

Self-actualization

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Recently, we have seen an emergence of mass protests in which thousands of people participate, and they share several characteristics. They can happen in different parts of the world, regardless of how distant they may be; they tend to result in some form of violence; and, most importantly, though they seem to have in common the fight against inequality, no one really understands what people are demanding, a fact that can be inferred by observing that social movements have not endorsed the various explanations that societies and governmental institutions have offered.

The goal of this paper is to formulate a hypothesis about the nature of these phenomena, and, in doing so, to avoid answers that have been written about from economic, political and social perspectives. To this end, I use new and unexplored concepts.

I studied political ethics in the works of a group of young German philosophers more than 35 years ago at the request of President Raúl Alfonsín. These philosophers generated a pithy definition: political ethics is the pragmatics of the actualization of the human being.

The reason this paper focuses on political ethics is because it seems to me that there is no clear claim being made by these social groups or movements. One might speculate that every being is making their own individual claim, which does not materialize at a later point as an institutional form. The geographic spread of the rallies seems unrelated to a specific culture, perhaps pointing to cross-cultural commonalities in motivation for the first time.

I made some modifications, such as using the term *self* rather than theory-laden terms, such as *individual* or *subject*, to explore the idea of self-actualization from a psychoanalytic point of view, and, in so doing, to focus on intrapsychic processes. Consequently, actualization arising from collective movements or opportunistic claims about external values with reference to the external world was obviated.

It becomes clear that we need to acknowledge that every human being is responsible for her own actualization, which introduces the need for every human to engage in a working through within themselves that differs from the work that engages with external conditions.

Imbued with transcendent qualities such as truth, freedom, and beauty, and drawing on every facet of cognitive and emotional functioning, self-actualization is an inner experience that takes place when a structure from within one's intrapsychic world meets a structure from the external physical world. This coming together manifests as an experience of being-in-the-world, simultaneously existential and emotional. At some point, all human beings have such experiences with untold elements of the physical world. Self-actualization cannot be managed or taught, and it does not depend on mental labor. It is simply a sensory experience of the brain with itself.

To clarify what I mean, I chose a phrase by Michelangelo in which he states that he once found a block of marble and saw an angel trapped within. He then carved it until he set him free. Michelangelo includes in this psychic act both the reality principle in the form of the external, physical marble block and the pleasure principle through the internal and psychological embodiment of the angel he saw in the marble.

We might add that being a sculptor and making a sculpture both involve an intention to work that, for Michelangelo, consists of removing excess marble from the figure – *per via de levare*. He certainly applied this view of the psychic act to his work. By describing a psychic act as being composed of distinct, irreducible natural categories, it follows that any consequence that is produced has no choice but to create something new since the psychic act thus described does not have an internal logic that connects its elements or allows some form of reasoning.

This representation of the nuances of psychic acts approximates the work of Husserl and Merleau-Ponty.

Moving from the brain, the organ that is responsible for creating something new, to analyzing brain functions themselves, we notice that creation is a constant. It has to be constant; our sensory functions cannot process the full reality of what we observe. Crick would say our senses deceive us all the time.

And the same goes for memory and other brain functions. Creativity, then, is a basic function of the brain and not a fortuitous event. It is structurally embedded, along with countless unknown brain functions.

My proposed hypothesis suggests that we do not understand the brain's creativity, only that it is a structural function. At this moment in time in the history of humanity, we may very well be able to say that every human being's creativity is unique and original, but we are a long way from truly knowing it as of yet.

It may be that everybody intuitively seeks to actualize beyond what is represented in their own consciousness, that they are not demanding the restoration of old privileges, and that what human beings actually demand is *allowed to be human beings*. Ortega claims humans must find out what they are because they are unaware of their nature.

We cannot keep to general categories and must develop a method of analyzing them. Perhaps this is the beginning. Let us then review and expand upon something I already said.

I consider it essential to reflect on the meaning of the word 'actualization'. We have said that a collective movement about a specific issue is not equivalent to the need for self-actualization. A person's experience of becoming actualized is a feeling, i.e., a cognitive and sensory event. It has the quality of truth and beauty. It involves finding a way to relate something internal to the external world. Although these experiences happen to many people, few appreciate them. The rest just carry on.

People unknowingly seem to be looking for society to incorporate and respect every individual's unique experiences, which has nothing to do with inequality per se. Mass movements are not found on the path to truth and beauty.

Self-actualization happens through an emotional experience, not through success or achievement. Self-actualization has an internal quality that approximates art and creativity. A sense of creation is linked to the notion of being human, to the idea that man is unprecedented, the only being who wonders what it is to be or who contemplates the ultimate meaning of his existence. To have a self, a human being has to discover it.

To be human is to experience the future, because when someone creates something, both the plan and the future come to be, and the future is already present. Nobody would be fulfilled were she to do something that does not feel like her own creation or like it has no future.

All knowledge and art can be understood in this way, as having been created through a relationship between something internal and something external. The moment something is created produces a future while, at the same time, being the subjective experience of that person's true self: his consciousness. As epistemologists are aware, the relationship between a part and the whole is indescribable.

But to return to the subject of inequality – it has always compelled the masses. Seeking to overcome it is the search for fulfillment of the many, and it collectively moves them.

Before the appearance of man, there were predatory animals: predators and prey. Predators kill and maintain the ecological balance. Following the development of culture, however, man faced but a single predator: another man, the other.

Violence and aggression have sustained human inequality. Someone of superior status (a sorcerer, a boss, etc.) arouses envy in someone lacking status that wants to be like him. He wants to have power that has been delegated to someone else. Until recently, this feeling had become permanent.

I hypothesize that privilege is being erased today for the first time in human history. This is the product of great labor and social reforms. Political, sociological, and economic categories are changing. Everything that those with power have is losing currency.

There are countless cases in which people that were once viewed as enviable stop being envied. Many people achieve economic, political or social success but do not appear to be happy and are not thought to be models of self-actualization. Material success is losing significance. The composition of societies is becoming more diverse.

Even the idea that psychoanalysts 'hold the truth' is void of meaning. In psychoanalysis – as with everything – there is a leveling tendency.

As we look upon old ideas with fresh eyes, we want to remember that creation and art attracted philosophers, scientists, psychoanalysts, and all of those who are drawn to the mystery of how the mind works. As is common practice among analysts, we might recall some of Freud's thoughts on the matter.

Sigmund Freud launched boldly into this field and produced a revolution in many respects. As a person of great culture and sensibility, he made deep contact with the arts and sciences of his time. He did not theorize about creation or art, and his aspirations went no further than to determine how his models and theories of mind worked when he applied them to creation and art.

An example of this is found in his work, 'The two principles in mental functioning, in which he applies the theory of conflict to explain the pleasure principle and reality principle, and their vicissitudes.

Art brings about a reconciliation between the two principles in a peculiar way. An artist is originally a man who turns away from reality because he cannot come to terms with the renunciation of instinctual satisfaction which it at first demands, and who allows his erotic and ambitious wishes full

play in the life of phantasy. He finds the way back to reality, however, from this world of phantasy by making use of special gifts to mold his phantasies into truths of a new kind, which are valued by men as precious reflections of reality. (Freud, 1911)

In 'The Moses of Michelangelo', Freud explains the relationship between the work of art, the artist and the spectator, giving an important place to the art's intention.

In my opinion, what grips us so powerfully can only be the artist's intention, in so far as he has succeeded in expressing it in his work and in getting us to understand it. I realize that this cannot be merely a matter of intellectual comprehension; what he aims at is to awaken in us the same emotional attitude, the same mental constellation as that which in him produced the impetus to create. (Freud, 1914)

Freud realized the importance of thinking about the functions associated with art and creation, on the one hand, as something that belongs to a particular psychic apparatus with a history of its own and, on the other hand, seeing these functions as characteristic of the species, as a structural part of the brain that is present in all humans.

If we could at least discover in ourselves or in people like ourselves an activity which was in some way akin to creative writing! An examination of it would then give us a hope of obtaining the beginnings of an explanation of the creative work of writers. And, indeed, there is some prospect of this being possible. After all, creative writers themselves like to lessen the distance between their kind and the common run of humanity; they so often assure us that every man is a poet at heart and that the last poet will not perish till the last man does. (Freud, 1908)

To conclude, I would like to point out that, everywhere, the number of artists is increasing across artistic forms, which always stands out to me because it reduces the rigidity and formality of these. There is greater freedom. In music, for example, new bands appear constantly, while dance develops with great spontaneity. Artistic expressions that once took place in enclosed areas now happen in the streets.

We are hoping that creativity will develop through freedom. The individual feels that what is being accomplished is true and that it is the product of freedom and beauty. Creativity, however, is an intimate experience that does not crop up on the outside, unlike the demands of the masses. Its actualization cannot be turned over.

All human beings are equal because each one depends, equally, on having found a way of relating their inner life to the outside world. It is, I repeat, a true experience, of freedom and beauty.

References

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