

SR REVIEWS

Books

The Potential of Normality

BY JOYCE CAROL OATES

THE FARTHER REACHES OF HUMAN NATURE

by Abraham H. Maslow
Viking/Esalen, 423 pp., \$12.50

It will come as a stunning surprise to most people—and to artists, geniuses, and saints especially—that “artists,” “geniuses,” and “saints” are as natural, as normal, as much a result of human instincts as are murderers and vandals and the enormous army of the sorrowful that make up so much of America today. To be told that Nietzsche may have been right—that “man is something that must be overcome”—and to have it backed up by empirical and demonstrable proof is so startling that few people will grasp it, let alone accept it. But it is becoming dramatically clear that we are in the midst of a revolution of some kind, and it will do no good to reject it, to stand clear of it, or to claim that it is imaginary.

If Nietzsche is the invisible prophet behind this revolution in consciousness, the late Abraham H. Maslow was and, through his writings, is the very visible, very articulate, very American spokesman for it—a psychologist, a teacher (he chaired the Department of Psychology at Brandeis University), a tough-minded philosopher whose books give us the vocabulary for a new assessment of the world. Like most geniuses, Maslow is humble, so conscious of his “self” as absorbed in a timeless tradition of “selves” that he

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transcends the merely personal, the parochial, the self-limiting squabbles that characterize many of today's “schools of thought” or “spokesmen for the coming revolution.” It is not very helpful to say that Maslow is a Freudian psychologist, one who has built upon Freud's enormous re-evaluation of the world, or that he is a behavioral psychologist who has grown up, or that he is a philosopher of science, a theoretician whose method is never to invoke anything beyond the human. He includes everything in himself, immensely eclectic and spontaneous, a thinker in the tradition of Hegel: that is, a man who accepts as his role in human history the task of synthesizing almost all dichotomies, conflicting visions of the world and of human nature.

When Blake says, “The desire of Man being Infinite, the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite,” or when Nietzsche insists that man must “become” what he already is, or—to be more topical—when such a controversial thinker as R. D. Laing insists that the “mystical” experience is available in ordinary experience, the reaction of the average person even or especially the average intelligent person is to read no further. But Maslow, in his numerous books and in this collection of his essays (his first posthumous publication), does not speak poetically or idiosyncratically, and it is difficult to imagine anyone not reading straight through *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* with that excited delight that comes only a few times in one's life, the hope and eventually the certainty that *here* is a truly remarkable voice, a voice that has not been heard before.

If pressed to distill Maslow's thinking, to make it as clear as possible, I would say that he has rerouted the downward, inward, deathly movement of consciousness in our time (in the West, anyway) and made available to us a scientific and demonstrable structure to support the beliefs most people

already have, somewhat apologetically believing them to be the products of primitive wishes or inverted aggression: the ideals of the great religions, the nearly exhausted platitudes of nations. He has not exactly stood on its head the traditional concept of the “normal” and the “abnormal,” an act of violence in itself that other spokesmen for the newer consciousness are fecklessly performing; he has, instead, offered to show how the concept of normality must be redefined in terms of the highest of human achievements—the “farther reaches of human nature,” and not the “nearer,” the “average,” the “ordinary.”

It is a revelation to be told that the ostensibly abnormal among us, saints as well as artists and geniuses, are in fact *normal*, that the Freudian model of a human psychology that tended to interpret extraordinary behavior as the manifestation of deep-seated neuroses or disorder is mistaken. For, if the Freudian model of the “normal” is accepted, as it has been, consciously or unconsciously, by nearly everyone, then the individuals who fall outside that category, whether they happen to be mass murderers or Dostoevsky, must be diagnosed as sick, as unnatural, as somehow freakish. In this scheme there is a central area inhabited presumably by most people (the statistical “average”) who are good citizens or who are at least silent about their eccentricities. Outside this area is the pathological: shadowy, exciting, sinister, wild, crazy, unclassifiable except as different. For Freud the Unconscious, the id, is generally an ungovernable and dangerous area, a place of nightmares or nightmarish possibilities, and those who enter it even to give a shape to it are risking sanity. For Maslow, however, the Unconscious is the source of our higher energies, a sacred reservoir of the self that can be, at times, unhealthy, but that in the end must be recognized as life giving and essentially beneficial to man.

The saint, then, is simply a normal human being who has grown beyond the rest of us. But he is "beyond" the rest of us only in the sense that he has been able to satisfy his instincts for sainthood, for what Maslow calls "specieshood," while the rest of us are held back—because of an unhealthy environment, or an unhealthy misuse of natural energies and instincts, or, what may be very commonplace, a fear of exploring "farther" reaches, since we have been told all our lives how dangerous, crazy, Faustian, or simply impractical such exploration might be. While accepting the deterministic facts of life on lower levels (especially the biological), Maslow insists upon the basic freedom of man's will. But it is a freedom that becomes possible only after other needs, other demands of the species have been satisfied: This makes all the difference indeed, setting Maslow apart from the self-righteous flippancy of those who exhort the weak to "be" strong, to "be" virtuous, and from the grim determinists who insist that we are all programmed, conditioned, and predictable. Maslow's work constitutes a heroic synthesis of preceding psychological theories of human nature.

This liberates us not only from the old terrors of rising above the "normal" multitude but from the newer, more fashionable infatuation with the energies of destruction. Most contemporary writers, if they bother to explore the human condition at all, concentrate upon the paradox that the unnormal are more interesting, more exciting, because they seem to be asserting their own energies in opposition to all restraints—as Mailer says, only a few individuals, "among them psychopaths," are able to remain independent of the anonymous prevailing forces of a great corporate state. Naturally, one must be "psychopathic," almost by definition, to move individually through a crowd that seems headed in the other direction. But what if the criminal, so long glorified in contemporary fiction and popular entertainment, is diagnosed as an individual whose instincts for self-transcendence have simply been stunted, an individual who is basically bored, played out, exhausted, and not possessed of an enviable energy after all? Nietzsche says of the criminal that he is "a strong man made weak," and Maslow shows that this is correct.

The Farther Reaches of Human Nature gives us the outline, then, for a conscious reconstruction of values. It is Maslow's belief that man wills his own future, that the "future" is in his being as powerfully as the past. If this

assumption is correct, then it is possible for that controversial (indeed, confused) vision of America's "greening" to become reality after all.

But the delight of Maslow's writing is Maslow's voice itself. The best introduction to Maslow is any representative remark, any stereotype-breaking paragraph:

I am convinced that the value-free, value-neutral, value-avoiding model of science that we inherited from physics, chemistry, and astronomy, where it was necessary and desirable to keep the data clean and also to keep the church out of scientific affairs, is quite unsuitable for the scientific study of life.

I must reassert that we have come to the point in biological history where we now are responsible for our own evolution. We have become self-evolvers. Evolution means selecting and therefore choosing and deciding, and this means valuing.

The value-life (spiritual, religious, philosophical, etc.) is an aspect of human biology and is on the same continuum with the "lower" animal life (rather than being in separated, dichotomized, or mutually exclusive realms). It is probably therefore specieswide and supracultural, even though it must be actualized by culture in order to exist.

If there is no adult value system (i.e., if parents cannot or will not prescribe modes of behavior, if the father wants to be a "pal" to his children, etc.), then a child or adolescent value system will be embraced. Juvenile delinquency (so called) is an example of such a . . . system.

The antagonism between the sexes is largely a projection of the unconscious struggle *within* the person, between his or her masculine and feminine components.

Facts create oughts!

Maslow exhibits a fascinating combination of humility and self-confi-

dence, of a faithfulness to the plodding, minute, rigorous methods of science and the sudden, unchartable leap, the inexplicable insight, of the artist. He speaks, always, in his own voice, outlining for his readers not only his discoveries and his pathways to those discoveries but also the initial, personal reasons for his having made his iconoclastic explorations. The result is a kind of autobiographical sequence of experience, never far from Maslow as a living, existing, socially concerned human being.

It is immensely revealing, for instance, to learn that Maslow's entire research in what he calls "humanistic biology" sprang from his love and admiration for two of his teachers, Ruth Benedict and Max Wertheimer. "I could not be content simply to adore," Maslow says, "but sought to understand why these two people were so different from the run-of-the-mill people in the world." While most psychologists are fascinated with disease, with the malfunctioning human being (indeed, one has to be "sick" in order to interest such people), Maslow's highly energetic curiosity was whetted by the more-than-ordinary. Since his training in orthodox psychology did not equip him for understanding these teachers of his, he had to start inventing his own "psychology," his own vocabulary, using behavioral and Freudian and Adlerian methods as far as they would take him, then building upon them (*not* rejecting them), until decades later he arrives at his "Theory Z," in which he attempts nothing less than an analysis of the transcending individual. What began as a young intellectual's fascination with two persons who were both geniuses and excellent human beings ended with a mature, highly confident scientist's explorations into the area

Abraham H. Maslow—"The ostensibly abnormal among us . . . are in fact 'normal.'"



that has traditionally been considered mystical—"mystical," hence not "scientific."

There is so much in *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* that it is hard to do justice to it, or even, for that matter, to the challenge of Maslow's amazingly fertile mind; his combining of teacher, seer, reporter, physician, visionary, social planner, critic; his ambition in tying together all varieties of apparently unrelated phenomena; his unstoppable optimism. Maslow's lifelong emphasis on the importance of man's subjective life leads us again to the realization (so clear in imaginative literature, so muddled elsewhere) that it is here, in the soul, inside the fantastically complex phenomenon of man, that the salvation of the entire world will take place. Maslow comes at a time when he is most needed, when the cry for "Revolution" is either hysterical or enfeebled, murderous or stereotyped and banal, in any case impotent.

The essays that make up *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature* were selected in 1969 by Maslow himself. After his death (of a heart attack) in June 1970, the book was edited without many revisions and includes a useful general introduction to Maslow's work by Henry Geiger. Papers are included on such subjects as "Health and Pathology," "Creativeness," "Education," "Transcendence and the Psychology of Being," "Some Parallels Between Sexual and Dominance Behavior of Infrahuman Primates and the Fantasies of Patients in Psychotherapy"—the last-named being worth the price of the entire book. In addition to *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, these earlier works of Maslow's are highly recommended: *Toward a Psychology of Being*, *Eupsychian Management*, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*, and *Motivation and Personality*. □

FREE AND FEMALE: The Sex Life of the Contemporary Woman
by Barbara Seaman
Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 288 pp., \$6.95

THE NATURE AND EVOLUTION OF FEMALE SEXUALITY
by Mary Jane Sherfey, M.D.
Random House, 188 pp., \$5.95

Reviewed by Caroline Bird

A sexy man is a man who wants a lot of orgasms. A sexy woman, on the other hand, is a woman who looks

ready to give them to him. Of course, she can have orgasms of her own, and, especially these days, a decent man keeps her in mind. But when all is said and done, her deepest satisfaction comes from his.

This, at least, is the way it is in the "marriage" manuals, including best-selling, everything-you've-always-wanted-to-know-about-sex Dr. Reuben. Autonomous, "masculine" women—the aggressive sort sometimes billed as "sexless bitches"—have long suspected that they were having more orgasms than the "feminine," sexy-looking women pictured in pinups. Kinsey confirmed the superior sexual response of educated, professional, "masculine" women, but nobody knew what to do with that information. Back in the 1950s it was just another embarrassing fact of life that didn't fit the prevailing theory.

Actually, of course, there wasn't any good theory of female sexuality. Freud taught that females who had their orgasms in the clitoris were infantile; normal women had them in the vagina. But he confessed himself mystified, and with good reason. In the absence of laboratory study, physiologists had to go by their own personal experiences with women, plus their theories of what women were, or ought to be, like. And since most of these physiologists and psychologists were men, all reared to believe that the sexuality of women was designed to satisfy the lusts of men, à la Reuben, their accounts of the sexual responses of women were about as scientific as the anatomy taught by medieval schoolmen who wouldn't go near a cadaver.

We're ready to do better. Masters and Johnson have made color movies of human sexual intercourse. The women's liberation movement has challenged the notion that women exist for men. More importantly, the movement has raised the consciousness of women psychiatrists and scientists to the male bias in the anatomy they were taught in school.

The first theory based on these revolutions is at hand, and it displaces males as the prime movers in sexuality the way Copernicus displaced the planet Earth. Women are naturally sexier than men—under normal circumstances, actually insatiable. Nymphomania should be redefined, not as a pathology, but as the normal, primitive state of woman. Two quite different liberated women bear the news.

Caroline Bird is the author of *The Invisible Scar*, *Born Female*, and, most recently, *The Crowding Syndrome: Learning to Live with Too Much and Too Many*.

Barbara Seaman is a medical reporter (*The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*). Her book is the easier of the two to read. In *Free and Female* she explains that women have more "sexy tissue" than men, but that it's been ignored because it's hidden. "The external clitoris is merely the tip of the iceberg or (more accurately) the volcano." And, unlike in males, sexual experience increases the volume of sexually responsive tissue, so that "the more a woman does, the more she can, and the more she can, the more she wants to." No wonder men fear nymphomaniacs!

Dr. Mary Jane Sherfey is a practicing New York psychiatrist. Her book, *The Nature and Evolution of Female Sexuality*, is the first installment of a comprehensive theory that will account for new and neglected old data on the physiology, psychology, evolution, and anthropology of the female sexual response. Noting that premenstrual tension, year-round mating, and orgasm appear to be exclusive to human females, she intends to spend what can only be the rest of her life showing "that these three uniquely human characteristics are related to each other and are the result of the evolution of man from the quadrupedal to the bipedal posture, and with the development of man's other unique characteristics, resulted in the human mating system."

Dr. Sherfey got started on her quest by reading up on premenstrual tension. This led to her questioning why menstrual periods at all, and from there into the contradictory and uncharted literature on human female sexuality in general. She found the record littered with evidence that male researchers had cast aside. One was the endocrinological evidence that the Book of Genesis had it the wrong way around: Adam was created out of Eve. According to the "male inductor theory" promulgated in 1957 and since ignored, embryos all start out female and become male only by the addition of male hormones. The penis is merely an androgenized clitoris.

Another discovery was the report by Masters and Johnson on the clitoris. "It was truly a Eureka experience for me," Dr. Sherfey writes. "This is it! Freud was wrong. Men were wrong. Women were wrong. Common sense was wrong. There was no such thing as the vaginal orgasm as heretofore conceived. Now the way was open. I went home and started writing that night."

An editor of *Family Circle* and wife of a psychiatrist, Barbara Seaman ap-