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## Strange Bedfellows: Abraham Maslow as Defender of Human Rights Violations, Jiang Zemin as Humanist

IBPP Editor  
bloomr@erau.edu

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Abstract. This article describes an instance in which humanistic psychological theory supports the rationale for behavior frequently linked with human rights violations.

One of the most popular humanistic theories of human motivation is that of Abraham Maslow. His hierarchy of needs theory posits that the most significant needs are those that are extremely pressing and basic to survival. These needs must be satisfied before less-pressing needs begin to motivate human behavior. Needs, then, form a hierarchy from those of physiology (e.g., hunger and thirst), safety (e.g., shelter), belonging (e.g., social network, love), and esteem (e.g., respect from others) to self-actualization (e.g. arts, altruistic behavior).

As opposed to the lower needs, the last in the hierarchy, self-actualization, is a growth need to expand and develop one's many potentialities, not a deficiency need to fill a lack of something. Maslow wrote that very few individuals are ever freed from the lower needs of the needs hierarchy to significantly pursue the moral, ethical, social, aesthetic, and cultural aspects of self-actualization. Yet his work is cited as an exemplar of the humanistic psychology tradition that supports what humans can become.

Jiang Zemin, President of the People's Republic of China (PRC), employed the humanistic argument in comments during his recent trip to the United States. To defend the PRC position on human rights, he stated "As a developing country of 1.2 billion people, China's very reality determines that the right of subsistence and development is the most fundamental and most important human right in China. Before adequate food and clothing is insured for the people, the enjoyment of other rights would be out of the question." Here Jiang clearly ascribes the most basic needs to physiology and safety just as Maslow does. One might quickly note that the Confucian emphasis on order--also a safety need and one often advanced by Chinese authorities to defend the killings of pro-democracy demonstrators during 1989 at Tiananmen Square--is comprised within the safety need as well. Human rights as a concept can be most easily placed within the highest need of self-actualization. As the highest need, human rights may be the most highly valued and most human in the sense of Shakespeare's Hamlet, who states "What is a man/If his chief good and market of his time/Be but to sleep and feed? A beast, no more./Sure he that made us with such large discourse,/Looking before and after, gave us not/That capability and godlike reason/To fust in us unus'd." Unfortunately, as the highest need human rights are also the last to be fulfilled, not only according to Chinese theories of government, but also to humanistic theories of psychology. As attributed to Confucius, "The ruler administers the way of heaven and earth and assists the proper balance of heaven and earth, thereby helping the people." With help like that who needs harm? (See Confucius. (1992/c. 500 B.C.). Analects. San Francisco: Harper, Book of Change 11, pp. 34-35; Maslow, A. (1970.) Motivation and personality (2nd Ed.). NY: Harper & Row; Mitchell, A. (October 31, 1997). China's leader is rebuked by U.S. legislators on human rights. The New York Times, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Shakespeare, W. (1994/c. 1600). Hamlet. NY: Routledge. (ll. 33-39.)) (Keywords: Human Rights, Motivation, Typology.)