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Becoming the Best Version of Oneself: Humanistic Psychology and Moral Development in The Golden Trio Harry, Hermione, and Ron

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Abstract

This article explores how humanistic psychology, particularly the theories of Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers, applies to the moral and psychological development of Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley in *Harry Potter and The Philosopher's Stone*, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, and *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban*. By analysing their growth through Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Rogers' concept of Self-actualisation, this study highlights how each character strives to become the best version of themselves through personal choices, relationships, and experiences. The research also delves into how external and internal conflicts shape their moral development and contribute to their evolving identities. It discusses the role of adversity, resilience, and the impact of social dynamics on their psychological growth.

Keywords: Identity Formation, Personal Growth, Resilience, Self-Actualisation

1. Introduction

Humanistic Psychology emphasises personal growth, free will, and the pursuit of self-actualisation. Unlike deterministic perspectives such as psychoanalysis or behaviourism, humanistic psychology sees individuals as inherently good, with the potential for self-improvement. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series is a rich narrative that provides insights into this psychological perspective, portraying characters who navigate personal and moral challenges as they grow into their fullest potential. The first three books of the *Harry Potter* series depict the formative years of Harry, Hermione, and Ron, showcasing their struggles with identity, morality, and self-worth. Through an analysis of their psychological development, this paper aims to explore how the three characters embody humanistic psychology principles, how their choices reflect their evolving sense of self, and how they move toward self-actualisation.

2. Aim of the Study

Abraham Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs provides a comprehensive framework for understanding human motivation and personal development. This theory suggests that individuals must fulfil a series of hierarchical needs, beginning with physiological needs, followed by safety needs. Once these fundamental needs are met, individuals seek love and belonging, which includes meaningful relationships, friendships, and social connections. The next stage involves esteem needs, where individuals strive for self-respect, confidence, and recognition from others. Finally, at the highest level, individuals reach self-actualisation, where they achieve personal growth, fulfil their unique potential, and pursue more profound meaning in life. Maslow argued that progress through these stages is essential, as people cannot fully strive toward self-actualisation without first meeting their lower-level needs.

Carl Rogers' theory of self-actualisation emphasises the role of an environment that fosters psychological growth. According to Rogers, individuals can only develop into their best selves if they experience unconditional positive regard, where they feel accepted and valued regardless of their flaws. He also highlighted the importance of empathy, where individuals are understood and supported, and authenticity, where people live in harmony with their true

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selves. Rogers believed that individuals need acceptance from significant others to achieve self-actualisation and grow to their fullest potential.

Applying these humanistic psychological principles to *Harry Potter* allows for a deeper understanding of how the Golden Trio**,** Harry Potter, Hermione Granger, and Ron Weasley, overcome personal struggles and develop into their best selves throughout the first three books.

3. Harry Potter: Overcoming Isolation to Find Purpose

Harry's journey toward self-actualisation is deeply rooted in his early experiences of neglect and deprivation, which contrast with the love and belonging he later finds at Hogwarts. Growing up with the Dursleys, he is emotionally and physically mistreated, forced to live in a cupboard under the stairs, and constantly reminded that he is unwanted. His basic psychological needs, as described in Maslow's hierarchy, remain unfulfilled in his early years; he lacks love, safety, and self-esteem. The Dursleys' rejection leaves Harry yearning for connection and validation, setting the stage for his transformation upon entering the Wizarding World.

Hogwarts becomes the catalyst for this change, offering him not only magical knowledge but also emotional security and companionship. His friendships with Ron and Hermione give him the social support he was denied. Hermione's loyalty and intelligence, combined with Ron's unwavering friendship and humour, create a dynamic where Harry learns to trust, cooperation, and the importance of moral responsibility. Further, Dumbledore's mentorship offers him the guidance he never had in childhood.

Harry's progresses through his years at Hogwarts, his choices increasingly reflect his intrinsic moral values rather than external expectations. His actions in *The Philosopher's Stone*, where he risks his life to prevent Voldemort from obtaining the Philosopher's Stone, mark an early instance of moral courage. When faced with the Mirror of Erised, Dumbledore explains why only someone who seeks the Stone for selfless reasons can retrieve it: "Only one who wanted to find the Stone - find it, but not use it - would be able to get it, otherwise they'd just see themselves making gold or drinking Elixir of Life"[1]. This moment highlights Harry's emerging selflessness and moral clarity.

Similarly, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, Harry once again displays his moral integrity when he descends into the basilisk's lair to save Ginny Weasley. He chooses to fight the basilisk with only a sword and Fawkes' assistance. In this moment, Dumbledore's words prove true: "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities"[2]. His decision to act despite fear demonstrates his growing sense of responsibility and justice. When Tom Riddle taunts Harry, calling him mediocre and questioning how he could stand against him, Harry counters with: "You're not the greatest wizard in the world. Sorry to disappoint you, but the greatest wizard in the world is Albus Dumbledore"[2]. This moment underscores Harry's loyalty and belief in goodness over raw power.

Throughout his journey, Harry's ability to withstand external pressures and maintain his moral compass is tested repeatedly. His status as "the Chosen One" places an immense burden on him, yet he resists the temptations of power and revenge. Unlike Voldemort, who seeks dominance and control, Harry consistently chooses love, loyalty, and justice over personal ambition. This reflects Rogers' idea that self-actualised individuals remain true to their core values, even when faced with challenges.

In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, his decision to spare Peter Pettigrew's life, despite having every reason to seek vengeance, demonstrates his ability to act with empathy and moral clarity. He rejects the cycle of violence and affirms his identity as someone who seeks justice rather than retribution. Additionally, when he produces a full-fledged Patronus to save himself and Sirius, he realises, "I knew I could do it this time, because I'd already done it... Does that make sense?"[3]. Potter's growing confidence in his abilities and his deeper understanding of his strength are signified in this moment. Ultimately, Harry's growth is a testament to the power of love, mentorship, and moral resilience. His journey from an unloved orphan to a self-actualised individual mirrors Rogers' belief that people thrive when placed in an environment of acceptance and encouragement. The friendships, guidance, and love he finds at Hogwarts enable him to overcome his early isolation, transforming him into the hero who consistently chooses to protect others over seeking personal power.

4. Hermione Granger: Striving for Excellence and Acceptance

Hermione Granger's journey toward self-actualisation is marked by her transformation from a rule-abiding, academically driven student to a compassionate individual who values justice over rigid obedience.

Initially, her strong focus on academic success and rule-following stems from her deep-seated need for validation, aligning with Maslow's esteem needs. As a Muggle-born witch, Hermione faces an implicit sense of needing to prove herself in a magical world where lineage often dictates status. Her relentless pursuit of knowledge and strict adherence to rules in *The Philosopher's Stone* reflect this desire to earn respect from authority figures such as teachers, particularly Professor McGonagall and Dumbledore. However, as Hermione grows, her friendships with Harry and Ron serve as catalysts for her emotional and moral development. Through her interactions with them, she begins to understand that intellect alone is not enough; wisdom, empathy, and ethical judgment are equally crucial. This shift is evident in *The Philosopher's Stone*, where she defies her initial instincts of strict rule-following to help Harry retrieve the Philosopher's Stone. She acknowledges the importance of qualities beyond academic achievement, telling Harry, "Books! And cleverness! There are more important things—friendship and bravery"[1].

In *The Chamber of Secrets*, Hermione's evolving courage and willingness to bend rules for the greater good become more apparent. She concocts the Polyjuice Potion, a highly advanced and restricted potion, to help Harry and Ron investigate the Heir of Slytherin. This act signifies her growing readiness to challenge authority when it conflicts with her moral compass. Hermione's growth becomes even more distinct in *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, where she learns to trust her instincts and make ethically driven decisions. The use of the Time-Turner serves as a significant turning point in her character development. Initially, she employs it for academic purposes, reflecting her previous priorities centred on personal success. However, as the story progresses, she chooses to use it for a greater purpose: Saving Buckbeak and Sirius Black. This decision signifies her shift from personal ambition to a broader sense of justice and empathy. Her evolving sense of justice is evident in her increasing willingness to stand against societal injustices. Her advocacy for house-elf rights in later books highlights her growth from a student who once conformed to authority to a young woman who actively challenges oppressive systems. Her journey is one of self-discovery, emotional intelligence, and moral growth. By balancing intellect with empathy, she moves beyond the need for external validation and embraces the courage to challenge injustice. Her character arc exemplifies Maslow's self-actualisation, as she learns to integrate her intelligence with compassion, becoming a leader who inspires others to think critically and act ethically.

5. Ron Weasley: Overcoming Insecurity to Gain Self-Worth

Ron Weasley's journey toward self-actualisation is shaped by his struggle with self-esteem and his deep desire to prove himself in a family of high achievers. Unlike Harry, who is thrust into fame from infancy, or Hermione, who excels academically and earns recognition through her intellect, Ron often feels like he is just another Weasley, constantly living in the shadow of his accomplished siblings. This sense of being overlooked and undervalued manifests in his frequent self-deprecating remarks and moments of insecurity throughout the series. However, Ron's journey is marked by moments where he gradually realises his worth, particularly through his bravery, loyalty, and strategic thinking. Over the course of the first three books, he grows from a boy who doubts his significance to a young wizard who recognises his strengths and values.

In *The Philosopher's Stone*, Ron's defining moment comes during the life-sized chess game, where he takes on a leadership role for the first time. Throughout the book, he often defers to Harry and Hermione, feeling that they are more naturally suited for heroism or problem-solving. However, during the chess match, Ron proves his worth by devising a strategy that allows them to progress to the next stage of the challenge. He boldly declares: "That's chess! You've got to make some sacrifices! I take one step forward and she'll take me—that leaves you free to checkmate the king, Harry!"[1]. Ron demonstrates not just courage but also strategic intelligence and selflessness by sacrificing himself so Harry can move forward. His decision to place the mission above his own safety is a pivotal moment in his character development, setting the stage for his evolving sense of self-worth. Similarly, in *The Chamber of Secrets*, Ron continues to display bravery, despite his fears. His confrontation with Aragog in the Forbidden Forest is a testament to his growth. Although he has an intense fear of spiders, he does not abandon Harry and instead faces his phobia in a life-threatening situation. Later, when Ginny is taken into the Chamber of Secrets, Ron is determined to help Harry rescue her. He willingly accompanies Harry into the chamber, even though the idea of facing the unknown horrors within

fills him with dread. When Lockhart's failed spell causes a rockfall that separates him from Harry, Ron does not panic or try to escape; instead, he stays behind and works to clear the path, showing a growing sense of responsibility and bravery that surpasses his earlier self-doubt.

In *The Prisoner of Azkaban*, Ron starts asserting himself more, standing up to authority figures and proving his equal place in the trio. One of the most defining moments of his growth occurs when he stands up to Sirius Black, whom he believes to be a dangerous murderer, despite having a broken leg: "If you want to kill Harry, you'll have to kill us too!"[2]. Ron's transformation from a boy who often questioned his own significance to a courageous and fiercely loyal friend who refuses to back down in the face of danger is encapsulated in this moment. Unlike his previous displays of bravery, which were often accompanied by hesitation or reluctance, Ron's declaration here is resolute and unwavering, showing his deep commitment to his friends and his growing confidence in himself.

6. Moral Development and Ethical Choices

A key component of humanistic psychology is the idea that moral choice reflects an individual's personal growth and journey toward self-actualisation. In the *Harry Potter* series, ethical dilemmas serve as defining moments for Harry, Hermione, and Ron, shaping their psychological and moral development. Harry Potter consistently chooses bravery over self-preservation, reinforcing his path toward self-actualisation. Despite his traumatic upbringing, he demonstrates moral strength by risking his safety to protect others. His refusal to kill Peter Pettigrew in *The Prisoner of Azkaban* showcases his moral maturity, as he prioritises justice over revenge. Harry's ability to see the humanity in others, even in former enemies like Draco Malfoy and Severus Snape, highlights his deepening compassion and wisdom.

Hermione Granger transitions from a rigid rule-follower to an ethical decision-maker, illustrating her moral flexibility. Initially, she views rules as absolute, but as she matures, she recognises the complexity of morality. From brewing Polyjuice Potion in *The Chamber of Secrets* to fighting for house-elf rights, Hermione evolves into an advocate for justice, demonstrating empathy and independent moral reasoning. Ron Weasley battles self-doubt and struggles with his esteem needs, yet over time, he learns to trust his own decisions. His growing confidence is evident in his willingness to take responsibility, such as sacrificing himself in the wizard chess game. His return in *The Deathly Hallows* signifies his ability to confront his mistakes, proving his moral and psychological growth. Through shared challenges and ethical tests, the trio refines their ethical compass, reinforcing the humanistic belief that self-actualisation is achieved through experience, reflection, and moral conviction.

7. The Role of Adversity and Resilience

Resilience is a core concept in humanistic psychology, as self-actualisation often requires overcoming hardship. In the *Harry Potter* Series, challenges serve as catalysts for growth, pushing Harry, Hermione, and Ron to develop inner strength and shape their identities. Their resilience allows them to endure adversity and progress toward self-actualisation, reflecting humanistic psychology's emphasis on personal agency and growth. Harry's resilience is evident in his ability to rise above his tragic past rather than letting it define him. Despite neglect and loss, he forges meaningful relationships and fights for justice. His choice to embrace his destiny, even when faced with fear and loss, highlights humanistic psychology's focus on self-determination.

Hermione's resilience lies in challenging societal norms and embracing her identity as a Muggle-born despite discrimination. Instead of succumbing to prejudice, she uses her intelligence and moral conviction to prove her worth and fight for justice, exemplifying self-determination and inner strength. Ron struggles with self-doubt, often feeling overshadowed by his brothers. However, through friendship and perseverance, he learns to trust his abilities. His sacrificial chess game illustrates his journey toward self-worth and leadership. Through adversity, the trio demonstrates emotional resilience, reinforcing humanistic psychology's belief in personal agency and self-growth. By choosing courage, perseverance, and self-acceptance, the trio embody the idea that resilience is key to becoming one's best self.

8. Conclusion

The character arcs of Harry, Hermione, and Ron reflect fundamental aspects of humanistic psychology,

emphasising love, belonging, self-esteem, and moral choice as essential to self-actualisation. Their journeys illustrate that personal growth is shaped by relationships, experiences, and ethical decisions, aligning with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and Carl Rogers' self-actualisation theory. Harry Potter's development highlights the need for belonging and self-acceptance. Despite his tragic past, he builds meaningful relationships that provide the emotional support necessary for his growth. Through his courageous choices, such as sparing Pettigrew's life and sacrificing himself to defeat Voldemort, he reaches moral maturity and self-actualisation.

Hermione Granger exemplifies the journey from external validation to intrinsic self-worth. Initially, she relies on academic achievement for esteem, but as she matures, she learns that true value comes from ethical convictions and relationships. Her advocacy for house-elf rights and willingness to break the justice rules reflect her moral evolution. Ron Weasley overcomes self-doubt and insecurity, learning that self-worth is not dictated by comparison. His growth into a confident leader and loyal friend marks his progression toward self-actualisation. By applying Maslow's and Rogers' theories, we gain deeper insight into how each character navigates hardship, identity, and morality, reinforcing that becoming one's best self is a lifelong process of learning and choice.

9. References

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