

A Critique of Maslow's Motivation Theory with Special Reference to Human Expansion into Space

Preliminary 6

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1 Introduction

The psychological theory of Abraham Maslow, specifically the part about motivation, has been proposed to support a general thesis in favor of human expansion into outer space by Space Renaissance International. In this essay we analyze it and show how it is outdated as a general motivation theory and therefore other contributions should be considered. Moreover, we shortly examine the implications for space expansion and what further considerations should be implemented in a general vision of the future of humanity in space.

2 Maslow and the assessment of human condition

2.1 What is missing in Maslow's theory

Since the times of Maslow many things have changed in occidental psychology. We will not try to describe all its developments, leaving this to occidental professional psychologists. The main source of novelty for this essay is specifically the integration of oriental science of mind with occidental psychology.

This specific development has been inspired by organizations like the Mind and Life Institute, created by His Holiness the Dalai Lama, Adam Engle and Francisco Varela to support the meetings that have taken place since 1987 between Buddhist scholars and occidental scientists. The most recent happened in 2025 and had AI as its main topic. Among the psychologists who participated in the activities of the Institute, and then formulated non-religious studies and methods based on the integration of Buddhist and occidental science of the mind, we can cite Daniel Goleman and Jon Kabat-Zinn.

Due to the importance of Maslow as a reference for Space Renaissance, this essay will go deeper into his thought and will explain where and why it should be amended.

In "Toward a Psychology of Being" Maslow tries to establish a proposal for a whole new psychology, aiming to describe the healthy human mind instead of focusing on disturbances and illnesses and limiting to describe what is needed to explain them and to find a cure.

His attempt is courageous and goes against a large part of occidental psychology of his time. It is a pity that he is remembered mostly for the "pyramid of needs", which is sometimes used in company



Figure 1: Maslow's pyramid

courses about motivation. The pyramid comes from his book “Motivation and Personality”, which he significantly corrects and overcomes in his most significant work.

In “Toward a Psychology of Being” we can also find references to oriental culture as a significant source that has been totally neglected by westerners about the highest experiences of the human being. Nevertheless, he only starts from occidental studies, apart from his own, and oriental thought does not appear with precise references and conceptual developments. As mentioned above, in the following years these concepts have been implemented by a significant current of occidental psychology that has effectively taken into adequate consideration oriental thought. Therefore he can be considered somewhat of a precursor, and his theory needs to be integrated.

This essay does not intend to be a true completion of Maslow’s theory, but just to give some good references both to oriental science of the mind and to how it has been integrated into occidental psychology since his time.

In the analysis of human motivation and human behavior, Maslow does not even try to create a fairly complete list of all the factors that exist in the human mind. He focuses on some motivations and finds that needs coming from deprivation are quite different from motivations that are relevant to something more and beyond that. This was a weak point of “Motivation and Personality” which is overtaken in “Toward a Psychology of Being”: Maslow correctly identifies that describing, for instance, love simply from the point of view of filling a need is not enough, and he describes B-love, as well as other Being – related statuses, as opposed to D-love, which results as a reaction to deprivation. This improvement removes several faults of his previous work.

What is still missing is the analysis of afflictive motivations. It does not occur to Maslow that healthy people, not just the disturbed ones, have negative factors in their mind and this can bring them to destructive attitudes and behaviors towards themselves and the others. This is not a form of illness, but a basic condition of any mind. This topics have been deeply analyzed by Daniel Goleman, see for instance his “Destructive Emotions”.

More than that, Maslow, like all occidental psychologists of his time, did not investigate the inner work of the mental factors: how they are originated, how they evolve and cause other factors, leading in the end to specific conditions of the mind and to practical behaviors. This inattention to the inner work of the mind is a result of the behavioristic legacy, which Maslow abandoned but had obfuscated the idea that the mind has inner mechanisms that can and must be studied.

To be more specific, while it is clear that Maslow has a positive idea of “self-actualization”, he does not realize that for most people it may mean things like:

1. having power over other humans
2. being as rich as possible, which enables:
 - a. having luxurious houses
 - b. having fashionable and expensive clothes
 - c. having fine and tasty food and beverages
 - d. enjoying vacations in fashionable places
 - e. doing a lot of fashionable activities etc.
3. having sexual relations with attractive persons
4. being praised and becoming famous for whatever reason (sports, entertainment etc.)

Therefore his “Psychology of Being” is not suitable to fully understand human behavior and the negative effects that the most common human desires constantly produce when they develop in the wrong way.

2.2 Being and Self

Maslow extensively describes, with examples and considerations, what he means by *self-actualization*, which is also relevant to the concept Being and Being-related factors, starting from B-love.

He also recognizes that the Self is neither static nor determined from the beginning (birth, genetic characteristics etc.), as each person makes herself to some extent.

The “Self” in *self-actualization* seems to be waning as he describes self-actualizing experiences as weakening it and introducing a sentiment of universality and a positive attitude towards the others.

It might be said that he chose a wrong word to express the concept, where it seems that the Self is essential while it becomes less and less important as the actual meaning is explained and developed.

He also uses the specifically Buddhist term “*nirvāṇa*” (here it is spelled correctly, to remark that we refer to its original meaning and not to its popularization), unfortunately showing that he is unaware of its true meaning. He also cites Taoism, but does not explain much about his connection with it.

It can be interesting to compare his conception with the actual oriental thought.

His use of the words *Being* and *Self* can be connected mostly to Hindu schools. We can make a specific reference to the one which has the highest importance in recent orthodox Hindu thought, which is Vedanta. Some concepts, anyway, are common to other schools.

Self therefore becomes the translation of *ātman*, which also translates as *soul*. More than that, in the Upanishads and in Vedanta it is specifically intended as the fundamental inner being of the person. But it also doubles as the inner presence of the all-encompassing universal Being that is the *brahman*. Through meditation a person can reach it and find the universal in the Self. This also means that individuality gets lost in the process and the ultimate goal is the identification with the absolute Being that is universal.

Buddhism, on its side, rejects the concept of *ātman*. The existence of a permanent, unitary and independent self is considered to be an illusion. As Buddhist schools went deeper in the concept, also for the solicitation coming from the disputes of the contemporary Hindu schools, the ultimate non existence of the self was better defined as the *lack of inherent existence*, which is true both for the self and for all the phenomena and is resumed in the term *śūnyatā* (emptiness).

As Maslow used the word, it is important to clarify that *nirvāṇa* (literally: putting out by blowing) indicates the permanent liberation from all afflictions and their seeds. It is different from *bodhi* (awakening) which is a higher condition in which all cognitive obscurations are eliminated as well.

It is not the purpose of this document to go deeper in these concepts. It is enough to say that Maslow seems to confuse *nirvāṇa* with concentrative absorption, as better clarified below.

Some who have a superficial contact with Buddhism, including a large number of occidental scholars who read the texts without a full understanding of the matter and without consulting with actual Buddhist scholars, confuse this view with nihilism. This is wrong as Buddhism defines itself as the middle way between “essentialism” and nihilism. Saying that things are empty of inherent existence does not mean that they do not exist at all: they do exist conventionally and they perform their functions. A fundamental concept posited by Buddhism is that inherently existing entities cannot perform any function. It is interesting that the same concept made its way in occidental philosophy too, as the Aristotelian concept of “substance” was abandoned. It is still true, anyway, that the prevailing worldview in the West is materialism based on natural science – apart from religious currents that still adhere to the specific tenets of each church or religious community. Therefore the Aristotelian substance is still implicitly alive in the convictions of many scientists.

2.3 Peak experiences

Maslow extensively describes the mental status that can be reached through peak experiences, which include all situations where a person reaches the peak of her capacities or a specially profound immersion in a sentiment or an activity, as well as what it determines as permanent effects in personality.

In consideration of all Indian and Chinese culture and more recent occidental psychology, this is well known as the effect of concentration on a single point or task. Athletes, dancers and other performers, as well as artists and even in some case scientists can achieve a high level of concentration in their activities, which leads to better results and, at the same time, to a sense of joy and bliss going well beyond the pure satisfaction due to a good result. Similar results of blissful experience can be reached through sensorial stimulation as well as the assumption of some substances.

If we go back to oriental science of the mind, we find that it teaches methods to reach mind concentration through meditation techniques, that generally fall under the definition of meditation of concentration, serenity or simply single-point meditation – in Sanskrit *śamatha*.

These methods are common to all Asian schools and not specific of one.

Single-point meditation can be practiced in a non-specific way and it can be useful for everybody.

It is a well defined method that allows to reach the kind of experiences that Maslow describes and go further. Alan Wallace compares meditation techniques to creating an instrument and a technology to explore inner space, like a telescope can explore the stars. Everyone can do it, no exceptional capabilities are required. The results depend on effort and practice, which may be difficult to exert if you live actively in our current, hectic civilization – which means that trying it casually may be harmful, because one may not see achievements and abandon it out of disappointment.

In any case, in the Buddhist view single-point meditation is a method to calm the mind, understand it and transform it in a powerful instrument of inner exploration, but it does not bring to permanent, conclusive results in improving one's existential condition. It must be considered an essential instrument but just that.

The status described by Maslow as peak experience can be easily identified with meditative absorption, which leads to high levels of bliss and further positive experiences. To be more precise, there is a sequence of subtler and subtler absorptions, until a final topmost one is reached. This is not specifically Buddhist, as mentioned above, and it has been devised and described in detail in several books, both Buddhist and non-Buddhist.

Going beyond this point means entering another kind of meditation, which is called insight meditation or *vipassana*. This is an essentially Buddhist method, even if non-Buddhist vipassana has been proposed by some.

Meditation has been elaborated in a non-religious context by occidental psychologists, as we said in the introduction. For instance, prof. Jon Kabat-Zinn has created a program called “Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR)”, which has reached a significant diffusion.

In conclusion, Maslow's indications about peak experiences are simply incomplete. They have been developed further in psychology but above all what he describes has been known literally for millennia in the East. Defining it as “self-actualization” is somehow misleading, because it may be understood as the full development of some inner quality that is specific of each individual. The good news is that everybody has this kind of potentiality and it is not an exaltation of the individual but rather the achievement of something that is common to all humanity. It should be more precisely described as “higher mind status”.

But there is more.

First, the conditions to enable the development of mind serenity are significantly different from the lower levels of Maslow's pyramid. They are:

1. Finding a good place – this resumes all the material conditions about having food, clothing, shelter and tranquility.
2. Having few desires – that is not following all the enticements of the world...
3. Being content – that is limiting our requirements to what is really necessary
4. Simplifying one's life – that is abandoning the too many activities that steal our time
5. Keeping a pure ethical conduct
6. Avoid mind constructions – that is avoid brooding about all the things of the world and contriving ideas that only exist in our mind...

I put this list here only to clarify that in order to reach those high experiences that Maslow himself describes, apart from satisfying the basic needs we do not need to add more on the worldly side: we must do the opposite, shedding all the worries of the world, which is the logical way to concentrate on what is really important.

Second, considering the absorptions due to high levels of concentration as the highest purpose of humanity is not correct, since they are nothing else than very specific pleasant sensations. Only if they are reached through a serious mental training they can lead to truly superior results, becoming an instrument to sharpen one's mind and open the way towards a higher path, which is not the subject of this document.

2.4 Assessing the status of humanity and how to improve it

Can we use Maslow as our guide to assess the status of humanity from the psychological point of view and find a way to improve it? The answer cannot be positive, because of the missing parts of his analysis. While he explores the mind of persons with a specific attention to the development of some positive attitudes, he misses out the negative sides that lurk in everybody's mind. This can lead to the wrong assumption that fulfilling material needs is enough to enable human development to reach higher and higher results.

The lack of a thorough study of negative emotions and the inner mechanism that give rise to them causes Maslow and his followers to miss the point that material progress does not bring happiness. It is not to be dismissed, since a decent living condition is a prerequisite for any higher advancement. But if it is not accompanied by an improvement on the side of the mind it can lead to a general situation of unease, triggering destructive developments.

The status of humanity is not good and it has never been. Modern occidental culture developed the idea of "progress" and the conviction that improving the living standards can lead to general happiness. This never happened. In the XX century the same civilization caused the two largest conflicts that humanity has ever lived. After the two wars there was the economic boom, when most households enjoyed a spectacular increase in material abundance. During the second half of the XX century this improvement flattened out and started to disappear. At the same time, other parts of the world were living a different situation: the progressively got free from the domination of western powers and started their own progress. This brought a crisis in the West, which lost faith in itself and its capabilities. It became apparent that a large part of that development had been made at the expense of the Earth environment. The ensuing political struggle is now in a very worrisome phase.

The occidental civilization only focused on material development, just to realize that people were not getting happier and development itself was doing a lot of harm.

Occidental economy requires that new material needs are constantly created to foster economic growth. The economic machine always prevails on a any attempt to improve life for everybody. It is easy to see how all attempts to introduce elements of better social equality are constantly thwarted on the base of economic considerations – which usually means corporate profit. Most people are pushed at the margins and left behind. Among these difficulties, politics only looks for scapegoats to indicate

as the culprits of all that is going wrong. Leaders are not interested in improving the life of the people, they just want to seize and preserve power and find it easier to inflame conflicts that allow them to exercise unlimited power on everybody.

It is impossible to understand the deep causes of this situation without understanding how the mind works and how happiness and sorrow are produced.

This means performing a thorough investigation on human mind, based on observation and reasoning about both the outer and the inner world. Western psychology originally failed for two reasons: it focused on disturbed minds and mental illness as the only conditions to be studied, for the noble purpose of finding cures; and it applied research methodologies devised for the study of the physical world and based on the concept of “objectivity”.

Western science of nature, in fact, originated with a new method to study physics that in summary tried to look at phenomena from the point of view of the “eye of God”. The new science of nature reached an astonishing success, which obscured the fact that the exploration of the inner human world had been forgotten and could not be studied in the same way. Furthermore, the technical superiority of the European countries led to their domination on the whole planet, which seemed to imply a cultural superiority over all the other civilizations. But in fact the way to achieve real, holistic progress was to be found in oriental, Asian culture.

Oriental culture, in fact, has a very long tradition of exploration of the mind by the use of insight. The instruments needed to do this in a consistent way are generically classified as meditation techniques, which need to be accompanied with rational analysis. The Buddhist science of the mind is structured exactly like this. It is very significant that an essential part of traditional Buddhist training is logical debate along with meditation.

The essential point is that there is no way out of the woes of existence through means that only belong to this sphere of existence. If the true cause of all sorrow is not faced correctly and removed, all the negativity of life will keep manifesting forever.

This does not mean that we must disregard material aspects of life: they are not bad in themselves and Buddhism refuses asceticism: Buddha Śākyamuni tried and abandoned it because he found that it only leads to the weakening and the destruction of the body, but it does not eliminate the sorrows of life.

The unsatisfactory nature of human condition is linked to the action of the three poisons of attachment, anger and mental confusion. The current global civilization has not reduced them, on the contrary it is heavily based on their exploitation.

Attachment is constantly aroused through commercial advertisement which exerts a constant pressure on every person to increase the aspiration of being richer, more attractive, more engaged in all sorts of activities that fulfill the senses (and fill the coffers of companies).

Anger and hate are constantly used by political propaganda to get votes and support while blaming someone else for all that is not going well – which is a basic psychological process constantly present at the individual level, more and more exploited by politicians to get consensus.

Violent, hateful language that was once a characteristic of unruly individuals is now common in public speech, even of people serving important offices in institutions.

The political arena has become so full of hate that a civilized discussion is now impossible. Real problems that our civilization faces are now denied by some political parties for the sake of their quest for power. It is enough for them to blame “the others” for everything bad. If their skin has a different color or their eyes have a different contour shape it is better, so they can be easily identified and persecuted.

The constant rain of messages, advertisement, pressure through all means, but especially nowadays the so called social media, increases mind confusion and decreases the capability of each person to concentrate and be aware on what they are doing. Artificial intelligence, which is being pushed on us

to justify the huge investments that have been done for it, is adding a new level of confusion. A large number of young people are seeking moral comfort in chatbots, which creates a huge risk, as there is no mind behind a LLM and they are designed to look gentle and kind but their advice may be devastating: there have been several cases of suicide due to the mindless advice the LLMs give.

A reversal of this course requires action on the side of a moral reconstruction of the civilization.

Without entering deeply into the Buddhist vision, it is possible to say that indications good even for non-Buddhists consist in moral rules that summarize in never harming sentient beings and helping as much as possible those in need – but with the full awareness that we cannot solve all problems, save everyone forever and so on through material actions.

The global status of humanity can have temporary improvements due to specific circumstances, but they are always followed by another deterioration and there are bad things that are in any case unavoidable, like for instance aging and death. The root of the unsatisfactory situation of sentient beings stands in the afflictions they have in their minds.

The simple abundance of resources does not solve anything, as the current status of civilization shows very well: a lot of people live better than any of their ancestor did in the past, and yet minds are more perturbed than ever and terrible actions are perpetrated every single day.

Teaching people about concentration and mindfulness is a first step to bring real improvement to the condition of everybody. Bringing the minds back to reality and out of confusion, making them understand how afflicted they are by attachment and anger is essential.

In addition to that, the most comprehensive way to get out of the misery of human condition is fostering love and compassion as universal values without which no liberation from global woes is possible, and of course involves keeping these values in consideration in any moment of our lives, even if they seem to be absent at the political level in our days. These topics should be included in educational programs to introduce all people from childhood to the idea that altruism and a warm heart are the only foundation of happiness.

This indications are intended to be secular, but it is also true that all religions are founded on these concepts, which can be defined as a litmus test for them: a valid religion is one that fosters love and compassion. It is true that there are evil leaders who use religious pretexts to spread hate and violence, but this just means that their religiousness is false and pretentious. Disparaging a religion because some individuals give a false interpretation of it is as wrong as their words and actions. Much more, spreading hate against the followers of another religion is just an example of false religiousness and wrong reference to it. The Rock Edict 12 of Emperor Aśoka (III century b.C.) says, among other, that “Whoever praises his own religion, due to excessive devotion, and condemns others with the thought ‘Let me glorify my own religion,’ only harms his own religion”.

“Religious” conflicts are in fact political conflicts disguised in religious robes. We have mentioned above how political actors use hateful messages to blame others of all their misdeeds, justify their failures and get consensus. They also use falsely religious messages to do so, using religion to define the groups that they want to label as enemies. Shrewd leaders spawn wrong pseudo-religious concepts that arouse hate in poor, ignorant people and incite them to perpetrate horrible actions. But this also happens with people who are neither ignorant nor poor, but are firmly attached to their privileges and ready to support horrible actions to defend what they consider their right.

In conclusion, spreading the concept that love and compassion are fundamental is the basic concept that unifies all main philosophical and religious schools, the only possible universal message.

Material improvements are good and they must be studied as clever solutions to make life easier, but never as decisive solutions to all the sorrows of humanity. The illusion, well established in occidental society, that this can be done, has only led to further troubles and suffering. Satisfying the basic needs is enough if you can achieve inner peace and serenity.

2.5 The pyramid revisited

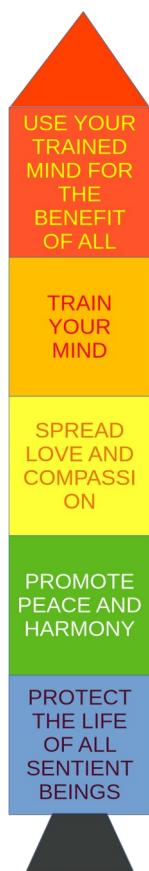


Figure 2: The rocket of altruism

In consideration of the previous two chapters, we can reach the conclusion that defining the highest purpose of humanity as “self-actualization” is not good. If we analyze Maslow’s actual concept, we can conclude that it is the highest achievement of the individual when it is considered only as self-motivated. As a minimum we should add another level above, if we want to keep a layered representation, which is the aspiration to universal altruism. It can be shortly defined as “the benefit of all sentient beings”.

The use of the expression “sentient beings” instead of just “human beings” is intended to bring true universality: the others are not only the other human beings, but all beings who can feel happiness and sorrow. We should include animals and any other entity – including synthetic minds if someday they are created and they become capable of happiness and suffering, according to the definition of “sentient being”. Just to be clear, what is currently known as AI cannot be considered sentient, but it is not possible to exclude that in the future some man-made device will become so.

More than this, the purpose of benefiting all, which we can be summarized in *love and compassion*, should not just be the top level of a pyramid, but a constant factor imbuing all levels. Therefore the whole pyramid must be revisited, changing it from the pyramid of selfishness to the rocket of altruism. The adoption of the rocket as a symbol stands for the replacement of static with a dynamic nature.

At the lowest level, of physiological needs, we can easily see how the purpose must be helping all those in desperate need of food, shelter and all the basic necessities of life. It is not possible to help all with limited means, but at least it is a moral duty to help as much as we can, both specifically and more broadly, creating the conditions of an improvement of life for all.

At the level of safety and security, first of all our duty is to do no harm to anyone, and then offer protection to those in need – not intended as taking part in fighting, but creating the conditions for a safer world, that is a peaceful environment for everybody. Fighting means taking part on one side against another, which is generally wrong, and doing harm to some. Working for peace is the only moral solution, knowing that it cannot be fully achieved purely by material means: changing the mind of everybody is the only way to ensure peace in the long term. At least, we can start from ourselves, being always kind in our action, speech and thought, which applies even more to the following level.

At the level of relations, it is easy, because love and compassion belong here. Of course they must be conceived not from the receiving end but from the giving. The natural need of being loved can be fulfilled by being the promoter, that is by loving others even without the expectation of anything in return. In every social context, from the family to the nation to the whole humanity, we must bring love and compassion, kindness and forgiving. Create organizations with this purpose in mind. Refrain from any collectively egoistic stance of “us against them”, never dividing people in enemy groups. The sheer fact of practicing this advice brings joy, and for sure it pushes the whole world in the right direction, improving everyone’s life – including ourselves.

At the level of esteem and recognition, we must dismiss all concerns about craving praise and fame and worrying about blame and bad reputation. Instead of nurturing a sense of the importance of our ego, be kind and humble, always considering the others and their point of view. Being gentle and helpful towards the others is the best way to avoid depression and self-discontent. In the figure of the

rocket this level is not indicated, since it can be considered as included partially in the previous and partially in the next.

At the top level of the original pyramid, we must understand that there is no self to be actualized. Reaching the top of our personal qualities means training our mind to be concentrated on whatever we do and analyze ourselves to find how we can do better and better whatever we do, always considering the benefit of others and not just our own. Peak experiences last for a moment, the correct goal is to change our mind to achieve serenity and true happiness consistently and durably.

A further level must be added, as the purpose of doing our best (the previous top level) must not be individual. A good name can be “universal loving kindness and compassion”, but in the figure it is indicated in the form of “using your trained mind for the benefit of all”, to underline the concept that mind training is not just done for one’s personal purpose. Those who believe in a theistic religion may find a reference to God, while the non-theistic and the non-religious are not required to.

3 Improving life for everyone – what will our future in space be like?

3.1 Why we need to go to space

In the current situation of the planet Earth, it has become impossible to ensure a decent life to all the inhabitants: humanity is already exploiting more than that the planet can regenerate, as the global environmental footprint calculations show. A large number of humans still live in poverty, many suffer the consequence of wars and man-made scarcity and even in the most “developed” countries a large number cannot afford the best cures when they are ill and a decent life when they grow old and need assistance.

Animals suffer as well: the domestic ones exploited by humans in extreme ways (like intensive farming) and the wild ones forced out of their living areas and pushed to extinction.

The fulfillment of basic needs for all sentient beings is the basis of the pyramid, and the introduction of universal compassion transforming the pyramid into the rocket only increases the urgency to ensure it.

We cannot solve this by simply reducing the living standards of humans, because most of them do not enjoy luxurious lives: quite the opposite! Population increase is naturally slowing down, but we are already exercising an excessive pressure with our number and our current technology and way of life. Expanding our civilization out of the Earth is a necessity. It would allow us to move environmentally impacting activities out of the planet, stop the exploitation of mineral resources which leads to the devastation of the territory – and of course is not sustainable in the long run, because these resources do not regenerate. This includes first of all fossil fuels like coal, oil and gas, but it concerns as well all elements required now for the manufacturing of electrical and electronic components, whose demand is increasing steeply due to the development of renewable energy sources and the electrification of transport and industry, which is taking place exactly to reduce the use of fossil fuels.

These elements are available in abundance in the asteroids. Just one metallic asteroids contains more metals than humanity has used in all history.

As some population starts moving to space, agricultural techniques devised to be used in space can be brought to Earth too, increasing the efficiency of food production and reducing land use. Recycling methods that are indispensable in space can be used on Earth for the same purpose, with great benefit of the environment.

These are the good reasons to foster space industrialization and settlement. In the short run it will not impact population, but later on it will, as larger and larger habitats are built off-Earth.

3.2 The bright and the dark side

In consideration of what we have mentioned in the previous chapters, we must also consider that just going to space or doing anything else on the material side is not enough.

Improving the living conditions of other beings on the material side is a commendable purpose and is worth to be pursued, as we mentioned above, but there is the absolute need of adding the mental (or spiritual if you like the word) element, otherwise failure is ensured.

Material progress brings some individuals to exploit it to accumulate power and riches beyond any limit, because their self is only satisfied with superiority and domination: after all, what is the pleasure of being rich and powerful if you have no one beneath you?

Others will simply try to enjoy sensual pleasures, only to find that they become boring and require more and more stimulation, which may result in the massive use of alcohol and recreational drugs, or looking for other experiences in virtual worlds, as technology is offering more and more. All this often leads to depression and suicidal attitudes, because in the end it becomes clear that all material satisfactions are not satisfactory at all, you get bored of them and always need more of the same or something different just for change, which may end with a total disappointment with life.

Just a few will be explorers and scientists, using technology in the endless search for further knowledge, or artists and musicians. All these activities can produce joy and satisfaction but they may be sources of disappointment and sorrow too. Some artists may be mature enough to elaborate their failures and feel satisfaction even at the end of their life, but others may suffer from that. Imagine a painter losing the use of his hands, a musician becoming deaf: if they have a higher purpose they can enjoy life anyway, but if they only had their art, they might consider suicide. On the other side, it often happens that artists and creators live in poverty and produce masterpieces while they are struggling to feed themselves or are involved in harsh situations.

The overview effect is often cited as a source of inspiration: several astronauts have described how the sight of the Earth from space is inspiring, showing how our planet is beautiful as well as small and fragile. But how much is it due to the fact that astronauts, until now, have been a selected, small minority of people whose interest for space had always been very strong? Some said that the sight of void is frightening. I suspect that when traveling in space becomes common, most passengers will simply watch movies or scroll their smartphones without paying any attention to what is out of the window. The same happened with air flight: the first aviators and passengers of the early '900 were enthusiasts, but now most airline passengers do not even bother to have a window view!

I am also afraid that power thirsty leaders may spoil the life of all the others as well in space as on Earth, using the resources liberated by technology to create a hell instead of a paradise even in outer space. A large population, arguably the majority, will just get lost in the endless and meaningless search for more pleasant stimulation, which technology would probably satisfy better through virtual worlds rather than space travel. Power craving individuals can exploit the desires of the majority just to satisfy their own thirst for domination. AI can only increase this trend.

3.3 Some history and some perspective

What is described above is exactly what has been going on since industrialization allowed a significant part of humanity to enjoy a higher living standard. If we consider the economic and social history of Europe and USA, we can see that while technology initially allowed a substantial improvement of well-being for a large number of people, especially in the years of the post-war economic boom, in the last decade of the XX century this process halted and since then we have assisted to increasing inequality and exploitation of both people and resources for the sake of a

minority. The concentration of wealth in an ever reducing number of extremely rich people is apparent nowadays. Technology is used to increase control by the powerful while the living standard of the majority is actually decreasing.

In Asia the trend is different: when the west started declining China, India and several countries of South-East Asia started to improve their living standards. A large number of people (numerically many more than in the West) emerged from poverty and formed a new middle class. This happened as manufacturing activities moved from occidental countries to Asia in search of cheaper labor, but it evolved into a general growth that created better jobs and increased the living conditions of many. Something like it had happened in the occidental countries over a longer stretch of time, from the XIX to the XX century. As industrial development is advancing, Asian countries have been moving from low to high technology and this process is nearing completion: they have already taken the technological lead in several fields and are quickly catching up in the last sectors where the West is still leading. How much is this due to cultural differences? The parallel with the West is not fully true and would need a deep discussion.

In any case, they are now gradually starting to do what is logically needed: as further growth on this planet becomes more and more difficult, they have started industrial development in space in their calm but steady way. China is now taking the lead, not by chance, both in space and in the protection of the environment on Earth, in a rational, planned way. India is still somehow lagging, but it is taking the same path with increasing determination.

The West is also starting a new space age, in a different way. Some industrial leaders are simply aiming to increase their profit as well as their ego, while political leaders look for more power for themselves and their nations instead of the benefit of all. They will keep doing in space what they have been doing on Earth for a very long time.

That is why, for instance, militarization of space has been practiced since the beginning of space age, as the purposes of the first satellites were communication (which is dual use) and spying. In that time, the race was taking place between two superpowers both strongly rooted in occidental culture, even if there were two versions of it.

If we go back to the dawn of space age, it is easy to see how space pioneers who were actually aiming for higher goals were forced to accept and even actively search the help of political and military power, to ensure the resources they needed to go beyond some nice small experiments.

The first satellites were declared to have scientific purposes, but spying on enemy territory was considered by the leaders of the two superpowers as the main motivation to make them. At the same time, the main political motivation of the space race was national prestige. Being the first to perform something in space was considered essential for the show, while military purposes were pursued more or less in secret. The Soviet Union enjoyed a long sequence of space firsts: first satellite, first man in space, first docking, first spacewalk, first woman in space. The only way for the USA to overtake them was to be first on the next finish line: the Moon. While scientists and space enthusiasts saw it as a great advancement for humanity, the US government had the Apollo program concentrate on getting to the Moon as soon as possible. Von Braun and his fellows were already devising new brilliant developments, but the hard reality was that the US government started de-funding NASA even before the first lunar landings. The last three missions to the Moon were canceled, as well as all the plans for establishing a lunar base, large space stations and voyages to Mars.

As the political interest dwindled human spaceflight barely survived those cuts and the Moon remained a lonely place, while the great pioneers had to retreat with their wonderful projects reduced to impossible dreams and nice papers. The end of the cold war only marked the definitive closure of the space race, which in fact had closed much earlier. Governments were just interested in developing communications and surveillance devices, which did not require crews on board. The expansion devised by space pioneers was dismissed.

Some activity in space remained just for the sake of saving companies and jobs. Since each nation was not willing to invest too much in space, international cooperation was found as the only way to go on within the meager available budgets – for sure the action of space advocates has always been behind this. The Apollo-Soyuz mission had already prefigured this development.

The International Space Station became the largest international space project ever. This was for sure a positive circumstance, but the ISS was also something like a last outpost, allowing human presence in space to barely survive while losing all the development opportunities that were already clear in the 1970s and even before.

Returning to more recent years, the new space age started in the XXI century when private initiative took over, led by entrepreneurs that declared to be motivated by the greatest benefit of humanity. Unfortunately it seems that at least some were and are only led by their own bloated ego: their only purpose is to “self-actualize” becoming the most important persons of the universe while disparaging and crushing all those who they perceive as opponents to the exaltation of their own personality. It must be said that some still declare higher goals and we hope they are sincere and they may behave like the XIX century industry leaders that financed most of the largest astronomical observatories (check the names of the observatories: most of them were privately funded and took the name of the benefactor).

In the light of our previous analysis this is not a surprise at all. We cannot just complain, for instance, about the militarization of space and try to stop it by imposing rules which nobody would accept: we cannot succeed if we are not able to analyze why it is happening and find clever ways to stop it. Space flight has always been the theater of a difficult cohabitation of enthusiasts, scientists, politicians, military leaders and billionaires.

It is still true that expansion towards outer space can be done for the benefit of all humanity and all sentient beings in general, and it can be very useful to improve the living conditions of all. But it is not true that expansion into space will improve the behavior of humans by itself. It may well happen the opposite: humanity may well expand into space bringing all the negativity there. In fact, it is already happening to a significant extent. Cooperation in space is waning as each nation and private organization go on their own. The ISS used to be an example of international cooperation in space, but now it is becoming clear that it will have no international successor and it will be replaced by privately owned stations for the US side and national stations of other countries – China already has its own and India is planning one.

It is clear that space development is starting concurrently and not in a cooperative way between USA, China and India. It seems that even Japan is taking its own way.

In the current international political environment it is perfectly possible that a fight will be put up for a piece of ice on the Moon, as we are seeing that someone has started a controversy for a piece of frozen land here on Earth. The first nations or companies that seize a significant amount of space resources will try to amass as much as possible and fight those who they perceive as potential competitors and enemies. Some materials are easier to get and everybody will concentrate on them: the amount of water on the Moon, for instance, is not well known but for sure the easily accessible part is not large and a conflict about it is perfectly possible. In fact it has already started: both the USA and China are planning missions to the South pole of the Moon and their motivation to go there is mainly to avoid that the other arrives first.

As human motivations are mostly afflicted by negative factors, the consideration that resources are abundant and it is not intelligent to fight for them is not enough and it is not even true in the (very) short term. Easily available resources are not so abundant and unfortunately most political and industrial leaders only see the very short term – at least in the West. But in general the leaders whose motivation is power and control over the majority do want constant conflicts, actual or just threatened, to justify their domination and to subdue their competitors. They will try to bring a conflicting attitude

into space activities as their purpose is to expand their own insatiable thirst for power wherever humanity goes. This is due to their inner afflictive motivations. The ongoing controversy about Greenland is a good example of how it is possible to generate a conflict without any serious reason. That is why we should avoid naive visions of a wonderful future that will never happen if we do not actively work to create it.

3.4 True quality of life

The only indication that we can give now is to start immediately looking for a way to do in space what has sometimes been tried but never accomplished on Earth: not just expanding the current civilization, but deliberately creating a new one, solidly based on principles that are present in all human beings but have been overwhelmed by the destructive ones in history. Outer space may be the place where this can happen, if these factors are considered since the beginning and embedded in the minds of the first space settlers.

Progress in outer space requires and does not grant progress in inner space. As we advocate expansion into space, we must at the same time advocate mind education and training as the basis of the future human civilization in space.

Space Renaissance is now focusing on “quality of life”.

Quality of life means first of all inner peace and warm-heartedness. No improvement in living conditions can effectively improve the quality of life without inner satisfaction. The analysis of human mind shows that material progress without mind progress only causes new kinds of dissatisfaction. Living in a nice place can help of course, but it is not enough and it bears inside the seeds of egoism and conflict.

Inner satisfaction is strictly linked to altruism. Not receiving but first of all giving loving kindness and compassion is the key, as mentioned above and made explicit with the invention of the rocket of altruism.

As a consequence, it is very important, for instance, that material quality is perceived as shared good and not as personal luxury. Whatever we do, must be done with the benefit of all and not just of someone (ourselves) in mind.

If at least some of the future space settlements can introduce these principles it will be a huge success, otherwise history will go on as it has always done till now.

Politicians in democratic countries may be sensitive to an appeal to the introduction of a program of positive mind development to be installed in space communities.

Religious institutions should promote it, maybe even in a non-confessional or multi-confessional format.

Educational institutions, specifically the academic world in the fields of philosophy, psychology and medicine could be involved.

Some industrial leader may be interested in covering the role of munificent benefactor.

All leaders are subject to the same negative forces that affect every human, and they are by definition more affected by self-centered aspirations, otherwise they could not reach roles like theirs. But this does not mean that virtuous motivations are not present in them: positive factors are there in everyone, and even the most selfish people can evolve. At least the aspiration to fame and glory can be exploited to reach goals of common interest, since intelligent leaders understand that well recognized public accomplishments add to their so desired “greatness”.

No one has the power to steer the whole civilization, neither billionaires nor heads of state, but maybe a seed planted in space can survive and grow from something little. The first communities in space will be necessarily small and composed of selected people. If our space dream can turn into reality,

those communities will grow not just as an expansion of the current civilization but a new one. At least, this can include institutions that favor the highest values.

The summary of this essay is that human life can improve in space only if positive values are actively fostered, it will not do it automatically for the simple fact that humanity is going to space. The opportunity to create a better future is there, but it requires a deliberate effort to be caught.

If this opportunity is lost, be prepared then for space wars and space empires, as some science fiction has been describing for many years.

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