

HUMAN FLOURISHING: PERSPECTIVES FROM MASLOW, ROGERS, SELIGMAN, AND WESLEY

David R Wilson

This paper was presented at the 9th Australasian Centre for Wesleyan Research Conference in Sydney, 7-9 September 2018.

This paper finds synergy between the positive and human-centred psychology movements of Abraham Maslow, Carl Rogers, and Martin Seligman and John Wesley's doctrine of Christian perfection or 'entire sanctification.' It argues that a synergistic approach to psychology and theology produces a fruitful basis for communicating ideas about human flourishing in a secular culture such as Australia.

Introduction

Human flourishing is a hot topic today, being discussed in forums on urbanization, urban planning, mental health, and spirituality, just to mention a few. Jesus talked about it in terms of 'life in all its fullness' and Maslow in terms of 'self-actualization.' Rogers set up his 'client centered therapy' for people to experience it, Seligman's 'Positive Psychology' spoke of 'flourishing', and Wesley built a theology around it, calling it 'entire sanctification'. This paper is written using an approach I call 'synergistic enquiry'. There are many and varied perspectives on life, and truth can be found in each perspective. We do ourselves a favour, in the pursuit of truth and its application, to listen well to as many perspectives as possible. This paper will look at the topic of human flourishing from two perspectives – psychology and theology – and hopefully open the way for other perspectives. It is proposed that this synergistic enquiry into human flourishing will bring about a broader and deeper understanding of the topic than would the approach of a single discipline. This will then produce benefits in a culturally appropriate communication of human flourishing and a better application of the principles on which human flourishing is based.

I. Synergistic Enquiry

According to one dictionary definition of 'synergy' it is 'the interaction of two or more forces so that their combined effect is greater than the sum of their individual effects' and 'cooperative interaction among groups that creates an enhanced combined effect.'¹ Synergistic enquiry flows from the belief that there are many varied sources of wisdom and that it is a good thing to be enquiring from those sources for wisdom that can be synergized and applied to issues of the day. There is wisdom in the sciences, the social sciences, and the humanities. Within each of these academic disciplines there are numerous fields of study, each of which offer their perspective on life, giving wisdom for the journey. These include physics and mathematics, economics and psychology, philosophy and religion, just to name a few. The backbone of synergistic enquiry is synergistic dialogue. People representing different disciplines get together and talk about an issue of importance from their perspectives. This can be done in any context ranging from a dinner table in a local pub to a formal conference session, but there must be a shared willingness to listen, to speak respectfully, to reflect, to seek common ground and to agree to disagree when necessary, while looking for ways to work together to solve the issues at hand. Synergistic enquiry also allows each discipline to bring its unique perspective to the table, which will add to the overall picture.

Different sources of wisdom will often have divergent points of view, different frames of reference and different world views/assumptions. However they will also have common ground and will have insight to offer on the issues in society that need to be addressed. No single source has a corner on wisdom or a valid claim to exclusiveness. Synergistic enquiry validates this by seeking wisdom in each of these sources and inviting synergistic dialogue from people engaged with the various disciplines with their own personal story. This is not a mere capitulation to post-modern relativism which regards everyone's story and all perspectives as truth and wisdom, however, for there is a discerning process in looking at all 'wisdom' from other sources through a pair of 'biblical glasses.' It is important, however, that our bias to biblical analysis is not communicated as if the Bible were the only source of truth. This

¹ 'Synergy,' <https://www.yourdictionary.com/synergy> accessed 10 January 2020.

is one of the main objections that a secular world has to the Bible being put forward as the only source of truth and wisdom. In a pluralist society this is particularly objectionable and from a Theo-Philosophical perspective it is grossly untrue, since we start with the premise that all truth and wisdom is God's truth and wisdom.

II. Human Flourishing

Many disciplines have been talking about human flourishing over recent years. Philosophy, medical science, urban planning, sociology, anthropology, psychology, economics, community studies, pastoral theology, politics, and legal studies are a few of the disciplines giving space to exploration of the topic. In fact, digging into the long history of academic research, it is noted that human flourishing has always been on the agenda, although not always in those terms. Aristotle talked of human flourishing as an end of all of the actions that we perform which we desire for itself. This is what is known as *eudaimonia*, flourishing, or happiness, which is desired for its own sake with all other things being desired on its account. *Eudaimonia* is a property of one's life when considered as a whole. Flourishing is the highest good of human endeavours and that toward which all actions aim. It is success as a human being. The best life is one of excellent human activity and 'the distinction of a good person is to take pleasure in moral action.' According to Edward Younkens, for Aristotle, 'human flourishing occurs when a person is concurrently doing what he ought to do and doing what he wants to do.'²

Human flourishing has been a centrepiece of humanistic psychology, transpersonal psychology, and more recently positive psychology. It has been referred to by various terms including well-being, high level wellness, and human potential. It has slowly become a part of mainstream psychology across most of the schools. The World Health Organisation defines mental health as 'a state of well-being in which every individual realizes his or her own potential, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to her or his community.'³ The Mental Health Foundation of New Zealand states that flourishing is a state where people experience positive emotions, positive psychological functioning and positive social functioning, most of the time. In more philosophical terms this means access to the pleasant life, the engaged or good life and the meaningful life. It requires the development of attributes and social and personal levels that exhibit character strengths and virtues that are commonly agreed across different cultures.⁴ On the other hand languishing includes states of experience where people describe their lives as 'hollow' or 'empty'.⁵

The concept of flourishing is now much broader than psychological well-being. Such disciplines as urban planning, environmental sciences, sociology, and economics have added their perspectives and emphases. Recent movements such as Community Development, especially Asset Based Community Development, and Placemaking, are developing a holistic view of human flourishing in community and place drawing upon the plethora of perspectives offered through these various disciplines. The recent UN Habitat III Conference in Ecuador (2016) drew extensively on these insights, calling our urbanized world to what biblical scholars call 'Shalom'. In what the participants of this Conference called a 'New Urban Agenda,' a Declaration was written which gives an insight into the breadth of human flourishing that we need to be addressing. A press release on the UN Habitat website sums it up:

21 October 2016 – The United Nations Conference on Housing and Sustainable Urban Development has wrapped up in Quito, Ecuador, with delegations adopting the New Urban Agenda – a new framework that lays out how cities should be planned and managed to best promote sustainable urbanization.

'We have analyzed and discussed the challenges that our cities are facing and have [agreed] on a common roadmap for the 20 years to come,' Joan Clos, Secretary-General of the conference and Executive Director of the UN Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), told participants at the closing session.

² Edward W. Younkens, 'Aristotle, Human Flourishing and the Limited State,' *La Quebec Libre* 133 (21 November 2003) <http://www.quebecoislibre.org/031122-11.htm> accessed 2 April 2019.

³ 'Mental Health: A State of Wellbeing,' *World Health Organization*, August 2014 https://www.who.int/features/factfiles/mental_health/en/ accessed 2 April 2019.

⁴ M.E. Seligman, T.A. Steen, N. Park and C. Peterson, 'Positive Psychology Progress: Empirical Validations of Interventions,' *American Psychologist* July-Aug 2005), cited in 'Flourishing, Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing: How Can They Be Increased?' <https://www.mentalhealth.org.nz/assets/Flourishing/Flourishing-and-Positive-Mental-Health-Dec-2010.pdf> accessed 2 April 2019.

⁵ B.L. Frederickson and M.F. Losada, 'Positive Affect and the Complex Dynamics of Human Flourishing,' *American Psychologist* 60:7 (October 2005): 678-686, cited in 'Flourishing, Positive Mental Health and Wellbeing.'

The conference, hosted by the city of Quito, drew around 36,000 people from 167 different countries over the past week and a reported 50,000 to the various associated exhibition areas.

Clos said that the document should be seen as an extension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, agreed by 193 Member States of the UN in September 2015. That Agenda's 17 Sustainable Development Goals recognized the power of cities and towns, which will constitute up to 70 per cent of the world population by 2050, to be the engine for sustainable growth in the future, a concept further emphasized in the New Urban Agenda...

Above all, Clos said, the New Urban Agenda is: 'A commitment that we will all together take the responsibility...[for the] direction of the development of our common urbanizing world.'⁶

Among a host of topics, the Declaration deals with:

- Human health and well-being
- Protection of the natural environment
- A commitment to address the adverse impact of climate change
- The responsible use of resources
- Acknowledgement of the importance of culture and cultural diversity
- Adequate housing, infrastructure, transportation, basic services and food security
- The important contribution of the built environment to human flourishing
- Basic human rights and opportunities
- Accessible and adequate education, health and employment programs
- Safety considerations
- The importance of transformation taking place at all levels of 'global, regional, national ... and local levels' with integrated and coordinated participation.
- The right of all people to the city and its public spaces
- Cities that fulfill their social and ecological functions
- Access to safe drinking water, sanitation for all people and clean air
- Cities that are participatory, promoting civic engagement, engendering a sense of belonging and ownership among all their inhabitants
- Encouragement of political participation at all levels and for all people
- The priority of 'safe, inclusive, accessible, green, and quality public spaces, friendly for families, enhance social and intergenerational interactions, cultural expressions... and foster social cohesion, inclusion, and safety in peaceful and pluralistic societies, where the needs of all inhabitants are met, recognizing the specific needs of those in vulnerable situations'
- Gender equality in all fields and in leadership at all levels of decision making
- Sustained and inclusive economic growth in both the formal and informal economic environment.
- Promotion of 'age-and gender-responsive planning and investment for sustainable, safe, and accessible urban mobility for all and resource efficient transport systems for passengers and freight, effectively linking people, places, goods, services, and economic opportunities.'

The Declaration asserts: 'By readdressing the way cities and human settlements are planned, designed, financed, developed, governed, and managed, the New Urban Agenda will help to end poverty and hunger in all its forms and dimensions, reduce inequalities, promote sustained, inclusive, and sustainable economic growth, achieve gender equality and the empowerment of all women and girls, in order to fully harness their vital contribution to sustainable development, improve human health and well-being, as well as foster resilience and protect the environment.'⁷ To bring this about, the Declaration makes three commitments and details how to address

- The ending of poverty

⁶New Urban Agenda Adopted at Habitat III, 'UN Habitat for a Better Urban Future, 21 October 2016, <https://unhabitat.org/new-urban-agenda-adopted-at-habitat-iii/> accessed 2 April 2019.

⁷New Urban Agenda, <http://habitat3.org/the-new-urban-agenda/> accessed 2 April 2019.

- The inclusivity of economic growth and benefits
- Environmental sustainability.

More recently, a report called *Australia Remade* has detailed the kind of Australia research participants dreamed about. In June 2017, the A24 Engagement Project began. The project sought to hear from ordinary Australians about the future they want for the country. The 200+ people who participated had a lot to say about what they think the country could be, and what they think is currently wrong. People were asked to dream out loud and to think about how such a transformation could happen. Their ideas and dreams present a vision for Australia, and are the basis of the *Australia Remade* document.

In summary, the vision involves nine pillars:

- A First Peoples' Heart: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island peoples and cultures are celebrated at the very heart of what it means to be Australian.
- A Natural World for Now and the Future: We are a part of, and connected to, this land. We love our wild forests and sandy beaches, our deserts and grasslands, our paddocks and farms. We love our wildlife and awe-inspiring vistas – and so we act to protect them.
- An Economy for the People: Australia's economy serves our people and the planet. Our government makes decisions that put people first: decisions that are good for nature lift people out of poverty and fairly share our country's wealth.
- A Society Where all Contributions Count and Every Job Has Dignity: Whatever we do, our contribution to society is recognised and valued. Some people have an obvious job or role; others contribute to the common good in other ways. Paid employment is not the only path to worthiness, recognition and success.
- A Diversity of People Living Side by Side: Australia is a diverse nation. We see this splendid diversity in our leaders, on our screens, in our papers, in the food we eat, in the books we read and in the cultures we celebrate.
- A Country of Flourishing Communities: We are compassionate and connected. Because our basic needs are met, we have time for each other and our communities. Our communities are places of music, fun and playfulness, kindness and generosity.
- A New Dawn for Women: Women are visible, valued and celebrated – with power in Parliament, business, the community and the home. Women and girls make up half of our leaders at all levels of society and lead us in new and inspiring ways.
- A Thriving Democracy: Our government exists for the people. Because we value a strong democracy we are engaged and thoughtful citizens. We know how democracy works and we are confident to play our part in large and small ways.
- A Proud Contributor to a Just World: Australia does good in the world. We stand on our own two feet as we develop a fair and just approach to working with other countries. We do not blindly follow others, no matter how powerful.⁸

From all of this it can be seen that human flourishing involves a lot more than psychological well-being. Factors in the natural environment, the built environment, the cultural environment, the economic environment and the socio-political environment all have something to contribute to healthy individuals, communities, and places. Though this paper concentrates on psychology, it does so in the broader context of all of the above.

III. Some Psychological Perspectives

1. Abraham Maslow (1908–1970)

Abraham Maslow was a Jewish-American psychologist and one of the most influential psychologists of the twentieth century. He was educated in Gestalt and Behavioral psychology, later rejecting Behaviorism as one of the two forces in psychology that needed to be challenged (Freudian psychoanalysis being the other). He was frustrated with their limited emphases and this frustration led to his development of 'third force' psychology, also known as Humanistic psychology, and later the development of Transpersonal psychology. Maslow was President of the American Psychological Association in 1968, giving him scope to bring third force psychology into the mainstream, as did his co-founding of two academic journals, *The Journal of Humanistic Psychology* and *The Journal of*

⁸ *Australia Remade: Creating the Best Version of Us*, <https://www.australiaremade.org/> accessed 2 April 2019.

Transpersonal Psychology. The main frustration that Maslow had with psychology and its two schools was their approach to human behaviour from a deficiency model. Psychoanalysis had a negative, emotional problems approach and Behaviorism reduced human behaviour to no more than instinctive responses, leaving little room for the understanding of human beings as anything beyond stimulus-response machines. Maslow's emphasis on human potential, his hierarchy of motivational needs, and his theories of self-actualization all sought to emphasize what had been lost in Psychoanalysis and classic Behaviorism. The three elements of human potential, the hierarchy of needs, and self-actualization are foundation stones of what I have been referring to as human flourishing.

a) Human Potential

Whereas Freud saw humanity as a constant struggle between inner urges (id, ego, and super-ego) which came down to a fight for survival and pleasure, and Skinner (a disciple of Watson, the 'founder' of Behaviorism) saw humanity as no more than matter coming to the conclusion that freedom and dignity do not belong to the human condition, Maslow saw immense potential in humanity, believing that humanness is more than the sum of its parts and more than its illnesses and deficiencies.

b) Hierarchy of Needs

Today, Maslow's psychology is best known for what he called the Hierarchy of Needs with each need arising as the one below it is met until self-actualization is met.

Self-actualization	Desire to become the most that one can be
Esteem	Respect, self-esteem, status, recognition, strength, freedom
Love and belonging	Friendship, intimacy, family, resources, health, property
Safety needs	Personal security, employment, resources, health, property
Physiological needs	Air, water, food, shelter, sleep, clothing, reproduction

This hierarchy reflects Maslow's theory on human motivation. The most basic human needs are physiological. If these are not being met then humans are driven to get fulfillment at this level, no matter what it costs. This is especially so for air, food, and water. Once these needs are being met the person is motivated by safety needs. Fulfillment of the lower needs means they are no longer a motivating factor, and so it goes on up the hierarchy. In his early research, Maslow hypothesized that one would need to have all levels of lower need (which he called 'deficiency needs') met before the self-actualization needs (which he called 'being needs') would be motivational. However, he later argued that one could deny the lower needs, especially if the meeting of them would undermine the higher needs. We might put forward Christ as a good example of that. At his crucifixion, Christ was certainly not feeling fulfilled at any of the lower motivational levels and yet for the sake of his true calling, his 'self-actualization', he refused to give in to those needs.

c) Self-Actualization

Maslow describes the characteristics of self-actualization in *Motivation and Personality* as well as other sources.⁹ It is a complex task to try to lift a list of characteristics from Maslow's writings. Those who have tried come up with twelve or thirteen or nineteen characteristics, described in different words. Tom Butler-Bowden has summarized fifteen characteristics:

- Clear perception of reality: including a heightened ability to detect falseness and be a good judge of character;
- Acceptance: of themselves and things as they are;
- Spontaneity: a rich, unconventional inner life with a child-like ability to constantly see the world anew and appreciate beauty in the mundane;
- Problem-centred: focus on questions or challenges outside themselves - a sense of mission or purpose - resulting in an absence of pettiness, introspection or ego games;
- Solitude-seeking: enjoyed for its own sake, solitude also brings serenity and detachment from misfortune/crisis, and allows for independence of thought and decision;

⁹ A. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York: Harper & Row, 1954).

- Autonomous: independent of the good opinion of other people, and more interested in inner satisfaction than status or rewards;
- Having peak or mystical experiences: experiences when time seems to stand still;
- Human kinship: a genuine love for, and desire to help, all people;
- Humility and respect: belief that we can learn from anyone, and that even the worst person has redeeming features;
- Ethical: clear, if not conventional, notions of right and wrong;
- Sense of humor: not amused by jokes that hurt or imply inferiority, but humour that highlights the foolishness of human beings in general;
- Creativity: not the Mozart-genius type that is in-born, but in all that is done, said or acted;
- Resistance to enculturation: ability to see beyond the confines of culture and era;
- Imperfections: all the guilt, anxiety, self-blame, jealousy etc. regular people experience, but not stemming from neurosis; and
- Values: based on a positive view of the world; the universe is not seen as a jungle but as an essentially abundant place, providing whatever we need to be able to make our contribution.¹⁰

David Sze sees twelve basic characteristics in *Motivation and Personality*.¹¹ Self-actualized people embrace the unknown and the ambiguous. They are not threatened or afraid of it; instead, they accept it, are comfortable with it and are often attracted by it. They do not cling to the familiar. Maslow quotes Einstein: 'The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious.' A self-actualised person accepts herself, together with all her flaws. She perceives herself as she is, and not as she would prefer herself to be. With a high level of self-acceptance, she lacks defensiveness, pose or artificiality. Eventually, shortcomings come to be seen not as shortcomings at all, but simply as neutral personal characteristics. Self-actualised persons 'can accept their own human nature in the stoic style, with all its shortcomings, with all its discrepancies from the ideal image without feeling real concern ... One does not complain about water because it is wet, or about rocks because they are hard ... simply noting and observing what is the case, without either arguing the matter or demanding that it be otherwise.'¹²

Self-actualizing people prioritize and enjoy the journey, not just the destination.

[They] often [regard] as ends in themselves many experiences and activities that are, for other people, only means. Our subjects are somewhat more likely to appreciate for its own sake, and in an absolute way, the doing itself; they can often enjoy for its, own sake the getting to some place as well as the arriving. It is occasionally possible for them to make out of the most trivial and routine activity an intrinsically enjoyable game or dance or play.¹³

While they are inherently unconventional, they do not seek to shock or disturb. Unlike the average rebel, the self-actualized person recognizes that:

the world of people in which he lives could not understand or accept [his unconventionality], and since he has no wish to hurt them or to fight with them over every triviality, he will go through the ceremonies and rituals of convention with a good-humored shrug and with the best possible grace ... Self-actualized people ... usually behave in a conventional fashion simply because no great issues are involved or because they know people will be hurt or embarrassed by any other kind of behavior.¹⁴

While most people are still struggling in the lower rungs of the 'Hierarchy of Needs,' the self-actualized person is focused on personal growth not simply the satisfaction of personal needs. 'Our subjects no longer strive in the ordinary sense, but rather develop. They attempt to grow to perfection and to develop more and more fully in their own style. The motivation of ordinary men is a striving for the basic need gratifications that they lack.' Self-actualized people have purpose. '[They have] some mission in life, some task to fulfil, some problem outside themselves which enlists much of their energies... This is not necessarily a task that they would prefer or choose for themselves; it may be a task that they feel is their responsibility, duty, or obligation ... In general, these tasks are nonpersonal or unselfish, concerned rather with the good of mankind in general.'¹⁵

¹⁰ T. Butler-Bowdon, *Self-Help Classics*, <http://www.butler-bowdon.com/abraham-maslow---motivation-and-personality1.html> accessed 2 April 2019.

¹¹ David Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person,' https://www.huffingtonpost.com/david-sze/maslow-the-12-characteris_b_7836836.html accessed 10 January 2020.

¹² Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹³ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹⁴ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹⁵ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

They are not troubled by the small things. Instead, they focus on the bigger picture.

They seem never to get so close to the trees that they fail to see the forest. They work within a framework of values that are broad and not petty, universal and not local, and in terms of a century rather than the moment ... This impression of being above small things ... seems to impart a certain serenity and lack of worry over immediate concerns that make life easier not only for themselves but for all who are associated with them.¹⁶

Self-actualized people are grateful. They do not take their blessings for granted, and by doing so, maintain a fresh sense of wonder towards the universe.

Self-actualizing people have the wonderful capacity to appreciate again and again, freshly and naïvely, the basic goods of life, with awe, pleasure, wonder, and even ecstasy, however stale these experiences may have become to others ... Thus for such a person, any sunset may be as beautiful as the first one, any flower may be of breath-taking loveliness, even after he has seen a million flowers ... For such people, even the casual workaday, moment-to-moment business of living can be thrilling.¹⁷

They share deep relationships with a few, but also feel identification and affection towards the entire human race.

Self-actualizing people have deeper and more profound interpersonal relations than any other adults ... They are capable of more fusion, greater love, more perfect identification, more obliteration of the ego boundaries than other people would consider possible ... [This devotion] exists side by side with a wide spreading ... benevolence, affection, and friendliness. These people tend to be kind [and friendly] to almost everyone ... of suitable character regardless of class, education, political belief, race, or color.¹⁸

Self-actualized people are humble. 'They are all quite well aware of how little they know in comparison with what could be known and what is known by others. Because of this it is possible for them without pose to be honestly respectful and even humble before people who can teach them something.' They also resist enculturation. Not allowing themselves to be passively moulded by culture, they deliberate and make their own decisions, selecting what they see as good, and rejecting what they see as bad. They neither accept all, like a sheep, nor reject all, like the average rebel. Self-actualized people 'make up their own minds, come to their own decisions, are self-starters, are responsible for themselves and their own destinies ... too many people do not make up their own minds, but have their minds made up for them by salesmen, advertisers, parents, propagandists, TV, newspapers and so on.'¹⁹

Because of their self-decision, self-actualized people have codes of ethics that are individualized and autonomous rather than being dictated by society. 'They are the most ethical of people even though their ethics are not necessarily the same as those of the people around them [because] the ordinary ethical behavior of the average person is largely conventional behavior rather than truly ethical behavior.' Despite all this, self-actualized people are not perfect. 'There are no perfect human beings! Persons can be found who are good, very good indeed, in fact, great ... And yet these very same people can at times be boring, irritating, petulant, selfish, angry, or depressed. To avoid disillusionment with human nature, we must first give up our illusions about it.'²⁰ Ideas that are especially relevant to today's human flourishing movement, including the idea that one can deny the fulfillment of lower needs for the sake of the higher needs, share many of the characteristics of self-actualization as described by Maslow.

2. Carl Rogers (1902–1987)

Carl Rogers is widely known as the founder of Client-centered therapy (also known as 'Person-centered therapy'), based on his belief that human nature is innately good and therefore has the inherent potential for growth and health, for flourishing. He emphasized the uniqueness of human growth potential and humanity's capacity for choice and health. This aligned him with Maslow and contrasted him with Psychoanalysis and classic Behaviorism. Rogers agreed with Maslow and the theory of self-actualization, but he spent more time on developing the theory, practice and environment that was conducive to self-actualization. Rogers believed that a person needed the right environment to grow

¹⁶ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹⁷ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹⁸ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

¹⁹ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

²⁰ Sze, 'The Twelve Characteristics of a Self-actualized Person.'

and become fully functioning and emphasized three characteristics of such an environment: empathy, genuineness, and unconditional positive regard (warmth).

Nineteenth-century novelist, Dinah Mulock Craic, described this environment well:

Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe with a person, having neither to weigh thoughts nor measure words, but pouring them all out, just as they are, chaff and grain together, certain that a faithful hand will take and sift them, keep what is worth keeping, and with a breath of kindness gently blow the rest away.²¹

Rogers' idea of a therapeutic environment is closely aligned to the type of flourishing world that would encourage others in their growth into flourishing, rather than being hindered by such things as indifference, hypocrisy, and conditional acceptance.

3. Martin Seligman (b. 1942)

Martin Seligman is the current Director of the University of Pennsylvania's Positive Psychology Centre and is known as the founder of the Positive Psychology movement, which is engaged in the scientific study of human flourishing, and an applied approach to optimal functioning. It is the study of strengths and virtues that enable individuals, communities, and organisations to thrive, otherwise known as the Science of Happiness. His most recent book, *Flourish*, has become a top seller and is recognized as the 'Bible' for human flourishing in many places today.²² Seligman states that the contributors to well-being are positive emotions, engagement, relationships, meaning and accomplishments. Positive psychologist, Lyn Soots, states: 'Flourishing is the product of the pursuit and engagement of an authentic life that brings inner joy and happiness through meeting goals, being connected with life passions, and relishing in accomplishments through the peaks and valleys of life.'²³

As with Maslow's characteristics of self-actualization, it is hard to list characteristics of flourishing, but the following are dominant in the writings of Positive psychologists:

- Close relationships
- Acts of kindness
- Exercise and physical wellbeing
- Finding your flow through striving for a goal which is challenging and well suited to your skills
- Spiritual engagement and meaning
- Discovery and use of strengths and virtues
- A positive mindset of optimism, mindfulness, and gratitude

The parallels with Maslow's theories of self-actualization are obvious. Seligman adds the need for spiritual engagement and meaning, which does not come up in the list of self-actualization characteristics. However, in Maslow's later work he developed what he called 'Transpersonal Psychology' which was based on the idea that there was more to life than what we see here and now. This opened up a new spiritual dimension to his work on human well-being and human potential.

IV. Some Theological Perspectives

Just as psychology often has an emphasis on mental illness and what happens when the person is not functioning well, so there are theological perspectives that concentrate more on the pathological aspects of human experience such as sinfulness and evil. Humanistic Psychology, and more recently Positive Psychology, argue that it is good to study human wellbeing, not to the annulment of understanding pathology but in addition to it. In theology, an emphasis on sanctification and holiness could be seen as a theological human potential movement, with obvious lessons for us in the study of flourishing.

A biblical anthropology is made up of five pictures of what it is to be human. 'Humanity Created' depicts human perfection in a perfect environment. This is flourishing par excellence. 'Humanity Fallen' is a picture of sinfulness and what it does to create the human condition of imperfection in an imperfect environment. 'Humanity Exemplified' is found in the humanness of Christ as lived on earth, a life of perfection in an imperfect world. 'Humanity in Restoration' describes human growth and development,

²¹ Dinah Mulock Craic, *A Life for a Life* (1859).

²² Martin Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-being* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2011).

²³ Cited in 'Flourishing in Positive Psychology,' *Positive Psychology Program*, <https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/flourishing/> accessed 2 April 2019.

flourishing in process. 'Humanity Glorified' pictures humanity transformed in the new heaven and earth, perfection in a perfect environment. Some schools of theology tend to focus more on the fallenness of humanity whereas others focus on the potential of created humanity, even in the midst of fallenness. This is where the Wesleyan emphasis on sanctification and holiness finds its parallels to the psychological perspectives outlined above.

I am in no way a Wesley scholar and my theology has been developed more from the streets and my passion for social justice than anything else, even though I hold undergraduate and postgraduate degrees in theology. I was working on the streets of St. Kilda, an inner city suburb of Melbourne, when I first discovered John Wesley through the reading of Robert Girard's book *Brethren Hang Loose*.²⁴ I was especially taken by the last chapter, where he takes some major aspects of Wesley's theology and applies them to the renewal of the church in the late twentieth century. To this young 'Jesus Freak' such theology was refreshing and challenging. Later, while I was studying Maslow and Rogers I was also reading about Wesley's ideas on entire sanctification and was fascinated by the synergy. Entire sanctification is best understood as perfect love for God and neighbour. My interest in the synergy between Maslow and Wesley was deepened when I came across Everett Shostrom and Dan Montgomery's *Healing Love*.²⁵ Shostrom was a 'disciple' of Maslow and brought a theology of 'perfect love casting out all fear' and a psychology of self-actualization together. The bottom line is that both self-actualization and entire sanctification take an interest in human potential and this puts them in line as positive forces in their respective domains of psychology and theology. The characteristics of entire sanctification are the characteristics of perfect love, defined in Scripture as the fruit of the Spirit and exemplified in the life and ministry of Jesus while on earth. The parallels with Maslow's self-actualization, Rogers' client centered therapy, and Seligman's positive psychology are worth exploring.

Neil Anderson, of Asbury University, writes:

Wesley taught that genuine faith produces inward and outward holiness. The regenerative process inwardly cannot help but find expression in an improved moral character outwardly. The doctrine of holiness is grounded in the command to be holy as God is holy (Lev. 19:2 and other Old Testament loci). Jesus commanded, 'Be perfect therefore as your Father in heaven is perfect' (Mt. 5:48). Jesus also taught that true Christian discipleship requires loving God with all the heart, soul, mind, and strength, and loving neighbor as self (Mt. 22:34-40). Whereas Luther and Calvin tended to view perfection in the absolute sense (i.e., perfect performance), Wesley understood it in the theological sense as having to do with maturity of character and ever-increasing love for God. The New Testament word 'perfection' translates from a Greek term that means maturity or completion: it does not mean flawlessness. Therefore, whenever Wesley discussed holiness, sanctification or perfection (all theologically synonymous), he preferred the expression 'Christian perfection.'²⁶

Self-actualization and entire sanctification have another area of similarity in the criticism that is often thrown at them, accusing them of being elitist and overly individualistic. Maslow was said to be developing a psychology for the elite who have all their needs met and who tend to be self-absorbed. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Maslow believed that the most self-actualizing people were those who gave themselves away to others. This can be seen in a number of the characteristics of self-actualization outlined above. Similarly, Wesley said that a solitary holiness was as absurd as the possibility of holy adulterers. The development of holiness requires a community in which to be developed and expressed as John Wesley made clear, "Holy solitaries" is a phrase no more consistent with the gospel than holy adulterers. The gospel of Christ knows of no religion but social; no holiness but social holiness. Faith working by love, is the length and breadth and depth and height of Christian perfection.²⁷

More recently a 'Political Manifesto' has been circulating, claiming to be a good summary and application of Wesley's teaching (I'll let the Wesley scholars amongst us fight that one out). It throws light on an application of Wesleyan theology in today's climate and also has some parallels with the concepts of flourishing and incarnational mission in our neighbourhoods. This Manifesto encourages the following actions:

- Reduce the gap between rich and poor
- Seek to ensure full employment
- Introduce measures to help the poorest, including a living wage

²⁴ Robert Girard, *Brethren, Hang Loose: Or What's Happening to My Church?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 1972.

²⁵ Everett Shostrom and Dan Montgomery, *Healing Love: How God Works within the Personality* (Nashville, Abingdon, 1972).

²⁶ Neil D. Anderson, 'Wesleyan-Holiness Theology,' <https://www.asbury.edu/about/spiritual-vitality/faith/wesleyan-holiness-theology/> accessed 2 April 2019.

²⁷ John Wesley, *Hymns and Sacred Poems* (1739), Preface, page viii.

- Offer the best possible education
- Empower individuals to feel they can make a difference
- Promote tolerance
- Promote equal treatment for women
- Create a society based on values and not on profits and consumerism
- End all forms of enslavement
- Avoid engaging in wars
- Avoid narrow self-interest and promote a world view
- Care for the animals with whom we share our planet.²⁸

This looks like a manifesto for the flourishing of person and place and is a good summary of the ideas behind the Cities of Shalom movement today (coming out of the UN's Habitat 3, discussed above). These are the types of outcomes that Maslow, Rogers and Seligman discuss as results of self-actualization, client centred therapy, and positive psychology. Wesley would promote them as made possible through entire sanctification lived out in a social setting. Again, there are parallels.

V. Finding Congruence

If all truth is God's truth, it shouldn't surprise us when we discover truth in disciplines other than theology and source documents other than the Bible. We would go about the process of discovering that between psychology and theology there exists contradictory material (saying different and opposing things), complementary material (saying the same thing), and supplementary material (saying a whole lot more on a common topic than another discipline, but not in a contradictory sense). In exploring the synergy between Maslow, Rogers, Seligman, and Wesley it will be helpful to use this framework.

There appears to be no contradiction between Maslow, Rogers, and Seligman on the basics of human flourishing. This may not be a surprise to many but to have three psychologists agreeing with each other is almost as surprising as having three theologians in agreement. The main area of contradiction that I can see between the psychology of flourishing and Wesley's theology of holiness is the means of achievement. Both focus on a human potential anthropology but whereas Positive Psychology emphasizes innate capabilities to actualize this potential, Wesley attributes the work to God. However, both Positive Psychology and Wesley do talk of the benefits of a socially conducive environment for flourishing. There are many areas of complementary material. The most basic is their common agreement that human beings are uniquely capable of flourishing and have an enormous amount of human potential.

Some of the characteristics of flourishing in Positive psychology and Wesleyan theology are also complementary. Love is the most obvious. Maslow spoke of the self-actualizing person as having a love for all humanity; Rogers' therapeutic triad is a threefold expression of love; Seligman's flourishing is love based; and Wesley's holiness is pure, unadulterated love. They all agree that the basis of human flourishing is love. Many of the characteristics of wellness in psychology and Wesleyan theology speak of the same things. They use different terminology and have different explanations for their existence, but they are describing wellness in similar ways. For example, when Maslow talks about desiring to help the entire world, Wesley might speak of avoiding narrow self-interest and developing a world view, and when Seligman speaks of acts of kindness, Wesley would propose that these are a product of Christlike love, and when Rogers talks of unconditional regard, Wesley would speak in terms of empowering individuals to feel they can make a difference. Each of the disciplines talks at length about aspects of flourishing that supplement the other's perspective. For example, Wesley supplements the ideas of Rogers' therapeutic triad when he talks of such things as the social implications of love, as listed in the 'Political Manifesto' above. Likewise, Maslow talks at length about the motivational needs that often need to be subjugated if self-actualization is to be experienced, a topic that Wesleyan theology doesn't address in such detail. There is plenty of synergy between positive psychology and entire sanctification, both complementary and supplementary material, as well as some contradictory elements.

There is one last question to answer - 'So what?' Does it really matter that psychology and theology agree on what it is to flourish as human beings? I propose three reasons to get the conversation started. First is the reinforcement of truth. When people from different perspectives work together and find common ground, it is more likely that what has been discovered will be accepted as truth than anything put forward by one perspective alone. The truth explored is reinforced. The second reason is the relevance of truth. Australia is in desperate need of a locally based theology that makes sense in the

²⁸ Gary Martin Best, 'John Wesley's Political Manifesto,' *New Room Magazine* (Spring 2016): 8-11.
<https://www.methodist.org.uk/media/3631/new-room-magazine-spring-2016.pdf> accessed 2 April 2019.

Australian culture and language. In many ways the dominant theology of Australian Christianity has been a Reformed one with emphasis on fallenness and sinfulness rather than life and flourishing. I am reminded of a friend of mine who had 'converted' to Buddhism, telling me that Christianity just made her feel bad because it made her more aware of how sinful she was, but that Buddhism made her feel good because it instilled hope in her. This is sad, but understandable. Psychology is often seen as offering an alternative to that negative theology, and self-help books coming out of Positive Psychology and promoting wellbeing while offering hope and flourishing, have become 'more popular than Jesus Christ' (apologies to John Lennon). Presenting people with the idea that there is a theology that also gives hope and is based on flourishing can help attract people to the source of that theology, God himself. The third reason to get the conversation started is the need for the communication of truth. For a theology of flourishing to be seen and experienced as relevant it needs to be communicated appropriately into the local culture. Terms like 'holiness,' 'Christian perfection', and 'entire sanctification' are 'off the planet' even for Christians today, let alone Australians who are secularized to the core. To use terms such as 'flourishing,' 'actualization,' and 'human potential' are much closer to language that people can relate to. Synergistic enquiry helps us to get in touch with such language.

In conclusion, I propose that the positive psychologies of Maslow, Rogers, and Seligman offer parallel understandings of human flourishing to Wesley and that Wesleyan theology can be utilized to help Australians grasp the reality of God-based hope and wellbeing. I look forward to the conversations that will flow from this proposition.

David Wilson has been a teacher and practitioner in urban mission for over 48 years. He is currently in active retirement and serves as Director of Barnabas Connexion and a board member of Voice of the Cities and Holy Fools.