

# History of Humanism

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## WHAT'S COVERED

In this lesson, we'll discuss one more important theory in the history of psychology, as well as the individuals who made significant contributions to that theory. The specific areas of focus include:

1. Humanistic Theory
2. Work of Carl Rogers
  - a. Client-Centered Therapy
3. Work of Abraham Maslow
  - a. Hierarchy of Needs

## 1. Humanistic Theory

Humanistic theory is the most recently developed of the theories we've been discussing. As you can tell from the name, this theory is focused specifically on people and their experiences, as well as how those experiences can influence the way people think and behave.

**Humanism** developed out of opposition to the other major theories, such as behaviorism, which focuses on outside influences, and Freud's psychoanalytic theory, which focuses on the unconscious.

Both behaviorism and psychoanalytic theory speak of the things that are outside of a person's control, whereas humanism talks about things that a person can directly control.

The major themes of humanism are free will, human creativity, and humans' ability to accomplish certain things.

Humanism is also a very therapy-centered approach to psychology, as its main goal is to change people's behaviors and lives for the better. This is accomplished through a focus on concepts like self-esteem, belonging, and psychological needs, as well as how to fulfill all of those so that people can develop into better human beings.



## TERM TO KNOW

### Humanism

Believes in human potential, not drives; behavior is chosen, not determined – we have free will; seeks to

## 2. Work of Carl Rogers

There are two main figures to know in the study of humanistic theory, the first of whom is Carl Rogers. Rogers was an American psychologist who, in the 1930s, studied and wrote about the different counseling practices occurring in the U.S.

In 1945, Rogers opened his own practice, where he developed what he referred to as client-centered therapy.

### 2a. Client-Centered Therapy

Just like humanism, client-centered therapy focused on individuals and their reactions. What these individuals reported having thought, felt, and acted upon were considered just as important as what the therapist observed.

Through this study of the individual, Rogers formed the idea that a person develops his or her own self-image based on a self-evaluation of his or her own thoughts and actions.

➦ **EXAMPLE** When a person is told as a child that having feelings of anger towards his or her parents is a bad thing, that person then starts to develop a negative image of him or herself. The person is evaluating him or herself negatively as a result of those feelings.

Rogers wanted to focus on how this happens so that he could better the lives of his individual patients.

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## 3. Work of Abraham Maslow

The second figure to know in the study of humanistic theory is Abraham Maslow. Maslow was an American psychologist who, in 1937, began his practice in Brooklyn before later moving to California.

He recognized in his patients a need for positive self-image, or a need to see themselves as being inherently good, worthwhile people. This led to his concept of self-actualization, which is the process of a person fully developing his or her personal potential. In other words, self-actualization means being the best that you can be.

### 3a. Hierarchy of Needs

Out of the concept of self-actualization came Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, which is a pyramid showing the overall needs of a person.

On the bottom are the basic, physiological needs such as food, water, and shelter. These basic needs also include feelings of safety and security. Just above those is the need for love and belonging, followed by the need for self-esteem. At the very top of the pyramid is Maslow's idea of self-actualization.

The hierarchical structure signifies that people need to fulfill the lower needs before they can advance to meeting the higher needs. In other words, you need to have your physical needs met, and be able to feel safe and secure, before you can start worrying about whether you have positive self-esteem, or if you're loved by other people.

At the same time, Maslow's idea was that people need the higher needs to be met in order to have fulfilling lives.

This concept was again very focused on individuals and trying to get them to the very top of the pyramid to feel the best that they can. We will be covering this in greater detail as we move through the course.



## SUMMARY

In this lesson, you learned that **humanistic theory** is a more recently developed psychological theory focusing on individuals and their experiences. According to humanism, these experiences influence the way people think and behave.

You now understand that there are two main figures important in the development of humanism: **Carl Rogers**, who created **client-centered therapy**, and **Abraham Maslow**, who created the concept of self-actualization and the **Hierarchy of Needs**. According to Maslow's Hierarchy, human beings must have their most basic, physiological needs met before they can focus on needs such as love, self-esteem, and ultimately self-actualization. The goal is for people to reach the stage of self-actualization so that they can be the best individuals they possibly can.

Good luck!

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## TERMS TO KNOW

### Humanism

Believes in human potential, not drives; behavior is chosen, not determined – we have free will; seeks to understand how we perceive the world and our place in it.