiritual core that, though not perfect, is perfectible by acquired and infused virtue. The virtuous life, insofar as the personal flourishing of properly human nature, is informed, in turn, by the *telos*, a real end beyond itself. Human essence and existence, intellect and rational appetite, true freedom and moral responsibility, human dignity, the good life, and the common good cannot be adequately defined and lived in isolation from those metaphysical and anthropological realities.

Conclusion

This paper's personalistic appraisal of Maslow's needs theory has uncovered this model's troubling anthropological and ethical grounds, along with their unsettling practical implications. The needs theory's philosophical underpinnings shortchange the core of "humanism": the human being. Personalism, on the contrary, renders human flourishing both theoretically intelligible and truly attainable. Based on teleological and realistic metaphysics, personalistic anthropology and virtue ethics properly consider natural and extra-natural, material and immaterial realities. This philosophically sound framework, rooted in Aristotelian-Thomistic thought, integrally accounts for the human person and the good life. Consequently, personalism provides a truly humanistic basis for motivation, and management theory and practice.

Table 1 summarizes this paper's appraisal and main conclusions. It contrasts the needs theory's and personalism's key anthropological and ethical presuppositions and implications, stemming from their respective metaphysical commitments. Built on materialistic naturalism and determinism, the needs theory's "humanistic" claims are subverted by its individualistic approach to the human person and the good life. Unlike the integral personalistic concept of the human person, it views human beings as fragmented

Table 1 From "humanistic" psychology to integral humanism

Metaphysics	Needs Theory	Personalistic Approach
Basis	Materialistic naturalism	Metaphysical realism
	Biological/psychological determinism	Real order and ultimate causes of things (final, efficient, formal, material)
Assumption	Psychologism / Scientism	Realism / Teleology
Realm of being and value	Material	Immaterial and material
	Subjective (self)	Objective and subjective
	Empirically accessible reality	Transcendentals (truth, good, beauty) All aspects of reality
	Natural (individual needs)	Extra-natural and natural (unique human person, human and nonhuman realities)
Focus	Object (material cause) / Outcomes	Being (all causes) / Wisdom
Key modes and attitudes	Experiment, objectify, measure, collect, analyze, inspect, manipulate, classify, examine, dissect, dispose, handle, possess, conquer, eradicate tradition, create anew	Relate, discover, acknowledge, assent, know, understand, respect, serve, sustain, behold, cherish, treasure, thank, care for, appreciate, nurture, contemplate, love
	Hubris, proud mastery	Wonder, wise and humble stewardship
Scope / Outlook	Fragmented / Partial / Incomplete Reductionist / Closed / Pragmatic	Integral / Comprehensive / Extensive Expansive / Theoretical and practical



Anthropology	Needs Theory	Personalistic Approach
Human nature / Distinct faculty	Aggregate of instinctual needs/ Voluntaristic self	Integral human person
	Body and will dualism	Unity of body and spiritual, rational soul
	Needing, feeling, choosing	Knowing and loving
Focus	Individuality / Individualistic	Personality / Community building
Human goods	Material / Psychological needs: physiological, safety, belongingness, esteem, self-actualization	Properly human goods: spiritual, religious, intellectual, moral, aesthetic social, cultural, physical, life, family, friendship, work
Basis	Weak and equivocal genetic, animal drives	Metaphysical, physical, social, spiritual realities
	Determinism	Teleological freedom
	Self-defined	Being-defined
Scope / Outlook	I-It (individual as sum of needs) Atomistic / Mechanistic Deficient / Separate / Reductionist Fragmented / Incomplete	I-Thou (entirety of human being) Holistic / Intentional Perfectible / Relational / Irreducible Integrated / Whole



Table 1 continued

Ethics / Business Ethics	Needs Theory	Personalistic Approach
Ethical norms	Self-actualization	Good human life / Common good
	Individualistic B-values or metaneeds	Intellectual and moral virtues
	Contingent rights or needs	Equal and inalienable rights
	Subjective and relative	Objective and universal
Imperative	Be <i>yourself</i> !	Be <i>virtuous</i> , be <i>truly human</i> !
Basis	Needs-based (gene-determined or self-defined)	Being-based (proper human nature and end)
	Deterministic / Materialistic	Teleological / Integral
	Voluntaristic / Empty	Reasonable / Content-full
	Individual, instinctual appetites	Distinctly human faculties
	Perceptions, preferences, opinions, feelings, self-acceptance, radical autonomy	Intellect and deliberate, rational appetite (will)
	Self-actualizers' desires and choices Descriptive / Fact	Human flourishing Normative / Ought
Scope / Outlook	Equivocal / Idiosyncratic / Indifferent Separate / Inconsistent Negative: there is no true morality; "ethics" is arbitrary, unrealistic, incommunicable, severed from society; it denies, coerces, or inhibits individuality	Manifest / Common / Significant Integrated / Consistent Positive: there is true morality; ethics is grounded, realistic, communicable, relational; it enables human nature to flourish
Evil	Unease, frustration, anxiety, displeasure	Deprives properly human goods
Consistent character traits, habits, and behaviors	Self (It)–oriented, egocentric	Other (Thou)–oriented, selfless
	<i>Ordinary</i> : ignorant, hopeless, frustrated, deprived, deficient, dependent, chaotic Fear, resentment, strife, moral ambiguity	Prudent, just, courageous, temperate, charitable, wise, honest, trustworthy, empathetic Discernment, reasoned judgment, self-control, self-sacrifice, fortitude, humility, gratitude, dialogue and communion, integrity, friendship, love
	<i>Self-actualizer</i> : narcissistic, uninhibited, detached, arrogant, self-indulgent, ruthless, nihilistic, cynical, hedonistic	
	Self-acceptance, sense of entitlement, rationalization, manipulation, hubris	
Business organization	Grouping of need-satisfying individuals	Community of human persons
	Pragmatic goals	Person-centered goals
Manager / Leader imperatives	Functional leadership	Virtuous leadership
	Promote private or individual interests	Promote human goods
	Recognize instrumental value	Affirm and honor each human person's dignity and rights
	Manage human resources	Serve the common good
Leader power / authority	Capacity to meet needs / Superiority	Intellectual and moral character
Managerial Focus	Doing / Transactions / Facts	Being / Relationships / Mission
Employees	Needy children / Resources / Means	Adult, unique human persons with intrinsic worth and dignity

individuals, whether as aggregates of needs or as voluntaristic selves. This reductionist standpoint overlooks distinctly human nature, goods, and end, the foundation upon which intrinsic human dignity and ethical principles can be cogently anchored. Its deficient anthropology—which neglects spirituality, relationality, and culture—entails, in turn, a needs-based ethics that is either instinct-determined or self-defined. By thus reducing *personality* to *individuality*, the needs theory paves the way for a relativistic “ethics” in which biological drives, idiosyncratic preferences, and feelings replace reason and deliberate, truth-informed will. In this individualistic “ethics,” genetic facts and voluntaristic values supplant objective and universal principles of virtue, the good life, and the common good. Egocentrism, hedonism, narcissism, a self-indulgent sense of entitlement, moral ambiguity, rationalization, cynicism, and manipulation are among the possible disturbing outcomes. Absent proper metaphysical grounds, individualistic anthropology and ethics are left hanging either from deterministic instincts, or from the subjectivistic and nihilistic shell of the self-actualizing will. Absent such grounds, therefore, the human being unwisely devolves into beast or presumptuously evolves into demigod.

The foregoing assessment, though focused on Maslow's needs theory, is pertinent for other management and business theories and perspectives with similar individualistic anthropological and ethical underpinnings. Business educators and practitioners are eagerly encouraged to embrace personalism as integral, fruitful, and truly human approach to management and business theory and practice. Failing to do so ultimately contradicts the very essence of business as human activity and of management as human calling.

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