1 AN INTRODUCTION TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.1 Describe the three dimensions of positive psychology and know why each is important to well-being.

1.2 Explain the concept of "flourishing."

1.3 Summarize the basic themes of positive psychology.

1.4 Explain what researchers mean when they say that positive and negative emotions are independent.

1.5 Identify three current ideas about happiness that originated over 200 years ago.

WELCOME TO POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

In 1998, Martin E. P. Seligman, then president of the American Psychological Association, urged psychologists to remember psychology's forgotten mission: to build human strength and nurture genius. In order to remedy this omission from psychology, Seligman deliberately set out to create a new direction and a new orientation for psychology (Seligman, 2018, 2019). The name for this discipline is **positive psychology.** Its challenge to increase research on psychological well-being and strengths has been heralded as a welcome development by many psychologists.

In the most general terms, the new area of positive psychology is concerned with the use of psychological theory, research, and intervention techniques to understand the positive, the adaptive, the creative, and the emotionally fulfilling elements of human behavior. In their introduction to a special edition of the *American Psychologist* on positive psychology, Kennon Sheldon and Laura King (2001) describe the new area as follows:

> What is positive psychology? It is nothing more than the scientific study of ordinary human strengths and virtues. Positive psychology revisits "the average person" with an interest in finding out what works, what's right, and what's improving. It asks, "What is the nature of the efficiently functioning human being, successfully applying

evolved adaptations and learned skills? And how can psychologists explain the fact that despite all the difficulties, the majority of people manage to live lives of dignity and purpose?" . . . Positive psychology is thus an attempt to urge psychologists to adopt a more open and appreciative perspective regarding human potentials, motives, and capacities. (p. 216)

In sum, positive psychology investigates the potentials for positive, adaptive, and healthy functioning at the individual, social, and community levels. According to the mission statement of the International Positive Psychology Association (2009), "Positive psychology is the scientific study of what enables individuals and communities to thrive." Sir John Templeton, who created The Templeton Foundation, described positive psychology eloquently and briefly by saying, "[positive psychology is] the study and understanding of the power of the human spirit to benefit from life's challenges" (Templeton, 2002). In studying what people do right and how it is that they manage to do it, positive psychology underscores what they do for themselves, for their families, and for their communities.

DIMENSIONS OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

Although the range of possible interest areas in positive psychology is large, its dimensions encompass human life in its positive aspects. In order to nurture talent and make life more fulfilling, positive psychology focuses on three general areas of human experience (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) that reflect its perspective:

1. At the subjective level, positive psychology looks at *positive subjective states* or positive emotions such as happiness, joy, satisfaction with life, relaxation, love, intimacy, and contentment. Positive subjective states also can include constructive thoughts about the self and the future, such as optimism and hope, as well as feelings of energy, vitality, and confidence and the effects of positive emotions such as joy.

2. At the individual level, positive psychology focuses on a study of *positive individual traits,* or the more positive behavioral patterns seen in people over time, such as manifestations of courage, honesty, persistence, and wisdom. It can also include the ability to develop aesthetic sensibility or tap into creative potentials and the drive to pursue excellence. That is, positive psychology includes the study of positive behaviors and traits that in the past were understood in the language of character strengths and virtues.

3. Last, at the group or societal level, positive psychology focuses on the development, creation, and maintenance of *positive institutions.* In this regard, it addresses issues such as the development of civic virtues, the creation of healthy families, and the study of healthy work environments. Positive psychology may also be involved in investigations that look at how institutions can work better to support and nurture all of the citizens they impact.

Source: Courtesy of Martin E. P. Seligman.

Martin E. P. Seligman

Positive psychology, then, is the scientific study of positive human functioning and flourishing at a number of levels, such as the biological, personal, relational, institutional, cultural, and global dimensions of life (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

SCOPE OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

A comprehensive list of topics that may be studied by a positive psychologist would, of course, be exhaustive. Evidently, people seem to be good at doing things well. In fact, the ways in which persons excel is much more extensive than has been recognized in psychology.

Even a partial list of interest for positive psychology runs the gamut from A to Z: altruism, building enriching communities, compassion, creativity, empathy, forgiveness, the role of positive emotions in job satisfaction, the enhancement of our immune system functioning, life span models of positive personality development, savoring each fleeting moment of life, strengthening the virtues as a way to increase authentic happiness, styles of psychotherapy that emphasize accomplishments and positive traits, and the psychological benefits of Zen meditation (Lopez & Snyder, 2003). Encouraging psychologists to pay attention to what people do right was an early accomplishment of positive psychology. Once psychologists began noticing the many ways that human beings succeed in life, these neglected aspects of behavior became the focus of theory, research, and interventions strategies.

A discussion of why the perspective of positive psychology is relevant today follows. This entails a deeper examination of just what we consider to be *the good life.*

BASIC THEMES OF POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY

The Good Life

Positive psychology is concerned essentially with the elements and predictors of **the good life.** This term may be only somewhat familiar to psychology students, for it has popular associations with the possession of extreme wealth, power, prestige, and beauty. However, such popular usage is incorrect—for in fact, the term comes to us from philosophy.

The notion of the good life comes from speculations about what holds the greatest value in life—that is, what is the nature of the highest or most important *good.* When this idea is applied

to human life, *the good* refers to the factors that contribute most to a well-lived and fulfilling life. Honderich (1995) stated that "things that are good may also be considered from the point of view of how they will contribute to a well-spent or happy human life. The idea of a complete good is that which will wholly satisfy the complete need and destiny of humans, the *summum bonum"* (p. 322).

Qualities that help define the good life are those that enrich our lives, make life worth living, and foster strong character. Martin Seligman (2002a), the founder of positive psychology, defines the good life as "using your signature strengths every day to produce authentic happiness and abundant gratification" (p. 13).

In positive psychology, the good life is seen as a combination of three elements: connections to others, positive individual traits, and life regulation qualities. Aspects of our behavior that contribute to forging *positive connections to others* can include the ability to love, the presence of altruistic concerns, the ability to forgive, and the presence of spiritual connections to help create a sense of deeper meaning and purpose in life. *Positive individual traits* include such elements as a sense of integrity, the ability to play and be creative, and the presence of virtues such as courage and humility. Finally, *life regulation qualities* are those that allow us to regulate our day-to-day behavior so that we can accomplish our goals while helping to benefit the people and institutions that we encounter along the way. These qualities include a sense of individuality or autonomy, a high degree of healthy self-control, and the presence of wisdom as a guide to behavior.

In short, positive psychology's concern with living the good life entails the consideration of factors that lead to the greatest sense of well-being, satisfaction, or contentment. Note, however, that the good life is not to be understood here in the sense of individual achievement removed from its social context. On the contrary, if it is to be a worthwhile determination, the good life must include relationships with other people and with the society as a whole.

Although the definition of the good life has so far been rather broad and abstract, future chapters address the finer points involved.

Positive Emotions Are Important

In the past 35 years, scientific research has revealed how vital positive emotions and adaptive behaviors are to living a satisfying, productive life. For much of the 20th century, many scientists assumed that the study of positive emotions was somewhat frivolous at best and probably unnecessary. They contended that psychology should focus on more pressing social problems, such as substance abuse, criminal behavior, or the treatment of major psychological disorders like depression; however, this assumption is only partially correct. It is true that psychology does need to study significant social and psychological problems. Indeed, positive psychologists do not reject the need to study and attempt to overcome the terrible societal and individual costs of these problems. Recent research, however, suggests that the study of positive emotions can actually help to fight these problems.

For instance, the presence of psychological strengths can help people recover from psychological problems (Huta & Hawley, 2010). In addition, low positive well-being in the present

can set the stage for the development of depression up to 10 years later (Joseph & Wood, 2010). Thus, newer forms of psychotherapy focus on the development of positive emotions and adaptive coping strategies rather than focusing on negative emotions, internal conflicts, and anxieties formed in childhood (e.g., Fava, 2016). Positive psychology researchers have found that positive forms of therapy can be just as useful as older therapies that focus on eliminating negative emotions (Parks & Layous, 2016; Rashid, 2009). Julia Boehm et al. (2018) reviewed the research on relatively simple interventions to increase happiness and found they can be effective at increasing positive emotions and well-being. In an interesting twist, psychoanalyst Volney Gay (2001) argued that adult distress often occurs because people cannot recollect joy, which in turn leads to a retreat from active participation in life. In general, positive forms of psychotherapy can be successful in helping people emerge from debilitating psychological problems. Self-help interventions based on positive psychology can also help increase positive mood and well-being (Parks & Layous, 2016).

Studies also support the important influence that positive emotions and adaptive behavior have on various positive outcomes in life. Sonja Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) completed a somewhat voluminous review of 225 studies on happiness and well-being. They concluded that people who experience more positive emotions tend to have greater success in numerous areas of life compared to those more negatively oriented. For instance, people who experience and express positive emotions more often are likely to be satisfied with their lives, have more rewarding interpersonal relationships, and are more productive and satisfied at their job. Lyubomirsky et al. (2005) also concluded that although being successful can make one feel happier, it is also true that being happier can lead to greater success later in life!

Positive emotions are also associated with successful striving for desired goals (Klug & Maier, 2015). In addition, people who experience and express positive emotions more often are more likely to be physically healthier, be more resistant to illness, and live longer than others (Diener & Chan, 2011; Diener et al., 2017). Therefore, the study of positive emotions and adaptive behavior can offer real benefits to the search for how to build more fulfilling lives by helping people reach their potentials and helping to eliminate negative emotions and problematic behaviors.

Positive psychology offers another direction for psychology by conducting investigations on who we are as human beings in more positive directions. In some ways, positive psychology encompasses an attitude that people can apply to research, to relations with others, and to themselves. With this notion in mind, a person may reasonably ask, "Just what are the ideas and attitudes that help shape positive psychology?" The next section describes several basic themes and perspectives that have helped to create and shape positive psychology today.

People Can Flourish and Thrive

Positive psychology seeks to investigate what people do correctly in life. As Sheldon and King (2001) noted, positive psychology recognizes that many people adapt and adjust to life in highly creative ways that allow them and those they come in contact with to feel good about life. All too often, psychological research has displayed a blatant bias toward assumptions that people are unwitting pawns to their biology, their childhood, or their unconscious. Previous psychological

theories have often argued that people are driven by their past, their biology, their cultural conditioning, or unconscious motives. Positive psychology takes the position that despite the real difficulties of life, it must be acknowledged that most people adjust well to life's vicissitudes.

That is, most people at least try to be good parents, to treat others with some degree of respect, to love those close to them, to find ways to contribute to society and the welfare of others, and to live their lives with integrity and honesty. These achievements should be celebrated rather than explained away as "nothing but" biological urges or unconscious attempts to ward off anxiety and fear. Therefore, a basic premise of positive psychology is that "human beings are often, perhaps more often, drawn by the future than they are driven by the past" (Seligman, 2011, p. 106).

In addition, psychology in the past has paid even less attention to how people move beyond basic adjustment to actually flourishing and thriving in the face of change. That is, some people don't just adapt to life—they adapt extraordinarily well. Some adapt so well that they serve as role models of incredible fortitude, perseverance, and resiliency. Among the goals of positive psychology is to understand how such people manage to accomplish such high levels of thriving and flourishing. **Thriving** has been defined as feeling and functioning well, as being resilient and adaptable, and being motivated to be the best person one can be. All of this occurs across multiple areas of a person's life (see Brown et al., 2017).

Corey L. M. Keyes and Shane Lopez (2002) created a classification system that has yielded one of the basic terms in positive psychology. In their system, people who score high on well-being and low on mental illness are *flourishing*. As we will see, the term **flourishing** is used in many areas of positive psychology to describe high levels of well-being. In contrast, someone who exhibits both high well-being and high mental illness is *struggling*. This refers to someone who is generally doing well in life but is currently experiencing significant distress about some issue. People who are low on well-being but high on mental illness symptoms are *floundering*. Obviously, floundering describes a difficult situation. When someone shows signs of low well-being but also scores low on mental illness, they are *languishing*. This would describe someone who has no significant mental health issues but is also dissatisfied or unfulfilled in life. These classifications may be especially important in understanding the lives of college students today. A 2016 study by the Wisconsin HOPE Lab (wihopelab.com) found that about 50% of college students are experiencing a current or recent mental health condition. That's half of all college students!

Keyes and Lopez took their idea a bit further and examined how well-being has been defined in the past. They argued that other systems of classifying mental health and well-being are incomplete because they focus on only a portion of what it means to be mentally healthy. Instead, they suggest that **complete mental health** is a combination of high emotional well-being, high psychological well-being, and high social well-being, along with low mental illness.

High *emotional well-being* or emotional vitality is present when people are happy and satisfied with their lives. High *psychological well-being* is found when people feel competent, autonomous, and self-accepting; have a purpose in life; exhibit personal growth; and enjoy positive relationships with others. High *social well-being* is found when people have positive attitudes toward others, believe that social change is possible, try to make a contribution to society,

believe the social world is understandable, and feel a part of a larger social community (see Chapter 11). High social well-being is further measured with the following five dimensions: social acceptance, social actualization, social contribution, social coherence, and social integration. Therefore, the complete model could include 12 basic classifications of well-being (i.e., the fourfold typology just described by three types of well-being: emotional, psychological, and social; see Figure 1.1).

Corey L. M. Keyes (2005) investigated certain parts of this model in a large sample of U.S. residents aged 25 to 74 years. First, he found that high mental illness tended to decrease mental health, as would be expected. However, it was also possible to be relatively high in both mental illness and mental health at the same time (i.e., struggling). Second, he found that 18% of the sample was flourishing because they scored high on at least one measure of well-being and at least six measures of positive functioning. Because Keyes required increasing indicators of positive well-being to indicate flourishing, the percentage in this category dropped until less than 10% showed high-level mental health by scoring high on almost all measures of well-being and positive functioning. One conclusion from the study was that interventions to eliminate mental illness do not automatically enhance well-being. Efforts to improve well-being may need different interventions that are aimed specifically at the enhancement of well-being.

A more recent study found that people high on languishing tended to be self-focused and were often motivated by desires for their own happiness (Wissing et al., 2021). In contrast, people who were high on flourishing were often focused on relationships and the well-being of other people. Interestingly, they were frequently motivated by a search for the common good. The researchers suggested that well-being might best be described with "dynamic quantitative and qualitative patterns of well-being" (p. 573). In other words, the assessment of well-being

FIGURE 1.1 ■ Complete Mental Health
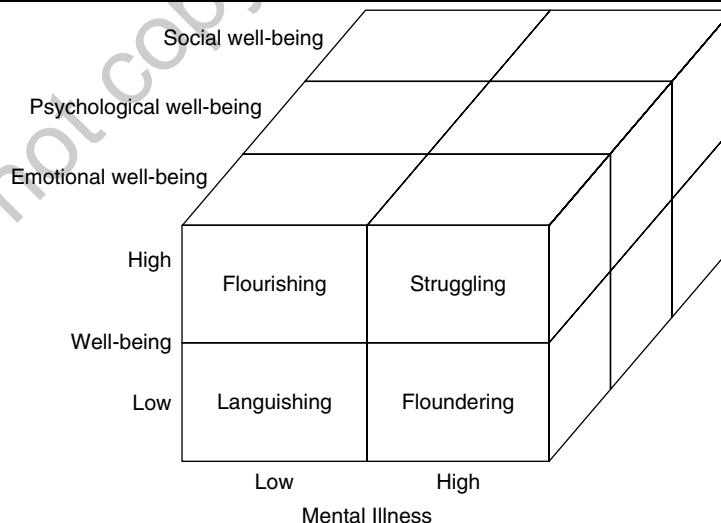
Source: Courtesy of William C. Compton, PhD.

may require multiple indicators and a willingness to examine complex interactions. A common theme throughout this book will be that research on the dimensions of well-being, as well as interventions to enhance it, will both require multiple methods in order to capture the complexity of real human lives lived through time.

People Need Positive Social Relationships

A corollary to the preceding assumption is the recognition that people exist in social contexts and that well-being is not just an individual pursuit. As Christopher Peterson (2006) put it, "other people matter. Period." Of course, positive psychology is not alone in recognizing the importance of the social context for human behavior. What positive psychology has done is to embrace ideas about positive social environments, such as social well-being and empowerment. Many of these ideas were initiated by community psychologists (see Chapter 11), but many positive psychologists have welcomed them.

Related to this notion is the recognition that differences may exist in how cultures conceptualize, encourage, or teach their children about the nature of happiness and the good life (see Matsumoto, 1994). In general, the search for happiness appears to be a universal quest. Nonetheless, there is a fascinating variety of ideas among cultures of the world about the specific nature of happiness. One of the more prominent distinctions is between cultures that view happiness as an emotion that is achieved by individuals through their own unique efforts or whether it is a more collective experience, that is, a joint product of persons and their immediate family environments (these distinctions are covered in more detail in Chapter 11). Positive psychology, as well as all of psychology, is beginning to explore cross-cultural comparisons that may enhance our understanding of how people throughout the world experience psychological well-being.

Strengths and Virtues Are Important

In positive psychology, it is recognized that any discussion of what constitutes the good life must inevitably touch on virtues, values, and character development (Fowers, 2005). It is not possible to discuss the dimensions of an admirable and fulfilling life without introducing discussions of virtues—such as courage, fidelity, and honesty. This is not to say that positive psychologists advocate certain virtues and values simply because they personally admire them. Science cannot address in any ultimate or absolute sense what values a person *must* believe in or practice in her or his life. Science will never be able to assert, for instance, that everyone *should* value happiness as the ultimate goal of life. However, a science of positive psychology does have a role in the investigation of values.

Over 50 years ago, M. Brewster Smith (1969) stated that the science of psychology can never dictate which values are "best." What psychology can do is use scientific methods to investigate the consequences of living a life based on the values of honesty, integrity, tolerance, and self-control. Likewise, Maslow (1971) argued that psychology had gained the ability to indicate "what makes [people] healthier, wiser, more virtuous, happier, more fulfilled" (p. 20). In addition, scientific methods can be applied in any cultural setting or in any society around the world to discover what values tend to enhance the quality of life for everyone in a community.

Therefore, the consequences of holding certain social values can be investigated within that specific culture. In addition, scientific methods can be used to investigate the possibility that certain values are found almost universally and, therefore, may represent a common core of virtues that have grounded many cultures over time.

Compassion and Empathy Are Important

For several years, much research in psychology was based on the assumption that human beings are driven by base motivations such as aggression, egoistic self-interest, and the pursuit of simple pleasures. Because many psychologists began with that assumption, they inadvertently designed research studies that supported their own presuppositions. Consequently, the view of humanity that prevailed was of a species barely keeping its aggressive tendencies in check and managing to live in social groups more out of motivated self-interest than out of a genuine affinity for others or a true sense of community. Both Sigmund Freud and the early behaviorists led by John B. Watson believed that humans were motivated primarily by selfish drives. From that perspective, social interaction is possible only by exerting control over those baser emotions and, therefore, is always vulnerable to eruptions of greed, selfishness, and violence. The fact that humans actually lived together in social groups has traditionally been seen as a tenuous arrangement that is always just one step away from mayhem.

It should be noted, however, that some early theorists did see potentials in human beings for caring, cooperation, and empathy. Two of Sigmund Freud's earliest colleagues, Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, both believed that certain positive traits were innate. Other researchers also saw potentials for prosocial behaviors in people. Nevertheless, a distinct trend in much psychological research was toward a fairly negative view of why people behave the way they do. Even positive behaviors, such as altruism, were viewed as essentially the result of self-centered motives.

In contrast, a new vision of human beings has been emerging from recent psychological research that sees human socialization and the ability to live in groups as a highly adaptable trait (Buss, 2000). In fact, a newer perspective holds that the need to cooperate and the desire to help others may be biologically based and innate (Keltner, 2009; Tomasello, 2009). We now know that animals demonstrate empathy for others and compassion for those in pain as well as show cooperation and a sense of social connectedness. Studies have also found that across the life span, a greater capacity for empathy is associated with higher life satisfaction and more positive relationships (Grühn et al., 2008). Another study has discovered that people can be motivated to overcome their low self-esteem if they felt their efforts would also help others (Grant & Sonnentag, 2010). It may be that doing good can buffer against the effects of feeling bad. Even 21-month-old toddlers were found to appreciate when someone was helpful to them (Kuhlmeier & Dunfield, 2010). The toddlers were also more likely to help someone who made an effort to help them by returning the favor.

Independence of Positive and Negative Emotions

Another basic theme in positive psychology concerns the relationships between positive emotional states and well-being. For some time, psychologists assumed that if people could

eliminate their negative emotions, then positive emotions would automatically take their place. For instance, many people who hope to win large sums of money on the lottery are driven by this assumption. They assume that money will eliminate negative emotions such as worry and then they will be happy. That is, these people assume that positive and negative emotions exist in a dependent relationship such that if negative emotions go down, then positive emotions must go up.

However, Ulrich Schimmack (2008) reviewed several research studies that examined this question and found that positive and negative emotions are relatively independent. He discovered that they tend to have distinct causes and can even occur at the same time. For instance, a mother can easily feel both some degree of sadness and considerable joy when attending the wedding of her only daughter. Physiological studies have also found that positive and negative emotions are associated with different biological markers (Ryff et al., 2006). Of interest to applied positive psychologists is Schimmack's additional conclusion that interventions to influence one type of emotionality may have no effect or even an opposing impact on the other type of emotionality. Therefore, efforts to increase positive emotionality may not impact negative emotionality. Corey Keyes (2005) has argued for a *two continua model* of mental health and illness that recognizes the predictors of mental health and illness are often unique and somewhat independent.

To illustrate this point, Argyle (1987) noted that the probability of experiencing negative emotionality is predicted by a number of factors, such as unemployment, high stress, and low economic status. It should be apparent to most people, however, that happiness and psychological well-being are not automatically achieved when a person has a job, is subject to normal stress levels, and is middle class. By comparison with someone undergoing greater stress, such a person feels better but is not necessarily as happy as he or she could be. Merely to eliminate one's negative feelings does not automatically bestow human strengths, virtues, and the capacity to thrive and flourish. Just because someone is relatively free of anxiety, depression, and worry, doesn't mean that person automatically exhibits inspiring instances of compassion, courage, honesty, or self-sacrifice. Similarly, Peterson and Steen (2002) found that optimism and pessimism had differential effects on a person's self-reported well-being.

You may be wondering if positive and negative emotions are independent in all circumstances. If you think about the last time you felt under considerable stress, you may recall it seemed difficult to feel positive emotions at the time. In fact, the *dynamic model of affect* (DMA) proposes that the independence of positive and negative emotions depends on the situation (Davis et al., 2004). Specifically, the DMA states that under normal circumstances, there is independence between positive and negative emotions. However, when people are under stress or uncertainty, then positive and negative emotions "fuse" and become dependent. Other research has also suggested that, within individuals at least, positive and negative emotions are not actually dependent on each other, but they are less independent than originally believed (Brose et al., 2015; Jayawickreme et al., 2017).

So whereas some of the predictors of positive emotionality and negative emotions are similar, they are not identical. There are unique psychological processes that help a person move from feeling negative emotions such as anxiety and depression to a position of neutral emotionality (e.g., decreasing the amount of negative self-talk). At the same time, there are other equally

unique psychological processes that help someone move from neutral emotionality to greater happiness, life satisfaction, and joy (e.g., creating a sense of vibrant engagement). Many of these positive psychological processes are the subjects of the chapters to follow.

Negative Emotions Are Still Important

At this point, it should be emphasized that positive psychologists do not wish to limit the topics of study but rather to expand these to include aspects of human flourishing. Positive psychology does not deny that there are many problems in the world that demand attention. It is also obvious that negative emotions can be necessary for survival at times. We would be far too vulnerable if we completely eliminated anxiety, fear, or skepticism from our lives. The recognition and expression of negative emotions are also vital to self-understanding and personal growth (Algoe et al., 2011; Kashdan & Biswas-Diener, 2014; Shmotkin, 2005). Positive psychology is not simply "happiology" (Seligman, 2011). In addition, positive psychology also includes recognition that the tragic elements in life can enrich our experience of being human (Woolfolk, 2002). Kirk Warren Brown and Melissa Holt (2011) argued that positive psychology should be "founded upon an accounting of the full range of human cognitive and emotional experience" (p. 147). James Maddux (2021) commented on the current social climate by saying "the goal of helping people to strive for greater well-being should not be misconstrued as a misguided effort to shield people, especially young people, from adversity and from ideas they might find unpalatable or even disturbing. Instead, it requires helping them to look reality squarely in the face and to even welcome adversity and differences of opinion as opportunities for growth" (p. xxii). There must be a reason why people throughout history have been drawn to plays, paintings, poetry, and even music that expresses sadness, tragedy, and defeat. It may be that in order to appreciate the positive in life we must also experience the negative. Positive psychology does not deny that every effort should be made to help eliminate problems associated with societal injustice and inequalities.

Today, many researchers in positive psychology agree that happiness ought not be the sole criteria for the good life (e.g., Diener, 2009c; Seligman, 2011; also see Gruber et al., 2011). For one thing, a big problem with "happiness" is that the term is vague and poorly defined from a scientific viewpoint (Algoe et al., 2011). In addition, when research findings on happiness are presented around the world to the general public, then an even greater array of folklore on happiness gets activated and the potential for misunderstanding is magnified. Thus, for some time now, leading researchers of subjective well-being have insisted that happiness may be "necessary" to the good life but not "sufficient" (Diener et al., 2003).

Having recognized the place for negative emotions, however, it also may be true that the desire to be happier and more satisfied with life is universally human. In most cases, people simply operate better within the world, whatever world they live in, if they are more optimistic, are more hopeful, and can rely on solid supportive relationships. Interestingly, some of the findings from positive psychology may have something approaching universal applicability. For instance, Ed Diener (2000), one of the preeminent researchers on well-being, stated that the closest thing psychology has to a "general tonic" for well-being is to improve happiness. Among the best things a person can do to increase one's quality of life is to help others increase their level

of happiness and life satisfaction. This applies to people at all levels of income and psychosocial adjustment.

The Science of Well-Being

One of the most distinguishing features of positive psychology is an insistence that research must follow the standards of traditional scientific investigations (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology is certainly not the first attempt by psychologists to study well-being and the good life. From the inception of the field, there has been an interest in studying healthy personality development and optimal states of well-being. For example, in the early part of the 20th century, many investigations into psychological well-being and the nature of the good life began first as scholarly analyses or as in-depth case studies of clients in psychotherapy. Attempts were then made to move the results of those studies into psychological laboratories for further experimental research or into real-life situations to help people increase well-being. Unfortunately, many of these efforts proved extremely difficult or even impossible.

In light of such difficulties from the past, positive psychologists have seen a need to reverse the direction of information flow. That is, many positive psychologists hope to build an experimental knowledge base in the psychological laboratory and then move those results out into real-world venues, such as schools, clinics, and the workplace. Toward this end, many of the founders of positive psychology have placed considerable emphasis on promoting and developing opportunities for experimental research on psychological well-being and the potential for greater fulfillment in life. Following this directive, considerable effort in positive psychology has been given to developing new assessment instruments that measure the new constructs in positive psychology. Two representative examples immediately come to mind: *The Comprehensive Inventory of Thriving* (along with the Brief version) and *The Flourishing Scale* (Diener et al., 2009; Su, Tay & Diener, 2014).

A SHORT HISTORY OF WELL-BEING IN THE WESTERN WORLD

To understand any field, it is important to examine the history of how ideas in that field developed over time. Positive psychology is the latest effort by human beings to understand the nature of happiness and well-being, but it is by no means the first attempt to solve that particular puzzle. Therefore, the next section of this chapter provides a brief history of how people in the Western world have answered the question *What is happiness?*

For many psychology students, the study of history often appears an intellectual abstraction with little relevance to the present. However, it is our strong belief that an exploration of history can teach valuable lessons. For contemporary theories of happiness, life satisfaction, and well-being actually derive from older ideas about the good life and, indeed, often remain relatively unchanged since at least the time of the Greek philosophers.

We hasten to note that other cultures have their own histories of well-being; however, space limitations do not permit a cross-cultural review (see Lomas et al., 2021, for a global perspective). Nevertheless, a short section on how Buddhist sages think about well-being is presented in Chapter 10, and a brief exploration of cross-cultural ideas on happiness is covered in Chapter 11.

Hedonism

Without question, the oldest approach to well-being and happiness is **hedonism.** It focuses on pleasure as the basic component of the good life. Hedonism in its basic form is the belief that the pursuit of well-being is fundamentally the pursuit of individual sensual pleasures and the avoidance of harm, pain, and suffering.

Although the single-minded pursuit of pleasure is among the oldest notions of the good life, this form of hedonism has been seen as self-defeating and unworkable by most societies throughout history. Nearly everyone realizes that sensual pleasures are transient and require a constant struggle to be sustained; when focused on too exclusively, the hedonistic drive produces no lasting benefits to personality and no personal growth. In general, simple hedonism cannot serve as the only basis of the good life or psychological well-being (Larsen et al., 2003; Parrott, 1993).

The Early Hebrews

Among the most influential factors in the development and proliferation of the Western worldview has been Judaism. In fact, the Judeo-Christian traditions have been called the first of three pillars that built Western civilization. For the Hebrews, many of the rules that governed the relationship to God were expressed as prohibitions, particularly in the form of the Ten Commandments. Philosophically, this approach to the search for happiness has been called a **divine command theory** of happiness. The idea here is that happiness is found by living in accord with the commands or rules set down by a Supreme Being (Honderich, 1995). Therefore, true happiness was related to a religious piety based on submission to God's supreme authority. The influence of this worldview on Western culture for the ensuing 2,500 years cannot be overemphasized. Obviously, the divine command theory continues to be one of the dominant orientations people follow in their pursuit of happiness (see Chapter 10).

The Greeks

The second pillar to sustain Western intellectual and moral development is the rationality developed in the ancient Greek culture. Although the Jewish tradition was largely influential in the development of ethical, moral, and religious beliefs, Greek culture set the stage for developments in philosophy, science, art, and psychology for the next 2,500 years. In fact, the core philosophical ideas of the Western world are rooted in Greek philosophy. Seligman (2020) described how the idea of *agency*, or the feeling we have control over our actions and their consequences, comes directly from the Greek and Roman philosophers. It was the golden age of Greece that introduced the fundamental idea that the good life and the proper path to happiness could be discerned through logic and rational analysis. The general answer to the happiness question was that human beings could decide for themselves which paths most reliably lead to well-being.

Socrates and Plato

The first individual responsible for the new direction in Greek intellectual life was Socrates (ca. 469–399 BCE). Socrates directed reason to ultimate questions of human knowledge and

especially to ideas on what we need to be truly happy. In his method, Socrates affirmed the Delphic motto, *Know Thyself.* The search for truth was thus centered on an exploration of the unchanging truths of the human psyche (Robinson, 1990). Socrates taught that true happiness could be achieved only through self-knowledge.

Following in Socrates's footsteps was his most important student, Plato (427–347 BCE). Plato also believed that changeable sensory experience could not be the basis of true wisdom. Rather, it must be found in an unchanging realm that transcends the sensory world. The person who undertakes this quest must have courage to find the truth hidden beneath the world of appearances that we experience through the senses.

In his famous analogy of the cave, Plato compared most men and women to people chained inside a cave who can only look at the back wall in front of them. As figures pass by outside the cave, the bright sun projects their shadows on to the back wall of the cave. For Plato, those inside the cave mistake the shadows for reality because they know nothing other than copies of reality. The philosopher, however, is someone able to loosen the chains and turn around to bear the brightness of "the sun" (i.e., true knowledge) and finally behold true knowledge beyond the cave.

Aristotle

With Aristotle (384–322 BCE), who was Plato's student, the intellectual tradition of the West took a significantly different turn. Universal truth was to be found in the intellectual discovery of order in the world. The vehicle for this search was the senses and the tools were logic, classification, and conceptual definition. The Aristotelian ideal valued poise, harmony, and the avoidance of emotional extremes. Aristotle believed that "the emotions were to be tamed, by rigorous self-discipline, to accept the dictates of reason" (Kiefer, 1988, p. 43).

One of Aristotle's goals was to find the *golden mean* that existed between the extremes of life. This was a state of balance, harmony, and equilibrium, which leads to a life lived in accordance with the principle of *eudaimonia*. Robinson (1990) explained **eudaimonia** as follows:

> That condition of flourishing and completeness that constitutes true and enduring joy . . . eudaimonia is not merely a set of pleasures or creature comforts or Epicurean delights. It is a life lived in a certain way, where life here refers to life-on-the-whole, not some number of moments strung together. Progress toward this end calls for the recognition that the better course of action is not the one that invariably satisfies the current desire or even an abiding desire. . . . To be wise is to strive for a condition of moral perfection or virtue *(arete)* by which the "golden mean" is found and adopted in all of the significant affairs of life. (pp. 16–17)

The good life, then, is found in the total context of a person's life. It is not just a transitory emotional state or even one specific emotion.

Although eudaimonia was often translated as *happiness*, today it is more frequently translated as *truly fortunate, possessed of true well-being,* or *flourishing* (Telfer, 1980; Waterman, 2013). The central idea is that the person who is truly happy has what is *worth* desiring and *worth* having in life. Implied here is the notion that though certain goals or objectives in life may produce positive emotions, these do not necessarily lead to eudaimonia. For Aristotle, eudaimonia was associated with a life of character, albeit a specific type of good character.

Aristotle considered certain virtues to be dispositions of character that lead a person toward eudaimonia (Schimmel, 2000). In his *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle (trans. 1908) wrote, "We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit" (p. 61). He proposed 12 basic virtues that when cultivated allowed us to grow toward a state of eudaimonia. They are courage, liberality, pride (as self-respect), friendliness, wittiness, justice, temperance, magnificence, good temper, truthfulness, shame (or appropriate guilt for our transgressions), and honor (see Aristotle, 1908). These virtues are examples of the *golden mean* between extremes. For example, courage lies between the excesses of rashness and the deficiency of cowardice.

This **virtue theory** of happiness (see Honderich, 1995) holds that the cultivation and development of certain virtues lead a

Aristotle

person toward the greatest well-being and, therefore, toward the good life. Today many theories of well-being posit a set of virtues associated with healthy personality development. As we have noted earlier, positive psychology is partially defined as the search for human strengths and virtues.
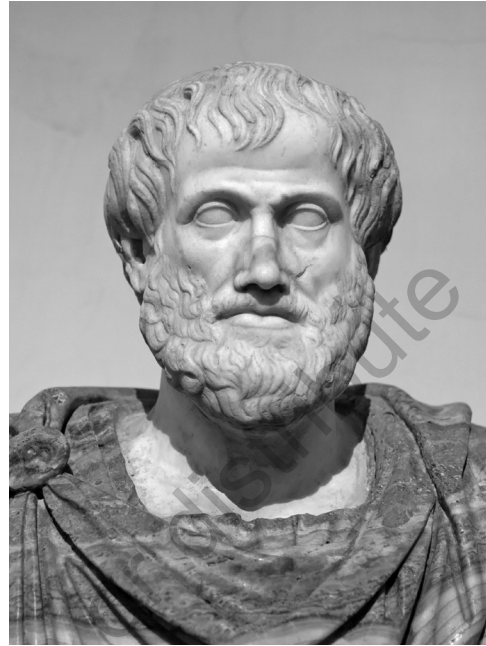
SUMMARY OF GREEK IDEAS ON THE GOOD LIFE

Only somewhat facetiously, Kiefer (1988) summarized the Greek approach to knowledge: "Once its straightforward principles were grasped, anyone who could stand several hours a day of brutal self-criticism could be a philosopher" (p. 38). Although one might argue with Kiefer's summary of Greek philosophy, there is no denying that the Greeks offered a structure to the search for well-being based on self-awareness, rationality, and logic. The legacy left to Western civilization by the Greeks cannot be overestimated. Unfortunately, the emphasis the Greeks placed on rational analysis, the freedom to choose one's own beliefs, and an honest and thorough search for wisdom and truth was lost during the Middle Ages. These qualities would not be central again to the search for well-being in Western civilization until the late 19th century.

Early Christianity and the Middle Ages

The rise of Christianity represented one of the most significant developments in Western civilization and has sustained Western civilization for two millennia. Christianity also transformed

the meaning of religious devotion in Western society by viewing God not as an awesome and powerful God to be feared but as a loving presence who deeply cares for humanity.

During the early Middle Ages (approximately 500 CE to 1200 CE), the Christian Church and its monasteries were the center of spiritual, intellectual, and often political life. Conceptions of the good life were therefore based on the religious perspective of the time. True happiness was delayed until after death and the resurrection into heaven. In this doctrine, the pleasures of the flesh and the spirit were seen as separate. Lowry (1982) summarized the medieval conception of human nature in this way:

> In the Middle Ages, man[1] was regarded as a creature of conflict and contradictions. . . . He had a spiritual nature and a carnal nature, and so long as the spirit inhabited the flesh, the two were constantly at odds. . . . In short, human nature was held to be the scene of a constantly raging battle between the demands of the spirit and the demands of the flesh. (p. 59)

This idea of an internal battle between the physical appetites and the more rational intellectual aspects is still common today. The most familiar example is found in Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory in which the irrational pleasure principle of the id must be moderated by the ego, driven by the reality principal.

Moses Maimonides

Among the major historical figures relevant to positive psychology is Moses Maimonides (1138–1204). He was a renowned Jewish religious leader, philosopher, and physician in Egypt, admired by Christians and Muslims for his medical ability and wisdom. As related by Hoffman (2009), Maimonides emphasized the role of both positive and negative emotions in affecting health and especially warned about the harmfulness of chronic anger and sadness. He also regarded esthetic experience, such as listening to music or gazing at beautiful architecture, as beneficial. In addition, Maimonides advocated the practice of mindfulness as vital to healthy functioning, that is, staying focused on the present moment instead of dwelling on the past or worrying about the future. In keeping with earlier Jewish teachings from the Talmud, Maimonides encouraged the development of positive character traits, such as cheerfulness, friendliness, and generosity in leading a worthy life. He was also influenced by Aristotle's concept of the golden mean in regard to emotional self-regulation.

Mysticism

During the Middle Ages, within the walls of the monasteries could be found monks involved in the intense practice of contemplative spirituality or *mysticism*. For these men and women, the passionate pursuit of a spiritual relationship with God was so satisfying that most worldly concerns mattered little. The monastic tradition and mysticism continue today, although as disciplines these are undertaken by relatively few individuals (see Chapter 10).

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[1] Throughout this book, the gender-specific term *man* is used only when it is a direct quote or when its use accurately reflects the cultural understandings of the time or place.

The Renaissance to the Age of Enlightenment

In Europe, the years 1400 to 1600 produced a steady shift in how people thought about personhood. Originating in the Italian Renaissance, this shift to humanism valued independent thought over Church-imposed religious doctrine. In this respect, it laid the groundwork for the later emergence of science.

The Rise of the Artist and the Rise of Science

During this epoch, two notions contributed vitally to this intellectual transformation: the idea that artists possessed a special gift and the rise of science. During the Renaissance, people came to believe that some artists possessed a special gift that other people lacked. The word "genius" was used to describe these artists. They were unique people; they were individuals. The rise of individualism eventually changed the image of a person in ways that significantly altered how people searched for happiness (Baumeister, 1987).

The end of the 17th century brought a new conception of human nature that was increasingly founded on the beginnings of modern science. The process to be used in the search for truth was a rationality based on dispassionate and objective observation of events in the world. The keys were logic, objectivity, and empiricism. *Empiricism* is the belief that valid knowledge is constructed from experiences derived from the five senses (Honderich, 1995). The second idea was that the "universe as a whole is one vast machine, a kind of cosmic clockwork, and that all its parts and processes are likewise governed by the inexorable laws of mechanical causation" (Lowry, 1982, p. 4). This philosophy became known as *mechanism,* and it was applied equally to events in nature and to human psychology.

The Rising Importance of the Social World

The focus on empiricism, rationalism, and mechanism created an image of human nature that appeared simple, understandable, and clear. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century social reformers such as Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill believed that the basic needs of people to seek pleasure and avoid pain could be used to create a more stable and enlightened society. If you want to know whether a certain behavior is right or ethical or fosters the good life, then you must show that it leads to the enhancement of happiness for the greatest number of people. They called this idea **utilitarianism.** Jeremy Bentham asserted that it was possible to quantify happiness by examining the ratio of positive to negative experiences in one's life. This principle was called the **hedonic calculus** (Viney & King, 1998).

John Stuart Mill agreed with many ideas in utilitarianism but disagreed with Bentham's belief that all pleasures should be given equal value—a notion that is central to the hedonic calculus. For example, Mill wrote that intellectual pleasures are far more important to human happiness than the biological pleasures, which humans share with other animals. Mill famously summed up his critique of utilitarianism by saying, "It is better to be a human dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied that a fool satisfied" (Hergenhahn, 2009, p. 158).

The Rise of Democracy

The third pillar that created the Western worldview is democracy. By the mid-1700s some people believed that the prevailing political power structure could be at odds with the welfare of

the individual and that when these two conflicted, members of society had the right to put in its place a system more conducive to individual liberty. Thomas Jefferson made these principles the founding assumptions of a new government when he wrote in the United States Declaration of Independence, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The pursuit of happiness became a right as well as a personal choice. Now the search for happiness also involved a search for the social and political environments that will best promote well-being.

Romanticism and the 19th Century

Emotion and the Romantics

In the early 1800s the growth of Western individualism began to turn toward the emotional expressionism that made each person unique. Indeed, the word *individualism* first appeared in 1835 when de Tocqueville used it to describe the emerging American perspective. The Romantic movement captured the excitement of the intelligentsia as they explored the full range of their emotional life from the spiritual to the mundane. For instance, Hunt (1959) noted that "the typical romantic prided himself on the ability to fall tumultuously and passionately in love . . . [however] In place of sexuality, the romantics delighted in being demonstratively sentimental, melancholic, tempestuous, or tearful, according to the occasion" (p. 309). The ability to feel emotions intensely was considered important to living a full and significant life.

It was during this period that the focus on personal emotional expression combined with the idea that social environments could stifle individualism. The result was the notion that a "true self" exists beneath the social exterior or the social masks that people wear. Today, numerous perspectives on well-being urge people to find and express their true self.

Love in the Romantic Period

Another consequence of rising individualism was that the idea of marriage should be based on affection between two people along with the unique emotional bonds they create together. This new idea of marriage also assumes that individual sentiments and emotions should be more important to the decision to marry than any societal authority (Taylor, 1989). With the rise of individualism comes the view that romantic love is the major means to soothe one's sense of being alone in the world. As Singer (1987) noted, from this point forward, "romantic love . . . involved oneness with an alter ego, one's other self, a man or woman who would make up one's deficiencies, respond to one's deepest inclinations, and serve as possibly the only person with whom one could communicate fully . . . this would be the person one would marry, and establishing a bond that was permanent as well as ecstatically consummatory" (quoted in Hendrick & Hendrick, 1992).

Of course, today in Western industrialized countries, it is assumed that love should be the only real motivation for marriage. Today, the ultimate test of whether two people should commit themselves to each other is found in the answer to a simple question, "Are you in love?" If the answer to this question is a resounding yes, then many people assume that the two should commit to each other for the rest of their lives. The search for intimacy and love remains a major focus for most adults—and is regarded as essential for attaining true happiness.

Celebrating Childhood Experience

One lasting influence of the Romantics was an adoration of childhood experience. In particular, the English poets William Wordsworth and his friend Samuel Coleridge viewed childhood as a special time of joy, when our senses are most open to the world and we are filled with exuberance and delight. They extolled the child's sense of wonder as a true basis for enjoying life to the fullest. Later, in the United States, the philosophers Ralph Waldo Emerson and his friend Henry David Thoreau emphasized the importance of exposing children to nature and encouraging their individual self-expression. For all these thinkers, children were viewed neither as miniature adults nor adults in waiting but persons with their own valid ways of perceiving the world.

The 20th Century

The first significant development in the search for well-being early in the 20th century came from William James. Acclaimed as among America's best philosophers, he was also the founder of American psychology and authored its first textbook. James initially trained as a physician at Harvard, where he taught psychology and philosophy for more than 30 years.

He became increasingly interested in how to awaken human potential, for he was convinced that we use only a tiny fraction of our full range of emotional and cognitive capabilities in daily life. To this end, he explored unusual mental phenomena such as hypnotism, altered states of consciousness, and trance medium-ship. In James's (1902/1985) most influential book, *The Varieties of Religious Experience,* he affirmed spiritual and mystical experiences as providing important clues to the heights of human personality. James also recognized the importance of happiness. He said, "How to gain, how to keep, how to recover happiness, is in fact for most men at all times the secret motive of all they do, and of all they are willing to endure" (James, 1958, p. 68).

At the beginning of the 20th century, Sigmund Freud and his followers added another significant perspective to the search for well-being. Although it wasn't completely new, his theory on the power of the unconscious provided a unique element into the search for well-being. Today most psychologists agree that at least some motivations for behavior and some emotions are hidden from conscious awareness. In fact, we know that the search for happiness may be either aided or hindered by unconscious forces, such as defense mechanisms.
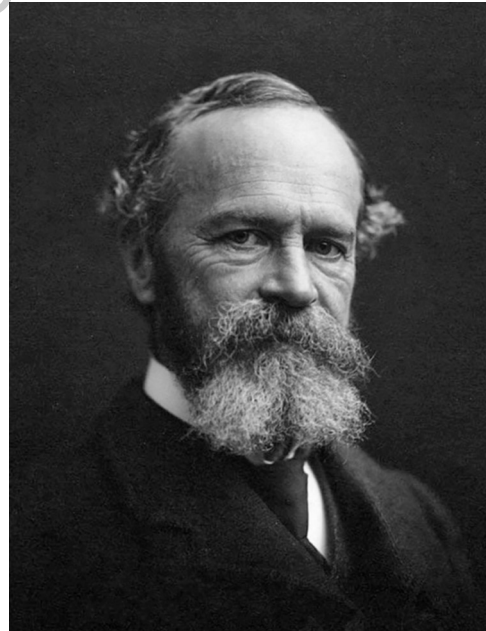
William James

Source: Houghton Library, Harvard University, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons.

Early attempts to heal mental illness and eliminate debilitating neurosis also led to the development of perspectives on optimal mental health. Beginning with Alfred Adler and Carl Jung, two of Sigmund Freud's most influential early associates, psychologists throughout the 20th century developed theories of well-being and human flourishing. Adler had an optimistic view of human capability. He believed that such traits as compassion, friendliness, nurturance, and altruism are innate in every child but are invariably affected by social support and discouragement. Jung emphasized our capacity for personality growth in the second half of life. He regarded the healthy personality as one that integrates the different components of the self, including a deeper and more universal collective unconscious (see Chapter 10).

Also early in the 20th century, the *mental hygiene movement* emerged with a focus on the promotion of mental health. Abraham Myerson (1917) coined the term *eupathics* to describe a new field that would focus on how the "mood of mankind can be elevated." In 1954, Herbert Golding discussed a "psychology of happiness" and noted that there was "vigorous popular concern" for information about happiness but a "marked reluctance" by scientists to study happiness (Landerfelt & Compton, 2017). Throughout the 20th century, sociologists and other researchers had been gathering data on various aspects of well-being. In 1974, these efforts coalesced into the discipline of *social indicators research,* which is an academic empirical discipline devoted to the study of happiness, life satisfaction, and quality of life. Much of the early data on happiness and life satisfaction came from social indicators research.

Humanistic Psychology

Humanistic psychology emerged in the late 1950s and throughout its history has focused on many of the same goals as positive psychology. Abraham Maslow (1954), one of the cofounders of humanistic psychology, even titled a chapter in his seminal book *Motivation and Personality* "Toward a Positive Psychology."

The differences between humanistic psychology and positive psychology can be found in the focus of investigations and the greater emphasis on traditional empirical research in the latter school. Much of the emphasis in humanistic psychology has been on theories of exceptional or optimal personality development, such as self-actualization. In general, positive psychology has tended to place greater emphasis on the well-being and satisfaction of the "average" person on the street (see the Sheldon & King quote earlier). As we have seen, positive psychology defines itself as the "science" of well-being so empirical research is essential. Of course, many humanistic psychologists have also been actively involved in empirical research on topics related to well-being and flourishing (e.g., Cameron et al., 2022; Hoffman et al., 2020; Orille et al., 2020).

However, humanistic psychologists tend to be more comfortable with non-experimental research methods. For example, humanistic psychology takes "the person as a whole" as the fundamental object of study (Bühler & Allen, 1972). One implication of this ideal is the assumption that people can't be fully understood by examining separate variables, constructs, or traits and then attempting to put the pieces back together again. In contrast, the traditional experimental model is based on analyzing separate variables in the search for greater prediction and control of behavior. Today, however, the differences between positive psychology and humanistic

psychology are diminishing. What differences remain tend to be about philosophical assumptions, such as the preceding one, rather than differences of competing approaches to science.

Finally, the 20th century also saw the recognition by Western psychology that perspectives on well-being from other cultures may be important (see Chapter 11). Some of the more interesting contributions have come from research on meditation, yoga, and consciousness (e.g., Dambrun et al., 2012). In particular, ideas from Buddhist mindfulness meditation have recently become important in positive psychology (see Chapter 4).

Lessons on Well-Being From History

For the study of well-being, history can offer some interesting insights or, at the very least, some intriguing hypotheses. Jonathan Haidt (2006) provided several lessons on well-being that can be learned from a study of history. His list shows the influence of both past history and the newer psychological perspective:

1. The human mind is divided into parts that can be in conflict.

2. Therefore, training the mind is important to well-being.

3. Pleasure comes more from making progress toward goals than in goal attainment.

4. It is possible for adversity to make you stronger.

5. We need to rise above our tendencies to be self-centered, ego-centric, judgmental, and biased.

6. Positive social relationships are important for well-being.

7. In particular, love and emotional attachment are important for well-being.

8. Virtues are important for well-being.

9. Spirituality and self-transcendence are important for well-being.

10. Having a sense of meaning and purpose in life is important. It comes from vital engagement in life and a sense of coherence or integration among various parts of your life.

POSITIVE PSYCHOLOGY TODAY

People of the Western industrialized nations entered the 20th century with a range of freedoms unprecedented in history. The ideals of freedom, democracy, and self-reliance allowed people to choose their professions, spouses, religious belief systems, system of government, and locales, as well as seemingly endless other choices important to their pursuit of the good life. In fact, citizens of democratic countries were expected to exercise those freedoms and make individual choices to enhance their daily lives.

When these choices are brought to bear on the question of the good life or happiness, people today find a veritable cornucopia of differing philosophies, beliefs, theories, ideas, and pronouncements all laying claim to authority. The freedom of full inquiry creates a stunning array of possible answers. Indeed, the sheer number of definitions of the good life seems to expand to fit the growing complexity of the world. One of the goals of positive psychology, therefore, is to bring some understanding to these various perspectives on the good life and well-being. Positive psychology enables researchers from diverse areas to come together and share ideas on the adaptive and creative abilities of people. Despite the fact that positive psychology is a new area, its popularity is growing rapidly. Positive psychologists have worked extensively to provide awareness of this new area and to provide opportunities for researchers interested in the area. Today there are over 15 different academic journals devoted to research on either positive psychology or well-being, and associations of positive psychology can be found in many countries around the world (see Maddux, 2021).

Although the editorial boards of journals on well-being and other academic venues for positive psychology draw internationally for expertise, the field of psychology today remains most advanced in the United States and Western Europe (see Donaldson et al., 2015). For example, comparatively few university courses on positive psychology have yet emerged in South America, Eastern Europe, or Asia. Fortunately, though, interest is growing throughout these diverse regions. The research focus of positive psychology is also becoming increasingly global in scope, with empirical studies, for example, in Brazil (Freitas et al., 2021), Chile (Rice et al., 2020), Japan (Oshio et al., 2020), rural China (Han & Gao, 2020), and Vietnam (Tran et al., 2022), and journals devoted to positive psychology in counties around the globe (e.g., *Indian Journal of Positive Psychology*).

When positive psychology was first launched as a new specialty, the American mass media focused almost exclusively on research about happiness. Some popular depictions of positive psychology still describe it only as the science of "happiness." However, research has considerably broadened to include individual meaning, purpose in life, wisdom, and personal growth as key areas of investigation. In addition, positive psychologists are now more insistent that a life well lived requires both positive and negative emotions. The practical applications of positive psychology were evident after the outbreak of the COVID-19 virus. A number of positive psychology interventions proved useful tools for coping with the challenges of a global pandemic (e.g., Waters et al., 2022).

Although the field of positive psychology offers a new approach to the study of positive emotions and behavior, the ideas, theories, research, and motivation to study the positive side of human behavior are as old as humanity. Positive psychology appears to be well on its way to gaining a permanent place in scientific psychology. The findings from research that takes a positive psychology approach are already influencing interventions that help people enhance their strengths and develop their potentials for greater happiness, satisfaction with life, and well-being.

SUMMARY

This chapter introduced the concept of positive psychology as the scientific study of optimal human functioning. Positive psychology also searches for those qualities that allow individuals, communities, and societies to thrive and flourish. Positive psychology focuses on three

major dimensions: positive subjective states, positive traits, and positive institutions. There are also a number of themes or basic assumptions that differentiate positive psychology from other approaches to research in psychology. This chapter also reviewed the history of how people in the Western world have thought about happiness, well-being, and the good life. The chapter ended with an appropriately hopeful note that speculated about the future of positive psychology. It seems that interest in this new field is growing rapidly and that positive psychology will be a thriving area in the field for many years to come.

LEARNING TOOLS

Key Terms and Ideas

complete mental health	positive psychology
divine command theory	the good life
eudaimonia	thriving
flourishing	utilitarianism
hedonic calculus	virtue theory
hedonism	

Books

Fowers, B. (2005). *Virtue and psychology: Pursuing excellence in ordinary practices*. American Psychological Association. A compelling argument for Aristotle's approach to virtue in contemporary psychology. (popular)

Hoffman, E. (1994). *The drive for self: Alfred Adler and the founding of individual psychology*. Addison-Wesley. The definitive biography of Alfred Adler. (popular)

Seligman, M. E. P. (2018). *The hope circuit: A psychologist's journey from helplessness to optimism*. Martin Seligman tells the story of how he created positive psychology. (popular)

Setiya, K. (2022). *Life is hard: How philosophy can help us find our way*. Penguin Random House. (popular)

Snyder, C. R., Lopez, S., Edwards, L., & Marques, S. (Eds.). (2021). *Oxford handbook of positive psychology* (3rd ed.). Oxford Press. A major anthology on positive psychology topics. (professional)

Tarnas, R. (1991). *The passion of the Western mind: Understanding the ideas that have shaped our world view*. Ballantine. A beautifully written book that makes reading about history a real pleasure. (popular)

Wulf, A. *Magnificent rebels: The first romantics and the invention of the self*. Penguin Random House. (popular)

On the Web

http://www.ppc.sas.upenn.edu. The Positive Psychology Center at the University of Pennsylvania. Links for researchers, teachers, students, and others.

http://positivepsychologynews.com. Online newsletter for those interested in positive psychology.

http://www.apa.org. The webpage for the American Psychological Association. Search for "positive psychology" to find numerous articles, books, and webpages.

http://www.goodnewsnetwork.org. The website for the Good News Network that publishes a news-letter covering uplifting and positive news from around the world.

https://mappalicious.com/2015/02/09/10-great-ways-to-stay-up-to-date-on-positive-psycholog y-linkedin-facebook-twitter-etc/. 10 ways to stay up to date on positive psychology.

http://www.ippanetwork.org. Site for the International Positive Psychology Association. Includes a link to SIPPA, which is the student division of IPPA.

Personal Exploration

In a famous essay called *The Energies of Men,* William James wrote that people often give up on tasks and projects too soon, that is, before they get their second wind to propel them across the finish line. "Our organism has stored-up reserves of energy that are ordinarily not called upon" but that exist and can be drawn up effectively, James insisted. Usually, the process happens without our conscious planning or effort, but James believed that psychology might some day discover ways to help each of us tap our stored-up energy, whether we engage in "physical work, intellectual work, moral work, or spiritual work."

Describe an experience in your life when you were feeling exhausted or drained—either mentally or physically—and then suddenly possessed renewed vitality and enthusiasm. (a) What do you think caused your second wind to kick in? Might it have involved encouragement from another person, a powerful moment of self-motivation, both of these causes, or something else entirely? (b) If you were teaching a skill or sport to elementary-school children, what advice would you give to help them tap into their second wind? (c) Over the next week, record any experiences in which you felt tired or discouraged but then caught your second wind of energy and enthusiasm. See if you can identify what caused it to arise.