

Humans needs can in
some ways, but not

Environment



Humans inherently yearn for a moment in their lives where they have reached their fullest potential. Whether achieved or failed, this realization is perceived to be the sole purpose for living.

Every thought, action, and emotion in human nature is driven by the instinctive characteristics of humans to make something more of life, other than survival. A philosophy claimed by Maslow, and evidently present in Cormack McCarthy's *The Road*, this novel illuminates Maslow's theory as McCarthy eloquently gives life to this post-apocalyptic setting, and the nameless father and son his work is centered on. The book follows the pair's challenging journey to the East coast in hopes of a more profitable and sane locale in which to attempt to survive.

Applicable to this story, Maslow's hierarchy of needs can in some ways, but not all, be found in the struggling lives of the man and his boy. In order to reach "self-actualization" to fit Maslow's terms, the man and boy must find themselves attaining each step of the hierarchy prior to, and in the end, realizing they have become the fullest version of themselves. Although they may complete some of the deficit-needs, or possibly all of them, most of those completed are fulfilled in each other and are done so at the lowest capacity. How can they reach their fullest potential when the world they inhabit holds no avenues for progression or thriving? It is not necessary in this post-apocalyptic setting McCarthy prescribes the man and boy, to achieve self-actualization.

Although the boy seems to find himself by the end of the novel, his father does not. Self-actualization is a luxury unnecessary to survival, but for the

boy, is the only way he can justify the actions of his father and himself.? The son finds a persona in the novel much different from any other nameless character, he strays from the conventional path one must follow to meet Maslow's hierarchy of needs, and this may be the justification as to why he is the only successful one to do so. He finds himself with more food than many of the other road travelers due to the sacrifice of his father, and had his security and belonging needs also seen to fruition because of his relationship he has with his dad.

Still yet, his needs on a grand scale were nowhere near full completion. Instead of fulfilling himself through sustenance and a proprietary goal of survival, he is never fully convinced he has made a difference in the world until he is certain he has stayed true to his morals. In this same exact manner that his father was able to save his life by defeating his attempted attacker. The boy refuses to speak to his father until he assures him that his actions were absolutely necessary and justifiable. In many instances the boy has an enormous amount of trouble in moving past the near-dead strangers plaguing the road, without offering his aid.

“ They went on. The boy was crying. He kept looking back.

When they got to the bottom of the hill the man stopped and looked at him and looked back up the road. The burned man had fallen over and at that distance you couldn't even tell what it was. I'm sorry, he said. But we have nothing to give him. We have no way to help him. I'm sorry for what happened to him but we can't fix it. You know that, don't you? The boy stood looking down. He nodded his head.

Then they went on and he didnt look back again.” The man’s son in many respects is lacking in terms of food and basic material needs, but still has found a way to go beyond his own self-interests, and begins to try to help others as a means of instilling a beacon of light in the cold and desolate setting they find themselves in. After they reach the coast, a man steals all of their belongings and the father forces the man to strip off his clothes in order to exemplify the emptiness he left the man and the son with. Although he knows that man was only thinking of himself, his charismatic nature withholds him from moving on in knowing the man was left completely vulnerable. “ What do you want to do? Just help him, Papa.

Just help him. The man looked back up the road. He was just hungry, Papa. He’s going to die.

He’s going to die anyway. He’s so scared, Papa.” Even though this stranger had just taken everything the boy and his father had worked so hard to gather, he could not bear to let him die naked and starving. The very nature of the boy and this illusive “ good guy” persona he constantly obsesses with maintaining, may be the very reason he obtains self-actualization. His father helps him to meet all of his d-needs, although it may be to the least extent possible. His has food, security, a father who is his world, and the recognition of being a good guy.

This is how he is able to find himself when the setting he inhabits makes it impossible for everyone else to do the same.? With a young boy at his side, facing the ashy and cold remnants of a desolate world makes the road almost impossible. Due to the fact he must strive to accomplish not only his

needs, but also his son's, the father has to make many choices that no man should ever have to make at all. Throughout the novel the man meets his psychological needs through the poor rations of food and water they find, while he finds solace and safety in the pistol he carries. " His world entire" fulfills his belonging needs, but his esteem needs aren't ever brought to full fruition. The first profound evidence of the impact the son has on the father, is when the man shoots another man who tries to kill his son.

" He (the stranger) dove and grabbed the boy and came up holding him against his chest with the knife at his throat. The man had already dropped to the ground and he swung with him and leveled the pistol and fired from a two-handed position balanced on both knees at a distance of six feet."

This profound event shows that because the father has obtained minimal levels of necessity, like his steady influx of food and water and the façade of the one-shot pistol he can survive in this terrible landscape. Without his son, the father will also be without a humane relationship, so if he were to ever lose his son, his belonging needs he has fulfilled would be exterminated. To lose his boy is to retreat to a lower level of necessity, at which point he becomes more vulnerable to losing other needs. He even goes on to compare his son to his very own personal God. The father recognizes that if his son were to die before he does, there would no longer be a point in seeking shelter, warmth, or food, because he only lives to serve and protect his son. He dies before he can truly meet the rest of his needs and reach his fullest potential, if that is even possible for anyone else other than the son.

? Self-actualization is a very complex concept many do not get the joy of experiencing in McCarthy's, *The Road*. If the son had not kept his

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compassionate composure, it is safe to say he might have found the same fate as his father. Dead, and never reaching his full potential. In this post-apocalyptic world however, survival is only meaningful goal.

What good does money do you if you cannot spend it, or fame if you cannot rise because of it. In this setting, finding your true and complete self is irrelevant when you have nothing to show for it. Survival is the exclusive thing that matters. Although the son reaches his full potential in regards to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, how can he benefit from it if he has no modes of survival? In all, it doesn't matter if you are dead. Self-actualization is only good when you can progress and cultivate your environment, and on the road, just making it to the next day is an accomplishment.