

Positive Psychology: Meaning



the scientific study of what makes life most worth living or

“the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing on multiple levels that include the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life”.

Positive psychology is concerned with eudaimonia, "the good life", reflection about what holds the greatest value in life – the factors that contribute the most to a well-lived and fulfilling life.

Positive Psychology: Meaning



- *“Positive psychology is the scientific study of what makes life most worth living.” (Peterson, 2008)*
- Positive psychology is a scientific approach to studying human thoughts, feelings, and behavior with a **focus on strengths** instead of weakness, building the good in life instead of repairing the bad, and taking the lives of average people up to “great” instead of focusing solely on moving those who are struggling up to “normal” (Peterson, 2008).

Positive Psychology Focuses, on in a Nutshell



focuses on the positive events and influences in life, including:

- Positive experiences (like happiness, joy, inspiration, and love)
- Positive states and traits (like gratitude, resilience, and compassion)
- Positive institutions (applying positive principles within entire organizations and institutions)

Positive Psychology: Meaning



- As a field, positive psychology spends much of its time thinking about topics like character strengths, optimism, life satisfaction, happiness, well-being, gratitude, compassion (as well as self-compassion), self-esteem and self-confidence, hope, and elevation.
- These topics are studied in order to learn how to help people flourish and live their best lives.

Positive Psychology is the science and applications related to the study of psychological strengths and positive emotions (Snyder, Lopez et al.)


Basic assumptions



Positive psychology complements, without intending to replace or ignore, the traditional areas of psychology.

By emphasizing the study of positive human development this field helps to balance other approaches that focus on disorder, and which may produce only limited understanding.

Positive psychology has also placed a significant emphasis on fostering positive self-esteem and self-image, though positive psychologists with a less humanist bent are less likely to focus as intently on the matter.

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- The basic premise of positive psychology is that human beings are often drawn by the future more than they are driven by the past.
 - A change in our orientation to time can dramatically affect how we think about the nature of happiness.

Content

Seligman and Peterson: Positive psychology is concerned with three issues:

- positive emotions,
- positive individual traits, and
- positive institutions.

Content



- **Positive emotions** are concerned with being content with one's past, being happy in the present and having hope for the future.
- **Positive individual traits** focus on one's strengths and virtues.
- Positive institutions are based on strengths to better a community of people
- Seligman identified other possible goals: families and schools that allow children to grow, workplaces that aim for satisfaction and high productivity, and teaching others about positive psychology



- According to Peterson, positive psychologists are concerned with four topics:
- (1) positive experiences,
- (2) enduring psychological traits,
- (3) positive relationships, and
- (4) positive institutions

Topics of interest are: states of pleasure or flow, values, strengths, virtues, talents, as well as the ways that these can be promoted by social systems and institutions.



- Those who practice positive psychology attempt psychological interventions that foster positive attitudes toward one's subjective experiences, individual traits, and life events.
- The goal is to minimize pathological thoughts that may arise in a hopeless mindset, and to, instead, develop a sense of optimism toward life.
- Positive psychologists seek to encourage acceptance of one's past, excitement and optimism about one's future experiences, and a sense of contentment and well-being in the present.

Historical Overview



Positive psychology began as a new domain of psychology in 1998 when Martin Seligman chose it as the theme for his term as president of the American Psychological Association.

Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Christopher Peterson and Barbara Fredrickson are regarded as co-initiators of this development.

It is a reaction against psycho-analysis and behaviorism, which have focused on "mental illness", meanwhile emphasising maladaptive behavior and negative thinking.

It builds further on the humanistic movement, which encouraged an emphasis on happiness, well-being, and positivity, thus creating the foundation for what is now known as positive psychology.

Historical Overview

In the first sentence of the book *Authentic Happiness*, Seligman claimed: "for the last half century psychology has been consumed with a single topic only – mental illness", expanding on Maslow's comments.^[a] He urged psychologists to continue the earlier missions of psychology of nurturing talent and improving normal life.

The term originates with Abraham Maslow in his 1954 book *Motivation and Personality*^[b] and there have been indications that psychologists since the 1950s have been increasingly focused on the promotion of mental health rather than merely treating mental illness.

Eastern and Western Perspectives on Positive Psychology

Aim of Positive Psychology is to define specific strengths and highlight pathways that lead to better lives.

Eastern views:

- Good times occur, so, too will bad times visit us.

This expectation of an desire for balance distinguishes Easterners' views of optimal functioning from the more linear path taken by westerners to resolve problems and monitor progress.

Eastern and Western Perspectives on Positive Psychology

- Easterners move with the cycle of life until the change process becomes natural and enlightenment (being able to see things clearly for what they are) is achieved.

While westerners might search for rewards in the physical plane, easterners seek to transcend the human plane and rise to the spiritual one.

- Western cultures emphasize optimal functioning as it occurs intrapsychically, Eastern cultures hold that an optimal life experience is a spiritual journey involving others and resulting in transcendence and enlightenment.
- The Eastern search for spiritual transcendence parallels the westerner's hopeful pursuits for a better life on earth.

Western Influences: Athenian and Judio-Christian Traditions

Athenian Views: Plato and Aristotle both focused heavily on virtue and human strengths.

Aristotle, after expanding on Plato's ideas regarding virtue, details **11 moral virtues: Courage, Moderation, Generosity, Munificence** (relates to money spending at an appropriate level), **Magnificence** (greatness of soul), **Even temper, Friendliness, Truthfulness, Wit** (ability to laugh and have fun at an appropriate level), **Justice, Friendship.**

Intellectual Virtues (associated with ideas regarding wisdom)

Believed that strength of character, as inculcated by the political community, would lead to enduring human excellence. (emphasis on political community)

Western Influences: Athenian and Judio-Christian Traditions

Political community as being a necessity in helping the average individual to self-actualize with regard to virtue; he stated it was only within a life of order and sanction that one could rise above hedonistic desire and become truly virtuous.

People with good human virtue provide a model for others so that the masses also develop such human excellence.

Government should be charged with the development of virtue in a particular society via early education and training (Solomon, 2006).

Western Influences: Athenian and Judio-Christian Traditions

Judeo-Christianity:

Bible: virtues of faith, hope and charity

Aquinas: 7 virtues- courage, justice, temperance, wisdom, faith, hope and charity

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Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Confucianism:

- Leadership and education are central to morality.
- Emphasised morality as a potential cure for the evils of that time.
- Tenets encourage looking out for others.
- “You would like others to do for you what you would indeed like for yourself.

In some way these teachings are parallel to thoughts put forth by Aristotle and Plato regarding the responsibility of leaders to take charge of the group, though there is less emphasis in Western writings on the collectivist ideal of taking care of others in the group.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Confucianism

The five Virtues deemed central to living a moral existence are

- Jen: humanity, the virtue most exalted by Confucius and said to encompass the other four virtues
- Yi: duty to treat others well
- Li: etiquette and sensitivity for others' feelings
- Zhi: wisdom
- Xin: truthfulness

Confucian followers must strive to make wise decisions based on these virtues; this continual striving leads to enlightenment, or the good life.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Taoism: Lao-Tzu (the creator of the Taoist tradition) states that his followers must live according to the Tao meaning “the way”. Way is a moving head and refers simultaneously to direction, movement, method and thought.

Tao is the energy that surrounds everyone and is a power that envelops, surrounds and flows through all things.

According to Taoist traditions, the difficulty in understanding the Way stems from the fact that one cannot teach another about it.

Instead, understanding flows from experiencing the way for oneself by fully participating in life. In this process, both good and bad experiences can contribute to a greater understanding of the Way.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism



Taoism:

Achieving naturalness and spontaneity in life is the most important goal.

The Virtues of **humanity, justice, temperance (sanyam), and propriety (suitability)** must be practiced by virtuous individual without effort.

One who has achieved transcendence (shresthata) within this philosophy does not have to think about optimal functioning but behaves virtuously naturally.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Buddhism: Main teaching: Do good of others

“Wander (vichalan) for the gain of the many, for the happiness of the many, out of compassion for the world” (Sanharakshita, 1991).

Suffering is a part of being and that this suffering is brought on by the human emotion of desire.

Nirvana is state in which the self is freed from desire for anything (Schumann, 1974).

Both premortal and postmortal nirvana states are proposed as possible for the individual. The **premortel nirvana** may be likened to the idea of the ultimate good life.

Postmortal (pashnashvan) nirvana may be similar to the Christian idea of heaven.

Eastern Influences: Confucianism, Taoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism

Buddhism: Virtues are described in personal qualities.

Buddhists speak of the Brahma Viharas, those virtues that are above all others in importance (Peterson and Seligman, 2004 described as universal virtues).

Love (maitri), compassion (karuna), Joy (mudita) and equanimity (sambhav).

The paths to achieving these virtues require humans to divorce themselves from the human emotion of desire to put an end to suffering.

Eastern Influences: Hinduism

Hinduism: No specific founder

- Emphasis on the interconnectedness of all things.
- Harmonious union among all individuals
- One's goal would be to live life so fully and so correctly that one would go directly to the afterlife without having to repeat life's lessons in reincarnated form.
- Thus, the quest of one's life is to attain ultimate self-knowledge and to strive for ultimate self betterment.
- One should be good to others as well as to improve themselves.
- Karma Philosophy: If one does not reach ultimate self knowledge in ones life and have to return to earth via reincarnation after deathm the previous life's good actions correlate directly with better placement in the world in this life.

Eastern Influences: Hinduism

The good life in the hindu tradition encompasses individuals who are continually achieving knowledge and continually working toward good actions.

Summary of Eastern and Western Philosophies

Both philosophies discussed importance of virtues, along with human strengths, as people move toward the good life.

There are differences in terms of which traits are particularly valued.

East Meets West

Ideologies stem from different historical events and traditions.

These differences can be seen explicitly in the value systems of each cultural approach to living, their orientations towards time and their respective thought processes.

Value System:


Cultural value systems have significant effects on the determination of strengths Vs weaknesses.

East Vs West: Value systems

East	West
Collective perspective	Individualist perspective
Group is valued above the individual	Focus is single person
Cooperation, collaboration are accentuated	Competition and personal achievement are emphasized
Foster interdependence, harmony, sharing and duty to the group	Value to personal freedom and autonomy
Value on staying out of conflict and going out with the flow	Value on personal gain despite potential loss to another
Orientation to Time: Greater focus on and respect for the Past. Recognize the wisdom of elders	Often look for Future. Strengths of hope, optimism, self-efficacy are valued

East Vs West: Value systems

Thought Processes: different process of linking and integrating ideas



East	West
Circular and constantly changing nature of the world (if hard time then easier time is on way)	It is a line
Believe in constant change but with things always moving back to some prior state.	Live in a simpler, more deterministic world;
Pay attention to a wide range of events	Focus on salient objects or people instead of the larger pictures
Search for relationships between things and	Think they can control events because they know the rules that govern the behaviour of objects
Think that one can't understand the part without understanding the whole	High priority to the right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness.
Goal of balance based more on using the strenght of endurance, trusting the fact that great unhappiness or suffering may occur in one's life, it would be equally balance by great happiness	Uses hope to achieve happiness



Books

- IdkjkRed euksfoKku& Mk e/kq TkSuA vfer ifCyds" kUl] t;iqjA
- Positive Psychology- C R Snyder, Shane J. Lopez & Jennifer Teramoto Pedrotti. Sage South Asia Edition.