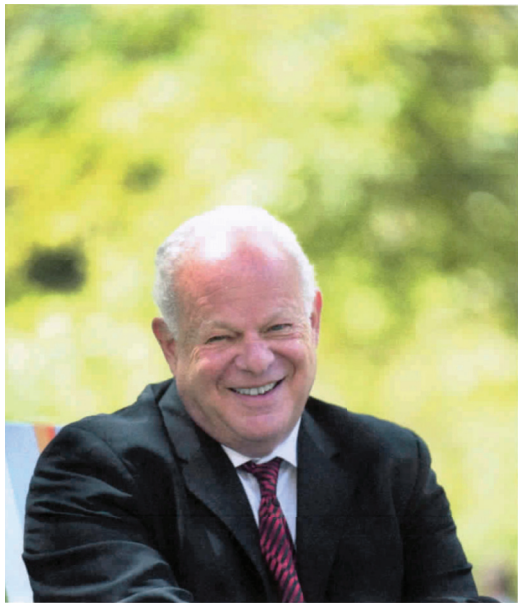


Martin E.P. Seligman

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Positive Psychology: A Personal History

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Abstract

As president of the American Psychological Association in 1998, I organized researchers and practitioners to work on building well-being, not just on the traditional task of reducing ill-being. Substantial research then found that well-being causes many external benefits, including better physical and mental health. Among the applications of Positive Psychology are national psychological accounts of well-being, Positive Psychotherapy, the classification of strengths and virtues, Comprehensive Soldier Fitness, and Positive Education. Positive Psychology has spread beyond psychology into neuroscience, health, psychiatry, theology, and even to the humanities. Positive Psychology has many critics, and I comment on the strongest criticisms. I conclude with the hope that the building of well-being will become a cornerstone of morality, politics, and religion.

Contents

PROLOGUE: 1997–1998 2
BEGINNINGS: 1998–2000 3
EARLY PROGRESS: 2001–2010 4
National Accounts of Well-Being 4
Authentic Happiness Website 5
Positive Psychotherapy 7
PERMA 7
Values in Action Classification of Strengths 10
Happiness as Causal 12
APPLICATIONS: 2008–2018 12
Comprehensive Soldier Fitness 12
International Positive Education 15
CRITICISMS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 18
THE FUTURE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY 20

PROLOGUE: 1997–1998

The idea of a Psychology of Well-Being had been percolating in my mind, but I thought it best to start my American Psychological Association (APA) presidency with a more conventional initiative.[1] So in January 1997, I visited with Steve Hyman, the young director of the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). Steve was no colorless Washington bureaucrat; he was a world-class intellect, formerly professor of neuropsychiatry at Harvard, and Steve and I shared a passion: basing treatment on empirical evidence.

"Steve," I said, "I won a mandate and we have an opening here to change the course of APA. Let's launch a program on evidence-based psychotherapy."

"If you can bring recalcitrant old APA into the fold, Marty," Steve said, "I will find $40 million to support such research."

Visions of cooperation between science and practice danced in my head. The reunion of Practice and Science. I asked to be invited to a meeting of the leading independent practitioners to explain my vision. They allotted me 15 minutes, and I had my first encounter with the machine I had just humiliated in the election by crushing their designated candidate with a 3:1 margin.

It did not go well.

There were about 20 stony-faced committee members, grouped around an enormous table in one of the many well-appointed seminar rooms in the luxurious new APA office building. I launched into my pitch. They stared at me as if I were an exotic bird that had flown off course from another planet. They stared. I couldn't seem to make my voice softer and less shrill. "These people hate me," I thought. As I described the possibilities of putting psychotherapy on a lasting, evidence-based platform, their faces got even stonier and their stares more hostile. I concluded by telling them that NIMH was willing to spend an unheard of amount—$40 million—to underwrite the search for evidence. This was my applause line.

There was dead silence.

One question cut through the silence, asked by their chair.

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[1] Most of this material is adapted from my memoir, *The Hope Circuit: A Psychologist's Journey from Helplessness to Optimism* (2018).

"What if the evidence does not come out in our favor?"

Later, Ron Levant, their secretary, took me out for a drink. Brimming with good cheer and friendliness, he said, "Marty, you are in deep shit."

In my adult life, I'd had only one true mentor: Ray Fowler. Ray was the chief executive officer of APA and, unlike the presidents who come and go, he was its institutional memory. Ray was the very soul of patience and moderation. He was the only officer of APA who advised me that my running for president was not impossibly quixotic, and he encouraged me to go for it.

In "deep shit," I turned to him.

"There are two kinds of leadership, Marty," Ray told me after listening patiently to my retelling of the fiasco, "transactional and transformational. You cannot out-transact these people. They sit on all the committees and they have great sitting power. They will out-sit you. If you are not to fail, you will need to be a transformational president. Your job is to transform American psychology."

BEGINNINGS: 1998–2000

"I've rented the Grateful Dead house in the Yucatan, Mike," I told Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi over the phone, "Can you and Isabella cancel your New Year's plans for 1998 and spend the first week with us, inventing Positive Psychology?"

I had gotten to know Mike well a year before, during late January 1997, at the now-defunct (eradicated by the tsunami that destroyed Fukushima in 2011) resort of Kona Village. Mike and I had found ourselves walking and snorkeling together. What I might do as president of APA and the possibility of a positive psychology was at the forefront of our discussions. Mike worked on flow, that high state of fascination in which time stops for you, you feel completely at home, and you are at one with the music. Flow had to be a centerpiece in any conception of what was positive in life. Mike and I talked for hours about what such a positive psychology might entail. I had asked him to help me create this new field, and he agreed.

"I've rented the Grateful Dead house, Ray," I told Ray and Sandy Fowler on the phone, "Can you spend the first week of the new year with the Csikszentmihalyi's and my family inventing Positive Psychology?"

The nine of us (Mandy, my wife, and I, and our three kids; Mike and Isabella; and Ray and Sandy) awakened in our psychedelic bedrooms on January 1, 1998, and the adults spent the week spelling out the elements of a new field and how to found it.

The name: Positive Psychology won out, not hands down, but by default. It sounded too much like the armchair positive thinking of Reverend Norman Vincent Peale to be a secular, science-based endeavor. Positive sounded too *amerikanisch* to Mike's coffee-house European ear. Psychology sounded too narrow for a field that might eventually supplement the dismal, remedial concerns of all modern social science. But we couldn't think of a better name.

The substance: We agreed here. The substance was anchored by the opposite concerns from clinical psychology: the good life—what it is to be healthy and sane, and what humans choose to pursue when they are not suffering or oppressed.

The people: We were unanimous here as well. The young people were the fulcrum. The old scientists and the old practitioners were sclerotic, overinvested in their way of doing things, and making their living from studying and treating misery. We had to attract the brightest not-yet-tenured scientists to Positive Psychology, and they needed to have the social skills to become the future leaders of the profession.

The funding: This was uncertain. Psychology relied almost exclusively on the federal government for support. But American politics and federal ideology were steeped in attending to what is wrong—disease, and pursuing a good life is not a disease—and, hence, Positive Psychology was

unlikely to attract tax dollars. We would have to work hard, but there were several avenues to explore. First, I would use my whole APA presidential allotment ($35,000) to hold a gathering of young people at this very spot in January 1999, exactly 1 year from this foundational meeting. Second, Don Clifton, the owner of Gallup, had written to me and asked if he could back us. Don had written *Soar with Your Strengths* (Clifton & Nelson 1992), and he told me he'd been waiting his whole life for APA to get to work on the positive. Third, I decided to pitch Positive Psychology to Sir John Templeton. The John Templeton Foundation was enthusiastic, and they began by funding prizes for the best research in Positive Psychology by young investigators. Barbara Fredrickson, Jonathan Haidt, and Suzanne Segerstrom won the first three $100,000 prizes.

But the biggest initial support came from an unusual source.

"That was a great meeting you held in Derry, Marty." The voice on the car phone was that of the treasurer of an anonymous foundation. They had supported a gathering of social scientists I had organized 6 months before to discuss when genocides do not happen.

"What do you want to do next?" the voice on my car phone asked. I was taken aback. I had assumed that the Derry meeting ended our work together.

"Next?" I ventured.

"Yes," he replied, "What are you thinking about now?"

I explained a bit about a Positive Psychology, composed of positive experience, positive traits, and positive institutions, and the conversation ended with him saying, "Why don't you come up to Manhattan and tell us about it?"

This time, unlike during my initial visit, there was a sign on the door: Atlantic Philanthropies. Chuck Feeney, the founder of the duty-free shops that are found in every international airport, had given away his entire fortune, some $5 billion dollars, to this foundation to advance opportunity and provide lasting change for vulnerable people.

"Now what is this Positive Psychology?" one of the two lawyers in the small room asked. I began, but after about 10 minutes he interrupted. "Could you send us two pages about this?" he asked, and as he ushered me out the door, "Don't forget to send a budget."

One month later, a check for $1.4 million appeared.

EARLY PROGRESS: 2001–2010

In Florence during the middle of the fifteenth century, Cosimo de Medici was the patron of a new Humanism: a flourishing of the arts, learning, and science, later dubbed the Renaissance. In Cosimo's honor, the brand new Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania held a 3-year celebration, Medici II. The idea was that the senior figures in Positive Psychology, along with a passel of junior fellows, would live together and meet daily for 2 months in the late spring of each year from 2001 through 2003.

National Accounts of Well-Being

One group was led by Ed Diener, and its goal was to create national psychological accounts of well-being. Could we use Positive Psychology to measure how well a nation was doing? Gross Domestic Product (GDP) was the widely used contemporary national account, but it was increasingly out of synch with well-being. GDP is the total of goods and services bought and sold, but GDP fails to distinguish goods and services that promote well-being from those that diminish well-being.

GDP includes what economists call regrettables. Every time a suicide or a divorce or an automobile accident occurs, GDP goes up. The funeral expenses, the legal fees, the hospital costs, and the repair bills all add to the GDP. The more tobacco sold, the higher the GDP. Moreover,

all graphs of national income against life satisfaction yield rapidly diminishing returns as income increases, once one is well above the safety net. This is true for the GDP of nations and for individual income, with roughly $100,000 per year in the United States being the inflection point at which markedly diminishing increases in happiness occur with increasing income.

"It's the economy, stupid," is a stupid account of human flourishing. Ed Diener assumed that what we wanted to measure was flourishing and that GDP had been a good start historically but was now outmoded. He was after a set of well-being indicators that would complement economic indicators and so assist policy-making for governments and corporations whose goal was the flourishing of their citizens and their employees. I called this goal the New Prosperity.

Ed's visionary initiative resulted in a landmark paper, "Beyond money: toward an economy of well-being," which made this case compellingly (Diener & Seligman 2004). Ed was kind enough to put my name on the paper. Soon thereafter, a gaggle of world-class economists—Richard Layard, Amartya Sen, Edmund (Ned) Phelps, John Helliwell, Jeffrey Sachs, and Joseph Stiglitz—trained their sights on happiness, and once these government-advising economists got into the act, well-being found its way onto the political agenda. Nicolas Sarkozy, the prime minster of France, formed a commission to recommend new measures of national success, and David Cameron, the prime minister of the United Kingdom, announced that he would measure the well-being of the citizens of the United Kingdom every 3 months, and he would hold himself accountable for the success or failure of his policies by changes in well-being. The European Left angrily accused Sarkozy and Cameron of trying to distract people with the sop of happiness because these governments were failing to grow their economies.

Authentic Happiness Website

Chris Peterson and Peter Schulman led the creation of a website (**https://www.authentichappiness.org**) that contained the major tests of well-being. The website was originally launched in English, Chinese (both simple and complex characters), and Spanish, and over the years we added German, Japanese, and Korean. The site was widely used in all these languages, but we did not seem to have made it over the Great Internet Wall in China. Although Positive Psychology became popular in China, our website was almost invisible there.

We continually added new surveys and refined old ones, and we shared our data with researchers around the world. On average, 2,000 new people registered daily, and as of this writing, more than 5,000,000 people have registered from more than 190 nations. It is a gold mine for researchers analyzing the website's data set. We also set up a Listserv (friends-of-PP@lists.apa.org), and I invite you to join the active discussions that occur there 24/7.

Our new website was marvelous, both as a way of testing new interventions and also as a futuristic way of delivering interventions on a massive scale. Outcome researchers have expended a lot of effort trying to test which psychotherapies and which drugs work for which disorders. Such efficacy studies are expensive and time consuming. Worse, they are often inconclusive because live clinical studies can afford only small and unrepresentative samples. In a typical well-done efficacy study, about 40 clinic volunteers are randomly divided into two groups, with half given an active drug or psychotherapy and half given a plausible placebo. Even for such small studies, NIMH budgets can run into the low seven figures.

The new website seemed to be a much cheaper way of testing new positive interventions with large samples. Are there simple exercises that individuals can do to improve their happiness, and might these exercises also lower depression?

Time magazine did a cover story on Positive Psychology in January 2005 (Wallis 2005). To capitalize on this, with Jeff Levy, a Philadelphia physician and entrepreneur, we set up an additional

website for the public to do these exercises. We gave them out free at first, and we hoped that if they worked people would pay a few dollars to subscribe for more exercises.

After reading the story in *Time* magazine, lots of people came and did the free exercise, which was called Three Blessings. Every night for a week, participants would write down three things that went well that day and why they went well. At this point, we had evidence from random-assignment, placebo-controlled studies (Seligman et al. 2005) that this exercise reliably lowered depression and raised life satisfaction for as long as 6 months. My interest was whether it would work for people who are severely depressed, that is, more depressed than the mildly depressed people who typically went to the authentic happiness website (**https://www.authentichappiness.org**).

The results from the first month were startling: 50 people fell into the severely depressed range when they registered. Their average depression score was 34, a score bad enough to indicate that these people were in pain: suffering a lot of sadness, crying a lot, very passive, with no zest, major loss of pleasure, and they were usually functioning very poorly, if at all, at work and at home. Thirty-four is close to extreme depression.

These 50 people did the exercise and came back to the website 2 weeks later to take their second depression test. Their depression scores on average got much better, declining to 17.2, which is right at the cusp of mild-to-moderate symptoms. A total of 47 of the 50 people (94%) had decreases in their depression scores. Their happiness scores, which to begin with averaged 53.4 (roughly in the bottom 10%), zoomed up to 69.8 on average at the posttest. This elevated them to the fortieth percentile, and 46 of the 50 people (92%) showed increases in scores of happiness.

These results are comparable, perhaps superior, to the effects of medication and psychotherapy in severe depression. My colleague Robert DeRubeis, a leading outcome researcher in severe depression, shared some of his typical findings with me for rough and ready comparison: Over 4 weeks, the combined use of cognitive therapy and medication decreased depressive symptom scores on average from 34.1 to 19.6 ($n = 134$) versus the use of a placebo with which symptom scores decreased on average from 34.8 to 24.4 ($n = 49$).

I was cautious about these dramatic results. I did not run out and shout that web exercises could cure severe depression since our method had plenty of flaws: no random assignment, no placebo control, no diagnosis of major depression, no long-term follow-up, and of course, unlike the usual severely depressed person arriving at therapy, these people came with high *Time* magazine–induced hopes.

Even with such promising initial findings, the use of the website dropped, and not enough paying subscriptions came in to keep the business afloat for more than 1 year. We failed to raise additional funding. This endeavor flopped as a business, and I never published those results, but I left that arena impressed by the potential of web-based therapy. Two of my graduate students, Acacia Parks and Stephen Schueller, took up the cause of web therapy for depression. But its long-term future is hard to predict. It should be viable because there are not enough face-to-face therapists to cope with the sheer amount of depression in our society. It is dirt cheap; it can be massively distributed; and, in my heart of hearts, I believe it is almost as effective as psychotherapy and medication. So why wouldn't web therapy prevail?

The competition is stiff, and the playing field is not level. Psychiatrists, clinical psychologists, social workers, and marriage and family counselors form guilds that tend to be self-protective. The drug companies rake in huge profits from their antidepressant drugs and do not welcome being undercut. But even more important than this competition is another factor that is almost entirely unnoticed: a discrepancy between patent law and copyright law in the United States, a discrepancy that has stifled—perhaps killed—the entire progress of psychotherapy. If you discover a drug that works at all well for depression, you can patent it, corner the market, and make out

like a bandit. If you discover a psychotherapy, or an exercise, that works just as well or even much better, you cannot make serious money. You can only copyright the words. Fair use law means that if a competitor merely changes a few words, for example, by calling the exercise What Went Well rather than Three Blessings and making a few other cosmetic refinements, that competitor is in business. As a result of their patent monopoly, Big Pharma has a massive war chest to trumpet their drugs, even if they are only marginally effective. Our initial results from the web exercise were at least as good as any antidepressant drug, but we could not raise enough money to keep the website going, and the public was deprived of what is likely an effective antidepressant treatment. The reason: Who would invest in a product that if it is found to be effective could be ripped off so easily and legally? Thus, there is minimal financial incentive to develop and promote new, effective, face-to-face psychotherapy and web-based exercises for mental illness. Once you do all the work and pour your money into promulgating them, any wealthy company can come along, change a few words, out-advertise you, create a jazzier website, and run you out of business.

Even if the website business failed, it led to Positive Psychotherapy.

Positive Psychotherapy

Tayyab Rashid became my postdoctoral fellow at the Positive Psychology Center. He decided to bundle all of the web exercises together and put them into the hands of skilled therapists and then test them in face-to-face therapy with severe depressives. I expressed my doubts that it would work, but Tayyab was undeterred, and he boldly tested a 14-session ensemble of Positive Psychotherapy against antidepressant medications and against cognitive therapy for clients with diagnosed major depression. He carried out a full-blown pilot study with severe depressives: 11 clients taking part in individual positive psychotherapy, 9 in usual treatment, and 12 in usual treatment plus antidepressant drugs. The results were startling: Positive Psychotherapy worked markedly better on all measures than the usual treatment and better than the usual treatment plus drugs.

Given these encouraging data, we applied for a grant from NIMH. It was turned down administratively, with no review at all. I was annoyed, and I saw NIMH more and more in the service only of neuroscience and Big Pharma. NIMH had by now given up on psychotherapy. Tayyab was discouraged, and he decamped for Toronto, Canada, where he carried out study after study, each of which showed good effects of Positive Psychotherapy. We reviewed 15 of the randomized trials in *Positive Psychotherapy: A Manual* (Rashid & Seligman 2018, Seligman et al. 2006).[2]

Table 1 presents a 14-session schematic of Positive Psychotherapy.

Nonetheless, in the absence of the expensive, definitive, larger-scale, random-assignment, placebo-controlled outcome studies, which only NIMH could afford to fund, I remained an optimist about Positive Psychotherapy, but I was skeptical that it would become as widespread as it deserved in my lifetime.

PERMA

In the process of gathering the tests and interventions for the website, I broadened my theory of well-being. In *Authentic Happiness* (Seligman 2002), I claimed there are three basic elements of

[2] For a meta-analysis of 39 studies of Positive Psychology interventions see Boller L, Haverman M, Westerhof G, Smit F, Bohlmeijer M. 2013. Positive psychology interventions: a meta-analysis of randomized controlled studies. *BMC Public Health* 13:119.
For later results, see Chaves C, Lopez-Gomez I, Hervas G, Vazquez C. 2017. A comparative study on the efficacy of a positive psychology intervention and a cognitive behavioral therapy for clinical depression. *Cognitive Ther. Res.* 41:417–33.

Table 1 Positive Psychotherapy: session-by-session description

Session	Exercise and homework	Description
1.	In session: orientation to Positive Psychotherapy	Presenting problems are discussed in the context of a lack of positive resources, such as positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and character strengths. Clients complete Positive Psychotherapy Inventory in session, score their responses, and reflect upon their scores. Clients introduce themselves through a story that shows them at their best.
	Homework: Positive Introduction	Clients write a one-page (about 300 words) Positive Introduction, in which they share a concrete and real-life story showing them at their best.
2.	In session: Character Strengths	Character Strengths are defined and discussed as important ingredients of therapy. The role of character strengths in problem-solving and in cultivating engagement is discussed. Clients identify their character strengths.
	Homework: Dynamic Strengths Assessment	Clients complete an online measure (the SSQ-72). Optionally, two significant others (a family member and a friend) identify the client's salient Character Strengths to help compute the Signature Strengths.
3.	In session: Signature Strengths	Clients integrate various perspectives to compute their Signature Strengths; goal-setting is discussed. The client and therapist discuss specific, measurable, and achievable goals targeting specific problems or for cultivating more engagement.
	Homework: Signature Strengths Action Plan	Clients frame specific goals into a concrete Signature Strengths Action Plan.
4.	In session: Good and Bad Memories	The role of bad and bitter memories is discussed in terms of how they perpetuate psychological distress. The impact on the emotional well-being of a client's bad and good memories is discussed. Positive Cognitive Reappraisal Strategies are discussed to help rewrite and repack bad and bitter memories.
	Homework: Positive Appraisal	The client uses one or more Positive Cognitive Reappraisal Strategies to assess bad memories, and feelings of anger and bitterness and their impacts on perpetuating emotional distress.
5.	In session: Forgiveness	Forgiveness is discussed as a potential option to transform feelings of anger and bitterness—associated with a specific transgression—into neutral or, if possible, positive emotions. Clients complete an exercise about what forgiveness is and what it isn't.
	Homework: Forgiveness Letter	Clients write about a transgression and its related emotions and consider whether forgiveness is a viable option. Clients write, but do not necessarily deliver, the forgiveness letter.
6.	In session: Gratitude	Gratitude is discussed as an enduring thankfulness. The roles of good and bad memories are discussed again, with an emphasis on gratitude. Clients write a first draft of a Gratitude Letter to someone whom they never properly thanked.
	Homework: Gratitude Letter and Visit	Clients refine the Gratitude Letter and deliver it in person to someone they never properly thanked.
7.	In session: Mid-therapy Feedback Session	The Signature Strengths Action Plan and the Forgiveness and Gratitude assignments are followed up. Therapeutic progress is discussed. Feedback to and from clients is discussed and necessary changes are made.
	Homework: exercise completion	Clients complete their Forgiveness and Gratitude Letters.

(*Continued*)

Table 1 (*Continued*)

Session	Exercise and homework	Description
8.	In session: Satisficing versus Maximizing	Concepts of Satisficing (settling for good enough) and Maximizing are discussed.
	Homework: Satisficing	Clients identify areas where they could benefit from Satisficing.
9.	In session: Hope, Optimism, and Posttraumatic Growth	Optimism and Hope are discussed in detail. Exercise: One Door Closes, One Door Opens—Clients think and write about times when important things were lost but other opportunities opened up. Potential growth from trauma is also explored.
	Homework: Optimism	Clients use specific strategies to exercise Optimism in everyday life.
10.	In session: Positive Relationships	The role and importance of Positive Relationships in well-being are discussed. Clients practice Active Constructive Responding, a strategy to foster positive communication in relationships.
	Homework: Active Constructive Responding practice	Clients self-monitor for opportunities for Active Constructive Responding.
11.	In session: Signature Strengths of Others	The significance of recognizing the character strengths of family members is discussed. Clients complete an exercise to identify the Signature Strengths of their family members.
	Homework: Family Strengths Tree	Clients asks family members to take the SSQ online measure, draw a family tree of strengths, and arrange an in-person or virtual gathering to discuss family members' Signature Strengths.
12.	In session: Savoring	Ways to Savor and strategies to safeguard against adaptation are discussed. Clients participate in a savoring exercise that uses various techniques and strategies.
	Homework: Planned Savoring activity	Clients plan a Savoring activity using specific techniques.
13.	In session: Altruism and Positive Legacy	The therapeutic benefits of helping others are discussed. Clients write a paragraph about how they would like to be remembered or what they would like their legacy to be.
	Homework: Gift of Time	Clients plan to give the Gift of Time by doing something that also uses their signature strengths.
14.	The Full Life	The Full Life is discussed as the integration of positive emotions, engagement, positive relationships, meaning, and accomplishment. Therapeutic gains and experiences are discussed and ways to sustain positive changes are devised.

Abbreviation: SSQ, Signature Strengths Questionnaire.

well-being: Positive Emotion, Engagement, and Meaning. An element is what free, nonsuffering people choose to pursue for its own sake. But I eventually became convinced that there were five elements of well-being (Seligman 2011) that are denoted by the acronym PERMA:

- Positive Emotion
- Engagement
- Relationships
- Meaning
- Accomplishment.

What persuaded me to revise the theory was seeing how common it was for people to pursue achievement doggedly for its own sake, even if it brought no happiness, no flow, lousy relationships,

and no meaning. (In 2018 there are now two more claimants as elements: physical health and control. But I am not yet convinced.)

Values in Action Classification of Strengths

Chris Peterson led another major project that emerged from Medici II: the classification of sanity (Peterson & Seligman 2004). Positive Psychology, as I see it, requires character. It is the study of Positive Experience, Positive Institutions, and Positive Traits. First: Why is the idea of trait indispensable? I am convinced that human beings have dispositions to behave consistently over time and situation, not close to 100% consistency of course, but enough above zero to make calling someone smart or loving or mean or weak, sensible, and this is likely universal across languages. So, traits are undeniable. Second: Why is Positive indispensable? Positive formally means "above indifference" or "chosen in preference to nothing," and there are many such preferred traits. Perhaps they vary from culture to culture, but kindness, wisdom, integrity, and courage are examples that most politics, religions, and cultures that I know of endorse. Importantly, this does not mean that Positive Psychology as a science prescribes good character, but rather it describes, studies, and asks how to build what is prescribed within the culture. Positive Psychology does not do the prescribing: The values of the culture or the values of the individual do that; Positive Psychology is not an exercise in changing values but in helping cultures and individuals better achieve what they already value.

Psychiatry-as-usual already had its extensive catalogue of negative traits: DSM (the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders*). This is a manual of the insanities: schizophrenia, psychopathy, panic disorder, autism, and the like, more than 300 of them in fact, along with their sex ratios, heritability, course, prognosis, and diagnostic criteria. Chris—funded by Neal Mayerson, head of the Manuel and Rhoda Mayerson Foundation—took a 3-year sabbatical from his post as director of clinical training at the University of Michigan and came to Penn to work with me on creating a DSM of good character and virtue along with a questionnaire to measure good character.

In this process, Chris became the closest colleague I have ever had. Our work was pretty one-sided. Chris read and read and thought and thought: early Christian theology, Karl Marx, Buddhist chants, Benjamin Franklin, Islamic virtues. Twice a week over lunch, he told me about strengths and virtues across time and space. He told me about the Lakota virtue of generosity. He told me about the Budo virtue *Rei* (courtesy and etiquette). He told me about Hufflepuffs and their loyalty and hard work. He told me about the Klingon virtue: to avenge insults against the family for seven generations. We were searching for universals, strengths endorsed by every religion, politics, and culture. It turned out that there was a lot of agreement across history and culture. I listened and reacted, mostly nodding my head approvingly.

We developed criteria for including a strength in our classification. Among the criteria were the following.

1. A strength is valued in its own right, not as a means to an end (i.e., intelligence, like perfect pitch, is not a strength; it is not valued in its own right, rather it is valued when it produces success).
2. There are paragons and prodigies of the strength and also idiots, people egregiously devoid of the strength.
3. A strength is endorsed universally (or at least ubiquitously).
4. A strength contributes to fulfillment in life.

Chris and I spent hundreds of hours—and I ate hundreds of grilled Reubens—arguing over which candidates fit these criteria. Kindness fit. Wisdom fit. Vitality fit. Social intelligence fit. Tolerance did not because it was not (universally) valued in Salt Lake City or Mecca. Obedience? The Boy Scouts and Merlin liked it, but the feminist movement did not. Chastity? The Victorians espoused it, but the commune movement rejected it. How about humor? That one was close. Everyone thinks they have a sense of humor (universality), and Chris was, in fact, a remarkable sotto voce stand-up comic. But I was not sure humor was important enough to make the list. Chris wore me down, arguing that humor is a transcendent strength that amplifies all the others. We eventually narrowed the list down to 24 strengths, and then we grouped the strengths, somewhat arbitrarily, under six virtues: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence.

With the help of 24 experts, one for each strength, we drafted a humungous document (when published, it weighed in at about 5 pounds). After an introduction in which we justified the need for a manual of sanity, we reviewed the history of virtue and the attempts at previous classifications. We then organized the rest of the book around the 24 strengths, one chapter for each. The chapters had a parallel structure, and the Forgiveness and Mercy chapter is an example. It opened with a paragon, Kim Phuc, the naked little girl who was napalmed by an American plane during the Vietnam War, immortalized in the horrific photograph. She publicly and movingly forgave the pilot when she met him years later. We then defined forgiveness, and we discussed the philosophical and religious stances on forgiveness, as well as contemporary views. We reviewed the measures of forgiveness. (There were two well-honed tests.) All of this was followed by a review of the correlates and consequences (e.g., forgiving people have less negative emotion), what was known about how forgiveness develops across the life span (e.g., young children are unforgiving), and the factors that inhibit or enable forgiveness (e.g., disagreeable and highly neurotic people are unforgiving). After this, the gender, national, and cross-cultural factors were addressed. Finally, we reviewed the interventions that build forgiveness, and we ended with what was not known about forgiveness.

This was only half of what Chris accomplished during his 3-year stint at Penn studying virtue. The other half was empirical. Chris created questionnaires, and he was a statistician. So using these skills, he created the VIA (Values in Action) Signature Strengths Test.[3] There are 10 items for each of the 24 strengths, and the VIA asks you to rate how closely each item describes you. This results in a rank order of your strengths, and it tells you what your five highest strengths are. In the 15 years since Chris created it, more than 3 million people have taken the test in English, and many other people have taken it in German, Chinese, Japanese, and Spanish. In addition to individual self-insight, the test is widely used in businesses and schools and in therapy.

A flood of findings emerged from this website. One of the most intriguing was about the universality of strengths. Our hope was that the strengths would transcend the local environment and culture and the vagaries of socialization, and perhaps tell us something about human nature itself. As a test of the universality of the survey, we looked at strengths across 54 nations in more than 117,000 adults. Americans rate themselves as having kindness, fairness, authenticity and gratitude as their top strengths, and they rate prudence, modesty, and self-regulation at the bottom. Keep in mind that these are self-descriptions rather than how much the participants value the strengths.

We then rank-ordered strengths across each of the 54 nations and correlated each nation's rank order with the American rank order. We were astonished by the sheer size of the correlations. Unsurprisingly, Americans correlated 0.94 with the British and 0.99 with Canadians. But the United States also correlated 0.92 with China, 0.92 with Japan, 0.90 with Zimbabwe, 0.94 with Brazil,

[3] You can take the VIA survey for free at **https://www.authentichappiness.sas.upenn.edu**.

and 0.84 each with Egypt and India. The average correlation between any two nations was around 0.80. Our takeaway was that we had found out something about human nature or at least about the nature of cultures that survive (Park et al. 2006).

Happiness as Causal

Positive Psychology led to an explosion of empirical research on happiness as a cause, rather than as a mere consequence, of desirable outcomes at work, at school, in health, in relationships, and in aging. Ed Diener is a central contributor to these findings, and here is a very brief summary of this very extensive literature on causality (Diener & Chan 2011, Diener et al. 2017a).

People assumed that favorable external conditions such as employment, safety, health, and community participation would result in higher well-being. It has now become clear that happiness also causes desirable outcomes. For example, happiness:

- boosts immune system functioning and leads to fewer cold symptoms (Diener & Chan 2011, Pressman & Cohen 2005)
- is associated with taking fewer sick days (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005)
- is associated with better health behaviors, such as wearing seatbelts and not smoking (Diener et al. 2017b, Lyubomirsky et al. 2005)
- predicts longevity (the happiest people enjoy a big boost in healthy years) (e.g., Danner et al. 2001, Diener & Chan 2011)
- predicts gains in income (De Neve et al. 2013)
- leads to better performance in companies, such as lower turnover, more customer loyalty, more energy (Diener et al. 2017a, Tenney et al. 2016)
- predicts advancement at work (De Neve et al. 2013)
- predicts sociability, volunteerism, and donations to charity (Diener et al. 2017a, Oishi et al. 2007)
- predicts staying married and changing jobs less frequently (Lyubomirsky et al. 2005).

Happiness doesn't just feel good, it is good.

APPLICATIONS: 2008–2018

The principles of Positive Psychology were being applied widely, and the two largest applications occurred in the United States Army and in education around the world.

Comprehensive Soldier Fitness

The four-star Chief of Staff of the United States Army walked in. Everyone jumped to attention and I, the only civilian, stumbled to my feet. General George Casey took the chair in the middle of the table, across from me. It was December 2008, and war was raging in Iraq, and the Army was plagued with mental illness. This is why I was invited to the Pentagon.

"Suicide, drug abuse, posttraumatic stress disorder, panic, depression, divorce," began General Casey, speaking deliberately but with an undertone of skepticism. "What does Positive Psychology say about all that, Dr. Seligman?"

"The human reaction to awful events like combat, sir, is bell shaped," I began. "You have just described the left-hand side of the bell curve, the different names for the ways in which people's lives are ruined. But most people are resilient, which means they go through a tough time in

combat and then a few months later by our physical and psychological measures, they are back to where they were before combat.

"More important and much less publicized," I continued, "is Posttraumatic Growth, the right-hand side of the bell curve. These are the soldiers who often go through a terrible time in combat, but 1 year later are stronger than they were to begin with. The Army is not a hospital, and of course you should continue to spend the billions of dollars it takes to help those who have their lives ruined, but my advice, sir, is to move the whole curve rightward toward Posttraumatic Growth."

General Casey then commanded, "What I want done is to teach the drill sergeants the skills of resilience and Positive Psychology, and the drill sergeants will then teach the 1.3 million soldiers. From this day forward, resilience and Positive Psychology will be taught and measured throughout the entire United States Army.

"Dr. Seligman, meet Rhonda Cornum. Rhonda is the chief urologist of the Army, and I want you to work with her to create 'Comprehensive Soldier Fitness.' Rhonda is a war hero, the only female general to hold the Purple Heart, having been wounded in combat. During Desert Storm, she went on a rescue mission. Her helicopter was shot down and all but Rhonda and one other soldier died. Both her arms and one leg were broken. She was taken prisoner and she was sexually molested. Saddam Hussein and President George H.W. Bush negotiated her release.

"It's too bad you're a woman, Major," the welcoming colonel told her when she arrived back in Saudi Arabia from prison, "otherwise you could be a general." But a general she became, and as I discovered somewhat later when at Fort Leavenworth, 1,200 majors and colonels rose to their feet applauding the return of not just any general, but a poster-child general.

To create a psychologically fit army, we needed two things: First, a measure of psychological fitness and not just the usual measures of unfitness, such as mental illness, indiscipline, substance abuse, felonies, and dishonorable discharge. We needed good measures of a soldier's well-being, resilience, character strengths, social support, sense of purpose, growth, and positive emotion: that is, the positive sides of a soldier's life, since the aim of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness was explicitly to increase the well-being of all soldiers not just to reduce negatives. Second, we needed a plan for building well-being and resilience: a plan to move the entire army toward the right-hand side of the bell curve, toward Posttraumatic Growth.

For the first, Chris Peterson along with Colonel Carl Castro and Nansook Park, taking the best items from a variety of personality inventories, constructed a 120-item Global Assessment Tool, and they started the pilot work right away.

"Report," General Casey barked. Same lunch table, same generals: It was now mid-February 2009.

"We developed a questionnaire to assess a soldier's well-being, resilience, and character strengths, as well as the usual deficits and problems," Rhonda said, "and we piloted it with 10,000 soldiers, sir."

"Good work, General Cornum. What are you going to do by way of building resilience and Positive Psychology in the army?"

"We'd like to run a pilot study with 100 drill sergeants and 5,000 soldiers," Rhonda said, "Each sergeant will teach 50 soldiers resilience skills and then for the next year we will gather data…"

"We are at war, General Cornum," interrupted General Casey. "I don't want a pilot study. I want you to teach and measure resilience and Positive Psychology in the whole army. Now."

"Move out, soldier!" he commanded, and he left the table.

We needed to craft an intervention that had a shot, in the absence of serious pilot work, at building resilience in soldiers.

Karen Reivich was enlisted to build the intervention. We had been teaching resilience and Positive Psychology to hundreds of school teachers, most recently at the Geelong Grammar School

in Australia. The drill sergeants were indeed teachers, but of a very different stripe. We needed to combine what we had learned training civilian teachers with the issues that overwhelm soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan.

So as Karen and her team wrote new manuals for the drill sergeants, they coupled scenarios from army life with scenarios from ordinary home life. Here's an example: an exercise to correct catastrophization—making the worst possible interpretation of an ambiguous situation—by transforming it into a more realistic interpretation.

Army life: You and your squad are out on a land navigation course. It is 20 minutes past the midnight deadline and one of your soldiers has not shown up. Step one is to list the worst possibilities.

- He's got heat stroke.
- He's probably dead.
- It's my fault and I will rot in jail the rest of my life.

Step two is to list the best possibilities.

- He's taking a nap.
- He's 100 meters away and will be here in 10 minutes.

Step three is to list the most likely possibilities.

- He got lost.
- He's hitchhiking his way back.
- I will have to report him and the captain will bawl me out.

Now develop a plan for dealing with the most likely outcomes.

- Find out who saw him last.
- Send out a couple of guys with a vehicle to look for him.

Home life: You phone your girlfriend when it is late at night in the States and she does not answer. Worst outcome?

- She's out on a date with another man.
- She's having an affair.
- It's all over.

Best outcome?

- She's asleep and does not hear the phone.
- She's staying overnight at her mother's house.

Most likely outcome?

- She's gone out drinking with her girlfriends.
- She's tempted by other guys.

Now formulate a plan for dealing with the most likely outcomes.

- Outline an understanding script about how lonely you both are.
- Rehearse it with your best buddy.

The manual started with a panoply of such resilience exercises; we called this section mental toughness. These exercises constituted the first 2 days of the program. During the next 2 days, each sergeant learned to identify his or her (20% of the drill sergeants were female) Signature Strengths

as well as the strengths of the soldiers in their platoons and how to deploy the range of strengths to carry out actual missions. Finally, we taught building strong relationships, a scientifically informed version of leadership skills.

We piloted the program successfully with several hundred drill sergeants and, after months of negotiations, the army contracted with the University of Pennsylvania to train thousands of drill sergeants and other noncommissioned officers during the next 3 years. My work was done pro bono.

As of this writing, more than 40,000 sergeants have been trained at Penn and in Army forts around the world. The sergeants were typically Black or Hispanic soldiers, originally from tough urban neighborhoods, and they had done three tours of duty in Iraq or Afghanistan, often heroic tours. They had seen it all, and they were forthright about their opinions.

I present some numbers about the effectiveness of this training below, but how the sergeants reacted was dramatic and more to the point. At the outset of the first hour, they were leaning away from us with facial expressions that ranged from stolid indifference to sucking on a lemon. By the end of the first hour, they were leaning forward, intrigued. By the end of the last day, three-quarters of them had volunteered to become trainers of trainers, the next level of teaching. Their average rating of the entire program was about 4.9 out of 5.0, and the modal and emblematic comment was "This is the single best course I have had in 20 years in the army."

We planned carefully to get good data on whether the program actually worked: using untreated control groups and the random assignment of sergeants to training or no training. We originally designed the rollout of the training so that we would have 10,000 soldiers with resilience training and 10,000 controls without resilience training, a nice, clean experiment. But the reality of war defeated us. The reception of the sergeants to this course was so overwhelmingly positive that the generals sped up the rollout, wiping out our neat control group.

So our well-designed experiment went up in smoke. In the meantime, the army decided to create a giant electronic database housed in Monterey, California, and for the first time, at least 30 siloes of data—formerly separated and unanalyzable—about more than 1 million soldiers were merged into the Person-Event Data Environment. Major Paul Lester and his team of statisticians in Monterey did their best to get before- and after-deployment data to see whether resilience-trained versus -untrained soldiers actually did better.

Looking at soldiers' psychological status before and after deployment to Iraq or Afghanistan, they reported that the soldiers who had resilience training ($n = 6{,}739$) improved in emotional fitness, active coping and optimism, and had lowered catastrophizing in contrast to the soldiers who had no resilience training ($n = 3{,}218$), who had actually dropped in these measures by the end of their deployments (Lester et al. 2011).

Since these were merely self-reported data, under Major Lester, the army went on to look at diagnoses of mental illness. Significantly fewer soldiers who had resilience training were diagnosed with posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression, and the rate of substance abuse was halved among those who had resilience training (Harms et al. 2013). Based on these findings, the Department of the Army declared the program effective and institutionalized it throughout the Army (Vergun 2012).

International Positive Education

Schools are the primary place where the values of a culture are instilled in young people. To the extent that teachers convey pessimism, distrust, and a tragic outlook on life, their students' worldview will be thus fabricated. To the extent that teachers transmit optimism, trust, and a hopeful sense of the future, this will positively influence their students' perception of the world.

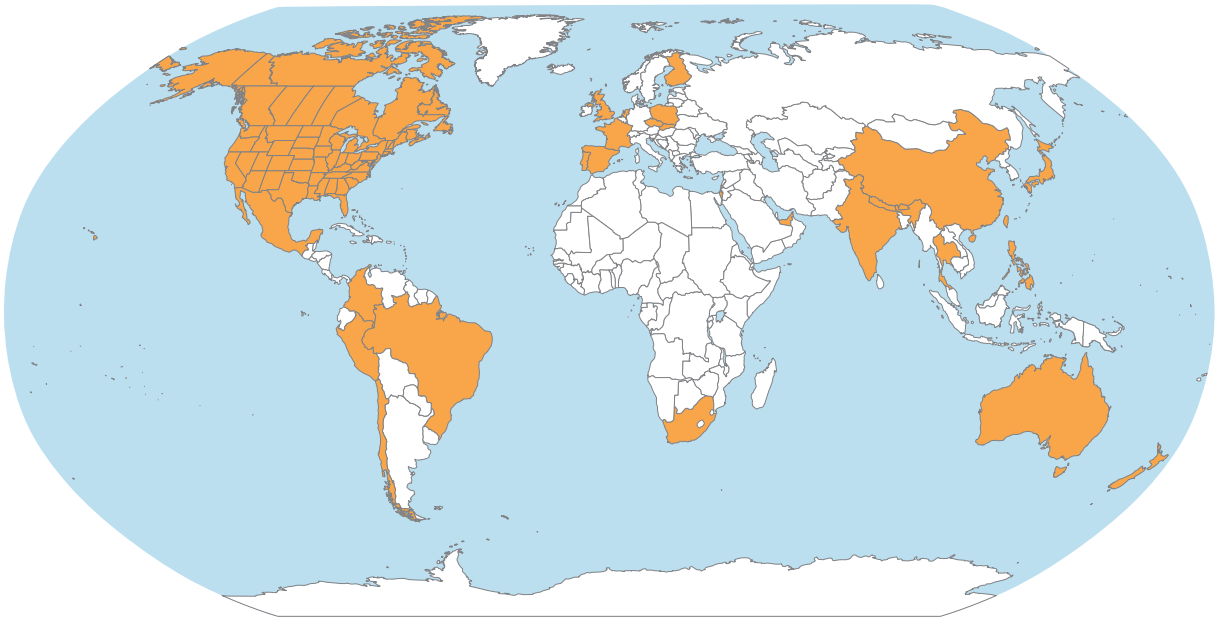


Figure 1

The map shows the countries where Positive Education has taken root as of 2018.

The guiding hypothesis of Positive Education is that positive schools and positive teachers are the fulcrum for producing more well-being in a culture. Positive Education adapts the interventions developed in the clinic to the classroom and measures well-being along with the traditional school measures: grades and national standardized examinations. It has been adopted widely across the globe, with thousands of teachers delivering the interventions, and the map of the world shows the nations in which Positive Education has taken root as of 2018 (**Figure 1**). As is obvious from the map, space does not permit a review here, but the controlled outcome data are important, so I present some of them.

Alejandro Adler, my graduate student from 2012 through 2017, was the key investigator. His first large trial was in Bhutan (Adler 2016). Bhutan is a small Himalayan country that was especially well suited to our first nationwide Positive Education program. The fourth King, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, declared in 1972, "Gross National Happiness is more important than Gross National Product." This idea drives public policy, and the Bhutanese Ministry of Education defines its mission as educating for Gross National Happiness (GNH). The ministry invited us to codevelop a GNH program for grades 7 through 12. The program is 15 months in duration, and it targets 10 positive life skills.

Our study involved 18 schools. Eleven schools (5,347 students) were treatment schools and seven schools (3,138 students) were the controls. The principals and teachers from both groups of schools were told that they were being trained to teach the GNH curriculum. The students in both groups of schools received the same number of classroom hours during the real 15-month Life Skills Course and the placebo 15-month course: 2 hours per week. All principals and teachers in the 11 treatment schools received training during a 10-day GNH curriculum retreat. The trainers were psychologists from Penn's Positive Psychology Center plus nine staff members from Bhutan's Ministry of Education; a training manual (*Educating for GNH*) was used. The trainers taught the principals and the teachers how to practice the skills in their own lives and how to

teach the 10 life skills to their students. Teachers learned to infuse their academic subjects (e.g., math, science, and reading) with the life skills. Literature, for instance, was taught through a GNH lens by identifying strengths and virtues in characters from novels and by encouraging students to use these strengths in their daily lives. The principals and teachers from the seven schools in the control group received training during a 4-day placebo GNH curriculum retreat, during which they learned about how to teach nutrition, psychology, and human anatomy.

We measured students' well-being and their national standardized exam scores at the end of the 15 months and then again 12 months later. Well-being rose and was significantly higher in students in the treated schools than in those in the placebo schools. Most importantly, academic achievement—as measured by the national exams—rose dramatically and remained much higher in the treated schools. We also found that more student engagement and more perseverance accounted for most of the superiority in examination results (Adler 2016).

Bhutan has now adopted this curriculum for all schools in the nation.

Alejandro's next target was his home country of Mexico. The governor of the province of Jalisco initiated a constellation of programs to build well-being, and the Ministry of Education partnered with us to conduct a random-assignment, placebo-controlled study of Positive Education. We had 70 schools with a total of 68,762 students. Alejandro and the ministry modified the Bhutan curriculum for Mexico.

Our Penn staff, using an extensive training manual, taught 35 Mexican trainers, each with a background in psychology and education, how to teach teachers these life skills and how to teach teachers to infuse these skills into their academic courses. These trainers went on to teach the principals and teachers of a random selection of 35 of the schools. In the 35 control schools, the same trainers taught the principals and teachers how to teach nutrition, psychology, and human anatomy.

Fifteen months later, the children from the Positive Education schools had higher well-being and significantly higher standardized test scores than the children in the placebo schools. Again, greater engagement and perseverance mediated the improved grades. The academic effect was somewhat smaller than in Bhutan, likely because there was an additional layer of training between the experienced Penn trainers and the actual teachers (Adler 2016).

Alejandro, in partnership with the World Bank, next worked in Peru: this time with 694 schools and 694,153 students (Adler 2016). The design was the same as in Mexico and Bhutan, and the curriculum was parallel to Mexico's. There was, however, one more layer to dilute the training. Our Penn trainers now taught 28 Peruvian trainers. These 28 Peruvian trainers now taught 590 local trainers who, in turn, trained the principals and teachers from the 694 schools.

The curriculum increased both well-being and academic performance, as measured 15 months later. The engagement and perseverance of the students were once again the mediators, and with yet another layer of dilution, the effect on academic performance, while highly significant, was smaller (Adler 2016).

Having an impact on the educational systems of the world is daunting, since teachers and principals are heavily invested in what they already teach, and unions entrench policies that make transformation nearly impossible. The main objection that Alejandro and I heard time and again is that schools are about creating paths to college and to the workplace. Any program that teaches well-being to schoolchildren must replace some useful program that already exists. There are only so many hours in the school day and not enough money to support what already exists. Therefore, making kids happier might subtract from traditional academic success. What Alejandro's data showed convincingly is that young people who acquire higher well-being actually do better in their academic courses. They become more engaged in school and grittier in their schoolwork.

CRITICISMS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

When I first advocated that psychology study and attempt to build well-being in addition to studying ill-being, I thought that was like advocating motherhood. As the discipline gathered steam, however, it attracted much criticism, some constructive and some made of straw men. In any case, here are the three strongest criticisms that I take most seriously and my responses.

1. Positive Psychology tells us nothing that my grandmother, St. Augustine, and my Sunday school teacher did not already know.

Here is a sampling of things I did not know before Positive Psychology came along.

- Optimistic people are much less likely to die of heart attacks than pessimists, controlling for all known physical risk factors (Boehm & Kubzansky 2012).
- Women who display genuine (Duchenne) smiles to the class photographer at age 18 are more likely to have marital satisfaction than those who display fake smiles (Harker & Keltner 2001).
- Together, externalities (e.g., weather, money, health, marriage, religion) account for no more than 15% of the variance in life satisfaction (Schkade & Kahneman 1998).
- Specific exercises produce increases in happiness and decreases in depression that last up to 6 months, while other plausible exercises are mere placebos (Seligman et al. 2005).
- The pursuit of meaning and engagement is much more predictive of life satisfaction than the pursuit of pleasure (Huta & Ryan 2010).
- Self-discipline is twice as good a predictor of grades in high school as IQ (Duckworth & Seligman 2006).
- Happy teenagers go on to earn substantially more income 15 years later than less happy teenagers, controlling for income, grades, and other obvious factors (Diener & Seligman 2002).
- People experience more flow at work than at home (Csikszentmihalyi 1997).
- People who prefer meaning (eudaimonia) to pleasure (hedonia) have a distinguishable genetic profile (Fredrickson et al. 2013).
- Trust that income inequality is fair in a nation cancels the effect of income inequality on life satisfaction (Oishi et al. 2011).
- Conservative Republicans report themselves happier than liberal Democrats do (Taylor et al. 2006).
- Mindfulness training makes you more resilient. Mindfulness groups that go through only 3 hours of practice have higher activity in the anterior cingulate cortex and also show higher performance on tests of self-regulation and resisting distractors compared with a control group (Davidson 2012).

2. Positive Psychology is just old wine in new bottles. Abraham Maslow and the Humanistic Psychology movement said it all 40 years ago.

Indeed the humanistic psychologists have been furious at me and the Positive Psychology movement. They feel slighted and not properly acknowledged. They have laid into me mercilessly.

I think their anger is more than partly justified. Abraham Maslow was the first person to use the term Positive Psychology, his thinking was iconoclastic, and it antedated some of our main ideas. In our inaugural article on Positive Psychology, Mike Csikszentmihalyi and I (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi 2000) foolishly lumped Humanistic Psychology with crystal healing and aromatherapy and, for my part, I apologize for this unwarranted slight.

However, Abraham Maslow did come too early. Scientific psychology did not take him seriously. Maslow himself recognized that he wanted scientific respect above all, and his research assistant Bob Gable, in a revealing personal letter in 2001, wrote to me, "Abe would have been happier with something that never happened—a return phone call from Fred Skinner."

Rather than carry out mainstream science on his ideas, his followers, calling themselves humanistic psychologists, developed their own qualitative and nonexperimental methods. Humanistic Psychology's then-radical ideas combined with its less-than-rigorous methods made it doubly difficult for science to digest, hence its present status as scientific backwater that is separate from Positive Psychology (Waterman 2013). Positive Psychology keeps some of the radical ideas, but it uses conventional, rigorous methods.

In fact, I had not read much Maslow, and so his writings had only a negligible role in my own thinking. Had I invoked Maslow, however appropriately, it would have been window dressing. Positive Psychology arose directly from my take on the shortcomings of mainstream clinical and experimental science.

3. Positive Psychology is unnecessary. Psychology-as-usual's mission is to get rid of what is bad. Human well-being follows automatically when all that is bad is fixed.

Is the good simply the absence of the bad? Does getting rid of the bad lead to the good? This is a deep and fundamental critique, and I think it is wrong.

There are three kinds of opposites: The first is when both extremes lie on the same continuum. Temperature is like this. Hot and cold are opposites, but they only differ as a matter, literally, of degrees. Hot is just less cold, and cold is just less hot.

The second kind of opposite is when one side is well understood and the other side is nothing more than the absence of the first side. Colored and colorless are like this. Colorless has no meaning except the absence of color.

The third is when each side forms its own distinct world, a world with properties that are not deducible from the absence of the properties of the other world. Civility is an example. The presence of civility leads to cooperation, friendship, and loyalty. Civility is a positive-sum game. Incivility leads to revenge, hate, and divorce. Incivility is a negative-sum game. Civility and incivility are different in kind not just in degree. The benefits of civility are more than just the absence of revenge, hate, and divorce, and the costs of incivility are more than just the absence of cooperation, friendship, and loyalty.

Good and bad, positive and negative, are this third kind of opposite. The good and the bad each form their own unique worlds.

"The basic mission of journalism is to uncover what is hidden," declared Bill Moyers to the audience. What Bill Moyers thinks about journalism is holy writ among American journalists, and he was the speaker at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at Penn. Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director, had chosen me to be a discussant.

"Imagine, Mr. Moyers, that journalism was wholly successful, and it uncovered everything that was hidden. Even further, imagine that you have uncovered everything that was wrong and hidden and journalism corrected everything that was wrong," I said. "Where would you have gotten to?"

"You would have gotten all the way up to…zero. Not getting it wrong does not equal getting it right. Has journalism no positive values? What is journalism's positive vision? What is praiseworthy? Heroic? Virtuous? Is there not a world above zero, a world that journalism should envision, praise, nurture, and help to birth?"

Bill Moyers took this seriously, and we then spent the entire dinner wondering how and if Positive Journalism could ever take off.

There is of course a long tradition of Positive Journalism, but it is derided as fluff. Many journalists, in addition to digging up dirt, write positive stories. These show up in the food section, in local columns, in feel-good stories, and in what used to be called the women's pages. In its strongest and most widely read form, Positive Journalism inhabits the sports pages. It is often said that writing about heroism and virtue and skill cannot be as commercially successful as uncovering scandal, but the popularity of the sports pages should tell us that the maxim "if it bleeds, it leads" is not necessary for commercial success.

The tradition I cut my teeth on, learning-theory-as-usual, made this same mistake, big-time. From E.L. Thorndike's cats in the puzzle box through B.F. Skinner's pigeons pecking lighted keys, learning was said to occur by trial and error. The animal only gradually eliminated all that was wrong (the error trials), and so eventually, its response finally got whittled down to the right one. The gradualness of the so-called learning curve in animals seemed to support this. But the apparently gradual curve was often just an artifact of averaging a lot of sudden step functions of different animals. So if there were 10 rats learning to press a bar for food and each rat suddenly "got it" by insight, but each on a different trial, suddenly—not gradually—learning what was right, the averaged curve would look gradual even if composed only of insight functions (e.g., rat 1 gets it on trial 2; rat 2 gets it on trial 5; rat 3 gets it on trial 12). In a classic experiment (Spielberger 1962), the experimenter nodded his head with approval whenever participants said words that ended in s. When averaged, learning to say s appeared gradual, but when this was broken down participant by participant, no learning occurred at all until the participant could verbalize the insight that words ending in s or plural words induced head nodding. Then participants jumped to getting their responses 100% right.

Nature just cannot work by the enormously inefficient way of gradually eliminating all possible errors. Evolution will favor cognitive mechanisms that help us to leap to the right answer, and animals (and people) surely have evolved to get it right in a more direct manner than by first eliminating all of the wrong pathways.

In its modern cognitive incarnation, the elimination-of-errors school, led perhaps unwittingly by Danny Kahneman (2011), makes much out of ridding ourselves of cognitive errors. By eliminating these errors, so Kahneman alleges, we will become more accurate. Maybe so, but coming up with the right answer is much more than just eliminating all of these errors. We often just see what is right, long before all errors are eliminated, and this insightful leap is at its heart nothing less than creativity itself.

That the positive adds properties over and above the absence of the negative is very important for psychotherapy. When I first became a therapist, I was taught, following the dogma of Sigmund Freud and Arthur Schopenhauer, that the best we can do is not to suffer, so my aim was to help the patient get rid of all of her negatives: anger, sadness, and anxiety. That done, therapy ended. Once in a while, we did very good work, and these dysphorias cleared up completely. Did I get a happy patient? No, I got an empty patient because the skills of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, and good relationships are entirely different from the skills of fighting anger, anxiety, and depression.

So arriving at the good is a lot more than just eliminating the bad.

THE FUTURE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Positive studies are spreading widely. I am pleased by the quality of peer-reviewed science, but I am bowled over by the quantity. Reuben Rusk and Lea Waters (2013) quantified the spread of Positive Psychology within psychology and across other fields as of 2012.

In 1992, there were 216 Positive Psychology–related articles published, and this number steadily grew through 2011 (the last year they researched), when there were 2,300 articles, a 10-fold increase.

This growing influence is not confined to the discipline of psychology, but it has also spread to psychiatry, neuroscience, health, and business. I do not have more recent quantitative data, but my impression is that the spread is continuing and perhaps still accelerating.

Positive Education (Norrish 2015, Seligman & Adler 2018), Positive Neuroscience (Greene et al. 2016), Positive Health (Boehm & Kubzansky 2012), and Positive Organizations (Cameron & McNaughton 2014) are presently gathering steam. Positive Psychiatry (Jeste & Palmer 2015), the Positive Humanities (**https://penntoday.upenn.edu/news/penn-researcher-awarded-25-million-study-well-being-effects-arts-humanities**), Positive Economics (Fox 2012), Positive Government (Bin Rashid Al Maktoum 2017, Helliwell et al. 2016), and even Positive Theology (Levine 2009, Yaden et al. 2015) all exist, even if in fledgling form. This tells me that Positive Psychology is not a fad, but that its popularity speaks to a deeper yearning for human knowledge. The real fad was to work only on the negative: to attempt to understand and correct all that had gone wrong in the hope that the better angels would then soar automatically once the demons had been slain. Whereas what is really needed is to build the good along with correcting the bad.

The future of this field may, in my highest hopes, take form outside academia. The impulse to build what is positive in life, to build temples yet undone, is by no means confined to the university. There is a moral vacuum in religious and secular morality and in our politics. Toward what might the moral compass point? What principle is grand enough and believable enough to live one's life around? To center politics and religion around?

I believe that well-being, in the sense of PERMA, is where the moral compass points, and it is sufficiently grand and believable (Layard 2016). What is it that every culture, every religion, every politics agrees upon? What is it that every parent wants for their children? What can almost everyone say yes to? We can all say yes to more positive emotion. We can all say yes to being more engaged at work, with those we love, and in leisure. We can all say yes to better relationships with our fellow human beings, our fellow animals, and our planet. We can all say yes to more meaning in life. And we can all say yes to more noble accomplishment.

Until recently, human history has been a tale of woe: warfare, plague, famine, injustice, poverty, ignorance, and violent death. The last two centuries have witnessed if not the eradication of, but a great reduction in, these ills. When life is a vale of tears, it is natural that politics, religion, science, medicine, and the arts should be about defense and damage. But what happens when life is no longer a vale of tears?

Florence of the fifteenth century is a beacon: no plague, no famine, civil harmony, peace, and extraordinary wealth. The city prospered under the genius of Medici leadership. Cosimo the Elder asked the city to debate what it should do with its financial surplus, how it should best use its great good fortune. Florence decided to invest in beauty and in science, creating what 200 years later we called the Renaissance.

Our world, emerging at last from its vale of tears, now stands at a Florentine moment. Until now, our institutions—political, religious, artistic, medical, and scientific—have seen their mission as reducing misery. They have succeeded in this laudable mission, imperfectly perhaps, but well enough that we must now ask, "What next?" In their belief that less suffering was the best we could aspire to, Freud and Schopenhauer led us toward a dead end. There is much more for us to aspire to than less suffering. We can also aspire to more PERMA—that is, more well-being. It is vouchsafed to us not only to witness the turning of the world but also to actually turn the world

toward well-being. We can remake politics, religion, arts, medicine, and science to become the engines of well-being.

DISCLOSURE STATEMENT

I have all sorts of potential biases. First and foremost, I am often called the "Father of Positive Psychology." While an overstatement, I do wish Positive Psychology to flourish and to be well thought of. Second, I am a board member of the International Positive Psychology Association and of the International Positive Education Network. Third, the University of Pennsylvania has a proprietary interest in Master Resilience Training, which was the backbone of Comprehensive Soldier Fitness. My services were provided pro bono, and I did not contribute to the data analysis. Penn also licenses such resilience training programs and Positive Psychology training programs to private companies. I receive a nominal fee from the university for some of these. Fourth, I am often paid well to give speeches about the material in this article. Finally, this article summarizes much of my intellectual history and I do hope my legacy will itself be positive.

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