

Maslow's hierarchy of needs

Post by “Matteng” of August 24, 2022 at 4:11 PM

Hi,

I am interested in the subject of desire and pleasure especially in light of modern science / psychology and the Epicurean Philosophy.

I know Maslow's pyramid, which considers not only basic desires but goes on till self improvement and personal values, transcendence/knowledge.

In the past I used to associate the lower levels with Epicurean philosophy and the higher with Stoic philosophy, the classical prejudice I think (Yes sorry I am a Convert from the Stoic camp and have to disentangle me from this system 😊).

But I think Epicurus maybe would embrace them but warn for the higher levels.

Maybe the lower levels (Deficiency Needs) would be the "natural & necessary" desires

The higher levels (Growth Needs) "natural & unnecessary" ?

But if my survival is saved I could go through self-improvement (if that's pleasure for me)?

But for example for self-improvement, learning new languages could be a desire without a limit, so -> unnecessary, but natural to have such desires ?

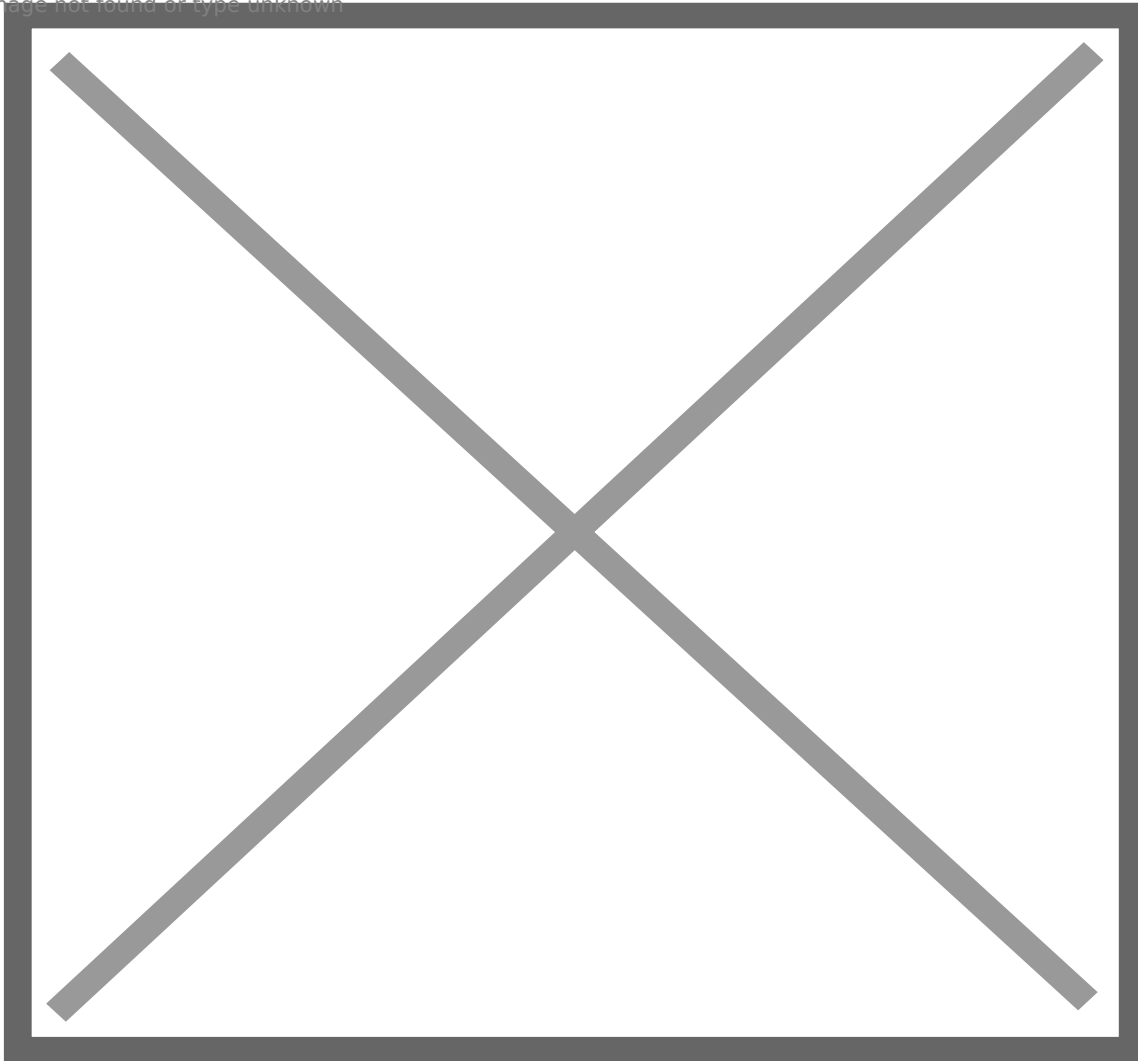
Or is this a complete wrong take ? Because there are the virtues.

In what category is the desire to become more virtuous ?

Or do I make here a category error ? For all desire's we need virtue. And here lurks the mistake to confuse the goal (pleasure) with the means (virtue).

Virtue is the greatest -> means <- for a happy life 😊

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[Maslow's hierarchy of needs - Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org)

en.wikipedia.org

What are your opinions about this subject ?

Post by “Martin” of August 24, 2022 at 5:27 PM

There is indeed an analogy between some of the needs and the Epicurean classification of desires.

However, transcendence is not compatible with Epicurean philosophy.

Self actualization is suspicious, too, because it is usually interpreted to become what you are meant to be. However, in Epicurean philosophy, there is no instance which would establish what you are meant to be.

By the way, Maslow himself never rendered his system of needs as a pyramid. The actual importance of a particular need varies with individual circumstances. Therefore, there is no fixed hierarchy.

He added transcendence much later when he apparently got already senile. At latest with the addition of transcendence, his system of needs moved out of science into superstition.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 24, 2022 at 8:39 PM

Maslow's hierarchy of needs is a very seductive idea. However I've encountered more confusion than clarity when I've tried to relate it to the categories of desires and my personal conclusion is that it's not helpful to one studying Epicurus. The more that I looked into it, the more academic criticisms of it I found.... It appeared to me that it could turn into another rabbit hole that would actually take me further from understanding Epicurus. I dropped it and focused on Epicurus and feel that I've been well rewarded for my choice.

Post by “reneliza” of August 24, 2022 at 8:55 PM

[Quote from Godfrey](#)

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I think that a lot of psychological models work really well *as models* and that like you said, it just becomes complicated and confusing when you try to use it as some real strict and decisive rule. With Maslow and Epicurean desires both that it's worthwhile to note that there are some fundamental things that, once taken care of, make it easier to pursue the other less basic

desires. But I wouldn't do a whole lot more with the hierarchy of needs than that.

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 25, 2022 at 9:42 AM

The above pyramid is incorrect and has incorrect names for the levels -- there are only 5 categories -- physiological, safety, belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. So it seems there are many variations that have cropped up over time -- and also funny memes:



Source: <https://www.bbc.com/news/magazine-23902918>

(This is both a good article and an easy quick read).

I would say that if we take the five categories we can compare them to "natural goods" and also to "natural and necessary" for happiness, so I see it as compatible to Epicureanism.

For an Epicurean, self-esteem would be about self-confidence that one can make good choices in life and that one is responsible and competent in life, and also skills of understanding pain and pleasure and how to deal with them in one's own life -- so skills of one's inner life.

As for self-actualization -- this would be doing activities which lead to a feeling of living a fulfilled, enjoyable, and happy life -- so developing skills within certain activities.

[Quote from Matteng](#)

But for example for self-improvement, learning new languages could be a desire without a limit, so -> unnecessary, but natural to have such desires ?

Or is this a complete wrong take ? Because there are the virtues.

In what category is the desire to become more virtuous ?

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Virtue is the greatest -> means <- for a happy life 😊

Desires without limit: this is when you desire to do something not for the joy of doing it but rather to achieve an abstract ideal of approval or perfection -- these goals can't ever be reached.

Instead of seeking abstract approval we need to find true friendship, and enjoy the pleasures of friendship.

If we first understand that virtue brings with it the idea of striving for perfection, then we can set aside the idea that virtue is better than pleasure -- striving for perfection won't bring a happy life. If a person thinks they have reached perfection in a certain area, then they will next have to seek out some other area of life to strive toward perfection -- so it is a desire without limit, and brings dissatisfaction.

If instead we seek for fulfillment in natural areas of life -- belonging, friendship, and enjoyment of fulfilling activities.

If we realize that we need to do work to establish or maintain future security, we don't need virtue (harsh discipline) to spur us on -- rather we think about what will bring a good life in the future and even if there is some pain in the present we will pursue what we need to do.

As for the other meaning of the word virtue such as kindness, patience, wisdom, etc, -- we see these as necessary for good friendship or a good life -- so virtue of this kind works toward the service of pleasure.

Post by “Matteng” of August 25, 2022 at 11:02 AM

Thanks for the response.

So all levels could be compatible with Epicurean Philosophy (EP), it depends on the content.

And not just only "things/objects" could be desired but also " fulfilling activities".

So values as "self-sufficiency" and even character traits and virtue or virtuous action can be desired when it brings pleasure.

This I thought in the past would be rejected in EP.

But when I include such things and broaden my horizon of pleasure, than many objections against EP fall apart.

For example the often discussed pleasure machine/pill idea:

I would reject it because living a real life with self-sufficiency, agency, freedom, possibility to use virtue, real friends, real experiences and fulfilling activities gives real, sustainable, more and reliable pleasure.

Post by “Godfrey” of August 25, 2022 at 12:45 PM

As an aside...

The industrial designer Eva Zeisel once said something along the lines of "I don't strive for perfection, because if I attain it, what else is there to do?"

Somehow this seems relevant here. But in thinking about it it might deserve a thread of its own.

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 9:04 AM

We've talked about this in other threads, and I remember posting elsewhere (a while back) on a revised "heirarchy of needs" and here is the likely source...

...excerpt:

Quote

The Updated Hierarchy of Needs

So what replaces self-actualization at the top of this revised hierarchy?

- **Parenting** takes the top spot, followed by
- **Mate retention**
- **Mate acquisition**
- **Status/esteem**
- **Affiliation**
- **Self-protection**
- **Immediate physiological needs** make up the very base of the pyramid.

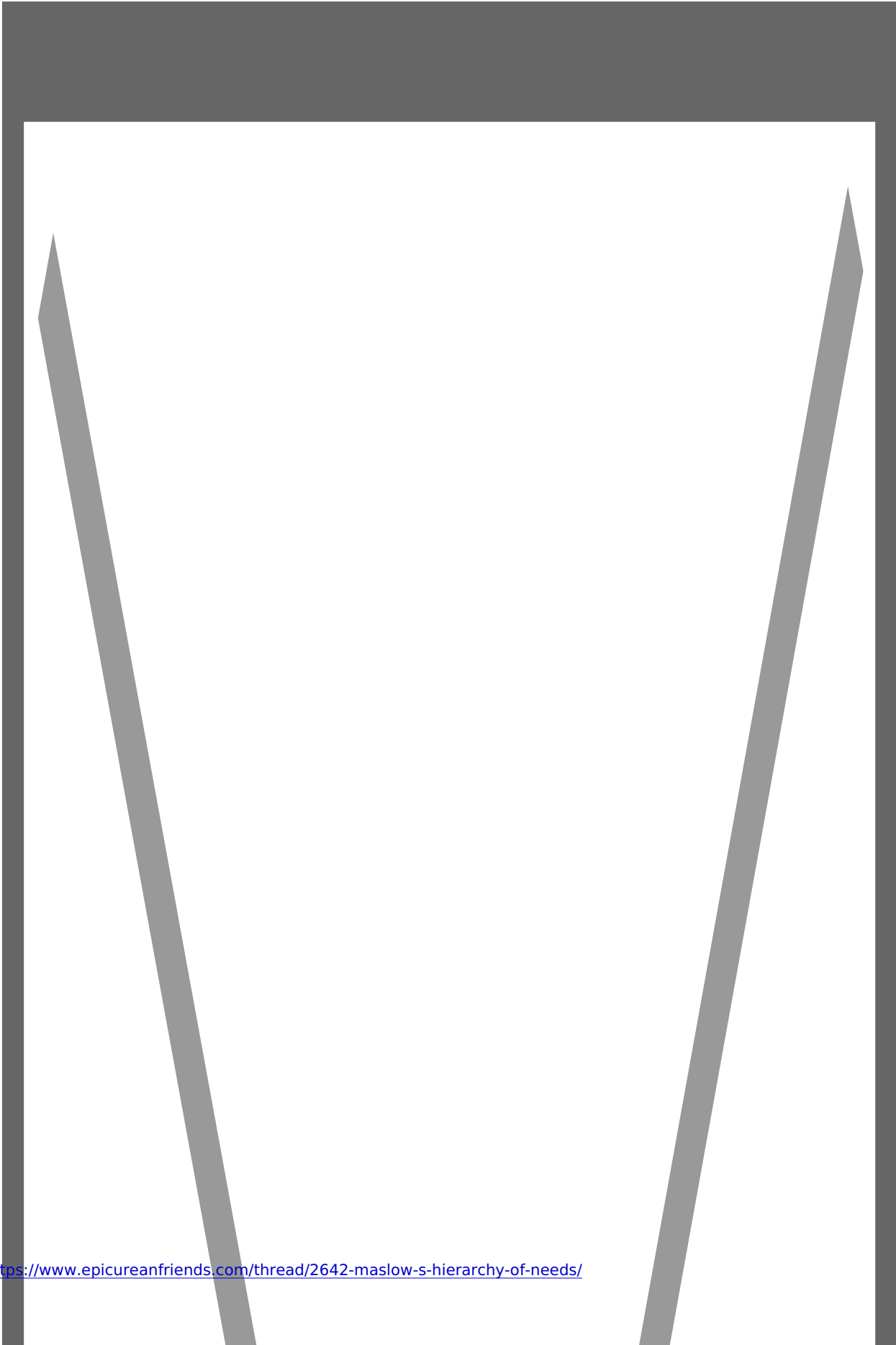
According to the researchers, reproduction is the most fundamental biological imperative. For that reason, they placed parenting at the top of their hierarchy.⁵

The proposed revisions to Maslow's original hierarchy did not come without controversy, however. The journal issue containing the revised hierarchy also included four different commentary pieces that offered perspectives on the original and revised versions of the hierarchy.⁵

While many agreed with the basic premise of the revised version, particularly the evolutionary basis for the revisions, many took issue with removing self-actualization as a key motivating need.

Source:

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[Is Maslow's Famous Hierarchy of Needs Still Relevant Today?](#)

The hierarchy of needs is widely accepted despite little supporting evidence. Is Maslow's hierarchy of needs still relevant today, or is it time for an update?

www.verywellmind.com

There are questions that come up as to how useful a hierarchy of needs is...

I ask this: Can we create an "Epicurean hierarchy of needs" ?

These needs would be biological/mental needs that are part of nature. Within these categories would be various options for fulfillment that encompass all temperaments (and we would be able to point to the "seeds" or causes of those needs). Each category would have a kind of "menu" of things to choose from - for example instead of a lifemate a particular person could instead choose to be part of a community club with close friendships, or good friends with workmates, or friends with housemates (who split the cost of rent). There are of course differences and then compensation from other categories may be needed.

(More thoughts on this to come).

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 3:08 PM

This is interesting (from that link):

Quote

Problems With the Pyramid

One interesting fact to note is that Maslow himself never presented his theory as the famous pyramid with which we are all familiar. He did not view these needs as levels or stages you reach before moving on to the next. Maslow instead believed that people move within the hierarchy and that we are often driven by multiple needs simultaneously.

Post by “Matteng” of November 22, 2024 at 5:29 PM

Inside the necessary / natural desires there could be the level from top to bottom (just my idea/ proposal):

1. Desires for happiness (eudaimonia)
2. Desires for Life
3. Desires for body/health

But like Maslow maybe a hierarchy would be not so realistic.

For example I could sacrifice 3 (health) for 2. (living) in cutting a part of the body or toxicate me to live better.

And 2(living) don't mean a happy life (1), so it can make sense to limit „life“ for happiness, in the extreme case in dying for a friend/ loved person so that you fulfill stage 1 but not 2 and 3 but to get to 1 you need a body (1) and a life (2) in the first place ☐☐

Post by “Kalosyni” of November 22, 2024 at 10:06 PM

[Quote from Matteng](#)

1. Desires for happiness (eudaimonia)
2. Desires for Life
3. Desires for body/health

I am thinking that there is a difference between "needs" and "desires". A human needs healthy and nutritious food but they may not desire to eat greens or vegetables. "Needs" are what humans evolved with as animals - it would be an innate feeling that something is "off" when something goes unfulfilled. Also, there may be some people who don't desire happiness (because they think they don't deserve it, they have given up on it, or they think that self-sacrifice is more important.)

I am thinking that a wheel could work rather than a pyramid. Here are some ideas, will organize this better tomorrow:

Survival needs

Safety/security needs

Physiological needs - food, water, shelter, movement, etc.

Competence/self-assurance

Social group connection and recognition

Flow in work and living environment

Mate and/or family/group



Post by “Kalosyni” of November 27, 2024 at 10:25 AM

More thoughts, and still thinking about creating an Epicurean heirarchy or wheel.

From the Letter to Menoecus:

"Third, keep in mind that some desires are natural whereas others are groundless; that among the natural desires some are natural and necessary whereas others are merely natural; and that **among the necessary desires some are necessary for happiness, some for physical health, and some for life itself**. The steady contemplation of these facts enables you to understand everything that you accept or reject in terms of the health of the body and the **serenity** of the soul — since that is the goal of a completely **happy** life." (Peter Saint Andre translation).

-----> "serene" - calm and free from agitation, distress, fretting, restlessness, or irritability

-----> "happy" - pleased and free from sadness, disappointment, hopelessness, or lethergy

-----> The word "necessary" can be thought of as a human need.

We also see from the [Principal Doctrines](#):

[PD29](#) "Among desires, some are natural and necessary, some are natural and unnecessary, and some are unnatural and unnecessary (arising instead from groundless opinion)."

[PD30](#) "Among natural desires, those that do not bring pain when unfulfilled and that require intense exertion arise from groundless opinion; and such desires fail to be stamped out not by nature but because of the groundless opinions of humankind."

-----> **necessary desires** are relieved by nature -- desires that arise because of our animal nature can be relieved by simple and natural means.

-----> but **unnecessary desires** can't be relieved by nature -- desires invented because of the consequences of **wealth** (the desire for continuous variations of sensation), **power** (the desire for protection by trying to find security against political violence or murder or by making unsavory alliances with unwise/tyrants against a greater enemy), or **status** (the desire to be admired or worshipped)

[PD27](#) says: "Of all the things that wisdom provides for the complete happiness of one's entire life, by far the greatest is friendship." And in [PD28](#) it says: "...security amidst the limited number of dreadful things is most easily achieved through friendship."

-----> Friendship should be included in an Epicurean wheel of needs.