

DEVELOPMENTAL PSYCHOLOGY
REDISCOVERED: 'NEGATIVE IDENTITY' AND
'EGO INTEGRITY VERSUS DESPAIR' IN
SAMUEL BECKETT'S *ENDGAME*

Gelişim Psikolojisinin Yeniden Keşfi: Samuel Beckett'in
***Endgame* Oyununda 'Ters Kimlik' ve 'Benlik Bütünlüğüne**
Karşı Umutsuzluk'

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Abstract

Samuel Beckett's plays are regarded as 'theatre of menace'; *Endgame*, one of the masterpieces of Beckett, is a typical example of it. Beckett's characters have contradictory and ambivalent relationships with each other. Their search for their identity through their inner thoughts' interaction with the external world—the world of 'existence and non-existence'—their necessity for 'trust' and the relatedness between age and ego are dealt with in this paper. Although these efforts are attempts to cover prospective contingency, the negativity of the past responds to the brokenness of the same life, in the same breath. Flashbacks turn identity search inside out, and the feeling of 'self-integrity versus despair' gains intensity in the process of old age. Needs vary from childhood to old age; accordingly, the reaction-based inferences relieve not only the ontological existence of the characters, but also their mental and spiritual beings. These reaction-based inferences lead sometimes to identity distortion, and sometimes bodily/physical depressions, and sometimes spiritual meltdowns; so, Beckett refers to the vital skills of the characters/ in modern/post-modern world order. This paper aims to reveal the probable reasons behind the identity crises of these characters as in line with Erikson's psychological development stratagem such as self-actualization, esteem, love/belonging, safety and physiology. The psychological development of Beckett's characters striving for concrete answers to their fragmented souls in the meaningless world in *Endgame* are depicted as fragmented psyches. 'Ego integrity versus despair' has been covered from a psychological perspective.

Key Words: *Samuel Beckett, Endgame, psychosocial development, ego integrity versus despair.*

Özet

Beckett'in karakterlerinin birbirleri ile çelişkili ilişkileri ve kendi iç düşüncelerinin dış dünya—varlık ve yokluk dünyası—ile etkileşimi yoluyla kimliklerini arayışı, güven ihtiyacı, yaş ve ego arasındaki bağ ve hızla değişen dünya: bunların tamamı karakterlerin açığa çıkardığı kimlik krizinin arkasındaki olası nedenlerdir. Beckett'in karakterleri, kendi benliklerini tatmin edecek bir anlam elde etmek için, psikososyal gelişim sürecinde kimlik kırıklarını ortaya çıkaran hayatlarını sorgulayarak bazı somut cevaplar bulmak için çabalar. Bu çaba ileriye dönük olumsuzluklar kapsamaya yönelik girişimler olsa da geçmişteki olumsuzluklar hayatın parçalanmışlığına yanıt verir aynı zamanda. Geriye dönüşler, kimlik arayışını 'ters' yöne çevirmekte ve yaşlılık sürecinde 'benlik bütünlüğüne karşı umutsuzluk' hissi yoğunluk kazanmaktadır. İhtiyaçlar çocukluktan yaşlılığa farklılık göstermekte, tepkisel çıkarımlar karakterlerin sadece ontolojik oluşlarını değil, aynı zamanda ruhsal ve tinsel oluşlarını belirgin hale getirmektedir. Bu tepkisel çıkarımlar bazen kimlik bozulmalarına, kimi zaman bedensel/fiziksel sarsıntılara, kimi zaman da ruhsal çöküntülere sebep olmaktadır; böylece, Beckett, modern/post modern dünya düzeninde

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karakterlerin/insanların yaşamsal yetilerine göndermede bulunmaktadır. Psikanalist destek için ağırlıklı olarak Erik Erikson'dan faydalanacak bu çalışma, Erikson'un psiko-sosyal gelişim aşamaları aracılığıyla Samuel Beckett'in başyapıtlarından biri olan *Endgame*'deki karakterlerin kimlik krizini ve 'benlik bütünlüğüne karşı umutsuzluğu' araştırmayı amaçlamaktadır. Bu bağlamda yapılan literatür taramalarında benzer çalışma olmaması açısından edebiyat-Psikoloji-egitim ilişkisini örneklemesi açısından kayda değer bir çalışmadır.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Samuel Beckett, *Endgame*, psiko-sosyal gelişim, benlik bütünlüğüne karşı umutsuzluk.

Introduction

Regarded as the father of absurd drama and famous for his chef d'oeuvre *Waiting for Godot*, which "marks the direction [Samuel] Beckett's writing for the theatre would take over the next 40 years" (Brater, 2003: 73), Samuel Beckett has profoundly contributed to the world theatre within an unlimited framework for a discussion of 'human question' in related auras. Separated into stage, radio, and television plays, within each Beckett's dramatic work, a cumulative stress on dialogue in *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame*, on speaking in *Happy Days*, and on gesture in *Act without Words* is revealed and the emphasis is apparently on the essential phase of our response to the semi-mundane enquiries: how and why do we exist/live and what directs us to exist/live. The question(s) of how/why to exist/live and the balance between how to live in some kind of harmony with the dilemma of human identity and how to adapt ourselves to "the triumphs and disappointments adherent to being, the originator of others or the generator of products and ideas" (Erikson, 1963: 241) are the prevailing secrets addressed by Beckett.

Based on the above-mentioned reasons and taking Erik Erikson's theory on psychosocial development of human beings as a standpoint, we will primarily outline the framework for a discussion of identity crisis by discussing the evident bilateral relations of the characters in Beckett's magnum opus: *Endgame*. We will proceed in the second subdivision to choose one character from Beckett's play aforementioned in order to represent identity crisis and psychosocial development within the limits of 'ego integrity vs. despair'. In the final subdivision, we will conclude our study, in the light of Erik Erikson's eight stages of development and our own insights gleaned from working on a production of these plays.

Negative Identity: *Endgame*

Coining the phrase *identity crisis*, Erik Erikson foregrounds that identity crisis is the possible failure to achieve ego identity during adolescence (Erikson, 1963: 234-37). He explains this failure within the concept of *negative identity* in which:

Identity formation normatively has its dark and negative side, which throughout life can remain an unruly part of the total identity. Every person and every group harbors a negative identity as the sum of all those identifications and identity fragments which the individual had to submerge in himself as undesirable or irreconcilable or which his group has taught him to perceive as the mark of fatal "difference" in sex role or race, in class or religion. In the event of aggravated crises, an individual (or, indeed, a group) may despair of the ability to contain these negative elements in a positive identity. (Erikson, 1975: 18-22)

Two of the scholars, Barbara Shapiro and Raymond Riva, discuss the Freudian elements in a number of Beckett's works.³ Suggesting that the mother-son relationships in Beckett's fiction are Oedipal, Riva and Shapiro correspond to some Freud's psychological theory. However, we also observe that Beckett has some interpretations within the context of 'ego' in Freudian psychology - the one of the three parts of the mind that connects a person to the outside world. As an equalizer between 'id' and 'superego', 'ego' can think and act; Beckett's characters' self to have a specified air/ to have an enormous ego or to despise themselves because of being inferior to the people around or belonging to lower status, or afraid of somebody's enmity relations are possible psychological and social reasons behind *negative identity*.

To Martin Esslin (2009: 46) "Beckett's preoccupation with the problem of being and identity of the self might have sprung from the Anglo-Irishman's inevitable and perpetual concern with finding his own answer to the question 'Who am I?', though it seems that Beckett stresses on the characters to find the answer to that question within a 'limited' time composed of 'yesterday' as a representation of past and 'now' as a representation of present. However, there seems to be "only questions without answers, suffering without purpose, consciousness without identity" (Postlewait, 1978: 476) in Beckett's *Endgame*.

Beckett, who portrays in nearly all his plays balance vs. imbalance, order vs. disorder, wealth vs. poverty, being vs. non-being, has turned the identity—behind which man tries to conceal himself, his existence and his own body—of the man upside down in relation to the transience of the world and the imaginary reflection of human being in the same world. Though Esslin (2009: 13) puts forth that Beckett "writes strictly for himself—or rather, his work is an attempt to explore himself and the nature of his consciousness, to reach to the inner core of that mysterious entity called his own individual Self", Beckett's subtle depiction of the idiosyncrasies of the characters reveals some distinctive 'identity-related' clashes which reveal their tragic flaws not just shaped through their unique individualistic defects but because of the psychosocial reasons, as well. The tragic behaviors of the characters do create an atmosphere—as Ronan McDonald (2006: 43) touches on the very same question in *Introduction to Samuel Beckett* particularizing "metatheatrical elements"—in which all manners of the characters reflect some developmental features of their own which provide a basis for 'identity crisis' in which "provisionality of fulfillment, the terrible destructiveness of time, the inevitability of death from the very moment of birth" (McDonald, 2006: 30-31) lead to a fractured Self.

Defined as "the distinguishing character or personality of an individual" and "sameness of essential or generic character in different instances" by *Webster Dictionary*, 'identity' seems to be expressed in close connection with *sameness* when the term is superimposed on Hamm and Pozzo, and Clov and Lucky in terms of their bilateral affairs. This sameness is addressed by McDonald (2006: 39) to be in connection with 'master-slave relationship' in which, he expresses, the relationship between Hamm and Clov is "based on mutual need but also entrapment" (McDonald, 2006: 45), while this relationship seems to be "the material exploitation of" (McDonald, 2006: 39) Lucky by Pozzo. Considering the 'master-slave relationship' between Hamm and Clov, and Pozzo and Lucky, it seems to be no fractures within their personal identities on the surface; however, their contradictory statements and mysterious manners do conceal a core meaning. At that case, some probable questions arise: how does the crisis develop and

³ Barbara Shapiro, 'Towards a Psychoanalytic Reading of Beckett's Molloy,' Part I, *Literature and Psychology*, no.2, 1969, pp. 71-86; Part II, *Literature and Psychology*, nos.3-4, 1969, pp. 15-30. Raymond T. Riva, 'Beckett and Freud,' *Criticism* 12, 1970, pp. 120-132.

what leads to that 'identity destruction' in these characters? In order to answer these questions and deepen the argument, we firstly need to explain *identity crisis*.

Identity crisis is a psychosocial development stage which is categorized in the identity cohesion vs. role confusion stage. Paraphrasing Erikson, it is expressed that during this stage (adolescence), physical growth, sexual maturation are observed and people integrate their ideas of themselves and about what others think of them. They, therefore, form their self-image and withstand the task of resolving the crisis of their basic ego identity. The progress through the previous developmental stages directs successful resolution of the crisis; this depends on issues such as trust, autonomy, and initiative (Erikson, 1963: 234-37).

The aforementioned developmental changes might result in identity crises one may encounter in his/her later life and often fail in combating these problems. This situation is evidently observed within the manners of Beckett's characters. Having been observed to have some parental indifference, Hamm appears having some concerns about self-esteem. The gap between 'self' and 'ego' is revealed through the speeches between Hamm and Clov. That Hamm regards himself as the center of events and persons in spite of his advanced age represents his aversion to not to lose his self-image. In the very beginning of the play, Beckett presents Hamm just in the "Center, in an armchair on castors, covered with an old sheet" (1958: 1). Samuel Beckett presents Hamm just in the very center of the stage, and this signifies Hamm's 'ego satisfaction' through which he distinguishes himself from the others. Hamm does not hesitate to repeat "Am I right in the center?" (Beckett, 1958: 26) to put a stop to his search for his Self. Before this remark, Hamm asks Clov to "take me [him] for a little turn" (Beckett, 1958: 25), but "Not too fast!" (Beckett, 1958: 25) and "Right round the world!" (Beckett, 1958: 25), which in some way echo his search for his real identity or his quest for his insatiable reminiscences that lack some previous developmental stages.

Moreover, Hamm's passion for the centre—Hamm insists on being placed right in the centre of his room—seems to dramatize one of Leopardi's most striking *Operette*: the *Dialogo di un folletto e di unogno* (Dialogue of a Sprite and a Gnome) where man's anthropocentric pretension, his deep illusion of a 'natural right' to a central position in the world and nature, is ridiculed in a context of extinction of the human race.... (Restivo, 2011: 69)

To Marilyn Orrock and others, "identity theory provides a firm conceptual linkage between self-esteem and psychological distress"(25) which leads to the formation of the fractured self. The aforesaid psychological tension or distress is reflected by Beckett in the movements and gestures of the characters and presented in the emotional expressions in dialogues. Hamm's metaphorical statement that "But we breathe, we change! We lose our hair, our teeth! Our bloom! Our ideals!" (Beckett, 1958: 11) reveals his thirst for his youth (adolescence) and his urge for taking "a little turn" (Beckett, 1958: 25) "Right round the world" (Beckett, 1958: 25)—a world in which "something[everything] is taking its course" (13) with an opposite direction, within Beckettian point of view, in terms of Erikson's developmental stages. This opposite direction addressed by Beckett reveals an upside-down metamorphosis of human nature in which an old man (Nagg) features some baby-like behaviors. When "the lid of one of the bins lifts and the hands of Nagg appear, gripping the rim" (Beckett, 1958: 9), the readers are kindly invited to 'the imaginary world of a pregnant woman who has just given birth to a baby'—(the bin is figuratively considered to be *womb*).After his (Nagg) first appearance—which means his

introduction to the physical world—he begins to utter such words as “Me pap!” (*ibid*, 9), which reflects a developmental stage of child language which is entitled to be “single word utterance which is called Holophrastic language” (Rahimpour, 2004: 60). On the other hand, his sucking or nibbling biscuit throughout the play is a reference to the period of infancy. Furthermore, the dialogues between Nagg and Nell corroborate this developmental reversion (from senility to infancy though the developmental stage proceeds from infancy to senility). With Nagg’s remark that “I’ve lost me tooth” (Beckett, 1958: 14) Beckett signifies the very early period of infancy in which the baby is toothless. The failure of the sense of “sight” (*ibid*, 14) and “hearing” (*ibid*, 15) also refers to the early infancy period in which the child has not developed the sense of ‘sight’ and ‘hearing’ and has just been introduced to the physical world. Beckett’s depiction of the characters in an antipodean developmental stage is a reflection of his stress on his characters’ “no clear purpose or identity” (Bloom, 2011: 31), and this stress is expressed through the diction Beckett subtly makes use of and through the language through which he expresses consciousness. As expressed by Harold Bloom (2011: 31), “consciousness expressed in language through character and narration exists prior to (and so perhaps independent of) physical identity, as a voice without determinate location in time or space”.

It is explicit that Beckett brings human and humanitarian features to the forefront and makes assessments within the framework of these features evokes what Abraham H. Maslow indicates through the hierarchy of basic needs⁴ of human beings. Considering Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, it is inevitable to conclude that through achieving these basic needs, people develop a successful identity. As he states in *A Theory of Human Motivation*:

Human needs arrange themselves in hierarchies of pre-potency. That is to say, the appearance of one need usually rests on the prior satisfaction of another, more pre-potent need. Man is a perpetually wanting animal. Also no need or drive can be treated as if it were isolated or discrete; every drive is related to the state of satisfaction or dissatisfaction of other drives. (Maslow, 1943: 3)

Categorized into five vitals consisting of physiological needs, safety needs, love needs, esteem needs and the need for self-actualization (Maslow, 1943: 4-11) respectively; these vitals are exemplified by Beckett’s characters. As expressed above, Nagg’s desire to have pap is an indication of the first stage: physiological. The second stage (safety) is reflected through an isolated room far away from all the dangers outside. Nagg and Nell’s being bottled in the dustbins figuratively echoes a safe atmosphere—safe enough to not to be exposed to Hamm’s insults. The following dialogue between Nagg and Nell also symbolizes the safety needs:

NAGG:
Are you cold?
NELL:
Yes, perished, and you?
NAGG:
(Pause.)
I’m freezing.
(Pause.)
Do you want to go in?
NELL:

⁴See appendix Figure 1

Yes.
NAGG:
Then go in. (Beckett, 1958: 16)

The need to be secure enough to survive is addressed through physical urges of these two characters. The forthcoming stage (love) is addressed through Nell's instinctive drive when she asks "Time for love?" (Beckett, 1958: 14), and when Nag confesses with the words "Kiss me" (Beckett, 1958: 14) though unfulfilled. Nagg's search for love appears in his outbursts when he forwards his son, Hamm, "After all I'm your father. It's true if it hadn't been me it would have been someone else" (Beckett, 1958: 55) which makes Nag proceed the next stage: the esteem need. The esteem need is revealed through the words of these two figures when they both have some dialogues.

NAGG:
I hope the day will come when you'll really need to have me listen to you,
and need to hear my voice, any voice.
(Pause.)
Yes, I hope I'll live till then, to hear you calling me like when you were a
tiny boy, and were frightened, in the dark, and I was your only hope.
(Beckett, 1958: 56)

When Hamm shouts his father with an uncontrolled voice uttering "Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?" (Beckett, 1958: 51), he does not point his 'ontological' being but his fractured identity. The last need (the need for self-actualization) is extremely challenging for Hamm due to the realization of careless parents to whom Hamm was obliged during infancy. Though Hamm believes that everybody is "obliged to each other" (Beckett, 1958: 81), he does end up with an extremely selfish, merciless and revengeful identity which is totally fractured. "Perhaps this heritage of fractured identity, this search for the self, might have left its mark on Beckett's later preoccupation with a painful indeterminacy of subjectivity. 'Who am I?' is a question that Beckett's creatures repeatedly ponder" (McDonald, 2006: 7).

Ego Integrity versus Despair: Nagg and Hamm

Reflecting on life, as expressed by Erikson, the elderly person may experience satisfaction or a sense of failure during this stage comprising the ages between 65 and over. To many a psychologist to get through a successful period requires the following qualities: proud, content with self and life; still actively thinking about the future; healthy interaction with self; self-approving; comfortable giving and sharing with others; like being an example to others, accept aging process gracefully and death as part of life cycle. However, should this stage elapse unsuccessfully, the outcomes appear to be as follows: despair; deep resentment; nothing left uselessness; low self-esteem; anger at self, others, world, society; closed to others; complaints, irritable; anger at aging, feel cheated (Erikson, 1963: 241-47). Considering Beckett's two characters, Hamm and Nagg, it is observed that neither of them has had a successful transition during that period. Hamm's speech at the very beginning of the play is actually an evidence of despair which exemplifies a move on to an uneven route towards 'ego integrity'.

HAMM:
Can there be misery---
(he yawns)
---loftier than mine? No doubt. Formerly. But now?

(Pause.)
 My father?
 (Pause.)
 My mother?
 (Pause.)
 My... dog?
 (Pause.)
 Oh I am willing to believe they suffer as much as such creatures can suffer. But does that mean their sufferings equal mine? No doubt.
 (Beckett, 1958: 2)

What we infer here is that Hamm's perspective on the transience of life and his fear of death are clearly documented through his word choice: suffering. Beckett often emphasizes the presence of time as a corrosive factor; every moment of time incrementally accompanies senility and death. Time is within the limits of 'zero' ironically depicted as a 'multiplication' unit of math which seems to have no worth though it appears to be 'absorbing element' which annihilates everything. Hamm's inquiry of time is replied by Clov to be "The same as usual": "Zero" (Beckett, 1958: 4). According to Beckett, time is a mysterious secret between death and life; death, as it annihilates all the values and all the beauties of life, is considered to be the equivalent of time. Death is extinction. It is the 'absorbing element' which swallows life. It is nothingness. Time as 'an absorbing zero' reflects what Hamm states: "Moments for nothing, now as always, time was never and time is over, reckoning closed and story ended" (Beckett, 1958: 83).

Though having always been considered as an equivalent of death, time is clearly indicated to be a factor formed by 'the merger of moments'. As a reflection of merger of moments, day and night symbolize life and death. In order to learn whether it is day or night, Hamm inquires about the sunset; and immediately after that, his question "Is it night already then?" (Beckett, 1958: 31) reawakens the feeling of death approaching, which points out his fear of death. Hamm's anger at his father, Nagg, does come from his lack of ego integrity which is fractured because of their 'anti' father and son relationship.

The lack or loss of this accrued ego integration is signified by fear of death: the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life. Despair expresses the feeling that the time is now short, too short for the attempt to start another life and to try out alternate roads to integrity.
 (Erikson, 1963: 242)

When Clov addresses Hamm "Do you believe in the life to come?" (Beckett, 1958: 50), Hamm avoids answering the question as indifferently as possible and immediately after that dialogue, upon hearing Nagg's voice, Hamm spills out hatred against Nagg in the words "Scoundrel! Why did you engender me?" (Beckett, 1958: 51).

Trapped in trash bins on the ground, Nagg and Nell symbolize 'two living nonbeings' as symbols of 'life and death'. Though physically staged above the ground (which makes them seem 'alive'), Nagg and Nell are entrapped in trash bins with some "sawdust" (Beckett, 1958: 16) and "sand" (Beckett, 1958: 17) as if two dustbins are newly dug graves over which are covered with sawdust and sand instead of soil. These thanatobiologic depictions have some equivocacies which are depicted through the characters' swinging inner moods. Nagg and Hamm, during their dialogue on swearing, laugh heartily when Hamm swears on his honor. This ironic laughter stigmatizes Hamm's honor, and the laughter may also reflect what they think about Hamm's honor.

Rather than fighting against external dangers, the individual must now fight against internal self-destruction, against a trend to catatonia, an inner paralysis that turns the whole world into putrefaction and death, in comparison with which, ironically, the 'fanciulloinvito' now becomes an assessment of life, that gives the life to Hamm's and Clov's outlook. (Restivo, 2011: 72)

CONCLUSION

As the formation of identity occurs through identifications primarily with those around us, the ambivalence and incoherence come up as a result of differentness of those around. This differentness sometimes leads to some cracks within individual self and thus considered, a person's psychological identity begins to destruct as a result: man loses his self-image (his mental model of him or herself), self-esteem, and individuality.

As a standpoint, Beckett's absurdist outlook is generally reflected in an unclear or ambivalent character identity or incoherent relations between his characters. Having gone in search of the answer to the question 'who', Samuel Beckett tries to reach the meaning of life through tediously hammering out idiosyncrasies of each of his characters. Through an antipodean direction against Erik Erikson's stages, Beckett exemplifies the 'broken' formation of individual 'self': ego cannot be satisfied within a/n un/limited time (zero) which comprises before and after, and life cannot be maintained without the fear of death. In *Endgame*, it is observed that necrophobia forces the characters to act in accordance with his /her desire, and it is ego that urges the self to destruct its own; however, it is necrophobia again which urges the self to be well balanced. Consequently, the identities of Hamm, Clov, Nagg and Nell are defined through their self-construal, in which how they construe themselves in their present world is a reference to their past. The self-destructions come up through their bilateral affairs and through unsuccessful developmental stages of the characters which Erikson and Maslow put forth. The characters are viewed as being sick, but, they are seen as being sick of life.

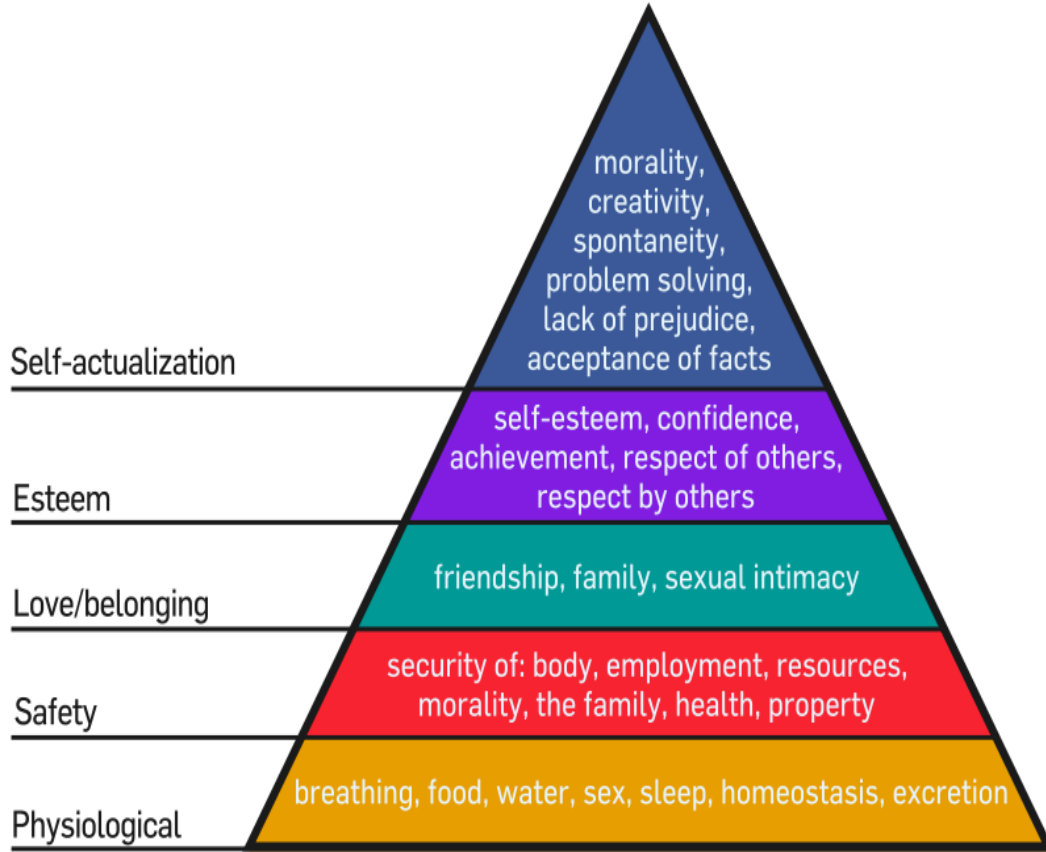


Figure 1. Image of Abraham H. Maslow's hierarchy of basic needs

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