

PRIMER EXEMPLAR

SELF-ACTUALISATION VS. SELF-DENIAL

“Self actualisation is the intrinsic growth of what is already in the organism, or more accurately of what the organism is” Abraham Maslow¹.

“If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross and follow me” Jesus Christ²

PART 1:

- The concept of self-theory is widely popular, secular and humanistic. Paul Vitz calls it, “*cult*” or “*religion*”³.
- In last few decades man has driven to seek affirmation of “self”. Encouragement is given to *look inward*, “*What ever the mind can conceive man can achieve*” – a very popular quote used in management/team building programmes.
- Man has the power to be who he wants to be.
- All fields of psychology have been affected by humanistic theories of self: behavioural therapists use self-actualising/self-esteem philosophies. Educational psychologists too use these ideals for building children to be *self-actualised*. Occupational Psychology in their management/industry/organisation work uses the theory of self-actualisation and looking inward for power and self-expression and esteem.

Unpacking self-actualisation/self-theory:

Group to brainstorm types of self e.g. self esteem, self acceptance etc after which using these as examples unpack the concept of self theory using some of the major theorists that most Universities use in Psychology courses!

Looking at the major theorists:

- **Maslow** postulates a hierarchy of human needs. Hierarchy which is innate and whose needs will have to be satisfied in a fixed order starting with basic needs of physiological/safety and ending with self-realisation (actualisation)
- **Fromm** sees man as intrinsically good, society is evil. Self has the potential for growth and expression; “*Not self-renunciation nor selfishness but the affirmation of his truly human self, are the supreme values of humanistic ethics*”⁴
- **Roger’s** position has become highly influential. A central work for him was his book *On Becoming a Person*. His work is oriented towards therapy, which he interprets as being a process of the changing and growing self. He sees therapy as

¹ Maslow, A (1970) *Motivation and Personality*, 2nd Ed. New York: Harper

² *Matt 16:24*

³ Vitz, P C (1994) *Psychology as religion (the cult of self-worship)* Carlisle: Paternoster Press

⁴ Fromm, E (1947) *Man for Himself* New York: Rinehart

a seven-stage process⁵: “*Individual’s move, I began to see, not from a fixity or homeostasis through change to a new fixity, through such a process is indeed possible. But much the more significant continuum is from fixity to changingness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process.*” At the seventh stage of Rogerian therapy – the highest stage man is finally, “*...a unity of flow or motion...has become an integrated process of changingness*”⁶

PART 2:

Unpacking Self-Denial (again for group to discuss)

1. Is there a problem with this from a Christian standpoint?
2. What was Jesus’ view of human progress and fulfilment?

PART 3:

Questions:

1. As Psychologists we have many standardised tests, for looking at concepts, personalities etc. Therefore if each person determines the standard by which they measure “self”, could it then be argued we are scrutinising “self” with “self”?
2. If you have answered YES to the above do you believe that measuring “self” with “self” is a valid/reliable way for measurement that we can stand by as Christians. Or, are we encouraging an “if I am ok with “self” for me, you cannot tell me I am wrong” attitude, thereby creating social anarchy?
3. Is there a way we can reconcile the Psychology theory of “self” with our Christian theory of “self”?
4. Carl Rogers argues that unconditional positive regard occurs when the client “*perceives himself in such a way that no self-experience can be discriminated as more or less worthy of positive regard than any other*”⁷. Paul Vitz suggests that such a statement is completely at odds with the Christian doctrine of original sin⁸. As Christian Psychologists do we feel that in encouraging “self-actualisation”/“Unconditional Positive Regard in our clients we are upholding “self-love” as opposed to “God-Love”?

⁵ Rogers, C (1961) *On Becoming a Person*, p. 131, Boston: Houghton Mifflin

⁶ Rogers, C (1961) *On Becoming a Person*, p.158

⁷ Rogers, C (1959) A Theory of therapy, Personality and Interpersonal Relationships as Developed in the Client Centred Framework. In Vitz, P C (1994) *Psychology as Religion (the cult of self-worship)* Carlisle: Paternoster Press

⁸ Vitz, P C (1994) *Psychology as Religion (the cult of self-worship)* p.109 Carlisle: Paternoster Press