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## ABRAHAM MASLOW & CARL ROGERS’ CONTRIBUTIONS TO NLP

When I wrote about the contributions of Fritz Perls, Virginia Satir, and Gregory Bateson to the development of NLP in the previous posts, I frequently noted that they were all second-generation *leaders* in the Human Potential Movement (HPM). That is highly significant because of their relationship to Maslow and Rogers and to the HPM. I noted this in the article I wrote back in 2005 about “The Secret History of NLP.” That was when I found out that the very persons *modeled* by Bandler and Grinder worked together and lived together at Esalen in the early 1960s.<sup>1</sup>

Imagine that! *They lived and worked together at Esalen as leaders in the Human Potential Movement.* Do you know what that means? For one thing, it identifies **the psychology** that they all were involved in, a psychology separated from Behaviorism and Psychoanalysis, the first two “forces” in psychology. They were involved in the third force of psychology. This terminology came from Maslow himself and was crystalized in the book, *The Third Force: The Psychology of Abraham Maslow* (1970) by Frank G. Goble.

What is the psychology of NLP? Yes, it is Cognitive Psychology in that it came from the leaders of that Cognitive Psychology movement—George Miller and Noam Chomsky. It is cognitive to the extent that we operate in the world using our mental models or maps as Alfred Korzybski noted, “the map is not the territory.” Yet more essential than that, the psychology of NLP is Humanistic Psychology or Self-Actualization Psychology.

Humanistic Psychology operates predominantly from the idea that there is within human beings a drive for excellence and that even when we do bad or evil things, it’s not because that is our nature. There is within a positive intention—we are doing the best we can given our mental understandings and our skills. Human evil arises from ignorance, misinformation, desperation, lack of development, etc. We have all the resources to handle the challenges of life. To fulfill that, we need to truly and adequately meet our needs and understand ourselves and then develop effective strategies.

In NLP all of these essential ideas are contained in “The Presuppositions of NLP.” These ideas, collected originally by Robert Dilts, summarize the key premises that NLP operates from. Where did they come from? What was the original source of these presuppositions? Ah, this is an amazing thing! I once assumed that those presuppositions were the premises or assumptions that the original developers collected from Perls, Satir, Erickson, Bateson, and Korzybski. Then when I took the time to go back and read through all of the original works of Maslow and Rogers, I found that almost all of those presuppositions

were already present. They came out of the HPM as the assumptive premises of that kind of Psychology.

What else in NLP goes back to what Maslow and Rogers contributed? *Modeling!* It was Abraham Maslow, who forty-five years before Bandler and Grinder, began modeling his two incredible mentors. He began studying Max Wertheimer who co-founded Gestalt Psychology and Ruth Benedict who was the founder of Cultural Anthropology. He took notes about them writing down their behaviors and characteristics and from his “good humans studies” he began a 30-year study with his graduate students of Self-Actualizing People. So even the idea of modeling outstanding individuals did not start with NLP, but with Maslow.

As Maslow was writing his book on *Abnormal Psychology*, a massive work on all of the ways human nature goes wrong, he began wondering about the other side. This was the sick side. Was there a healthy side? Thinking in terms of a bell-curve, was there are exceptional, superior, and excellent outliers. To find out, that’s what initiated his modeling of Max and Ruth.

NLP certainly did not start from scratch. There are many forces that contributed. NLP did not invent new premises that had never been heard of before. Instead, what happened at the beginning and what created what we today know as Neuro-Linguistic Program arose from a movement—the *Human Potential Movement*.

Here’s more evidence of the connection between NLP and the Human Potential Movement. Consider for example *where* NLP originated. It originated at Kresge College, a college that began in 1971 as an alternative and experimental college on the campus of the University of California— Santa Cruz. *This college would have been named the Carl Rogers College* if it had not been for the rich donor.

“The college was designed with the concept of participatory democracy as a means of encouraging a strong sense of community. The vision was for the college to be a place where students enjoyed a sense of creativity, community, and individuality.” (UCSC’s website)

“Robert Edger, the provost of Kresge ... decided to develop and run an innovative experiment in academic organization, using Kresge College as a test case. The experiment was a living/learning model for Kresge— a model of how to develop community within the boundary conditions of a college at a university...” (Grinder, *Origins*, p. 175)

“Groups ... a popular theme on Kresge College campus ... The college had instituted the process of T-Groups, frequently described as a form of sensitivity training.” (Carmen Bostic-St. Clair, *Origins*, p. 241)

Perhaps a sad loss to NLP was the fact that while the original developers obviously could not have modeled Maslow, he died in 1970 as did Perls. But Carl Rogers lived until 1980 (same as did Erickson and Bateson) and NLP began at his college. Yet in the years of the beginning of NLP (1971-1976), Rogers never appeared on campus. He was at the University in Chicago at the time.

**Notes:**

1. You can see that article on the Neuro-Semantic website and in the book, *Self-Actualization Psychology*.

[www.neurosemantics.com](http://www.neurosemantics.com)