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Anthropological Foundation of the Levels of Happiness:

Robert Spitzer, Abraham Maslow and Leonardo Polo^[1].

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Abstract:

The purpose of this paper is to see how Leonardo Polo's Transcendental Anthropology can give a foundation to the levels of happiness of Robert Spitzer, in his work: *Healing the Culture* and the hierarchy of basic needs of Abraham Maslow. Spitzer distinguishes four levels of happiness according to the inner tendencies of the human being, which he names in Latin as "*laetus, felix, beatitudo* and *gaudio*". Maslow orders the basic human needs from physiological to safety, love, esteem, and finally self-actualization. This paper observes that a) both Spitzer and Polo are in agreement with the perennial philosophy views about happiness and b) that Polo gives a trans-metaphysical (transcendental) grounding to a personal consideration of the last two levels analysed by Spitzer and c) that Maslow bases his analysis in dynamic psychology, and tends to mix Spitzers' last three levels in his three last levels of needs.

Keywords: Happiness, Levels of Happiness, Transcendental Anthropology, Hierarchy of Needs, Spitzer Robert, Maslow Abraham, Polo Leonardo

Introduction

It is interesting to see how the Transcendental Anthropology of Leonardo Polo can give an ontological foundation to the levels of happiness proposed by Robert Spitzer (Spitzer, 2000) and to the hierarchies of basic needs of Abraham Maslow (Maslow, 1943). Spitzer bases his proposal in cultural philosophy, Maslow in psychology, and Leonardo Polo (Polo, 2003) in the ontological structure of the person.

As Robert Spitzer indicates happiness (*eudaimonia*) is one of the most frequent topics in religion, philosophy and psychology. Happiness is related to perfection, and it is viewed as the motivation of human actions.

“The purpose of education from the days of the Greek Academy to the present has been to help students to move from the immediately gratifying to the enduring, from the apparent and superficial to the deep, from the narrow and intensive to the pervasive. This is why these four levels of happiness have found their way into so many philosophies, psychologies and anthropologies. They are not simply part of our inner makeup. They are really a culmination of many cultures’ reflections on the common good and the purpose of education.” (Spitzer 64)

It is difficult to find views about happiness that are entirely new and that cannot be traced in previous authors. Nevertheless Robert Spitzer, Abraham Maslow and Leonardo Polo are somehow original. Spitzer uses the tools of cultural philosophy to summarize the achievements of the previous authors in four levels and relates happiness to the culture in which people are immersed.

“With respect to its use as cultural philosophy, I have found the Life Principles to be useful in business, nonprofit organizations, law firms, university and high school environments, and even nursing homes and hospitals.” (Spitzer 15)

Polo gives a new outlook to the metaphysical and anthropological foundations of happiness which blends very well with the systematization done by Spitzer, and can also give a foundation to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs. We shall start with a schematic description of each proposal using the most relevant texts of each author and conclude attempting to blend their proposals in an integrated way.

In the bibliography we include links to short biographies of Spitzer R. (Spitzer, n.d.), Maslow, A. (Hoffman, 1988) and Polo, L. (“Intellectual Trajectory of Leonardo Polo - Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophy,” n.d.)

Spitzer’s four levels of Happiness,

Spitzer considers happiness in the classical sense of satisfaction of innate desires.

“Desire is not linked only to purpose; it is also linked to happiness. In general, when my desires are fulfilled, I am happy. When my desires go unfulfilled, I am unhappy. Perhaps the most general definition of happiness is ‘the fulfillment of desire’ (whether that desire be superficial or sublime). Likewise the most general definition of unhappiness might be the nonfulfillment of desire: frustration, continual heartache, and yearning. In sum, happiness is linked to desire; desire to purpose; and therefore, happiness to purpose.” (Spitzer 59)

Happiness is also considered a cultural category in the sense that it influences how society views the aim or purpose of the person, which is directly related to human dignity and that the present cultural environment does not appreciate because of its minimalist and materialistic point of view.

“These ten categories (of cultural discourse) include happiness, success, quality of life and love; suffering; ethics and freedom; and person, rights and the common good. Unfortunately, because the ten categories are intangible, they too are underestimated and undervalued.” (Spitzer 28)

“Metaphysical materialism tends to reduce reality to matter. Frequently matter is interpreted not in light of late twentieth-century physics (for example, quantum theory, relativity theory, big bang cosmology) but rather in terms of what is tangible, clearly perceived, and clearly understood (for example, colors, solids, locomotion). This type of materialism tends to view reality as building blocks that are clearly perceived by individuals and even clearly within their control.” (Spitzer18)

The four levels of happiness are a systematic way to analyze the ultimate reasons that motivate human decisions and consequently human behavior. The author gives brief description of the four levels of happiness: physical gratification, ego-gratification, contribution and transcendence.

“Much of this book will be concerned with four levels of meaning and purpose in life. (...) Suffice to say that the first level of meaning (physical pleasure and possession) and the second level (ego-gratification) are quite tangible, immediately gratifying, and emotionally intense. The third and four levels of meaning (concerned with contribution and love –level 3- and transcendence and faith –level 4) require delayed gratification, education and subtlety, but they have pervasive effects beyond a single person, last much longer, and involve our most creative powers (for example, love, ideals, intellectual creativity, and the pursuit of the common good).” (Spitzer 23)

The characteristic of the first level *laetus* is seen as physical pleasure or sensitive gratification which is intense but short-lived and because of this requires repetition, creates habituation that leads to increasing demands. It can also lead to the destruction of the organic base that causes pleasure. The second level *felix* is the level of ego-gratification, where achievement of wealth, recognition, power is sought. It is a competitive level, where the ego has to be ahead of other egos, and recognition of the supremacy is the main motor. This level may lead to jealousy, anxiety, bitterness and trampling of other egos. Spitzer points out that these two levels are self-centred and that as such do not satisfy completely the aspirations of the human being. Humans will not be satisfied until their *transcendental aspirations are met*. These transcendental aspirations are met partially in level three *beatitudo* where the ego goes beyond himself and gives himself to another “who”, discovering his own “who”. While this level is more authentic, more human, more personal, still the only level that can fulfill the personal desires for transcendence is the fourth level “*gaudio*”. At the *gaudio* level is where God as person can give full recognition to the desire of total happiness which is purely spiritual and therefore unattainable by created beings.

Maslow's theory of motivation

As indicated before Maslow's approach to happiness is exclusively based on psychological observations. Maslow does not use the term happiness in his paper. For him the satisfaction of the desires, or motivations, is what constitutes the motor of human behaviour.

"The present paper is an attempt to formulate a positive theory of motivation which will satisfy these theoretical demands and at the same time conform to the known facts, clinical and observational as well as experimental. It derives most directly, however, from clinical experience. This theory is, I think, in the functionalist tradition of James and Dewey, and is fused with the holism of Wertheimer Goldstein, and Gestalt psychology, and with the dynamicism of Freud and Adler. This fusion or synthesis may arbitrarily be called a 'general-dynamic' theory." (Maslow, 1943, p. 372).

Man motivations, though, cannot be reduced to animal motivations.

"This theory starts with the human being rather than any lower and presumably 'simpler' animal. Too many of the findings that have been made in animals have been proven to be true for animals but not for the human being. There is no reason whatsoever why we should start with animals in order to study human motivation. The logic or rather illogic behind this general fallacy of 'pseudo- simplicity' has been exposed often enough by philosophers and logicians as well as by scientists in each of the various fields. It is no more necessary to study animals before one can study man than it is to study mathematics before one can study geology or psychology or biology." (Maslow, 1943, p. 393).

"That this truism can be forgotten is due mainly to two reasons. First, rats have few motivations other than physiological ones, and since so much of the research upon motivation has been made with these animals, it is easy to carry the rat-picture over to the human being." (Maslow, 1943, p. 375).

What is more relevant of Maslow's theory for our purpose is the list and explanation of the five levels of needs that motivate human beings.

"There are at least five sets of goals, which we may call basic needs. These are briefly physiological, safety, love, esteem, and self-actualization. In addition, we are motivated by the desire to achieve or maintain the various conditions upon which these basic satisfactions rest and by certain more intellectual desires." (Maslow, 1943, p. 395).

Man, rather than seeking a situation of homeostasis, or perfect satisfaction, is eager to develop all his capacities, which makes him an active changer, will not be ever really satisfied.

"I should then say simply that a healthy man is primarily motivated by his needs to develop and actualize his fullest potentialities and capacities. If a man has any other basic needs in any active, chronic sense, then he is simply an unhealthy man." (Maslow, 1943, 395).

"Man is a perpetually wanting animal. Also no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete" (Maslow, 1943, 370).

Finally, another interesting statement is that no desire or motivation works in isolation, but they are all intertwined and never fully satisfied, due to the incapacity to satiate all his desires.

“Thus man is a perpetually wanting animal. Ordinarily the satisfaction of these wants is not altogether mutually exclusive, but only tends to be. The average member of our society is most often partially satisfied and partially unsatisfied in all of his wants.” (Maslow, 1943, 395).

Maslow’s hierarchy of needs is a psychological ranking of needs, which goes from the most basic life needs to the highest. Though he suggests that only higher needs are taken into consideration when the lower are satisfied, he defends that not all need to be totally satisfied. He also defends that there are interrelated and that they are exceptions in singular cases.

“As for the concept of emergence of a new need after satisfaction of the prepotent need, this emergence is not a sudden, saltatory phenomenon but rather a gradual emergence by slow degrees from nothingness. For instance, if prepotent need A is satisfied only 10 per cent: then need B may not be visible at all. However, as this need A becomes satisfied 25 per cent, need B may emerge 5 per cent, as need A becomes satisfied 75 per cent need B may emerge 50 per cent, and so on.” (Maslow, 1943, 388).

For our topic what is interesting is that Maslow makes a classification of motives, of human desires in an increasing order of importance and that he also says that the desires of man are never satisfied; man has an inner force which moves him always ahead, always looking for more. This is one of the characteristics that Spitzer has clearly pointed out and that is at the core of Polo’s Transcendental Anthropology as we are going to see.

The transcendental structure of man according to Polo

After seeing the cultural and psychological approach to a hierarchy of happiness and satisfactions we discuss whether Leonardo Polo’s Transcendental Anthropology can give an ontological foundation to the findings of Maslow and Spitzer.

Polo uses the classical definition of happiness recognizing his debt to Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas.

What is the natural will fixed to so precisely and exclusively? To what does it inflexibly tend? Thomas Aquinas says to happiness (ST 1.41.2 ad 3m; 1.2.4 ad 2m). This is an old idea that comes from Aristotle (Nicomachean Ethics 1.7 [1097b ss]). The human being as a spiritual being tends by nature to happiness. The human being cannot but tend to happiness, and this means that with respect to happiness there is no choice. The human being cannot tend to misfortune, to a physical evil, or to any other thing, but only to something which makes him happy. The vegetative functions tend to fulfill their task and are fixed *ad unum* in accord with it. But the end of our

spiritual natural tendency, being fixed *ad unum*, is not to nourish itself or things like that, but happiness. (Polo, 2008, p. 4)

“Duty is compatible with happiness because happiness consists in the possession of the ultimate good.” (Polo, 1994)

Polo agrees with both philosophers in that the desire of happiness is embedded in our will, which is of the will as nature *-voluntas ut natura-* before it is actualized by the intelligence *-voluntas ut ratio*. According to Polo the classic Greek words are *orexis* for the *voluntas ut natura* and *boulesis* for *voluntas ut ratio*.

“But in so far as we are beings that are not animals, we human tend in a special way that is linked to our reason. This tendency that is not merely biological, because reason can influence it and it obeys reason, this special *órexis* is called *boúlesis* by the Greeks. The Medieval philosophers, upon receiving the Greek heritage, translated the two Greek concepts as *voluntas*. They called the will as tendency *voluntas ut natura*. *Voluntas ut natura* is the radical act of desire of our spirit. They called *boúlesis* -which is not another faculty, but a phase, a development of the *voluntas ut natura* in so far as it is related to human reason—*voluntas ut ratio*.” (Ethics,149)

Polo does not speak of levels of happiness but the triadic structure of the human being can explain them. He arrives at the triadic structure by distinguishing a new level which transcends the hylomorphic composition of body and soul and the hylomorphic composition between them. This new level goes beyond the hylomorphic structure by being a purely formal distinction between the human essence and his act of being. This third level is the level of the personal act of being, which makes each person radically different from each other person. He posits that Thomas Aquinas discovered this fundamental distinction but did not use it in anthropology.

“Effectively the soul is the immortal part of human nature and because of this it is detachable from the body. But it is not only a “quidditas” but also an essence really different from the human “esse” inasmuch as it is habitually perfected. Summing up, the originating (“principlial”) character of the soul has to be dealt with care. Because of its dependency of the human being the soul cannot be properly a principle.” (Polo, 1999, p. 140)

“Specifically my proposal starts from Tomas Aquinas’ real distinction between the esse and the essence, which is the last important discovery of traditional philosophy. (...This) Thomistic discovery can be expanded, or better used, when studying *in recto* (directly) the human being; this is if the act of being human, which is the person, which should be distinguished from the human essence.” (Polo, 1999, p. 19)

Following this clarification he distinguishes three levels: the natural, the essential and the personal. At the natural level the human being “has” (*tener* = to have, to possess). This level roughly coincides with what the classics considered the human body, and the sensitive and affective levels that are linked to it. The essential level, which is exclusive of human beings is where the human rational faculties of the intelligence and the will are located. All human beings coincide in having intelligence

and will which are the acting powers for human activities. This is the level of 'doing' (*hacer* = to do).

And finally the personal level -the personal act of being- where each human being is irreplaceable, unique, and where the four *personal transcendentals* have their seat.

"The link between these dimensions of the co-existence is clear: the improvement of the universe is linked to the improvement of the human essence. Nevertheless, the ultimate meaning of the human co-existence, by which the human person accepts himself radically, beyond 'having' and 'doing', and gives himself, decides his own destiny (se destina en su ser). The free intimate of his giving [here LP is referring to the personal level] should be more radical than the immanence of 'having' [he is talking of the natural level] and even more radical than the immanence of the virtue [he is referring to the essential level]. Intimacy is what strictly defines the person: a being who is capable of giving, of adding, as the only way to countersign his 'having' and 'being' ". ("IEF Leonardo Polo," n.d.)

"Certainly, in each human being the person is dual with the essence and this is dual with nature. But the human essence is not a replica of the person. And because the essence is not a replica, the replica has to be sought in other persons. These dualities; the person with the essence, and the person with the replica, are not the highest. If there was only one person, and nothing else, the person will be unknown, and the dualities will disappear. This will not only be a disaster, it is impossible; because nothing human will be real if there were no personal co-existence. Because of this I have proposed the expansion of the transcendentals." (Polo, 1999, p. 179)

In the same way than in metaphysics the transcendentals transcend the categories -they are beyond the categories- because they apply to all beings, the personal transcendentals transcend the different types of persons and are therefore common to all persons, for the mere fact of being a person. Polo describes four personal transcendentals: co-existence-with, personal freedom, personal knowledge and personal love.

"Consequently, in the first place, it is suggested that the theory of the transcendentals can be expanded, that the transcendentals discovered and somehow coordinated by traditional philosophy -which I call metaphysical transcendentals- can be distinguished from the other transcendentals which I call personal transcendentals." (Polo, 1999, p. 31)

"The anthropological transcendentals are achieved as thematic value of the character of the "additional" (además). These transcendentals are: the act of being of the person, which I call co-existence, intimacy of second act of being; the intellectual transparency, that I call intellectus ut co-actus; the love that accepts, which is the donation structure of the person; and freedom." (Polo, 1999, p. 216)

Co-existence-with is the one we are interested now because it is the one that expresses the way of being of the persons, which is different from the way of being of non-personal realities. A person alone cannot be thought, he is intimacy that by design

has to be shared, he has to be in a personal relationship with other beings. These other beings can be at the same personal level –in our case human beings- but in a deeper way has to be the person who is the origin of the persons, the absolute “replica” who can reflect and quench all capabilities and potentialities of the person and therefore make him or her known finally to himself or herself.

“A second consideration with regards to the duality is to say that what is deepest in human beings is the person and the personal being is incompatible with monism. A unique person will be the absolute disaster because he/she will be condemned to have no replica; on the other hand, a person can only have as replica another person.” (“IEF Leonardo Polo,” n.d.)

Suffice for this brief article this description of Polo’s transcendental anthropology which will make possible to compare it with Spitzer’s levels of happiness and Maslow’s hierarchy of basic needs.

The integration of the psychological and cultural in the ontological

Polo’s first anthropological level, the natural level, can be an ontological support to the first level of happiness, *laetus* or satisfaction described by Spitzer. The first gratification is the fulfillment of the natural passions of the biological component of human nature. Whatever is received, whatever is acquired in a physical way gives us the immediate satisfaction or corporal satisfaction. This level is common, but not identical, with the animals, who also have needs and feelings that require satisfaction. It can also be the foundation to the physiological and safety needs as described by Maslow. Nevertheless one has to take into account that Maslow’s safety needs also include safety of live projects, which only men by the fact of their spiritual nature can plan. For Polo this level is exclusively on the sensitive, not intellectual realm.

Polo’s second level, the essential level, is the level of the *felix* or “achievement”. The second level of happiness is the fruit of the achievements that our intelligence proposes and that our will conquers. Success requires planning, challenges, foreseeing the future. It requires the ability to distinguish between ends and means, and the constancy of implementing the decisions taken in spite of the difficulties that may arise. This level can appease Maslow’s needs for esteem, and self-actualization, whenever they do not involve the personal donation, which correspond to Spitzer’s third and fourth level of happiness, and Polo’s personal level.

While Polo does not explicitly make a distinction in his texts because he does not really deal with level of happiness, he distinguishes the relationship with God at a personal level and the relationship with other persons who are at our own level.

The relationship of person to person is done through the intelligence and will, This is done at the essential level where we communicate and recognize that there are other egos, other persons. To treat them as persons and not as ‘projects’ or ‘means’ we have to go out of ourselves, to reach the level of acceptance and donation, that for

Polo are two ingredients of personal love. This is Spitzer's third level of happiness, which is the first level where the person is unselfish, and where *beatitudo* is achieved. This can also be Maslow's level of love. Maslow's love is not as precisely described as Spitzer's and Polo's though he clearly does not reduce it to sex.

"One thing that must be stressed at this point is that love is not synonymous with sex. Sex may be studied as a purely physiological need. Ordinarily sexual behavior is multi-determined, that is to say, determined not only by sexual but also by other needs, chief among which are the love and affection needs. Also not to be overlooked is the fact that the love needs involve both giving *and* receiving love." (Maslow, 1943, p. 382).

Lastly Spitzer's fourth level of happiness *gaudio* can be linked to the person to person relationship between the person at the personal level and God as a person. Polo speaks of a double way a person can know God: one through the intelligence, through the arguments of the existence of God, the second in a personal relationship as the fulfillment of the intimate desire at the personal level of finding the plenitude of the personal relationship both as origin and end. These arguments allow us to relate with God as creator, unique, omnipotent, first cause uncaused, perfect good and perfect truth, perfect beauty and its own being, where there is no distinction between His act of being and His essence, and the personal God who can be "touch" as a person, through the innate habitual knowledge of wisdom.

Summary

Abraham Maslow gives a psychological dynamic view of human motivation, based on the analysis of the needs and their satisfaction. He affirms that they are hierarchical and interconnected and that in no time man is fully satisfied. He gives accurate facts, good descriptions and valuable hypothesis. He does not attempt to find the causes, which is beyond his discipline.

Robert Spitzer gives a cultural classification of the levels of happiness based on very valid and vivid observations of society, and the works of classic philosophers. His ranking is based on the spiritual nature of human beings and their desire for what is permanent and transcendent. Beauty, good and truth, can only be achieved in a direct relationship with God at the highest level of happiness, which encompasses the other three levels.

Leonardo Polo suggests an ontological structure of the person that can explain well the valuable findings of the two previous authors, and help us understand more in depth the causes and consequences of the descriptions given by them. Polo's explanations require a deeper knowledge of his theory of knowledge and his Anthropology, not an easy task but full of rewards because even if unknown by most, is one of the philosophers that has the potential to contribute more to the

development of a deep philosophical anthropology and theory of knowledge in the XX century.

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