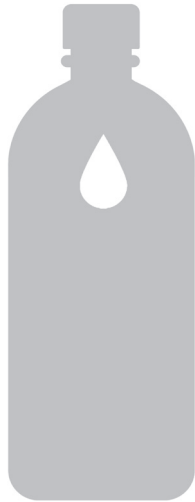


SIGNIFICANCETAB EDWARDS

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SIGNIFICANCE

**A postulate of everyday irrational human behavior;
by otherwise rational human beings**



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THE PERFORMANCE LABORATORY No 33 / TMBE MEDIA
PHILADELPHIA, PA. 19129



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A person's sense of **worth, usefulness** or **purpose**, and **value** often become evident when the person gains appreciation for how they connect with others—something for which all human beings have the capacity—and how they can contribute to society and the common good, i.e., their usefulness or purpose.

As British-American anthropologist Ashley Montagu wrote in “Growing Young,” children are not only born with the need to be loved—which informs children’s mental conception of self—but also the need to love others. Austrian physician and psychiatrist Alfred Adler, the creator of the school of thought known as *individual psychology*, believed that human beings are born with the need to be connected with each other. This connectedness, he proposed, forms a willingness and need to cooperate with others for the common good. Taking the concept further, Thomas J. Sweeney, professor emeritus at Ohio University, concluded:

The only salvation from the continuously driving inferiority feeling is the knowledge and the feeling of being valuable which originate from the contribution to the common welfare. ... Valuable can mean nothing other than valuable for human society.

The idea that human beings have an innate desire to practically help others is a trait Montagu calls *compassionate intelligence*. Montagu, as well as Adler and Sweeney, generally believe that social interest, connect- edness, and the intrinsic need to help (love) others is necessary for feeling worthy and useful (i.e., **valuable**). It is also important for well-being, and achieving life satisfaction.

When people with an ambivalent notion of self come to realize and believe that: (1) they possess intrinsic value, even if their value has simply not been understood by them; (2) their value can be manifested through connections with others who will appreciate the value they bring; and (3) contributing to the good of society in whatever form they are capable, they will likely begin to feel not only worthy, useful, necessary, and valued, but also **significant**.

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SIGNIFICANCE

noun: sig.nif-i-cance | \sig-'ni-fi-ken(t)s \

1. **A subliminal or conscious intrinsic basic need that motivates behavior**
2. **A perception that possesses the qualities of self-worth, feelings of necessity or purpose, and a sense of value**
3. **A mission that is pursued toward personal fulfillment**





SELF-WORTH, VALUE, NECESSITY, AND SIGNIFICANCE



Modern society has shaped the art of making people feel dispensable. Millennials understand belonging to a community as an opportunity to reverse this tendency: pursuing a sense of belonging becomes a means of achieving a sense of being needed.”

-SHIRLEY Le PENNE-

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That which is *necessary* is essential, requisite, and vital, to achieve a result, goal, or other desired outcome. Because we establish goals based on satisfying that which is physiologically or psychologically required for functional existence, the concept of *need* separates itself from something that is either worthwhile, useful, or even has value.

Human beings need food for our ultimate goal: survival. I say this is our *ultimate* goal because, faced with the choice of dying today and going to “the great beyond,” or doing anything else, healthy, rational people will choose to live. To accomplish the most desired human goal of survival, what do human beings actually *need*? Fundamentally, we need food, we need water, we need air, sunlight, and, to a degree, we need protection from the elements of nature, including such things as fire, clothing, and shelter.

Maslow proposed that humans *require* the elements in his Hierarchy of Needs, while more contemporary thinkers in the field, such as neuroscientist Dr. Nicole Gravagna, believe that, in addition to food, water, and shelter, human beings need sleep, human connection, and *novelty*, which he defines as the opportunity to learn and the potential to fail. The test for *necessity* is to ask: If we voluntarily removed the thing in question (e.g., water), could the thing under consideration (human life) proceed? Based on the question of survival, could a person live without self-actualization, electricity, the wheel, or the Phillips head screwdriver? If the answer is “yes,” though these things might have tremendous *value*, they are not *necessary* for survival.



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Taking an example from the physiological and psychological realms to the physical, the same test of necessity applies to work, goods, services, work occupations, and even individuals: Is the mail carrier useful? Yes. Is s/he valuable? Yes. It is a great service to have mail and packages delivered directly to your front door. Is the mail carrier *necessary*? No. If there were no mail carriers, people would still be able to get their mail and packages, albeit more inconveniently. What about the church pastor? The doctor? The same rationale would apply. The necessity of a doctor or surgeon is a tricky one, given the changes in the way human beings have become accustomed to living over the centuries. Modern humans cannot imagine a world without such medical professionals. However, modern human beings with the capacity for language survived without trained doctors for approximately 100,000 years; more, if you consider homo sapiens dating back more than 300,000 years. As Thomson, et. al. explained in “History of Medicine:”

Magic and religion played a large part in the medicine of prehistoric or early human society. Administration of a vegetable drug or remedy by mouth was accompanied by incantations, dancing, grimaces, and all the tricks of the magician. Therefore, the first doctors, or “medicine men,” were witch doctors or sorcerers.

THE ISLAND QUESTION

To more easily conceptualize the nuance between that which is useful, valuable, or necessary, consider this question: Which would you prefer to take with you on a hazardous journey into the wilderness: (a) something that you find to be *useful*; (b) something that you believe has (situational) *value*; or (c) something that you will *need* on such a journey?

As with most things of interest to human beings, satisfying our distinct, basic needs not only drives our behavior, but is also the reason why we develop goals or aspire to a desired outcome. For instance, if a person is hungry, it is an indication that the person has a physiological need that must be satisfied. To satisfy the physiological need—hunger, in this case—s/he sets out to get something to eat to satisfy that need. So, to “stave off hunger” becomes the purpose or goal the person establishes for satisfying their physiological need that manifests as a feeling of hunger.

To function optimally, fundamental needs must be satisfied. This is a truism for human beings, animals, businesses, and other organizational forms. By the same logic, if a person’s goal was to survive a hazardous journey into the wilderness, I suspect that most rational people would choose option (c) from the choices above, in other words, something that is *needed*.

SIGNIFICANCE

Suppose you were stranded on a deserted island with only the clothes on your back: a t-shirt, a pair of khaki pants, and a pair of flat boat shoes. You know nothing about the island: who, if anyone or anything, inhabits it; if there is food or a viable water source; if there is any form of shelter, anything. More importantly, you do not know when or if a boat or airplane will be coming to rescue you from the island.

With that as a premise, if you could take any three (3) things onto that deserted island with you—from the table below—which three things would you take?

Which 3 Items Would You Take?	
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A box of 250 matches• A crate with 24 bottles of water• A bottle of rum• A warm blanket• A first aid kit• Your mobile phone (no charger)• An axe• A gun with six bullets• A water desalinator	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• An inflatable life raft• A compass• A flashlight (solar)• A mirror• 15 feet of nylon rope• A fishing kit• 24 Snickers bars• Shark repellent• A flare gun

Initially, when I asked this question without providing a person with any options, their choice of items would vary wildly. I once conducted a job interview with a college sophomore who said that she would take: her cell phone (“So that I can text my friends to tell them where I am”), a copy of *People Magazine* (“In case I get bored. I couldn’t *live* without my *People Magazine!*”), and a pack of breath mints (“In case I run into someone on the island”). Now, whenever I ask this “island” question of anyone, I provide them with a list of options, if for no other reason than to move the dialog forward.

The most commonly-chosen items that people *initially* elect to take onto the island with them are: 24 bottles of water, a flashlight, and a gun. Admittedly, there is no perfect group of three choices or answer to this question. I also understand and acknowledge that limiting the choice to only three items doesn’t seem to be enough to survive on an unknown island. However, there is a purpose for limiting the number of items a person can take with them: the “scarcity” effect.

Scarcity suggests that there is only a finite amount of resource available to satisfy infinite needs. When this is the case, a person faced with a scarcity of resources necessary to satisfy a basic need will develop a *scarcity mindset*, whereby the person’s decisions and behaviors will be dictated by the fact that there is a scarcity of the resource. The scarcity mindset will force people to become singularly-focused on the need for which there

is a scarce resource that is required to satisfy the need. For example, if a group of people is faced with starvation and the food supply is limited—and not enough to stave off every group member’s hunger—the starving people will eat *anything* that is available, not leaving a scrap of food or a crumb on their plates after licking it clean. The people’s minds will be preoccupied and singularly-focused on food. At that point, long-term thoughts and plans go out the window and their obsession becomes the here-and-now: “How can I satisfy my hunger *today*?”

To reiterate, resource scarcity makes people think tactically as opposed to strategically or longer-term, as they might when resources are abundant. If a family of four is financially wealthy, their thoughts might be focused on how they can invest their extra disposable income to have a better retirement in 20 years, or how to buy securities so that they can pay \$305,000 for four years of their kids’ college tuition at New York University (NYU). This family with abundant financial resources can think long-term, about the future. Conversely, it is not uncommon for a middle-class family of four earning \$53,000 per year to figure out how to stretch \$75 until their next paycheck in two weeks. Money scarcity will dictate that the middle-class family’s thoughts become laser-focused on how they can feed their kids *now*, this week. Paying for the kids’ college in five years is not that important right now. Pressing needs—for which we set goals to satisfy—limit long-

term perspective.

Scarcity also forces people to make trade-off decisions. The middle-class family with only \$75 to last them for two weeks will inevitably be forced to make a trade-off between responsibilities: Do they use the money to buy food for the family, get new tires for the car, or do they pay the electric bill? These scarcity-driven decisions will force the family to decide between that which is useful, desired, or *needed*. In this example, a rational family will conclude that the car tires, while they would be nice to have, are not a necessity at the moment. Paying the electric bill is important, and electricity is valuable for computer usage, television, having lights, and running the refrigerator. But the kids **need** food or they cannot function, or worse, they could become seriously ill. The family will choose to spend the money on food which is physiologically **necessary**, as opposed to new car tires which would simply be nice to have.

Useful	Valuable	Necessary (For accomplishing your goal)
Car tires	Electricity	Food and water

This is the idea behind The Island Question: Scarcity of resources—the person can only take three things onto the island—will (*should*) force people to focus on their **goals** and to figure out how to act *tactically* to accomplish them. If a person's goal is *to survive on the island for some length of time in hopes of being rescued*, the person will choose a related set of items that will help them survive for a long period of time. If the goal is to get off the island as quickly as possible, the choices will be different.

Because of the scarcity of options, the person whose goal is to survive on the island for as long as possible will then have to decide which of the available items are absolutely **needed** to accomplish that goal, versus which items are simply nice to have. Sure, a warm blanket would be nice to have and a fishing kit would be very valuable to a person stranded on an island with no food. Ultimately, however, while the blanket and fishing kit would be quite useful, they are not truly necessary. The sorting of available items might look like the table on the next page.

People have an intrinsic, fundamental desire (i.e., need) to be as worthy, valued, and needed—*useful, valuable, AND necessary*—as are water, food (snickers), fire (matches), and an axe in this scenario.

SIGNIFICANCE

A postulate of everyday irrational human behavior;
by otherwise rational human beings

Why do athletes, entertainers, and others frequently and publicly proclaim, "I want to thank God"? Why are people racist? Why do wealthy people buy huge mansions? Why do men wear expensive designer clothing and women buy expensive designer bags? Why do women show off their diamond engagement rings? Why do we love receiving an apology? Why are we happy when "beautiful" and successful people fail?

By understanding these and other irrational behaviors in which we all engage, we gain deeper insight into ourselves and our motivations, putting us on a path toward growth, fulfillment, and becoming better versions of ourselves.

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