

### CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SELF-ACTUALIZED PERSON: VISIONS FROM THE EAST AND WEST

(Raylene Chang and Richard C. Page)

IN THE BRIEF space of one article Chang and Page achieve a smooth and elegant comparison of the similarities between Taoism and Zen Buddhism on the one hand and Maslow's and Rogers's ideas on the other hand. But the smoothness roughens when one begins to look at the differences. Chang and Page use the terms *self-actualized* and *self-actualizing* interchangeably, which is not a good practice.

The self-actualized individual is the enlightened one who has attained perfect inner freedom and whose tranquility and detachment are perfect. The self-actualizing person is the one described by Maslow. There is a widespread and entrenched error to assume that Rogers's fully functioning person is identical with Maslow's self-actualizer. Maslow drew from case studies and his description has empirical validity, whereas Rogers's ideas about fully functioning people were not drawn from live models. In fact, they were extrapolations from the growth trends he saw in persons engaged in psychotherapy. These differences, I think, are very significant because the emphases are so dissimilar.

In Maslow's description of self-actualizing people, the emphasis is on more accurate perception of reality, democratic character structure, profound kinship with others (*Gemeinschaftsgefühl*), problem-centering (having a mission in life, which flows from a sense of responsiveness, to carry out a task on behalf of others, a response to an urgent need—what one *must* do—rather than to what one *wants* to do).

In Rogers's the emphasis is on self-acceptance and openness to experience. Compassion, humility, and helpfulness are the by-products rather than the essence of personal growth. While Rogers described a process that *may*, in the longest run, lead to self-actualization, Maslow studied people who were fully engaged in it. He also identified their imperfections, something that Chang and Page overlooked in their quest for similarities.

The concepts of ideal persons have good circulation and cost very little. They appeal to our longing for the ideal (which will not be appeased until the ideal person is produced in the flesh), but they lack the empirical foundation of case studies and anchor in theory. Although Maslow based his formulation on the study of individual cases, he did not proffer even one as an illustration, a case that would exemplify most if not all the characteristics of self-actualization. Some attempts in this direction have been made (Brennan & Piechowski, in press; Piechowski, 1978; Piechowski, 1990;

Piechowski & Tyska, 1982; Sinetar, 1986), but in order to understand more fully the nature of self-actualization, its different patterns and profiles, and the developmental conditions and the nature of the paths leading to it, we need many case studies. Sinetar's work is particularly significant here because she identified the developmental changes in persons who have awakened to the inner call of their true self. She found 40 persons in various stages of self-actualization. Although she was generous with illustrative quotes, still no full-scale case study was given.

While Rogers's description of a fully functioning person is too general to be amenable to a theoretical test, Maslow's full-bodied and specific profile of self-actualizing people certainly is—it has been shown to fit Dabrowski's theory of emotional development (Brennan & Piechowski, in press; Piechowski, 1978). Dabrowski described five patterns of personality development and arranged them into a hierarchy of five levels (Nelson, 1989; Weckowicz, 1988). Maslow's self-actualizing person fits Level IV; the self-actualized person—the enlightened one—fits Level V. (The early stages of self-actualization identified by Sinetar correspond to Level-III growth process.) Pinned against the scaffold of Dabrowski's theory, the apparent similarities between the four perspectives outlined by Chang and Page get stretched over several levels. The similarities, then, lie more in the ultimate goals of these perspectives than in the nature of the beast. But only in Maslow's case is the beast known, because no identified and carefully studied exemplars are available to us in the other three.

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