

NOTES FROM: Transcend, by Scott Barry Kaufman

SUMMARY: This was one of my standout reads of 2020, a book that impressed me and astounded me *so strongly* that now I recommend it all the time.

In his professional academic career, Scott Barry Kaufman has focused on expanding on and spreading the ideas of Abraham Maslow, whose name you may recognize from that pyramid you were made to memorize in school. You know the one!

At the bottom level, you've got the very basic survival needs of air, food, water, and health. Then, going up a level you find shelter and stability as the next most important human needs, all the way up to the need for development, creativity, and growth.

Kaufman shows how, at the end of Maslow's life, he was working towards extending his world-famous ideas (dealing mainly with self-actualization and self-expression) to the idea of transcendence, or interconnection between the fates and destinies of every human being alive on Earth.

"The fully developed (and very fortunate) human being working under the best conditions tends to be motivated by values which transcend his self. They are not selfish anymore in the old sense of that term. Beauty is not within one's skin nor is justice or order. One can hardly class these desires as selfish in the sense that my desire for food might be. My satisfaction with achieving or allowing justice is not within my own skin; it does not lie along my arteries. It is equally outside and inside: therefore, it has transcended the geographical limitations of the self."

"Within the humanistic psychology framework, the healthy personality is considered one that constantly moves toward freedom, responsibility, self-awareness, meaning, commitment, personal growth, maturity, integration, and change, rather than one that predominantly strives for status, achievement, or even happiness."

The Thirteen Sources of Well-Being:

- More positive emotions
- Fewer negative emotions
- Life satisfaction
- Vitality
- Environmental mastery
- Positive relationships
- Self-acceptance
- Mastery
- Autonomy
- Personal growth
- Engagement in life
- Purpose and meaning in life
- Transcendent experiences

“Becoming fully human is about living a full existence, not one that is continually happy.”

The hierarchy can also be broken down into two separate classes of needs, marked by deficiency or growth.

“The greater the deficiency of these needs, the more we distort reality to fit our expectations and treat others in accordance with their usefulness in helping us satisfy our most deficient needs.”

“As we sail through the adventure of life, it's rarely clear sailing. The boat itself protects us from seas that are rarely as calm as we would like. Each plank of the boat offers security from the waves. Without it, we'd surely spend all our energy trying to stay above water. While even one plank is better than nothing, the bigger the boat, the more waves you can endure.

Likewise, in life, while safety is an essential foundation for feeling secure, adding on strong connections with others and feelings of respect and worthiness will further allow you to weather the storms. Having a secure boat is not enough for real movement, however. You also need a sail. Without a sail, you might be protected from water, but you wouldn't go anywhere. Each level of the sail allows you to capture more wind, helping you explore and adapt to your environment. Note that you don't 'climb' a sailboat like you'd climb a mountain or a pyramid. Instead, you *open* your sail, just like you'd drop your defenses once you felt secure enough.

This is an ongoing dynamic: you can be open and spontaneous one minute but can feel threatened enough to prepare for the storm by closing yourself to the world the next minute. The more you continually open yourself to the world, however, the further your boat will go and the more you can benefit from the people and opportunities around you.

And if you're truly fortunate, you can even enter ecstatic moments of peak experience - where you are really catching the wind. In these moments, not only have you temporarily forgotten your insecurities, but you are growing so much that you are helping to raise the tide for all the other sailboats simply by making your way through the ocean.”

“We miss the ocean for the waves.”

“I believe the drive for exploration is the core motive underlying self-actualization and cannot be completely reduced to any of the other needs, including our evolved drives for affiliation, status, parenting, and mates.”

Security: Safety, Connection, and Self-Esteem

Growth: Exploration, Love, and Purpose

“There is something comforting about the fact that we all exist together and have to confront the same existential dilemmas.”

"I do not accept any absolute formulas for living. No preconceived code can see ahead to everything that can happen in a man's life. As we live, we grow and our beliefs change. They must change. So, I think we should live with this constant discovery. We should be open to this adventure in heightened awareness of living. We should stake our whole existence on our willingness to explore and experience."

"I believe in the fundamental capacity of humans for growth. No matter your current personality or circumstance, I believe that this book can help you grow in precisely the direction you truly want to grow, in your own style, and in such a way that allows you to show the universe that you really existed, and benefited others, while you were here. Let's begin the process of becoming."

"There is a character difference between the man who feels safe and the one who lives his life out as if he were a spy in enemy territory."

"We should never have the desire to compose music or create mathematical systems, or to adorn our homes, or to be well dressed if our stomachs were empty most of the time, or if we were continually dying of thirst, or if we were continually threatened by an always impending catastrophe, or if everyone hated us...Obviously a good way to obscure the higher motivations, and to get a lopsided view of human capacities and human nature, is to make the organism extremely and chronically hungry or thirsty."

"Life is best organized as a series of daring ventures from a secure base."

"Social isolation has an impact on health comparable to the effect of high blood pressure, lack of exercise, obesity or smoking."

"What has gone so wrong in our society that loneliness is so rampant?"

"The way we are prioritizing our life, and what we are prioritizing, often goes against our greatest need for belonging."

"In cultures that foster face-to-face interactions, people tend to be highly satisfied and live long lives."

"No one belongs here more than you."

"What a man can be, he must be."

"I think of the self-actualizing man not as an ordinary man with something added, but rather as the ordinary man with nothing taken away."

Characteristics of Self-Actualization: Truth-Seeking, Acceptance, Purpose, Authenticity, Continued Freshness of Appreciation, Peak Experiences, Humanitarianism, Good Moral Intuition, Creative Spirit, and Equanimity.

“It’s striking just how many of the characteristics of self-actualizing people that Maslow proposed almost seventy years ago can be reliably and validly measured. Nevertheless, Maslow was way off base about one important thing: the characteristics of self-actualization are not nearly as rare as he believed.”

“We get the biggest rush of dopamine coursing through our brains at the possibility of reward, but this rush is no guarantee that we’ll actually like or enjoy the thing once we get it.”

“When we can no longer change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.”

“Intellectual curiosity predicts the creative achievement of inventions and scientific discovery even better than IQ.”

“We are often so cold to ourselves.”

“The defensive strategies to see the self in a positive light can be collectively summed up as ‘the ego.’”

“The best way to transcend the ego is via having a strong identity.”

“Clinical psychology Cindy Meston and evolutionary psychologist David Buss identified 237 distinct reasons why humans have sex.”

“The year was 1954, and it was the last day of classes at Brandeis University. Maslow was delivering one of his riveting lectures, and his students were completely transfixed. In his soft spoken but intense manner, Maslow encouraged his students to be aware of the totality of their being, including their own unique talents and vast potentialities. He spoke of responsibility and how it was ultimately up to each of them to become all they could become in life. The students were moved, and many reported feeling an 'almost palpable spirit of inspiration in the room.' One young woman raised her hand. Maslow looked at her thoughtfully and acknowledged her. 'I'm wondering about the final exam,' she said. 'Could you give us some idea about the questions on it?' Every head in the room turned toward this student with a mix of astonishment, shock, and disgust. For the first time in the course, Maslow appeared visibly angry. With a reddened face and vehemence in his voice, he replied: 'If you can ask a question like that at this moment, then I'm concerned about how much you've really understood here this semester.'”

Maslow: “The only happy people I know are the ones who are working well at something they consider important.”

“It seems only the neurotic and the unhappy that expend their concern explicitly and directly on their happiness.”

"Happiness is a state that is pushed away by the hand that would grasp it but that tends to accompany the person who is alive to his own being."

“The most growth-fostering purpose is one that is built on a strong foundation of a secure environment, belonging, connection, and a healthy self-esteem, and is driven by exploration and love. It requires a deep integration of many needs.”

“If you deliberately plan on being less than you are capable of being, then I warn you that you'll be deeply unhappy for the rest of your life. You will be evading your own capacities, your own possibilities.”

“Those with the quietest ego defenses often have the strongest sense of self.”

“You have to be somebody before you can be nobody.”

“Awe is an unusual and complex emotion because it mixes emotions that don't tend to go with each other, such as ecstasy and fear. Studies conducted since that 2003 paper have linked awe with increased life satisfaction, a feeling that there is more time available, increased generosity and helping, and decreased aggressive attitudes. Awe can also affect the way we perceive our bodies, leading us to underestimate their size, temporarily increase religious and spiritual feelings and actions, and temporarily increase both supernatural belief and the tendency to perceive human agency in random events.”

Maslow: “I think an unearned Paradise becomes worthless.”

“Nationalism is dead, although it doesn't know it yet.”

“Healthy transcendence is an emergent phenomenon resulting from the harmonious integration of one's whole self in the service of cultivating the good society.”

“We understood what was most important in our lives, and while we were more aware of death than ever, we were also more aware of life than ever.”

“When given a choice between living forever alone or dying prematurely surrounded by loved ones, most people choose *death*.”

“Human beings can be wonderful out of their own human and biological nature. We need not take refuge in supernatural gods to explain our saints and sages and heroes and statesmen, as if to explain our disbelief that mere unaided human beings could be that good or wise.”

“If sometimes it feels as though there are multiple personalities within you that are constantly warring with one another, well, *that's because there are multiple personalities within you that are constantly warring with one another!*”

“No one else in the entire world has as much potential to become you as you.”

“Through a lifetime of exquisitely intricate interactions among thousands of genes interacting with one another and with the environment, you make decisions that determine your existence. During the process of becoming, you still very much create yourself.”