Psychology Cagematch â?? Maslow vs Frankl

Description

I was talking with a colleague who is a trained psychologist about different views concerning the human condition. The two views we contrasted were Abaraham Maslow and Victor Frankl, both Jewish, both European, and both having similar philosophies about human purpose, yet really having fundamentally different conclusions about what drives that purpose.

Abaraham Maslow believed that humans are only ready to act upon their growth needs if and only if the deficiency needs are met. Once met, the person then moves onto the next stage of need to be met. The theory has eight stages where we progressively move from physical, bodily needs to more metaphysical and spiritual needs. There were 8 stages:

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1) Physiological: hunger, thirst, bodily comforts, etc.;

2) Safety/security: out of danger;

3) Belonginess and Love: affiliate with others, be accepted; and

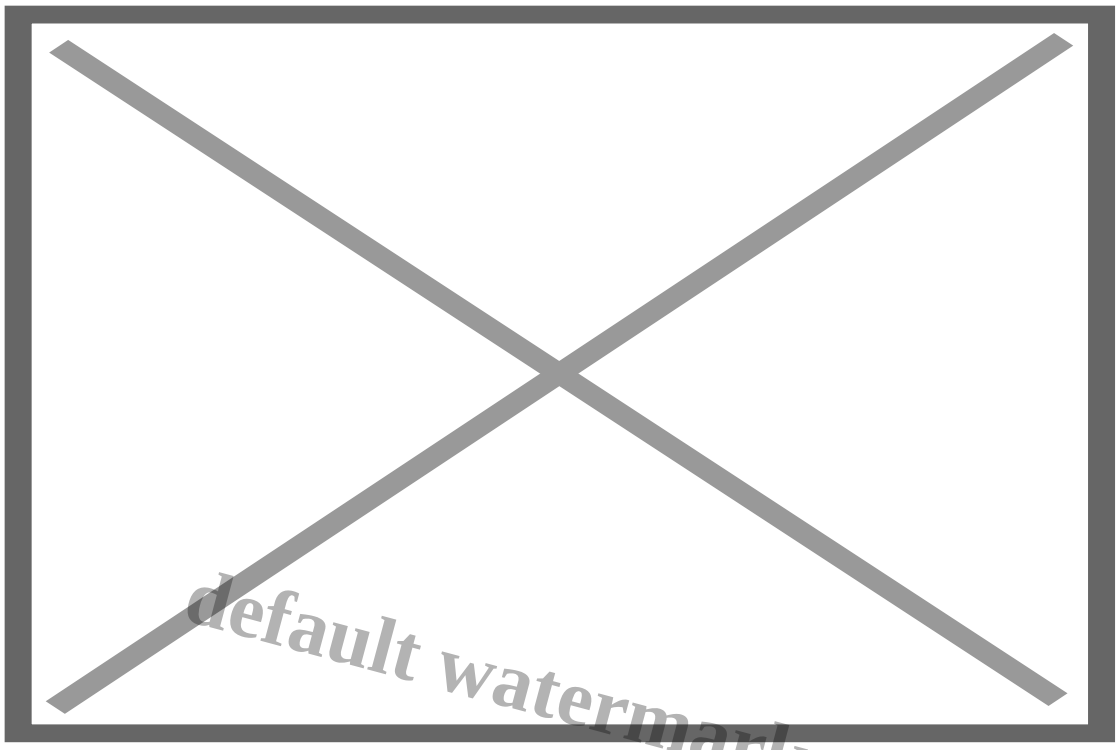
4) Esteem: to achieve, be competent, gain approval and recognition.

5) Cognitive: to know, to understand, and exlore;

6) Aesthetic: symmetry, order, and beauty;

7) Self-actualization: to find self-fulfillment and realize oneâ??s potential; and

8) Self-transcendence: to connect to something beyond the ego or to help others find self-fulfillment and realize their potential.



Courtesy of https://chiron.valdosta.edu/whuitt/col/regsys/maslow.html

The Hierarchy of Needs appears to make sense. People from the poorest parts of Africa are focused on self-survival and do not have the energy to pursue other needs such as cognitive pursuits or aesthetics.

Butâ?¦

Along comes Viktor Frankl who talks about the same things, but arrives at a remarkably different conclusion. Being a concentration camp survivor and also a trained psychiatrist, he developed a psychological view called Logotherapy which possessed some fundamental assumptions:

- Life has meaning under all circumstances, even the most miserable ones.
- Our main motivation for living is our will to find meaning in life.
- We have freedom to find meaning in what we do, and what we experience, or at least in the stand we take when faced with a situation of unchangeable suffering.

There is no hiearchy here! Victor Frankl discovered that the people who survived the concentration camp were those who found something to live for. It could be the hope to see family again, a desire for revenge, a belief in religious salvation, or anything else. The lesson was not to give up.

Both psychological philosophies are silent about the entire question of evil and the purpose of suffering. Maslowâ??s Self-actualization can be co-opted by the most nefarious mass murderers as a justification of their behavior. Whereas finding something to live for according to Logotherapy is silent on what is that thing that is to live for. Morals and ethics are not within the realm of either system.

Yet, their shared weakness does not leave these two theories with a match draw. Maslowâ??s theory has never been found to be born out in actual studies. Maslowâ??s theory is attractive, tidy, and

appears reasonable and logical yet is simply not true. Maslow focused his theory based on the observations and interviews with a small population of the societyâ??s highest self-acutalizing people â?? successful business men, artists, and politicians.

Ironically, Franklâ??s observation comes from the extreme opposite group â?? people whose basic physical needs are so repressed that we would think that survival is their only purpose. Yet that was not the case. Franklâ??s theory has the added advantage of directly observing a control study of a population whose most fundamental needs where striped away leaving the subjects with nothing but oneâ??s sense of meaning. He saw with his own eyes that peole can still find meaning in the most trying of circumstances.

It is just another example of life teaching us that 1+1 can equal 3 when the 1s are different qualities. The nice tidy continuum that Maslow presents has no helpful bearing on understanding the human condition. At least Franklâ??s theory does.

Cagematch Outcome: Frankl wins.

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Author
doc_surge