Edward B. Davis
Everett L. Worthington Jr.
Sarah A. Schnitker *Editors*

# Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality

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*To my beloved family—Meghan, Graham, Madeleine, Hayes, and Rachel. Thanks for always supporting my "nerdy work" (aka scholarly research). I love y'all with all my heart and am deeply grateful for each of you. The greatest joy of my life is getting to love and be loved by you. Thank you for inspiring me daily to nurture a meaningful spirituality and the virtues that emanate from it.*

—E. B. D.

*We all need people to open doors to admit us into new professional arenas. Rodney K. Goodyear (at that time editor of the Journal of Counseling and Development) and Stanley R. Strong (one of my research and counseling mentors, who is now deceased) both invited me into mainstream psychology religious and spiritual research that went beyond Christian psychology. I'm so grateful to them and to my students who journeyed with me.*

—E. L. W.

*To my husband, Seth Robins, and the healthcare administrators and workers around the world who have drawn upon religious and spiritual resources to exhibit courage, compassion, perseverance, and patience during the global COVID-19 pandemic.*

—S. A. S.

# Foreword

To date, two areas of behavioral science have informed one another too seldomly—positive psychology and the psychology of religion and spirituality. Each subfield has now accumulated decades of empirically grounded wisdom on the practices and processes by which people can best forge their better selves. In uniting these two subfields, this innovative *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* leverages the accumulated evidence from each subfield and builds the case for further synergies between them. Whether people seek to be more joyful or peaceful, or more centered or moral, these seekers will be better served by deeper, more frequent, and more substantive cross-fertilization between these two scientific domains.

This scholarly fusion is well-timed. In an era of rising threat and mushrooming uncertainty, increasing numbers of pandemic-weary people are struggling to nurture and maintain their mental well-being and hope. Growing social divisiveness has eroded civility worldwide, undermining many people's faith in humanity. Making matters worse, all manner of scandals and greed have surfaced within traditional religious institutions. Eroded public trust in these institutions thus has often made them unattractive sources of solace. Against this backdrop, increasing numbers of people who describe themselves as "spiritual but not religious" appear more likely to mix-and-match their own self-styled spiritual practices than to accept—or even explore—the longstanding prebundled practices that are offered by established religions.

Both personally and professionally, I find the fusion of positive psychology with the science of religion and spirituality to be generative. Having dedicated my career to establishing the science of positive emotions, I frequently use the insight that positive emotions both broaden and build to guide me toward personal spiritual practices that most effectively open my heart and mind and build my resilience and resolve. Seen through these lenses, nature hikes, meditation, and slow stretch yoga have become soul-satisfying "go-to" practices when I feel unmoored. By contrast, religious or spiritual practices that leave me feeling cold fail to sustain my attention.

In my professional life, seeds to integrate the science of religion and spirituality into my research program on positive psychology were first planted in 2010, when

I accepted the invitation to become a Templeton Research Fellow at the Danielsen Institute at Boston University. My charge was to explore the intersection of religious and psychological well-being. The ensuing six lectures I delivered at Boston University became the framework for my 2013 book, *Love 2.0* (Penguin, www.PositivityResonance.com), which in turn became a roadmap for my team's work in our Positive Emotions and Psychophysiology (PEP) Lab at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (www.PositiveEmotions.org). More seeds were sown in 2012 when Patty Van Cappellen joined the PEP Lab, at first as a visiting doctoral student and eventually as a post-doctoral fellow and assistant research professor. She brought a deep scholarly understanding of religion and spirituality to the table, and since then, we together have investigated how religion and spirituality shape and are shaped by positive emotions. Dr. Van Cappellen's contributions to the subfields of positive psychology and the psychology of religion and spirituality have since been honored with multiple early career awards, and I am fortunate to continue to learn from and with her.

The accumulating evidence, from my and others' research teams, has convinced me that both domains of inquiry—positive psychology and the science of religion and spirituality—unpack a multitude of complementary practices and processes that help people, relationships, and communities flourish. Flourishing, by definition, fuses individual psychological well-being with contributions to the greater societal good, thereby providing foundations for morality and spirituality. As I put it in my book *Love 2.0*:

> I've been particularly drawn to religious writings that shine a spotlight on experiences of oneness and connection, because those are part of the signature of love [a.k.a., positivity resonance]. In these moments, borders seem to evaporate and you feel part of something far larger than yourself, be it nature, eternity, humanity, or the divine. … Following in [William] James's footsteps, I take spirituality to revolve around expansive emotional moments like these. … [As James wrote in 1902], "Feeling is the deeper source of religion, and … philosophical and theological formulas are secondary products, like translations of a text into another tongue."
>
> I especially resonate with how …George Vaillant…equates spirituality with positive emotions, noting that these states are what connect you to others, to the divine, and over time help you attain wisdom and maturity. [As Vaillant (2009)] succinctly concludes "Love is the shortest definition of spirituality I know."
>
> These potent, boundary-blurring and heart-expanding experiences of positivity resonance that you share with others are not merely an academic concept or a poetic flourish. Positivity resonance changes your biochemistry in ways scientists are only just beginning to grasp… In this way, love and health cocreate each other in your life. At the same time, this reciprocal, upward spiral dynamic between micro-moments of love and lasting changes in your health forges a path toward your higher spiritual sense of oneness.

My team has since documented, through randomized field experiments, that when people begin a spiritual practice, like loving-kindness meditation, they build up their flourishing mental health. Likewise, when they begin a positive psychology practice, like forging more everyday moments of social connection, they build up their spirituality. Yet current understandings of these mutual influences barely scratch the surface. Further integration of these subfields will take us deeper, as is one of the central theses of this *Handbook*. To the science of religion and

spirituality, for instance, positive psychology can bring fresh hypotheses about biopsychosocial mechanisms. To positive psychology, the science of religion and spirituality can bring fresh concepts and measures to better capture ineffable experiences that seekers and believers might characterize as divine, sacred, or spirit-filled. It will also be vital to investigate the processes by which secular practices become sacred and whether and to what degree such sanctification increases the benefits of those practices.

In short, this new *Handbook* offers fresh seeds to germinate in the minds of researchers, practitioners, and laypeople worldwide. In the coming decades, when these ideas have fully taken root as tested hypotheses across wide-ranging research projects and real-world settings, we will have accumulated greater scientific understanding, better science, and more impactful applications of that science. Humanity sorely needs deeper scientific understandings—based on evidence gathered across continents, cultures, and social classes—of the practices and processes that support human flourishing. For some, that science might inspire a course correction in their life's journey. In aggregate, those course corrections stand to uplift all of humanity.

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December 2021

Barbara L. Fredrickson

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There are many people and groups we wish to thank for how they contributed to this *Handbook*. First, we would like to thank the culturally and religiously diverse cast of authors who wrote its chapters. You all are incredibly talented and busy people, and we are grateful for how you devoted your time, expertise, and wisdom to this project. You did so in the midst of the global COVID-19 pandemic—which affected us all but affected some of you particularly acutely—and you graciously responded to the editorial feedback and requests of three scrupulous editors. We are delighted with the chapters you wrote and are thankful for the ways that you drew on your virtues of wisdom, patience, and grit to bring them to fruition.

Next, we would like to thank the John Templeton Foundation (JTF), Templeton World Charity Foundation, and Templeton Religion Trust, which have generously supported not only this volume (JTF Grant 61865) but also the lion's share of the theory and research that comprises it. We are especially grateful to the various Templeton program officers and executives who have helped shape and shepherd our and our colleagues' work at the positive psychology of religion and spirituality (PPRS) intersections over the years, including Nick Gibson, Richard Bollinger, Kimon Sargeant, Andrew Serazin, Ellen Morgan, Bonnie Poon Zahl, Chris Stewart, and Erik Gjesfjeld. You have been instrumental in building the theory, research, and practice foundations for the integrative PPRS field that is the focus of this book.

We also would like to thank our colleagues and friends in the American Psychological Association's Division 36 (Society for the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality) and at our respective work institutions—Wheaton College (EBD), Virginia Commonwealth University (ELW), and Baylor University (SAS). You all have generously supported us in this project and in our broader careers, and this *Handbook* would not be possible without your faithful support.

We thank our editors and project coordinators at Springer, especially Sharon Panulla, Sofia Geck, and Srividya Subramanian. We are grateful for your enthusiastic support of this project and the editorial wisdom that you and your team brought to helping refine, publish, and promote it.

In addition, we are grateful to all our wonderful colleagues and students who have journeyed with us during our careers. It has been a joy and privilege to

collaborate with you in building the foundations of this PPRS field. We are particularly thankful for our friends and colleagues in the Institute for Research on Psychology and Spirituality (IRPS), including Pete Hill, Todd Hall, Clark Campbell, Doug Daugherty, Liz Hall, Julie Exline, Don Davis, Joshua Hook, Daryl Van Tongeren, Alexis Abernethy, Bob Emmons, Jo-Ann Tsang, Steve Sandage, Liz Mancuso, Keith Edwards, Steve Porter, John Williams, Dave Wang, Mark McMinn, Jason McMartin, Kathy Johnson, Pam King, Cynthia Eriksson, Carissa Dwiwardani, Wade Rowatt, Charlotte Witvliet, Joe Bulbulia, Justin Barrett, Kevin Masters, and many others. You all have helped immensely in stimulating, challenging, and enriching our work over the years, and we are deeply grateful for you. In many ways, our IRPS group's esprit de corps has fueled our passion to devote our careers to this PPRS field.

In addition to these dear friends in IRPS, we are grateful to the other key colleagues and students who have contributed so meaningfully to our lives and work. Ward would like to thank Andy Yarborough, Jamie Aten, Gary R. Collins, Beth Brokaw, Corné Bekker, Mark Yarhouse, Glen Moriarty, Jen Ripley, Steve Parker, Bruce Bartholow, Jim Laffoon, Crystal Park, Pehr Granqvist, Carissa Sharp, Theresa Tisdale, Nancy Crawford, Tyler Lefevor, Richard Cowden, Job Chen, Laura Captari, Laura Shannonhouse, Stacey McElroy-Heltzel, Joe Currier, Kevin Ladd, Michiel Van Elk, Jordan LaBouff, Terri Watson, Ben Pyykkonen, Jake Johnson, Cynthia Neal Kimball, Virginia Shaffer, Austin Lemke, Andrew Cuthbert, Kevin Glowiak, and Ethan Lacey.

Ev would like to thank so many people that we're afraid it would extend the book's length beyond the possibility of even lifting it. He is extremely grateful to all his former student colleagues, from whom he has learned so much and to whom he owes a deep debt of gratitude. He also has over 25 international colleagues with whom he is currently collaborating, and they have been very inspirational to him. He also truly appreciates the many, many colleagues widespread throughout the United States. He would like to acknowledge two who were particularly formative in his career and whom the three of us—and countless others—are grieving their loss in 2021—Larry Crabb, Jr. and Gary R. Collins. We know they are happy with their Lord, and yet we miss them.

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We also would like to thank and congratulate each other. It has been a true privilege and honor to work on this project with such dear friends and respected colleagues. We have worked together harmoniously throughout this labor of love, and we are grateful for how we have sharpened, inspired, and supported each other. We also are grateful for the reliable Internet connection at the public library and

McDonald's about a mile from Ev's home, without which Sarah and Ward would not have been able to communicate with Ev. (He had let his annual subscription to the Pony Express expire just prior to starting this book.)

Sarah and Ev are particularly grateful to Ward, who did more than his share of the work. Thank you, Ward. When this book is published, you'll deserve to take a long, well-deserved victory lap. And then a long, well-deserved nap. How you managed to care for three wonderful kids, engage in loving husbandly interactions, and still keep us and all the authors on point is a modern-day miracle.

Most importantly, we are deeply grateful for our families—our spouses, children, grandchildren (for Ev at any rate), parents, and siblings—who have enriched our lives and been essential people who contribute to our own flourishing. We are grateful for their patience with us as we nerd out on work, travel to nerd conventions, lose track of time while writing or editing, and copyedit errors on emails or grocery lists. We are especially grateful for your support of our meaningful work even amidst a global pandemic. You are the ones who inspire us most to help build a positive psychology of religion and spirituality.

As we close this account of our acknowledgments in pulling together a book on religion, spirituality, and positive psychology, we must acknowledge that we each attribute all that is good to God. We pray this book will contribute meaningfully to the faith, hope, and love of people around the world.

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# Part I
# Historical and Theoretical Considerations

# Chapter 1
# Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution

**Edward B. Davis, Everett L. Worthington Jr., Sarah A. Schnitker, Kevin J. Glowiak, Austin W. Lemke, and Chase Hamilton**

It was a fall day in 1930, and the famous American philosopher and historian William Durant was raking leaves in his yard. A despondent stranger walked up and shocked Durant by confessing he was planning to commit suicide unless Durant could give him "one good reason" to live. Flustered, Durant gave a feeble reply: "I bade him get a job—but he had one; to eat a good meal—but he was not hungry; he left visibly unmoved by my arguments" (Smith, 2017, p. 19). Durant was so haunted by the man's question that he wrote over 100 of the brightest minds of his time, asking each luminary to answer the question "What is the meaning or worth of human life?" (Durant, 1933, p. 3). He compiled their answers in *On the Meaning of Life* (Durant, 1933), published in the wake of World War I and heart of the Great Depression (Smith, 2017).

Questions about life's meaning have vexed humans across history. For millennia, philosophers and religious scholars led discourse on the topic, but since psychology's inception in the late nineteenth century, psychology has contributed to this discourse as well. Psychology's contribution budded with the work of William James, a founding figure both in mainstream psychology and the *psychology of religion and spirituality* (R/S; i.e., "the empirical or academic study of spiritual experience or organized religion from a psychological perspective," VandenBos, 2015, p. 860). James (1890/2011) presciently warned psychology from becoming "a psychology without a soul" (p. 7), experiencing a kind of etymological amnesia

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by forgetting its Greek root words *psyche* and *logos* literally mean "the study of the soul" (Pillsbury & Pennington, 1942, p. 2). Unfortunately, James's advice went unheeded. Psychology largely ignored the scientific study of R/S until the 1960s, when interest was reinvigorated (Hood, 2012).

Yet another of psychology's roots remained largely neglected until the end of the twentieth century. In his 1998 Presidential Address to the American Psychological Association (APA), Martin E. P. Seligman (1999) averred: "It's my belief that since the end of World War II, psychology has moved too far away from its original roots, which were to make the lives of all people more fulfilling and productive, and too much toward the important, but not all-important, area of curing mental illness" (p. 559). In response, he issued a clarion call for a "positive psychology" (Seligman, 1999, p. 561) that would redress this imbalance and help psychology reclaim its mission by reorienting psychological science and practice toward understanding and promoting human strength and flourishing (Seligman, 1999). Several of Seligman's predecessors (such as William James, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers) had already called for psychology to focus more on positive mental health, optimal functioning, personal growth, and human potential, but it usually is Seligman who is credited with catalyzing the positive psychology field in 1998 (Hart, 2021).

## Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

*Positive psychology* is the "field of psychological theory and research that focuses on the psychological states (e.g., contentment, joy), individual traits or character strengths (e.g., intimacy, integrity, altruism, wisdom), and social institutions that enhance subjective well-being and make life most worth living" (VandenBos, 2015, p. 810). In developing the Values in Action taxonomy that became the theoretical foundation of positive psychology, Peterson and Seligman (2004) consulted scholars and exhaustively searched the scholarly and historical literatures. They drew heavily from the writings of religious scholars and moral philosophers across time, cultures, and faith traditions. Indeed, R/S was one of the 24 character strengths that emerged in their taxonomy.

However, mainstream psychology has historically adopted a "noninteractive stance" (Jones, 1994, p. 184) toward R/S, perhaps because psychologists (a) generally are much less religious or spiritual than the overall population (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013), (b) often do not have much formal training or competence in R/S (Vieten & Lukoff, 2022), and (c) frequently hold skeptical (or even biased) attitudes toward R/S (Gergen, 2009; Jones, 1994). But how much has positive psychology adopted this noninteractive stance toward R/S, given that R/S is one of the core character strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004) and is robustly linked to health and well-being (Koenig et al., 2012)? In many ways, this question is what sparked the current handbook.

With this *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality*, we particularly sought to accomplish three goals: (a) examine the existing degree of overlap between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields, (b) summarize and synthesize the relevant theoretical and empirical literature at these intersections, and (c) catalyze the integration of these fields and thereby potentiate their coevolution toward greater scientific and societal impact. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to set the stage for your evaluation of whether this book achieves these lofty goals. First, we describe the cumulative growth of the two fields, including how much overlap exists and where their research is published. Second, we outline reasons why the increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology R/S would be reciprocally beneficial. Third, we discuss potential barriers to this integration and suggest ways to transcend them. Lastly, we preview the handbook and recommend ways to glean the most as you read it.

## Existing Trends and Overlap

To examine existing trends and overlap, we conducted two systematic literature searches in the APA's PsycINFO database. Both searches were conducted on December 31, 2020, and only used the standardized index terms available in the *APA Thesaurus of Psychological Index Terms* (APA, 2020). The following four index terms were the only ones available to use for positive psychology: "positive psychology," "virtue," "happiness," and "well-being"; the only three available for the psychology of R/S were "religion," "spirituality," and "faith." We constrained our search to index terms, because using a controlled (standardized) vocabulary is generally recommended, due to countless ways researchers can describe related concepts (Soto, 2017). Additionally, for these searches, we used the search field "DE" (Descriptors), because doing so ensured the retrieval of entries that were focused on a specific concept (rather than entries that merely contained a keyword anywhere in the entry, regardless of that entry's focus).

In Table 1.1, we present the results of the first search, which identified the cumulative number of academic articles and book entries that focused on positive psychology topics, psychology of R/S topics, and both types of topics. Entries are presented by year, starting with 1998, when Seligman gave his APA Presidential Address on positive psychology. From 1998 to 2020, 48,623 articles and book entries focused on at least one of the indexed positive psychology topics; 26,192 on R/S topics; and 1,783 (2.4% of the collective 73,032 entries) on both.

Table 1.2 displays results of the second search, which examined a selection of premier psychology journals to see how much they each published articles on positive psychology topics, R/S topics, or both, between 1998 and 2020. Among the selected 23 journals (most of which were among the top-ranked psychology journals in the *2019 Journal Citation Reports* [Clarivate Analytics, 2020]), the proportion of articles focusing on positive psychology varied widely—from 0.5% to 7.2%. By comparison, the proportion of articles on R/S was consistently low (0.0–2.0%),

**Table 1.1** Cumulative Number of Academic Articles and Book Entries on Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality

| | Positive psychology ($n$ = 48,623) | | | | Psychology of R/S ($n$ = 26,192) | | | Total | Both (%) |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Year | Positive psychology[a] | Virtues[b] | Happiness[c] | Well-being[d] | Religion[e] | Spirituality[f] | Faith[g] | | |
| 1998 | 0 | 2 | 64 | 399 | 180 | 176 | 11 | 792 | 10 (1.3) |
| 1999 | 0 | 4 | 137 | 831 | 346 | 380 | 26 | 1,616 | 27 (1.7) |
| 2000 | 10 | 10 | 259 | 1,413 | 572 | 664 | 46 | 2,756 | 56 (2.0) |
| 2001 | 29 | 14 | 379 | 2,038 | 823 | 968 | 63 | 3,979 | 79 (2.0) |
| 2002 | 101 | 24 | 523 | 2,893 | 1,141 | 1,339 | 93 | 5,529 | 134 (2.4) |
| 2003 | 183 | 36 | 668 | 3,780 | 1,551 | 1,777 | 125 | 7,318 | 178 (2.4) |
| 2004 | 341 | 42 | 821 | 4,780 | 2,010 | 2,277 | 175 | 9,436 | 226 (2.4) |
| 2005 | 413 | 58 | 1,018 | 5,817 | 2,584 | 2,927 | 225 | 11,734 | 281 (2.4) |
| 2006 | 534 | 66 | 1,241 | 7,235 | 3,379 | 3,728 | 293 | 14,783 | 359 (2.4) |
| 2007 | 675 | 91 | 1,527 | 8,685 | 4,140 | 4,510 | 369 | 17,953 | 439 (2.4) |
| 2008 | 835 | 114 | 1,856 | 10,268 | 4,889 | 5,280 | 432 | 21,214 | 518 (2.4) |
| 2009 | 1,066 | 136 | 2,215 | 11,908 | 5,710 | 6,074 | 501 | 24,692 | 609 (2.5) |
| 2010 | 1,271 | 198 | 2,600 | 13,707 | 6,493 | 6,822 | 586 | 28,337 | 689 (2.4) |
| 2011 | 1,539 | 274 | 3,031 | 15,668 | 7,328 | 7,668 | 729 | 32,321 | 815 (2.5) |
| 2012 | 1,787 | 385 | 3,458 | 17,876 | 8,238 | 8,641 | 935 | 36,760 | 945 (2.6) |
| 2013 | 2,167 | 529 | 4,071 | 20,681 | 9,165 | 9,617 | 1,139 | 42,018 | 1,066 (2.5) |
| 2014 | 2,601 | 700 | 4,623 | 23,494 | 10,200 | 10,529 | 1,352 | 47,359 | 1,205 (2.5) |
| 2015 | 2,956 | 877 | 5,121 | 26,236 | 11,069 | 11,347 | 1,597 | 52,367 | 1,325 (2.5) |
| 2016 | 3,318 | 952 | 5,637 | 29,148 | 11,783 | 12,053 | 1,687 | 57,133 | 1,403 (2.5) |
| 2017 | 3,634 | 1,050 | 6,048 | 31,921 | 12,510 | 12,786 | 1,734 | 61,702 | 1,529 (2.5) |
| 2018 | 3,963 | 1,160 | 6,461 | 34,658 | 13,232 | 13,469 | 1,816 | 66,190 | 1,630 (2.5) |
| 2019 | 4,197 | 1,247 | 6,929 | 37,474 | 13,789 | 14,115 | 1,910 | 70,542 | 1,722 (2.4) |
| 2020[#] | 4,297 | 1,295 | 7,144 | 39,157 | 14,111 | 14,477 | 1,962 | 73,032 | 1,783 (2.4) |

*Note.* R/S = religion/spirituality. Entries were identified in PsycINFO, using the following search terms: [a]DE "Positive Psychology," [b]DE "Virtue," [c]DE "Happiness," [d]DE "Well-Being," [e]DE "Religion," [f]DE "Spirituality," [g]DE "Faith." For all searches, the only limiters were "excludes dissertations" and that the Source Types were either "academic journals" or "books"

[#]Up through December 31, 2020

**Table 1.2** Positive Psychology (PP) and Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (PoRS) Articles in Select Psychology Journals, 1998–2020

| Journal | 2-year IF | Total articles | PP articles | PoRS articles | PP + PoRS articles |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Psychological Bulletin | 20.838 | 1,122 | 38 (3.4) | 5 (0.4) | 0 (0.0) |
| Annual Review of Psychology | 18.111 | 573 | 15 (2.6) | 8 (1.4) | 2 (0.3) |
| Personality and Social Psychology Review | 12.321 | 453 | 19 (4.2) | 9 (2.0) | 2 (0.4) |
| Clinical Psychology Review | 10.255 | 1,480 | 26 (1.8) | 4 (0.3) | 0 (0.0) |
| Perspectives on Psychological Science | 8.275 | 1,008 | 46 (4.6) | 6 (0.6) | 0 (0.0) |
| American Psychologist | 6.536 | 4,094 | 141 (3.4) | 30 (0.7) | 1 (0.0) |
| Journal of Personality and Social Psychology | 6.315 | 3,423 | 218 (6.4) | 37 (1.1) | 2 (0.1) |
| Journal of Applied Psychology | 5.818 | 2,471 | 80 (3.2) | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| Psychological Science | 5.367 | 4,153 | 151 (3.6) | 20 (0.5) | 0 (0.0) |
| Current Directions in Psychological Science | 5.110 | 1,548 | 46 (3.0) | 9 (0.6) | 1 (0.1) |
| Child Development | 4.891 | 3,290 | 66 (2.0) | 14 (0.4) | 0 (0.0) |
| Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology | 4.632 | 2,481 | 28 (1.1) | 8 (0.3) | 1 (0.0) |
| Journal of Counseling Psychology | 3.697 | 1,290 | 80 (6.2) | 17 (1.3) | 4 (0.3) |
| Journal of Personality | 3.667 | 1,311 | 95 (7.2) | 25 (1.9) | 2 (0.2) |
| Journal of Clinical Child and Adolescent Psychology | 3.656 | 1,693 | 9 (0.5) | 0 (0.0) | 0 (0.0) |
| Journal of Experimental Psychology: General | 3.169 | 1,718 | 38 (2.2) | 8 (0.5) | 0 (0.0) |
| Health Psychology | 3.052 | 2,502 | 80 (3.2) | 16 (0.6) | 2 (0.1) |
| Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin | 2.961 | 2,898 | 158 (5.5) | 28 (1.0) | 3 (0.1) |
| PLoS ONE | 2.740 | 13,035 | 292 (2.2) | 40 (0.3) | 5 (0.0) |
| Attachment & Human Development | 2.656 | 741 | 12 (1.6) | 3 (0.4) | 0 (0.0) |
| Psychological Trauma | 2.595 | 1,233 | 31 (2.5) | 25 (2.0) | 2 (0.2) |
| Counseling Psychologist | 2.263 | 1,078 | 52 (4.8) | 19 (1.8) | 2 (0.2) |
| Journal of Clinical Psychology | 2.138 | 2,805 | 59 (2.1) | 56 (2.0) | 2 (0.1) |
| Total (% of total) | | 56,400 | 1,780 (3.2) | 387 (0.7) | 31 (0.1) |
| Journal of Positive Psychology (2006–2020) | 3.819 | 889 | – | 35 (3.9) | 35 (3.9) |
| Psychology of Religion and Spirituality (2009–2020) | 2.367 | 522 | 69 (13.2) | – | 69 (13.2) |

*Note*. IF = impact factor from the *2019 Journal Citation Reports* (Clarivate Analytics, 2020)

and the proportion on both R/S and positive psychology was extremely low (0.0–0.4%). Of the 56,400 articles published collectively across these journals, only 387 (0.7%) were on R/S and 31 (0.1%) were on both R/S and positive psychology. Even in the top niche journals in these fields, the proportion of articles on both topics was low, ranging from 3.9% (35/889) in *Journal of Positive Psychology* to 13.2% (69/522) in *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*.

## Integrating the Fields of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of R/S

There is growing scientific evidence that, across a wide variety of complex systems, integration ("the linkage of differentiated elements," Siegel, 2020, p. 461) is a central marker and mechanism of flourishing (Siegel, 2020). Indeed, we approach the current handbook with the belief that increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S will lead each field not only toward greater flourishing but also to greater flourishing in mainstream psychology and society. Yet first we explore reasons why such integration is even possible.

### *Why* Can *We Integrate These Fields?*

**They Often Have Similar Aims** The overall aims of mainstream psychology are to (a) enhance scientific understanding of the human mind and behavior and (b) use this understanding to benefit society and improve people's lives (APA, 2011; Bermant et al., 2011). Similarly, the central aims of positive psychology are to advance scientific understanding of human strengths and flourishing and then use that understanding to benefit people, institutions, and societies (Hart, 2021; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Likewise, the main aims of the psychology of R/S are (a) to enhance scientific understanding of *spirituality* ("search for or relationship with the sacred," Harris et al., 2018, p. 1) and *religion* ("search for significance that occurs within the context of established institutions designed to facilitate spirituality," Pargament et al., 2013, p. 15) and (b) use that understanding to benefit society and improve people's lives (Pargament, 2013). In sum, because positive psychology and the psychology of R/S have resonant aims (with each other and with the aims of mainstream psychology), they can be integrated readily. Both fields are working toward the same goals—advancing understanding and improving lives.

**They Have Similar Foundations** Next, both positive psychology and the psychology of R/S are dedicated to the empirical study of the human mind and behavior; thus, they share a fundamental methodology (empirical science) and topical focus (human mind and behavior). They also have similar historical and philosophical

origins, dating back to the classical and medieval periods (e.g., the writings of Aristotle, Plato, and early and medieval Christian authors; see Chap. 2, this volume). Moreover, each has historically explored the foundations of morality, ethics, and virtues (see Chaps. 3 and 4, this volume). Further, there historically has been considerable overlap in these fields' epistemological assumptions (Nelson & Slife, 2012; Snyder et al., 2021).

**They Have Similar Emphases** In the modern era, both fields have resonant emphases as well. For instance, positive psychology focuses on the study and promotion of subjective experiences and individual traits that enhance well-being, as well as on the social institutions that facilitate these experiences and traits (Seligman, 2011; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Similarly, the psychology of R/S studies people's search for the sacred and the social contexts and institutions that facilitate this search (Pargament et al., 2013). Both fields also emphasize practical applications (in clinical, workplace, and other contexts; Donaldson et al., 2020; Pargament, 2013) and issues relevant to people across cultures and time (health, well-being, meaning, virtues, positive emotions, and relationships; Seligman, 2011; Vaillant, 2008).

## *Why* Should *We Integrate These Fields?*

Taken together, clearly we *can* integrate these fields, but *should* we? In the inaugural article of *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, Linley and colleagues (2006) asserted that positive psychology "can prosper through integration [with other fields and with mainstream psychology], rather than wither through isolation" (p. 5), and they outlined strategies for accomplishing that goal. Likewise, many scholars (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003; Jones, 1994; Pargament et al., 2013) have argued that the psychology of R/S will prosper to the degree it becomes more integrated with other disciplines, with other psychology subfields, and with mainstream psychology.

**Greater Integration Will Benefit Both Fields** By "integration" we do not mean the two subfields will become indistinguishable. Rather, we are suggesting that these differentiable fields can achieve more interconnection and become increasingly intersecting circles on a Venn diagram in which their overlap represents a truly shared space of dialogue, synergy, and collaboration. As shown in Tables 1.1 and 1.2, this shared intersection is currently quite minimal.

If positive psychology and the psychology of R/S achieve greater integration, it will be mutually beneficial. Because positive psychology already has a substantial platform in the scientific literature (Rusk & Waters, 2013) and public sphere (Donaldson et al., 2020), its integration with the psychology of R/S could permit the latter to have greater visibility and impact. Similarly, because positive psychology is grounded firmly in the highest standards of scientific measurement and methodology (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), its

integration with the psychology of R/S could enhance the scientific rigor of the latter's studies, measures, and methodologies (see Chaps. 7 and 8, this volume).

Positive psychology will also benefit from increased integration with the psychology of R/S. For billions of people across the globe, R/S is a major source of meaning (Park, 2010), identity (Hays, 2016), growth (Tedeschi et al., 2018), and resilience (Pargament & Cummings, 2010). Nonetheless, R/S has received relatively little attention within positive psychology (Rusk & Waters, 2013; Snyder et al., 2021). Increased integration of these fields would enable positive psychology to enhance its scientific understanding of how people from diverse cultures and traditions draw on R/S to nurture positive emotional and relational experiences, create and sustain a sense of meaning, cultivate and enhance their well-being, and cope with and grow from adversity (Pargament, 2013; Vaillant, 2008). It also would enable positive psychology to draw on well-validated measures of R/S and the expertise of religious/spiritual scholars and practitioners (Pargament, 2013).

**Greater Integration Will Benefit Mainstream Psychology** Additionally, the broader field of psychology would benefit. Indeed, the APA's vision statement (i.e., the change APA aspires to bring in the world) is "a strong, *diverse*, and *unified* psychology that enhances knowledge and improves the human condition" (APA, 2011, p. 4, emphasis added). Within mainstream psychology, R/S is recognized as an important facet of human diversity (Hays, 2016; Vieten & Lukoff, 2022), yet as shown in Table 1.2, premier psychology journals still do not publish many articles on R/S. This dearth represents an enormous opportunity for positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Because the link between R/S and well-being is so well-established (Koenig et al., 2012; Lefevor et al., 2021), research and practice at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology can help psychology fulfill its mission of improving people's lives. For example, greater integration of these fields can help psychology grow in scientific understanding of how R/S can enhance the flourishing of people, institutions, and societies. It also can help develop and refine spiritually integrated interventions that are evidence-based and designed both to alleviate problems and actualize potentials (Pargament, 2013; see Chap. 26, this volume).

**Greater Integration Will Benefit Society** Ultimately, the increased integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S will benefit society. Research suggests that the largest influence on someone's well-being is the country in which they live (Geerling & Diener, 2020). Nations can draw on scientific R/S research to enhance the well-being of their citizens individually and the flourishing of their society collectively (Diener & Seligman, 2004, 2018). People who are higher in well-being tend to live healthier and longer lives, have more positive and rewarding relationships, be more economically prosperous and productive, feel greater meaning and purpose in life, and exhibit better citizenship and civic engagement. Additionally, countries with higher collective well-being tend to experience greater collective economic, environmental, social, and societal flourishing (Diener & Seligman, 2018; Diener & Tay, 2015). When it comes to R/S, empirical evidence suggests that R/S may exhibit its strongest effects on people's well-being via its

influence on their social support (Geerling & Diener, 2020), meaning/purpose in life (Jebb et al., 2020), and positive emotions (Van Cappellen et al., 2016). These effects are especially pronounced for people in societies characterized by difficult life circumstances (e.g., low safety, income, life expectancy, and basic need fulfillment; Diener et al., 2011). Increased research at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S could have a particularly strong and positive impact on those societies and their communities and citizens.

Early in the positive psychology movement, Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000) envisioned that "a psychology of positive human functioning will arise that achieves a scientific understanding and effective interventions to build thriving in individuals, families, and communities" (p. 13). Advancing scientific understanding and practical interventions at the intersections of positive psychology and R/S will help make this dream a reality. In so doing, the coevolution of these fields can promote their respective and collective actualization.

## *Barriers to Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*

### Personal and Professional Unfamiliarity with Religion and Spirituality

In general, psychologists are not very religious or spiritual (Shafranske & Cummings, 2013). For example, in the U.S., roughly 90% of people believe in God and 75% say R/S is a *very* or *fairly important* part of their lives (Gallup, n.d.; Pew Research Center, 2017). However, only 30% of U.S. psychologists believe in God, and just 50% indicate R/S is *very* or *fairly important* (Delaney et al., 2013; Shafranske & Cummings, 2013). Although over 80% of U.S. psychologists believe R/S is beneficial to mental health (Delaney et al., 2013), only 20–30% receive explicit professional training in R/S competencies (Hathaway, 2013; Vieten & Lukoff, 2022). This lack of personal and professional familiarity with R/S is presumably one barrier that has limited the integration of the psychology of R/S field with both positive and mainstream psychology (Jones, 1994).

### Skepticism Toward and Potential Bias Against Religion and Spirituality

Furthermore, psychology has historically exhibited considerable skepticism toward R/S, perhaps due to the dominant influences of positivism, naturalism, and materialism (Jones, 1994; Shafranske & Cummings, 2013; Slife & Reber, 2009). This skepticism creates a barrier between R/S and both mainstream psychology and positive psychology. In fact, some scholars have even averred that mainstream psychology is fundamentally biased against R/S (Gergen, 2009; Slife & Reber, 2009). This skepticism and possible bias may be one explanation for why there currently is so little

incorporation of R/S into positive psychology research (see Table 1.1; Rusk & Waters, 2013) and so little R/S research published in premier psychology journals (see Table 1.2).

### Skepticism Toward and Potential Bias Against Positivity

Correspondingly, one possible barrier to the integration of positive psychology with mainstream psychology and psychology of R/S research might be humans' evolutionarily adapted *negativity bias* ("propensity to attend to, learn from, and use negative information far more than positive information," Vaish et al., 2008, p. 383). This bias helps explain why people across the world are often more psychophysiologically reactive to negative than positive news content (Soroka et al., 2019). This negativity bias likely contributes to mainstream psychology's tendency to focus on negatively valenced phenomena such as distress, disease, and dysfunction (Seligman, 1999; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Another consequence of this tendency may be a bias *against* positivity, especially when it comes to publishing manuscripts or funding projects that focus on positive topics (e.g., strengths, virtues, resilience, and well-being) or processes (e.g., growth, optimal functioning, flourishing, and actualization). Psychology's potential bias against positivity may be so strong that it fuels skepticism toward various forms of positivity that are encountered in scientific research, clinical practice, and everyday life (e.g., posttraumatic growth; Tedeschi et al., 2018). This skepticism and bias may impede the integration of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S.

## *Recommendations for Transcending These and Related Barriers*

Despite these barriers, integration between positive psychology and psychology of R/S is possible. Several scholars have proposed theoretical accounts for how mainstream psychologists can better engage the study of R/S (Cresswell, 2014; Gergen, 2009; Jones, 1994; Paloutzian & Park, 2021; Slife & Reber, 2009) and positive psychology (Hill & Hall, 2018; Snyder et al., 2021). These accounts often begin with identifying value conflicts (Yarhouse & Johnson, 2013), self-assessing biases embedded in one's own worldview assumptions (e.g., about ontology, anthropology, universalism, and morality; Hill & Hall, 2018) and philosophical assumptions (e.g., about epistemology and about whether theism and scientific naturalism are compatible; Nelson & Slife, 2012; Slife & Reber, 2009, 2021), and then working to transcend these biases.

Although people may adopt a variety of approaches to interacting across disciplines and subdisciplines (e.g., Jones [1994] describes critical-evaluative, constructive, and dialogical approaches to interactions between R/S and psychology), there is recent convergence on approaches that emphasize social constructionism, cultural diversity, and lived experiences. For example, Cresswell (2014) argues

psychologists should adopt a pragmatic cultural-psychology approach that focuses on "inductive understandings of realities shaped in everyday practices within communities as opposed to naturalist laws" (p. 137), partly to avoid the "nothing but—" reductionism William James sought to redress. Hence, in this handbook, we devote considerable attention to theory, methodological assumptions, cultural diversity, and practical applications.

## Outline of the Handbook

The handbook is divided into eight parts: historical and theoretical considerations (6 chapters), methodological considerations (2 chapters), cultural considerations (8 chapters), developmental considerations (2 chapters), happiness and well-being (4 chapters), character strengths and virtues (3 chapters), clinical and applied considerations (5 chapters), and field unification and advancement (1 chapter).

### *Part I: Historical and Theoretical Considerations*

The six chapters comprising the first part of the book will lay the foundation for understanding the ways the psychology of R/S and positive psychology overlap. The present chapter offers an orientation to the topic and the book, and then Nelson and Canty (Chap. 2) offer an overview of each field's history, including how those histories interact. In Chap. 3, Porter and colleagues explore philosophical questions regarding whether these fields can and should be integrated, as well as philosophical reasons why methodological pluralism is a promising paradigm for integration. Next, Ratchford et al. (Chap. 4) examine the intersections of virtue theory and research in these fields, and MacDonald (Chap. 5) reviews each field's dominant theories of health and well-being. Park and Van Tongeren (Chap. 6) propose that meaning is a framework for integrating science and practice in these two fields, and they offer suggestions for guiding this process. Throughout Part I, authors explore motives, models, and methods for bringing together these currently rather disconnected fields. They approach integration historically, philosophically, and theoretically, and they argue that virtues, health/well-being, and meaning are focal areas by which these subfields can become unified more fully and synergistically.

### *Part II: Methodological Considerations*

Two chapters comprise this section, and each chapter reveals the shared commitment that the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields have to empirical methods. In Chap. 7, Hill et al. review existing measurements in these fields and

offer recommendations for using those tools and techniques in research and practice. Tsang and colleagues (Chap. 8) summarize existing methodologies utilized in each field, and like Porter et al. in Chap. 3, they suggest that methodological diversity is a promising strategy for achieving greater integration and impact. Overall, in Part II, the authors help lay the methodological groundwork for the rest of the handbook.

## *Part III: Cultural Considerations*

Similarly, the next section helps lay the cultural groundwork for the book. Mattis (Chap. 9) discusses how various cultural groups have grappled with matters of virtue, justice, and well-being, including how religious/spiritual institutions and individuals have successfully (and unsuccessfully) promoted virtue, justice, and well-being worldwide. This leads to chapters exploring the intersections of positive psychology with each of the world's major religions: Christianity (Hodge et al., Chap. 10), Judaism (Schiffman et al., Chap. 11), Islam (Saritoprak & Abu-Raiya, Chap. 12), Hinduism (Singh et al., Chap. 13), and Buddhism (Segall & Kristeller, Chap. 14). The section's last two chapters examine the geographically different cultural contexts of science and practice at the intersections of positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Rossy and colleagues (Chap. 15) focus on the regions of Europe, non-U.S. North America, and South and Central America. Cowden and colleagues (Chap. 16) look at the regions of Africa, Asia, and Australia–Oceania. Taken together, in Part III, authors unpack the cultural nuances and complexities embedded in science and practice at these intersections.

## *Part IV: Developmental Considerations*

But these nuances and complexities are not limited to matters of culture, faith tradition, or geography, as Part IV illustrates through its focus on human development. Like in Chap. 6, King and colleagues (Chap. 17) adopt a meaning-making framework to discuss how R/S can help promote the thriving of children and adolescents. In Chap. 18, Davis and colleagues propose Positive Religious/Spiritual Development theory, an integrative theory that explains how R/S develops and interacts with well-being across the lifespan. In these chapters, we see how science and practice at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology must adopt a developmentally sensitive framework, even as they must adopt the culturally responsive frameworks highlighted in Part III.

### *Part V: Happiness and Well-Being*

Parts V and VI shift the discussion of positive psychology and R/S toward particular topics of study. Part V looks at the topics of happiness and well-being. Mancuso and Lorona (Chap. 19) review existing theory and research on the relationship between life satisfaction and R/S, including the nuances that affect the directionality and dynamics of this relationship. Likewise, Van Cappellen and colleagues (Chap. 20) synthesize existing theory and research on the link between positive emotions and R/S, with a focus on the self-transcendent emotions of awe, gratitude, compassion, and love. The other chapters in this section consider the intersections between R/S and both physical health (Masters et al., Chap. 21) and mental health (Shafranske, Chap. 22), including the directionality and influencers of these relationships.

### *Part VI: Character Strengths and Virtues*

In Part VI, the topical discussion pivots to specific character strengths and virtues. This section begins with chapters exploring theory and research at the intersections of R/S with two sets of related virtues: (a) forgiveness and hope (Washington-Nortey et al., Chap. 23) and (b) humility and gratitude (Cauble et al., Chap. 24). Then, in Chap. 25, Long and VanderWeele examine another set of related virtues—the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love—but they do so from a public health perspective. In so doing, they help transition to the next section, which is practical and applied in focus.

### *Part VII: Clinical and Applied Considerations*

Part VII looks at applications in particular domains. Captari and colleagues (Chap. 26) focus on clinical and applied interventions at the intersections of R/S and positive psychology. The next four chapters look at these intersections in other applied contexts: work (Dik & Alayan, Chap. 27), couple and family relationships (Mahoney et al., Chap. 28), faith communities (Wang et al., Chap. 29), and disasters and humanitarian aid (Captari et al., Chap. 30).

### *Part VIII: Field Unification and Advancement*

In Chap. 31, we summarize key themes that emerged across the book. We propose unifying positive psychology and psychology of R/S into an integrated field—the positive psychology of R/S—and make recommendations for science, practice, and funding in this field.

## Conclusion and Suggestions

We hope this review of the topic and the handbook has whetted your appetite for the chapters that follow. We encourage you to approach this book as an intellectual meal to savor slowly and mindfully. Yet we recognize you might not be satisfied fully with the buffet, because as always, there are many unanswered questions. As this chapter's analysis of publishing trends reveals, there currently is not much overlap between the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields, but there is exciting potential for them to become more unified in science and practice. We encourage you to approach this handbook with that vista of possibility in mind. Search for reasons that might be beneficial for positive psychology to integrate R/S more into its theorizing, empirical research, and practical applications. Similarly, look for ways religious/spiritual individuals and institutions might benefit from positive psychology's theories, research, and applied tools. Ultimately, we hope this chapter's suggestions will inform what you "eat" and digest from this book, so that it can help guide you to new horizons of discovery in your research, practice, and life.

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# Chapter 2
# Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality in Historical Perspective


**James M. Nelson and Noelle Canty**

A pastoral care team from a local church located in a Christian-minority area of the U.S. recently visited an elderly member, Jane. Suffering pain from terminal cancer, she was bedridden and preparing to enter hospice care. The team expected despondency, but she was deeply content, grateful that she was in good hands. Her main concern was for the daughter of a fellow church member who was also fighting cancer. The visit concluded happily when the team promised to visit her friend and joined her in prayer.

Contemporary psychologists have much to offer in understanding and helping this extraordinary woman. Scientists in the field of positive psychology (PP) focus on advancing scientific understanding of virtues, strengths, and well-being, so they could help the pastoral care team by sharing relevant research findings about how and why people's character virtues often enhance their well-being (see Ratchford et al., Chap. 4, this volume). PP practitioners could help by offering research-supported interventions to help Jane cope with her illness, prepare for death, and enact her virtues during her remaining time. In the same way, scientists in the psychology of religion/spirituality (PRS) field—which focuses on the scientific study of people's search for sacred meaning and connection—could share helpful scientific findings about how people's religiousness/spirituality reliably leads to growth in virtues and enhanced well-being (see Davis et al., Chap. 18, Appendix 18.S2, this volume; Long & VanderWeele, Chap. 25, Appendix 25.S2, this volume). Practitioners from the PRS field could share spiritually integrated psychological interventions that could help Jane to enhance her well-being (see Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume). There are also rich possibilities for collaborations between the fields (Barton & Miller, 2015; see also Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume).

An understanding of history provides two critical pieces of information that help us understand the potentials and challenges facing these fields. First, PP and PRS

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have shared methodological commitments that have emerged historically, and although these commitments offer some advantages, they are based on dated philosophical positions that can hinder research and its practical application. Second, although history reveals that interest in positive human states and their connections to religious or spiritual life goes back many centuries and incorporates many insightful ideas, researchers in PP and PRS have sometimes misread and redefined foundational concepts like "happiness" or "spirituality," leading to problems in research and practice (Martin, 2007). It is always desirable for scientists and practitioners to look carefully at their presuppositions and methods so that they do not hinder progress toward valued, important goals. This chapter takes a somewhat critical tone, not because we do not appreciate the terrific successes of PP and PRS, but because we hope historical material in this chapter will help individuals in these fields better realize their distinct and shared goals.

## Historical Development of PP and PRS

PP and PRS involve exciting attempts to understand important but often neglected aspects of human experience and behavior, potentially generating knowledge of great benefit to individuals and society. The current incarnation of PP has its official beginnings in the late twentieth century with the work of Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000), whereas PRS has slightly older roots going back to the work of William James and his contemporaries in the late nineteenth century.

In early PP, the goal was helping individuals or groups achieve what Martin Seligman (2002) called "gratification" through strengthening latent, natural characteristics. For Seligman, the definition of the good life was "*using your signature strengths to obtain abundant gratification in the main realms of one's life*" (p. 262). In later writing, Seligman (2011) seems to prefer to define the good life through using the term and concept of "well-being" (pp. 5–29). The goal of PP then became *the understanding and enhancement of well-being*. By comparison, PRS is "the empirical or academic study of spiritual experience or organized religion from a psychological perspective," including "ways in which religious faith affects the behaviors and cognitive processes of believers" (VandenBos, 2015, p. 860). Both fields make frequent use of universal categories and are deeply committed to utilizing the scientific method, as practiced in mainstream psychology. This method is a historical development with strengths and limitations.

### *Positivism and the Development of Method*

With origins in the early and later twentieth century, science in PP and PRS typically assumes the philosophical viewpoint of positivistic naturalism (PN). Unrelated etymologically to the term "positive" in PP, PN is a cluster of beliefs about science and the world that developed in the sixteenth through twentieth centuries, at the

time psychology was attempting to define its place as a science. *Positivism* assumes that all knowledge of reality must be empirically verified using the scientific method, and *naturalism* assumes there are no realities beyond the material world, which operates according to fixed, natural laws. Naturalistic assumptions are particularly tricky in the field of PRS, because these assumptions often conflict with beliefs of the religious traditions they study.

In the Early Modern period, science was redefined through the work of scientists and philosophers such as René Descartes. Their viewpoints encouraged the development of universally applicable models based on perceived general natural laws (Dijksterhuis, 1961; Nelson & Slife, 2013; Wootton, 2015). The view of humans as machines, promoted by writers like Descartes and de lá Mettrie, also emerged at this time, leading to scientific *atomism*, the idea that people can be understood by disassembling them and studying component parts.

The increasing emphasis on objectivity and empiricism in Early Modern and Enlightenment thought eventually reached its peak in the philosophy of science known as positivism. Positivism was a creation of the early nineteenth century philosopher Auguste Comte, who argued that an idea can be true only if it is backed by empirical data obtained by an investigator who is a detached, impartial observer. He believed that human inquiry was passing through "primitive" stages of religious and philosophical thinking, eventually to be replaced by scientific inquiry that would propel human advancement. This view of history led to *scientism*, the belief that only the scientific method can produce true knowledge (Comte, 1839). Because history was seen as positively progressive, there was little to be learned from studying the past, other than to produce triumphal accounts about how we are moving to a glorious future (e.g., Seligman, 2019).

Adherents of PN trust a basic method of organizing knowledge. This method is thought to give them correct feedback about their perceptions, but it automatically invalidates other types of knowledge. It limits inquiry only to statements directly verifiable by sense perception; other types of statements are judged "metaphysical" or "armchair speculation" and thus meaningless (Feigl, 1949). Mechanistic models eliminate ideas of final purpose or transcendence, rejecting philosophy and theology as valid ways of knowing about the world (Dijksterhuis, 1961). PN can thus become not just a philosophy of science but a kind of alternative worldview.

The sole focus of naturalism is on universal laws, which marks a large departure from previous thinkers such as Aristotle. Aristotle argued the principles of *eudaimonia* or the good life—the foundations of ethics—are natural and thus necessary. Because these principles are a certain knowledge accessible to reason, they were viewed as *epistēmē*, a kind of scientific knowledge (1926, VI.iii.2–4). However, Aristotle felt such principles were largely inadequate by themselves, because applying them in specific situations required practical reasoning and virtue (*phronēsis*), the principles of which are not "scientific" truths because what is best changes based on particular situations (1926, VI.v.1–4). A scientific statement thus can never completely capture what the virtuous person needs to know in daily pursuit of the good life in a particular context. Taking this view of Jane's situation, one would argue that any set of universal statements will not provide much of what is needed for Jane to live a good life in her current circumstances.

In PN, moral statements are not viewed as facts but instead are seen as expressions of emotion or attempts to rouse them (Ayer, 1952, pp. 102–108). This *emotivist* position is a type of *moral nihilism*, where moral positions have no mind-independent enduring reality and are outside of the possibility of direct scientific study (Hunter & Nedeliski, 2018; cf. Willard, 2018). One can scientifically study the effects of a particular behavior or belief, but science by itself cannot support claims about if these effects are good or bad. In the emotivist view, behaviors are bad only if they become the occasion for either producing offense or undesirable feelings. This would be in contrast with Jane's point of view, which focuses on her obligations to others rather than on her feelings. Interestingly, this view of emotions is a philosophical (and not scientific) viewpoint that automatically rejects absolute moral knowledge. It also leads PP to a paradoxical position whereby virtue is subjective to individuals but also a universal, acultural phenomenon.

A key point is that these methods are not necessary to scientific practice. Rather, they are one of a set of possible choices regarding what constitutes good science, including scientific investigations of interest to psychologists in PP and PRS.

## *Effects of PN for PP*

Although PN has been debunked in moral philosophy and rejected in the general philosophy of science (Willard, 2018), it remains the unspoken position in mainstream psychology and much of Western culture. Many researchers in PP and PRS would not identify as positivists, but they continue to practice (or unconsciously hold to) many tenets of PN. Their research often focuses on stating universal laws that apply across individuals and situations, limiting how the results can be applied to particular cases. Feelings of scientism and disdain for philosophical and traditional religious perspectives limit the ability of researchers to appreciate, understand, and engage concepts and successful methods from the past. A mechanistic/atomistic view of the human person often leads to unrealistically decontextualized and simplistic results, in contrast to more complex models found in some excellent recent PP and PRs studies (Kashdan & Steger, 2011; McNulty & Fincham, 2012). There is frequent discomfort with the idea that there might be universal moral truths or religious/spiritual phenomena that influence our well-being.

Atomism and reductionism can be beneficial, as they motivate and simplify scientific study, but they also have limitations and even incoherencies. For instance, Hunter and Nedelisky (2018) note that happiness levels were high in Hitler youth groups. Shall we thus put everyone in Hitler youth groups as a "positive" intervention? Most would say no, because such a decision misunderstands the full implications of such a move. From a religious/spiritual and philosophical point of view, we can say that the way of life in which the Hitler youth groups participated involves a violation of other goods that we value, such as respect for human beings regardless of ethnicity, handicaps, religion, or spirituality (Ivtzan et al., 2016, p. 11). Atomistic research in PP has these limitations.

The case of Jane raises similar issues. It is impossible to understand her virtue of gratitude separately from her altruistic character, her religious faith that was nurtured in the context of her faith community, and the religious/spiritual way of life that she has lived for many years. For her, religion/spirituality is not just taken up for its health benefits, but it is something that gives her a connectedness and prudence that reaches beyond the sum total of her other virtues. This leads to further questions. Why does her character development seem unlimited, despite the limitations of death and suffering? What is the role of her religious/spiritual community and friends in this process? PN limits PP's ability to research these issues, because it often negates the objective desirability of a religious/spiritual way of life and the ability of this life to carry one beyond "normal" in character development. Furthermore, even if we knew the general answers to these questions, we would still lack the knowledge of how to apply those principles to others in different situations. The attempts in PP to develop specific interventions (e.g., the work of Enright on forgiveness) are a step in the right direction (see Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume), but these systems often provide inadequate guidance for how they can be deployed in the way of life of specific individuals. As Aristotle argued, what works for Jane may be unlikely to work for others.

## *Effects of PN for PRS*

For much the first half of the twentieth century, despite a promising beginning with works of researchers like William James and Edwin Starbuck, negative views toward religion/spirituality (which are endemic to PN) abounded, as seen in works by Sigmund Freud and James Leuba. These views suppressed research in PRS. Freud (1927/1961) argued that religious/spiritual experience had no veridicality, was a liability, and was an emotional defense mechanism against powerlessness, and Leuba (1912) argued that psychology could assist in the formation of a way of life to take the place of religion/spirituality. Leuba believed all religious/spiritual experiences or needs were simply psychological phenomena that should be studied by psychologists using positivist, scientific methods (and not by religious practitioners or theologians, whom he viewed as ignorant and biased). This stance provided little incentive for psychologists to study religion/spirituality, except as a kind of psychopathology.

The undermining of religious/spiritual and philosophical ways of thought created a vacuum of ways to address issues of human struggle. Faith in medicine replaced them. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the widespread establishment of mental hospitals and the explosion of diagnostic categories, such as in the works of Pinel and other writers (e.g., Pinel, 1807). Moral questions were explicitly discussed from a medical perspective, as in the work of James Prichard (1835) on "moral insanity" (pp. 12–26). In the twentieth century, the medicalization of what were formerly human problems continued, despite protests (Horowitz, 2002; Jahoda, 1958).

Many researchers in PP and PRS are aware of at least some of these deficiencies. However, professional training in psychology deeply embeds PN attitudes and methods into the thinking of budding psychologists, and even those who recognize the problems have difficulty moving beyond them. For instance, most scholars would reject the PN idea that the measures they use in studies somehow fully capture the underlying phenomena; however, researchers often speak or act as if the measured phenomena are now understood and universal naturalistic principles have been uncovered, assuming for instance the meaning of a particular phenomenon is the same or similar for all individuals and across all cultures, situations, and time periods.

## *Historical Reactions and Resistance to PN*

Many twentieth century psychologists were unhappy with psychodynamic psychology and PN. They tried to develop alternatives, notably in the "third force" of humanistic psychology. In the first edition of *Motivation and Personality*, Maslow (1954) articulated a vision to move the field "toward a positive psychology" (pp. 353–363) that would study a widened set of problems. Challenging the positivist orthodoxy and psychology's sole focus on pathology, he later advocated a holistic and moral perspective based on the positive potential of the human person. This new psychology would abandon the atomistic approach and be attentive to the interactions of individual problems within the context of the well-being of the human character.

Existential, phenomenological, transpersonal, and some personality psychologists worked with goals similar to those of Maslow (Froh, 2004). For instance, Gordon Allport argued that even though universal "nomothetic" laws might exist and be describable, they were so general as to be worthless in understanding the individual in their "idiographic" reality (Allport, 1961, pp. 8–9). However, humanistic psychology's rejection of the PN worldview and its methods led to marginalization within professional psychology, so that its ideas are rarely referenced today even within PP (Rich, 2018). Founders of PP like Martin Seligman have sometimes claimed that the PP's movement beyond focus on pathology is a new undertaking, although this claim has been disputed (Held, 2005), and Seligman appears to have stepped back from this claim at times.

In one of the founding documents of PRS, *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, William James (1902/1961) displayed discomfort with the PN emphasis on natural law, quantification, and mechanistic models; he preferred the qualitative method of case study. James affirmed the usefulness of religion/spirituality, as perceived by those who participated in his case studies, and he took the view that suffering, indecision, and conflict could lead to personal growth. However, he also subscribed to the PN view of moral nihilism—the idea that the truth values of religious/spiritual feelings could only be evaluated based on a pragmatic standard of their effects.

After psychodynamic psychology was dethroned in the 1960s, PRS became an academic field. On the organizational side, psychologists with personal religious/spiritual commitments who did not share the PN allergy to religion/spirituality formed professional groupings, beginning with the American Catholic Psychological Association in the late 1940s and eventually becoming Division 36 in the American Psychological Association (Reuder, 1999). Intellectual developments included the work of Gordon Allport, who developed the concepts of intrinsic and extrinsic religious motivation, which he used to challenge the accepted connection between religion and prejudice (Allport & Ross, 1967). Researchers and statisticians like Richard Gorsuch (1984, 1988) soon developed sophisticated measurement techniques for phenomena related to religion, leading to an explosion in empirical inquiry and publications. This research also challenged PN stereotypes of religion/spirituality as psychopathology, as it empirically demonstrated that religious/spiritual participation had many advantages (Bonelli & Koenig, 2013). Gorsuch also pointed out the limitations of nomothetic naturalistic research, arguing that ideographic inquiry focused on the individual and their context was essential. However, even in its study of religion/spirituality as advantageous, PRS accepted the constraints of PN methodology and its bracketing of moral issues (Hood, 2012). This strategic move bypassed psychology's opposition to non-PN viewpoints and helped it succeed.

## *The Current Situation*

In theory, PP are PRS undermine the PN view of religion/spirituality and philosophy because PRS treats religion/spirituality as a worthwhile object of study, and PP allows moral virtues inspired by philosophy to form the basis for experimentation and treatment. Both areas set out to objectify their areas of study, but this objectification still assumes the naturalistic and atomistic approach of PN (Fernández-Rios & Novo, 2012; Hill & Hall, 2018). PP and PRS make their objects of study more objective by developing broad abstract categories like "spirituality" in order to generalize about aspects of happiness and spirituality that are purportedly universal in every culture. The approach is commonly atomistic, where for instance ethical and religious/spiritual categories are separated from each other in research, even though historically their integration in the human personality was viewed as necessary. In their theorizing and research, positive psychologists frequently follow an atomistic line, which for instance focuses on one virtue without regard to other virtues or their practical context, contrary to Aristotelian virtue ethics (Vaccarezza, 2017).

In order to maintain acceptance and relevance, PP has historically been forced to deal with medical models of the good life, which can view the good life as "the phenomena of a superstate of good mental health, well beyond and above the mere absence of disability illness [but which] has yet to be scientifically demonstrated … In contrast, the benefits of disease prevention and control have been tangibly demonstrated" (Barton, 1958, pp. 112–113). In consequence, many past and recent

articles in PP tout benefits to physical or mental health as a reason for pursuing PP practices, which could be taken to imply a kind of implicit endorsement of medical model thinking. In the medical model, the case of Jane would revolve around possible diagnoses, rather than problems in living or exceptional aspects of her life, and in so doing, it would miss vital aspects of Jane's exceptionality.

## History and the Development of Concepts in PP and PRS

Modern psychology overall has relatively little interest in human potential, especially as it is related to religion/spirituality, leaving the field quite thin in terms of native concepts and theory. In order to correct this, PP and PRS have mined the resources of philosophy and theology. However, PN assumes these traditions are inferior ways of knowing the world, so PP and PRS have frequently rechristened and altered ancient terms and concepts with more acceptable, secular meanings. Unfortunately, this can undermine our ability to form the deep and clear definitions necessary for research (Reich & Hill, 2008), and it precludes a common understanding even of basic concepts like PP (Lazarus, 2003). The rechristening of the terms "happiness" (*eudaimonia*) and "passion" (*pathē*) are especially important.

### *The Good Life, Virtue, and Happiness*

Positive psychologists often argue their field has two approaches to understanding the good life. These are a *hedonic approach* (where the good life is associated with happiness or well-being) and a *eudaimonic approach* that connects it with the development of positive virtues.

Early treatments of emotions like happiness appeared in the work of Carol Ryff, and the hedonic approach has been more recently championed by Ed Diener (2000) under the construct "well-being," which he has advanced as a scientific approach to studying happiness. Diener defines well-being as a universal variable involving "peoples' positive evaluations of their lives, includes positive emotion, engagement, satisfaction, and meaning" (Diener & Seligman, 2004, p. 1). In theory, this is a very broad concept, but in practice the term well-being is often associated with feeling good or positive subjective experiences, and discussions of issues related to life meaning were relatively few until Seligman's (2011) PERMA model. In more recent work, Diener and other positive psychologists have argued for the broadening of the well-being concept so it can better be applied to the benefit of individuals and societies.

The eudaimonic approach of Seligman and others is different in some ways, but fundamentally it is not very different from the hedonic approach. It spends considerable time talking about character development and virtue, but like the hedonic approach, the good life ultimately comes down to "subjective well-being," which is

often conceptualized as an individual feeling state, even though the concept can also be applied at a group or societal level. This perspective leads research to largely coalesce around a subjective, emotivist point of view that tends to emphasize an individualistic view of the person (Ivtzan et al., 2016).

The emphasis on feelings or subjective experience can also be found in PRS discussions. In the nineteenth century, modernist writers like Schleiermacher (1897) saw feelings as the center of religion/spirituality. This idea was key in the work of William James (1902/1961), who argued that a psychological understanding of religion/spirituality must focus on "religious feelings and religious impulses" (p. 22). James (1902/1961) identified two types of religion/spirituality, one of "healthy mindedness" (connected to a straightforward experience of "religious happiness") and the other of the "sick soul" with a deeper emotional experience of "the depressed and melancholy" (connected to an acute awareness of evil; pp. 78–142). Psychologists could talk about the religious/spiritual experience but not talk about the power of religious/spiritual practices. In this situation, "spirituality" can become a more key topic than "religion," and both can be objectively studied and measured based mainly on categorizing the types of feelings people feel during their experiences. This kind of division must be approached cautiously, because for people like Jane, spirituality and religion are intertwined.

The PP understanding of *eudaimonia* may be based on a misunderstanding of the Classical concept. For Aristotle, *eudaimonia* was the positive goal of life. The term literally means "gifted by a good daimon," but translations from the past couple of centuries misleadingly render the term as "happiness." *Eudaimonia* actually equates with the good life (*eu zēn*), a life lived with our natural final cause or purpose in mind (1926, I.iv.2). *Eudaimonia* is thus not an emotion or feeling. It is a form of life (*de tithemen ergon zōē tina*) that involves the "exercise of the soul's powers" according to a rational principle (*logos*) and virtue (*aretē*) across a lifetime (1926, I.vii.14–16), where virtue is a disposition to act in praiseworthy ways (1926, I.xiii.20). The end of virtue is virtue itself, just as the best life is one in which a person's natural, latent faculties are exercised to the fullest ability in accordance with reason. This could be a pleasant life (*hēdus*), but any pleasure is a byproduct of living a rational life, not life's goal (1926, I.viii.10–11). Importantly, it is a state of being and way of life lived in the context of a community (*koinōnia politikē*; Slife & Richardson, 2008) and cannot be thought of in strictly individualistic terms. A key aim of Classical philosophers was the attempt to create communities that would not just discuss *eudaimonia* as an idea but develop it as a way of life for its followers (Hadot, 1995).

Early Christian thinkers likewise believed that human flourishing, *eudaimonia* or *beatitudo*, does not consist of bodily pleasure; instead, it consists of finding personal or communal meaning as given by God in the present moment, which may or may not have an accompanying sense of enjoyment (Aquinas, 2012, Ia-IIae Q2 A6, A8; Q3 A8). A good life can be had even when one does not have pleasurable feelings, if one is finding meaning in their life. *Beatitudo* and *eudaimonia* are related to the kind of life we live and the meaning we find in it, so happiness can be found even in the midst of suffering—as is amply demonstrated in Jane's case.

As part of its relational view of persons and the good life, Christianity attempted to create communities that would promote the development of a good life—not just to a select few but to all who desire it. Judeo-Christian thought holds that we are created in the image of God (*eikona theou*), and as a result, human potential both transcends imagination and the human condition itself. Our potential as created in the image of God is both a gift and a goal (Nellas, 1987). The term *deification* (*theōsis*) describes the process of the human person becoming more like the objectively good Divinity, through God and the person mutually approaching (*perichōrēsis*) each other (Maximos Confessor, 1857–1858). It leads to a reconstruction of our nature beyond individual human effort, dependent on grace and aided by the Christian community. The human person was intrinsically relational, both with God and other humans (Nelson & Slife, 2017).

## *Virtues, Vices, Passions, and Emotions*

From its modern inception, PP has attempted an analysis of virtues and positive feelings. A key work was that of Peterson and Seligman (2004), who made an inventory of strengths, called Values in Action, based on a selective review of materials from the Western, South, and East Asian traditions, using the atomistic criteria that "each element can be defined and measured independently of the other elements" (p. 2). The definitions of the values usually differed from their original meaning, and Peterson and Seligman (2004) admitted "it proved beyond our ability to specify a reasonable theory" that would underlie a taxonomy (p. 6). The virtues are viewed as isolated scientific entities in that they can be measured, and they are thus claimed to express intrinsic and universal truth. Individual instances of religion/spirituality in history are summarized in one word, such as transcendence (Slife & Richardson, 2008). Such operational definitions can be highly reliable, but they may have questionable validity.

The PP analysis of virtue differs substantially from the Classical view. For Aristotle, virtues (*aretē*) are habits that operate in unison, forming the stable character traits (*hexis*) necessary for *eudaimonia*. For example, acquiring prudence (*phronēsis*) is impossible without possessing the other virtues (1926, VI.xii.10). A unity-of-virtues view allowed Aristotle to claim that health is associated with a harmonious balance of the virtues, not the pursuit of individual virtues. He also argued that it was impossible to understand virtues without considering *vices*, habits that undermine our pursuit of the good life. Many early Christian authors were trained in Classical thought and creatively synthesized the ideas of virtues, practical reasoning (*phronesis*) in individual situations, and *eudaimonia* with Christian theology. As in Aristotle, negative characteristics needed to be discussed in order to identify and encourage positive growth better.

Another difference between Classical and PP concepts revolves around the terms "passions" (*pathē*) and "emotions." Classical authors were primarily interested in the passions, which were viewed not just as emotions but as complex cognitive and feeling states that interfered with the good life. Christian thinkers developed

sophisticated mental practices to eliminate the barriers to flourishing produced by inordinate passions, sin, and ordinary human limitations. This changed in the Early Modern period, when the term *passions* (with its philosophical and theological linkages) began to be replaced by the term *emotion* (Descartes, 1909; Dixon, 2003). Emotions like pleasure became the key to *eudaimonia*, and the PN reduction of ethics to emotion tied the worth of virtue to feelings (Willard, 2018). Note that this is not a scientific "truth" but a historically conditioned position that we may or may not adopt.

### *Effects of Conceptual Developments on PP and PRS*

In PN, a universal human nature selfishly prioritizes individual survival and happiness, which transferred to the Western cultural movement of modernism as a value for individualism (Sugarman, 2007; Taylor, 1989). The growing restlessness in PP seems related to discomfort with these roots in inherited modernist individualism and the problematic methodology of atomistically separating virtues from each other. Post-Enlightenment sources are the only ones that tend to make the cut, and pre-Enlightenment sources tend to be interpreted within twentieth or twenty-first century ideological priorities, apart from the relationality of persons and virtues.

Some researchers in PP want to move the field in new directions. The use of concepts like forgiveness could derive consistent meanings based on Classical concepts. Paul Wong (2011, p. 69) has suggested a "PP 2.0" that would focus on meaning and other issues. Some authors also feel uncomfortable with the current emphasis on positive emotions, neglecting to address negative emotions and vices and the positive value of suffering in developing virtue (Kidd, 2015; Kristjánsson, 2013, pp. 86–150; Lazarus, 2003). In addition, a rising chorus notes how most PP research has been conducted within the cultural framework of the Western values and methods of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, especially in the individualistic focus on subjective happiness rather than communal flourishing (Koop & Fave, 2013). An allergy to religious and philosophical ways of thinking is problematic, because religious and philosophical traditions can provide conceptual categories and structures that can strengthen psychological investigations into questions involving life's meaning (Ivtzan et al., 2016; Kaczor, 2017). Concern over decontextualized models has led some researchers to begin exploring the use of qualitative methods, although in practice many of these studies diverge from basic tenets of this type of research, as used in other social science disciplines like anthropology.

## Conclusion

Many helpful premodern ideas about the human person and various ways of life are difficult to access today. A PN approach, based in antiquated philosophy of science, rejects a historical understanding of how the good life can be studied and achieved

in various religious/spiritual and cultural contexts. A movement away from positivist views of virtues—and towards an interdisciplinary pool of Classical and Christian or other religious/spiritual strategies (e.g., material drawn from Buddhism) for maximizing positive potential—could benefit PP and PRS research and practice. This chapter has offered a foundation for correcting these problems in PP and PRS.

PP could improve its potential contributions to therapy as it moves away from universal naturalistic understandings of virtue to definitions more appropriate to diverse contexts. With less vague generalization and more basis in specific historical and religious/spiritual examples of virtues and religious/spiritual practices and beliefs, PP and PRS will be more empirical. An understanding of the complexity of virtues can reconcile the points of view of the psychologist and the patient more quickly and enable a patient to become more proficient in virtuous habits appropriate to their practical individual situation. As informed by PRS, one key PP goal should be helping people cultivate objectively good virtues or habits that work together harmoniously to support character stability and enhance health and well-being (see Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume).

Jane is a rare example of a person who lives the good life under extraordinary circumstances. Wouldn't it be wonderful if PP and PRS could make Jane's resources accessible to others? This twenty-first century potential cannot be attained using approaches mired in nineteenth century prejudices. Instead, PP and PRS can work together to bring the good life to an ever-expanding number of people in our global society. Patients like Jane, positive and concerned about the needs of others even in circumstances that often dampen character, are realistic possibilities.

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# Chapter 3
# On the Integration of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/ Spirituality: Logical, Normative, and Methodological Questions

**Steven L. Porter, Jason Baehr, Tenelle Porter, and Robert C. Roberts**

In one way or another, every human person lives out answers to four fundamental questions of human existence: What is real? What is the good life? What does it mean to be a good person? And, how does one become a good person? Even if one's answers are that there are no right answers, that will surely manifest in one's life. Others may be absolutely certain they have arrived at *the* truth regarding these matters, and perhaps in part due to that certainty, their answers can lead to a lack of empathy for those who disagree. Still, there will be persons who find their way into a vision of reality, the good life, the good person, and the process of becoming a good person that strike many as beautiful and compelling. Clearly, much is at stake when answering these fundamental human questions, and we need all the help we can get to arrive at answers that are good, better, and best. Although we can make do without knowledge, it helps when we are guided aright. To that end, research and theory coming out of the interface of positive psychology and the psychology of religion/spirituality (R/S) holds great promise.

With the existential import of this discussion in mind, we investigate three second-order, philosophical questions that overlay any attempt to integrate theoretically these two (and any other) fields of study (Porter, 2004). First, we have the *logical* question: *can* these fields be integrated? Second, we address the *normative* question: *should* these fields be integrated? And, lastly, we approach the *methodological* question: *how* should these fields be integrated?

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## The Logical Question: *Can* These Fields Be Integrated?

Is there a logical relationship between positive psychology and psychology of R/S, such that meaningful theoretical integration is possible? By *meaningful theoretical integration* we have in mind interaction among the two fields' concepts, theories, methodologies, data, and practical implications, with the ultimate aim of increased understanding of human functioning. It is important to highlight that our focus is the *theoretical* integration of ideas from these respective fields and not, for instance, the *clinical* integration of interventions from these two fields. Whereas there are important things to be said about clinical and other forms of applied integration, we are concerned with the prior issue of the interrelationship of ideas. The logic, then, of such integration is quite clear: we need (a) two demarcated fields of study, (b) that are both attempting to make truth-claims about the nature of reality, and (c) the bringing together of which may yield increased understanding. Let us approach these items in turn.

When it comes to (a)—having two clearly demarcated fields of study—psychologists of R/S are attempting to "come to an understanding of the psychological bases of religious belief, experience, and behavior" (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003, p. 377), whereas positive psychology is seeking to come to an understanding of hedonic and eudaimonic well-being (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Given these descriptions, it would be sensible to think that the study of one field would naturally involve the other, because most religions/spiritualities are concerned with questions of human well-being, and contrariwise, investigation into human well-being will eventually have to consider the place of R/S, if any. Despite this overlap, we can sensibly demarcate these two subject matters: one field is primarily attentive to the psychology of human well-being (whether or not that includes R/S), and the other is mainly focused on the psychology of R/S (whether or not that includes notions of human well-being).

Besides having two clearly demarcated fields, we also need to ensure that (b) both subdisciplines are attempting to make truth-claims about a unified reality. The only manner in which the claims of one field can bear logical relations to the claims of another field is if both claims refer to an interconnected reality. Some might balk at the realism assumed in this way of countenancing integration. However, at this juncture, we simply mean to distinguish fields that are attempting to describe a real world from those areas of study that are by definition fictional or antirealist. Although it might be metaphorically rich, for instance, to integrate the Harry Potter series with the study of plate tectonics, the Harry Potter series is a work of fiction that is not attempting to describe the nature of the actual world. Rather, Rowling's books construct a fantasy world, whereas plate tectonics attempts to describe the actual structure of the earth's crust. It is not that the wonderful world of wizardry and the presumably wonderful world of plate tectonics are so far apart. Rather, it is that they are referencing two logically distinct worlds, one of which does not actually exist. Although the fictitious world of Harry Potter might end up providing a

metaphor that aids in real-world plate tectonics, and Rowling's understanding of plate tectonics might make for a great scene in the Harry Potter stories, there would be something illogical about trying to expand our knowledge of, for instance, an earthquake early-warning device by poring over Book Five of the Harry Potter series. Of course, it would not be illogical to do so if we discovered that Rowling had carefully studied plate tectonics and was attempting to advance a theory about earthquake early-warning devices in her otherwise fictional Book Five. But that just shows the point: the only manner in which the claims of one field can be logically related to the claims of another field is if both fields are making claims that refer to a unified reality. Because researchers in both positive psychology and the psychology of R/S put forward claims about actual human persons and their functioning in real life, things look good for there being a logical relation between these two areas of investigation.

And yet, there is another, more vexing assumption of realism in what has been said thus far. Psychologists study agreed-upon *constructs* of human psychological phenomena and, it might be thought, *not* the psychological phenomena themselves. Indeed, on some metaphysical accounts, all that exists is a socially constructed reality with no "real" world beyond agreed-upon conceptualizations (Burr, 2015). If positive psychologists are constructing worlds of hedonic/eudaimonic well-being and psychologists of R/S are constructing worlds of religious and spiritual ideas, experiences, and behavior, how would one determine whether there can be logical relationships between these two socially constructed "realities"?

In response, we distinguish between moderate and radical social constructionism. The latter, which philosophers call "antirealism," is the view that we have no access to the "realities" that our conceptual schemes "refer" to—the "realities" are in fact fictions of our own making. The moderate view maintains that human conceptualizations of the world are socially embedded and, therefore, socially influenced interpretations or models of reality. This way of understanding social constructionism is not antirealist about the nature of reality itself. Rather, the idea is that there exists a mind-independent reality that can be accurately understood and described through human thought and language, to greater and lesser degrees. Moderate social constructionism appreciates the subjective and social nature of the mind–world relationship, while maintaining that claims about reality still have a truth-value. Consequently, logical relations such as deductive entailment, inductive inference, and probabilistic/statistical reasoning are tenable.

A radical social constructionism adds an antirealist ontological claim to this moderate view. The radical social constructionist maintains that there is no mind-independent reality beyond humanly agreed-upon conceptualizations. Social constructions make things what they are in such a way that there is no nonconstructed court of appeals for the truth or falsity of human perspectives about the world (Gergen, 1999). If radical social constructionism is true (although it is difficult to know how we could determine that), then logical relations would be constituted by social agreement as well. If enough participants consented to use language to

discuss these two areas of discourse, then it would be "logical" to do so based on social agreement. In principle, there could be no objection to this move. For the current chapter to proceed on this basis would be for us to try to persuade you, the reader, to join us in thinking about these issues in the manner we do. Because epistemic goods—like truth, understanding, and knowledge—are no longer the goal, we would have to proffer some sort of pragmatic motivation for our call to solidarity (Rorty, 1985). Of course, a problem arises when this pragmatic motivation for social agreement (and/or what is socially agreed upon) requires criticism. If all reality is socially constructed, there is no basis to critique those social constructions of reality that do harm or otherwise fail to achieve agreement.

Fortunately, there is another way to proceed—via embracing moderate social construction alongside a commitment to ontological realism about human psychological phenomena (Boghossian, 2006; Richardson & Guignon, 2008). Although it is essential to appreciate that human knowers are subjectively interpreting reality through culturally embedded and socially influenced interpretive frameworks, that admission does not bar humans from attempting to collect evidence and develop theories that to varying degrees approximate the way people are. On this view, the second condition for integration to be logically possible is secured: (b) both positive psychology and psychology of R/S are making truth claims about reality.

With the first two conditions met, we turn to consider whether the last condition holds: (c) whether the bringing together of the two fields may yield increased understanding of human psychology. First, a word about "bringing together." The simplest way to bring these fields together is for those researching positive psychology to include religious/spiritual concepts and variables in their research and vice versa for psychologists of R/S. Presumably, this strategy will largely consist of testing for interrelationships between features of human well-being (e.g., virtues and positive emotions) and features of human religious/spiritual life (e.g., meditation and perceived experiences of God). Will such testing yield increased understanding of human nature and functioning? Presumably the answer is, yes. Even if there is no statistically significant relationship between positive psychological qualities and religious/spiritual life, that finding itself would be breaking news. Of course, if there are significant correlations, that too would be important. But with these considerations we now will turn from the logical question—*can* we integrate these two fields?—to the normative question, would it be *valuable* to do so?

## The Normative Question: *Should* These Fields Be Integrated?

Although we contend there are no logical barriers to the meaningful theoretical integration of positive psychology and psychology of R/S, we now turn to exploring the value of such integration. That we *can* integrate does not mean that we

necessarily *ought* to. Because intradisciplinary integration is a theoretical affair, the normative question is whether such integration will further human understanding in ways that are perceived as value-added.

On this score, there appears much in favor of the integration of positive psychology and R/S and little to say against it. Again, because humans cannot avoid bumping up against issues of human well-being and questions of religious and spiritual significance, understanding the interrelationships between these two domains of life has an immediate appeal. And there is good reason to think that there are important interconnections. For one, many historically situated philosophical and religious/spiritual schools of thought have maintained that there are significant connections between ethics and religious belief, virtue and spiritual practice, human flourishing and religious behavior, and so on (e.g., Hare, 2009). A variety of psychological studies already suggest relevant connections (e.g., Davis et al., 2012; Schnitker et al., 2017; VanderWeele, 2017; Wilkins et al., 2012; for reviews, see Davis et al., Chap. 18, Appendix 18.S2, this volume). It would be of immense benefit if psychological study could help locate reliable and unreliable religious/spiritual paths to virtuous, meaningful lives. And because increasing numbers of people are deidentifying with religion (e.g., Van Tongeren et al., 2021), it would also be helpful to determine how well-being is affected in the absence of religion and/or spirituality.

Beyond the benefits of increased understanding of personal development, there are an array of social ills that have to do with a disconnect between religion/spirituality and human flourishing. For instance, the term "religiously motivated" far too often qualifies things like racism, gender discrimination, homophobia, ethnic cleansing, hate crimes, terrorism, and so on. It is difficult to think of a domain of contemporary life that is more fraught with animosity than moral failures by religious persons and institutions. If the integration of these two areas can help realign religion and justice, that would bring tremendous good (e.g., Palmer & Burgess, 2020).

Although the likelihood of valuable integration looms large, we also need to consider normative reasons against integration. Perhaps one reason is the track record of religion alluded to above. It seems there are far too many cases of religious persons and institutions being on the wrong side of justice. Hunter and Nedelisky (2020) have noted the "epic failure of religion to provide a unifying and peaceable solution to the problems of difference and complexity in the modern world" (p. 212). One might think that given this failure, positive psychology needs to steer clear of religion in order to make progress in conceptualizing and promoting human flourishing. And yet, there is a more complex story to tell about the historical relation of religion to human well-being. Religion has not only perpetuated injustice but also inspired reform movements and helped produce social reformers (Palmer & Burgess, 2020). Rather than neglecting its study, the continued threat of religiously fueled violence and the promise of religiously motivated compassion should lead to prioritizing the study of R/S in relation to human flourishing.

## The Methodological Question: *How* Should These Fields Be Integrated?

Having seen that we *can* and *should* bring together the study of positive human qualities and religion/spirituality, our final query is *how* best to do so. Initially, things look rather straightforward in this regard. Seeing that both fields utilize a range of similar quantitative and qualitative methods (see Tsang et al., Chap. 8, this volume), combining research programs should be fairly seamless. In principle, researchers in each field can include the theories, constructs, measures, and data from the other field, with the goal of testing relationships between features of well-being and religious/spiritual life. *Voila*, successful theoretical integration!

The very existence of this volume attests to a more complicated situation. For instance, some have suggested that positive psychology research tends to be more rigorous than R/S research, so for there to be effective integration, there needs to be an increase in the rigor of psychology of R/S (Worthington et al., in press). If that claim is true, the way forward is clear: psychologists of R/S need to up their scholarly game. Yet that is a practical matter, not a philosophical one. Indeed, whatever rigor-related difference exists between the two fields, both disciplines operate within the same social scientific milieu that tends to value randomized controlled experiments as the gold standard (McCall & Green, 2004). How closely each field's research designs measure up to that standard is itself an empirical question.

However, lingering in the background of this discussion, there is a philosophical question about method that is relevant to these fields' integrative potential. The question can be put like this: Why think features of hedonic/eudaimonic well-being and religious/spiritual life are adequately captured by the empirical methods of psychology, particularly quantitative-statistical methods? Obviously, this question is a skeptical one (as philosophers are wont to do), and it may seem like it is headed in the wrong direction for a volume defending the integration of positive psychology and R/S. Although the question is skeptical, our suggested way forward is constructive. One answer to how we might best integrate these two subfields is to encourage an integrative methodology that goes beyond narrowly empirical sources/methods and includes nonquantitative sources/methods, in order to capture more of the irreducible nature of the phenomena in question. In what follows, we first propose an integrative methodology and then turn to several considerations in its favor.

### *The Nature of Methodological Pluralism*

The integrative approach we have in mind—what has been called methodological pluralism (Roth, 1987; cf. Gantt & Melling, 2009; Slife & Reber, 2021)—might be thought of as a broaden-and-build epistemology that allows premises from philosophy, religious/spiritual traditions, phenomenological experience, and other nonquantitative sources into the evidence base, alongside quantitative-statistical

findings. Obviously, this is a more radical sort of mixed-methods approach that goes beyond the call for the more frequent use of qualitative methods (e.g., Davis et al., 2016; Gergen et al., 2015).

To be clear, our call for methodological pluralism is consistent with the desire for more rigor in research. Psychology should do empirical science as rigorously as possible. It is just that psychology should also do *scientia* as rigorously as possible. The Latin *scientia* signals a premodern view of knowledge in which evidence from philosophy, religion, historical traditions, phenomenological experience, and the like entered rational investigation, alongside quantitative evidence. Ours is a call for positive psychologists and psychologists of R/S to take this broader expanse of evidence into consideration when coming to their conclusions, in the same manner that at least some philosophers and religious scholars take on board the empirical evidence of the sciences when coming to their philosophical and religious conclusions. Our proposal then for how best to integrate positive psychology and psychology of R/S is to be even more integratively inclusive and move towards *inter* or even *trans*-disciplinary integration (McGrath, 2019). This would involve looking to virtue ethics, moral philosophy, existentialism, Aristotelianism, Confucianism, Thomism, personalism, Darwinism, phenomenology, analytic theology, Buddhist thought, Jewish theology, Islamic theology, Hindu theology, Christian theology, religious studies, philosophical naturalism, and so on. Again, these perspectives would be consulted not only in conceptualizing the phenomena to be studied (generating meaningful research questions and testable hypotheses) but also in interrogating the empirical results.

In this effort, we heed the call of Emmons and Paloutzian (2003) who recommended a "multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm" (p. 395) for research in the psychology of R/S. They argued: "A single disciplinary approach is incapable of yielding comprehensive knowledge of phenomena as complex and multifaceted as spirituality" (p. 395). Building off this claim, Belzen and Hood (2006) proposed that a multilevel interdisciplinary paradigm "cannot be achieved without acceptance of…methodological pluralism" (p. 6). They identified three major types of methods. The first type includes the familiar quantitative-statistical methods of psychology. The second type "includes research methods from a broader social-scientific range" (Belzen & Hood, 2006, p. 10), such as qualitative interviews, ethnographies, and biographical analysis. The third type "relies heavily on data and insights from disciplines like history, theology, literature, and cultural studies" (Belzen & Hood, 2006, p. 10). Although Belzen and Hood (2006) acknowledged that many topics in psychology can get along well with using the first type of research methodology alone, they contended that the personal nature of R/S (and we would add hedonic/eudaimonic well-being) require the second and third types of methods as well.

An openness to methodological pluralism can be found within positive psychology as well. Schnitker and Emmons (2017) have argued that researchers from positive psychology "have neglected to fully engage theological and philosophical perspectives throughout the research process" (p. 239). They envision fostering "cross-disciplinary conversation that engages current scholarship in psychology of religion and spirituality, positive psychology, theology, and philosophy"

(pp. 239–240). Similarly, Rich (2017) has called for positive psychology to embrace a broad range of qualitative and interdisciplinary methods that are "by nature more open and pluralistic than the quantitative approach associated with logical positivism" (p. 229). Lomas et al. (2020) have forecasted a coming "third wave" of positive psychology that involves an "epistemological broadening" (p. 1) that "goes beyond the boundaries of psychology to incorporate knowledge and research methodologies from a broad range of fields" (p. 11).

In championing methodological pluralism, our negative concern is with *methodological exclusivism*. By methodological exclusivism, we mean the tendency to exclude sources of knowledge that do not meet the standards of the quantitative-statistical methods. Rich (2017) has gotten at the spirit of this sort of exclusivism in his encouragement to psychological researchers to be "vigilant against any sort of 'physics envy' in which they mistakenly feel that using numeric data and quantitative methods in itself makes them more 'scientific'" (p. 222; cf. Friedman & Brown, 2018). Below we contend that this exclusivism is driven, in part, by a lingering hangover from twentieth century logical positivism as well as the cultural authority that is found in some settings by hewing to the experimental protocols of the natural sciences (that is, scientism; see Nelson & Canty, Chap. 2, this volume). Richardson and Guignon (2008) have argued that positive psychology problematically assumes scientism, and they instead have recommended thinking of positive psychology as an "*interpretive* social science rather than an aggressively 'scientific' and heavily instrumental one" (p. 623). They have suggested: "An interpretive psychology would draw on a wider array of methods or approaches to understanding," including "[c]ultural history, theoretical and philosophical analysis, some degree of cultural and political engagement, spiritual experiences and disciplines, to mention just a few, along with varied forms of quantitative and qualitative research" (p. 623).

Our point is not to generate skepticism regarding quantitative-statistical methodologies but rather to point out the epistemic inadequacy of such methodologies alone. People filter scientific findings through their personal experience, family history, cultural traditions, philosophical points of view, religious/spiritual outlooks, and political commitments. "There must be something wrong with the study" or "This research must be biased" are tempting and all-too-frequent responses when the proclaimed results of a study do not match up with what people deeply feel or have reasons to believe true. "We believe in science," says the popular poster, but many people do not believe in *scientism*, where *scientism* refers to the view that science-backed findings are the only source of knowledge and/or automatically override any other claims to knowledge. This latent skepticism is particularly at play when it comes to positive psychology and psychology of R/S, given how central human well-being and R/S are to personal experience and to culturally embedded traditions. Doubts over quantitative-statistical findings can be soothed when they are considered alongside evidence from philosophy, religion, history, and phenomenological investigation. Drawing off this broader evidence-base can provide confirmation, explanation, elaboration, and/or qualification of the empirical results.

There are at least two ways such interdisciplinary integration might unfold. First, the researcher might allow philosophical, religious, and spiritual premises into their evidence base and argumentation. This is to do research from an explicit point-of-view, which many have argued is inescapable (see Gantt & Melling, 2009). The philosophical naturalist, the Ignatian, the Zen Buddhist, the humanist, the Aristotelian, the Confucian, and so on announce that their research is being conducted based on certain principles from those traditions, both in the conceptualization of the study and in the evaluation of the empirical results. The second integrative route is for the researcher to bracket any explicit point-of-view and hypothetically consider additional sources of evidence in the discussion of the empirical results. For instance, a study that shows that mindfulness practices decrease anxiety can be interrogated from the perspectives of Zen Buddhism, contemplative Christianity, and philosophical naturalism. The value here is to consider the interpretations, objections, and affirmations of one or more salient perspectives. The researcher can discuss these matters hypothetically: *if* one is a Zen Buddhist, one will likely respond in such-a-such way, but *if* one is a philosophical naturalist, one will likely respond in this other manner. On either route, the empirical findings are not presented either in an epistemological vacuum or within a presumed secular frame (Taylor, 2007).

## *Four Considerations in Favor of Methodological Pluralism*

Having described methodological pluralism, we propose four considerations in its favor. The first is a reminder that, within contemporary psychology, any tendency to privilege quantitative-statistical methods at the exclusion of nonquantitative approaches is unwarranted (Nelson & Slife, 2012). Many have argued that the social sciences tended towards a methodological unity with the natural sciences in part due to the historical rise (in the 1920s and 1930s) of what came to be known as "logical positivism" championed by a group of philosophers referred to as the Vienna Circle (Gergen et al., 2015; Nelson, 2006; Robinson, 1995; Toulmin & Leary, 1985). For instance, a series of eight monographs entitled "Unified Science" were written by those associated with the Vienna Circle. Each volume sought to extend the quantitative experimental designs of the natural sciences to the social sciences. The first volume, written in 1932 by Otto Neurath, was titled "Unified Science and Psychology" (Sorell, 1994, pp. 12–13). This attempt to unify experimental methods was rooted in logical positivism's "verificationism." The principle of verificationism stated roughly that "all statements are either analytic (and thus tautological), empirical (and thus verified by observation), or meaningless" (Toulmin & Leary, 1985, p. 603). Because the natural sciences possessed the most stringent methods of controlled observation, the developing social sciences adopted those methods to avoid meaninglessness. Even though logical positivism and its verificationist criterion were eventually subjected to serious critique, Roth (1987) has noted the social

sciences "have retained a fundamentally positivistic conception of knowledge, a conception that identifies knowledge with the results of natural science" (p. 116), and Nelson (2006) has claimed that logical positivism became the "de-facto epistemology for psychology" (p. 210; cf. Sorrell, 1994).

This lingering adherence to a defunct positivism (and the scientism it funds) is unwarranted. It bears reminder there were at least three crucial problems that led to the demise of verificationism. First, moral statements—such as, "racism is wrong" or "honesty in research is good"—are unverifiable by sense experience and therefore rendered meaningless (Willard et al., 2018). It is absurd to maintain that calls for racial justice and honest reporting of data are meaningless emotional pleas, and such a view undermines the values needed for a functional science. Second, various notions required for science—such as causation, universal generalizations, and atomic/subatomic particles—were themselves unverifiable. The verifiability principle undermined core elements of the empirical science that positivists meant to uphold (Misak, 1995). The third problem was that logical positivism's verificationist criterion could not itself be empirically verified. The proposition that "only propositions that are logically true or can be verified by empirical facts should count as meaningful" is not itself logically true nor can it be verified by empirical facts. Indeed, the claim itself is not an empirical claim but a universal claim about what makes statements meaningful (Plantinga, 2018). According to the verificationist criterion, the criterion itself is meaningless. No doubt empirical verification is an important source of evidence (and quantitative-statistical methods are one way to provide such evidence), but to maintain that it is the only valid source of evidence is unjustifiable.

A second consideration in favor of looking beyond quantitative-statistical methods is that showing the reliability of these methods depends on nonquantitative arguments. For instance, the existence of mind-independent reality, the notion that language refers to reality, the identification of standards of a good theory, the reliability of sense-perception, memory, testimony, and rational intuition are each foundational to trusting quantitative-statistical methods, yet these matters cannot be determined by those methods (De Haro, 2020). Other forms of investigation, such as conceptual analysis, phenomenological experience, rational intuition, and principles of evidential reasoning are required. As De Haro (2020) has concluded: "The scientific quest presupposes having a number of philosophical issues settled first: or, at least, it presupposes engaging with the various conceptual options, and taking a stance on them" (p. 310).

A third consideration in favor of a methodological pluralism emerges from the distinction between etic and emic research (Pike, 1967). Etic research utilizes more distal constructs that are generalizable across multiple contexts, whereas emic research is a more proximal approach that takes an insider, tradition-specific perspective (Hall et al., 2018). Watson et al. (2011) have argued that both etic and emic approaches are necessary in the psychology of R/S, with emic research lending greater cultural validity. Cultural validity would certainly be an instrumental good of emic methods, but presumably emic research is likely to have greater cultural

acceptance because it is paying attention to the broader evidential base that is already accepted within its context of study. This broader and contextualized evidential base is data in the sense of the Latin *datum*, that which is "given." Emic researchers can take seriously what counts as legitimate sources of evidence within their research context, thereby providing additional indicators of unobservable constructs and additional explanatory evidence for connections between variables. One reason to take the evidential base of one's research context seriously is that it opens up the possibility of deeper contextualized understanding of the phenomena in question. Another reason is that, within that context, there may be evidence that is relevant to the quantitative-statistical results. And yet, why provisionally trust the evidence that is culturally accepted within a social setting? For one thing, to do otherwise would be to privilege the agreed-upon evidential sources within the researcher's context, and unless there is good reason to do so, this privileging is arbitrary. Second, although contextualized systems of thought can be horribly wrong, there is some reason to think that living, historically situated traditions have stood the test of time for good reason. This leads us to the last consideration in favor of methodological pluralism.

Living religious, spiritual, and philosophical traditions are embodied ways of life that ideally refine practical wisdom over time. McDowell (1996) has characterized a tradition as "a store of historically accumulated wisdom about what is a reason for what" (p. 126). In the context of discussing traditions, McDowell (1996) noted that the rise of modern individualism

> brings with it a loss or devaluation of the idea that immersion in a tradition might be a respectable mode of access to the real. Instead it comes to seem incumbent on each individual thinker to check everything for herself. When particular traditions seem ossified or hidebound, that encourages a fantasy that one should discard reliance on tradition altogether, whereas the right response would be to insist that a respectable tradition must include an honest responsiveness to reflective criticism. (pp. 98–99)

MacIntyre (1984)—a well-known proponent of this idea—has contended that a "living" tradition is "an historically extended, socially embodied argument" (p. 222) in which traditions are refined over time through interaction with people within and outside the tradition. Although MacIntyrean notions of tradition-dependent rationality and incommensurability seem to go too far, it remains true that human moral and religious lives are embedded in lived, culturally situated traditions (Hill & Hall, 2018). Methodological pluralism is built into communities of practice, which are subject to internal refinement such that "immersion in a tradition might be a respectable mode of access to the real" (McDowell, 1996, p. 89).

Acknowledging the reality of the social embeddedness of human moral and religious/spiritual life (and the potential for internal correction) does not on its own offer a reason to think these historically situated traditions accurately conceptualize the good life and the good person. However, it does make it plausible to think that they offer a coherent narrative of the world that is, to varying degrees, in touch with reality. The refined narratives within these traditions offer accounts of the interrelationships among beliefs, practices, virtues, and ultimate

purpose. This provides space for positive psychology and the psychology of R/S to engage jointly and meaningfully with religious and philosophical traditions as important interlocutors, attending to what is "given" within those traditions—on those traditions' own terms. A helpful analogy is that of a crime scene investigator who takes in eyewitness testimony, footage from nearby security cameras, footprints at the scene, psychological profiles, DNA evidence, and even the local psychic. The investigator does not lay aside their own evaluative and methodological filters, but they are willing to countenance purported evidence from sources that they may later find good reason to overturn. So, this is not the metaphysical claim that one can only make sense of human well-being and religious/spiritual life from within a particular tradition. Rather, it is the epistemological claim that there are sources of evidence available from within particular traditions that are neglected unless methodological pluralism is embraced intentionally and practiced meaningfully.

## Conclusion

What if humanity is not on the verge of apocalypse but instead moral and religious/spiritual breakthrough? Indeed, perhaps we are on the verge of such a breakthrough in part because we are on the verge of apocalypse. As Camus' *The Plague* illustrates, there is nothing like the inevitable demise of humanity to get humanity's attention. When death and disaster loom, possibilities of otherworldly transcendence and this-worldly well-being are piqued. Specifically, what if we are on the verge of a moral and religious/spiritual breakthrough that requires the integrated resources of positive psychology, the psychology of R/S, and additional evidential resources found within philosophical, religious, and spiritual traditions? One early proponent of a pluralist method, William James (1909), wrote: "Let empiricism once become associated with religion, as hitherto, through some strange misunderstanding, it has been associated with irreligion, and I believe that a new era of religion as well as of philosophy will be ready to begin" (p. 314).

MacIntyre (1984) famously ended *After Virtue* with these lines: "We are waiting not for a Godot, but for another—doubtless very different—St. Benedict" (p. 255). If McIntyre is right that we need communities like St. Benedict's to help structure our moral and religious/spiritual lives, perhaps we also need those communities to understand properly the relationship between R/S and human well-being. If so, alongside another St. Benedict, perhaps we also wait for another—doubtless very different—William James.

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# Chapter 4
# Virtues in Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

**Juliette L. Ratchford, Mason S. Ming, and Sarah A. Schnitker**

Take a moment to think of the most virtuous person you know. Ask yourself: What virtues do they possess? What makes them virtuous? How did they become virtuous? How religious or spiritual is this virtuous person? What role does religion/spirituality seem to play in the embodiment, expression, and enhancement of their virtuous character?

The purpose of this chapter is to explore such questions by reviewing and synthesizing virtue theory and research from two fields of study—positive psychology and the psychology of religion and spirituality (R/S). Historically, both fields have aimed to promote scientific understanding and practical cultivation of virtues (Schnitker & Emmons, 2017). However, as shown in Chap. 1 (see Tables 1.1 and 1.2), since positive psychology's inception in 1998, virtues have received considerably less scholarly attention than other key concepts (such as well-being or happiness), and journals have been reluctant to publish research on the intersections between positive psychology and R/S. In the current chapter, we first discuss reasons why virtues represent an optimal hub for integrating positive psychology and the psychology of R/S. Next, we explore places of intersection between the two fields in relation to the study of virtue. Finally, we discuss practical applications and implications of integrating virtue research and practice. Throughout the chapter, we summarize theories and research on virtues.

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## Psychology of Religion and Spirituality, Positive Psychology, and Virtue

Following the attacks on the World Trade Center and Pentagon on September 11, 2001, the psychology of R/S garnered major research attention, as seen in the six-fold increase in the frequency of "religion" or "spirituality" being used in article titles and abstracts from 2005 to 2014, compared to prior decades (Paloutzian, 2017a). The study of R/S now spans multiple subdisciplines and countries, as researchers worldwide investigate the continued importance of R/S across cultures (Paloutzian, 2017b). But interest in the psychological study of virtues and religion did not originate in recent decades. For example, during his 1906 presidential address to the American Psychological Association, William James (the father of American psychology who investigated religious beliefs and conversion experiences throughout his career) proposed two empirical questions: "(a) What were the limits of human energy? and (b) How could this energy be stimulated and released so it could be put to optimal use?" (Rathunde, 2001, p. 136).

Psychological interest in virtue and R/S waned in the mid-1920s and 1930s. For the study of virtue, this lack of interest was catalyzed by Hartshorne and May's (1928–1930) empirical studies, which found a dearth in consistent truth-telling across different honesty-relevant situations and thereby launched the person–situation debate. This debate involved a situationist critique that challenged the assumption enduring personality characteristics actually exist and thus led to a relative stalemate in virtue research until the latter part of the twentieth century. That stalemate coincided with the waning study of R/S until the 1960s, influenced by such factors as the separation of psychology and philosophy departments, the scientific model of psychology being based on positivist scientific principles, and the fears of "taboo" topics that veered into philosophical or theological directions (Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003).

The co-occurring sporadic research histories of virtue and R/S suggest that researchers might associate the two constructs to some degree. Indeed, much of the literature that examines the benefits and detriments of R/S considers virtue as an outcome of interest (Ratchford et al., 2021a). Likewise, the scientific study of virtues has regularly consulted philosophical and religious writings to inform construct creation, definition articulation, and theory development (Peterson & Seligman, 2004). Hence, this chapter explores virtues from both positive psychological and religious/spiritual lenses. In fact, we argue that virtues are an optimal hub for integrating the positive psychology and psychology of R/S fields.

## Virtues: An Optimal Hub for Integration

Virtues can be generally defined as "dispositional deep-seated habits that contribute to flourishing and that occur in activities with the following three features: they are done well, not done poorly, and in accordance with the right motivation and reason" (Ratchford et al., 2021b, p. 8).[1] Virtues provide a unique context for integrating psychology of R/S and positive psychology. Religious texts from Buddhist, Christian, and Islamic traditions are replete with references to virtues such as courage, justice, humanity, temperance, wisdom, and transcendence (Wade, 2010). Also, positive psychology's conceptualizations of virtue often derived from religious traditions. For example, the virtue of the *Protestant work ethic*—emphasizing hard work, discipline, and thrift—has become increasingly secularized and universal (Kalemci & Tuzun, 2019), but it was historically rooted in the specific faith tradition of Protestant Christianity.

Many virtues studied in positive psychology are pulled directly from religious/spiritual teachings. For instance, *gratitude to God* (Rosmarin et al., 2011) and *grace* (Graves, 2017) are explicitly religious constructs and have received growing empirical attention. Other examples, which probably include both religious/spiritual and secular influences, include *chastity* (Hardy & Willoughby, 2017), *hope* (King et al., 2020), *humility* (Davis et al., 2017), and *forgiveness* (Worthington & Wade, 1999). Considering the historical enmeshment between R/S and virtues, a serious inclusion of religious/spiritual understandings of virtue would profit the broader scholarly study of virtues. Pluralistic multidisciplinary work among theologians, psychologists, anthropologists, and philosophers may provide a more accurate "thick" contextual understanding of R/S and virtue, as each discipline brings a unique perspective to the narrative (Graves, 2017).

Even after considering the many converging points, the psychology of R/S and positive psychology have hesitated to cooperate fully in virtue research. For various reasons, each has resisted drawing upon the rich knowledge and perspectives the other has to offer. Perhaps researchers in these fields have hesitated to cooperate due to concerns about pathologizing the human condition, worries about forcing R/S on secular individuals, or assumptions that one field might begin to subsume the other. At times this hesitation may even be based in mistrust and prejudice. Regardless of the reasons, these fields have much to offer one another, and researchers have thus begun integrating R/S into their work with virtues (e.g., Schnitker & Emmons, 2017). Our aim is to highlight key intersections between positive psychology and the psychology of R/S, within the context of virtues research. Given that virtues are a component of the personality system, we organize these intersections around commonly held, virtue-relevant components of personality and context: trait taxonomies, cultural ideals, cultural practices, goal pursuits, context-specific emotions, and narrative identities (McAdams & Pals, 2006).

[1] This conceptualization of virtue ties well with the Positive Religious and Spiritual Development (PRSD) theory presented in Davis et al. (Chap. 18) of this volume.

## Intersection on Trait Taxonomies

Examination of virtues as personality traits is a common point of intersection between positive psychology and psychology of R/S. Perhaps the most salient example of integration is Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS). Seligman, widely considered the father of positive psychology, oversaw a massive project to classify human strengths and virtues into a cohesive taxonomy of flourishing that could be used as a companion to extant taxonomies of languishing (e.g., the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual [*DSM*]). To do so, Peterson and Seligman delved into Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, and Hindu religious texts and thought. McGrath (2015) followed up on their work by taking millions of globally representative responses to the VIA-IS and using factor analytic methods to organize the virtues into three categories: caring, inquisitiveness, and self-control. However, some scholars have raised concerns about the VIA-IS's viability as a virtue measure (Snow, 2019), arguing it has not yet demonstrated adequate construct equivalence (measurement invariance) to verify its assumption that its assessed virtues hold universal meanings within and across cultures.

Additionally, in the HEXACO honesty–humility factor (Lee & Ashton, 2004), R/S and virtue-related concepts have been proposed as potential sixth factors of personality, unique from other well-established high order Big 5 personality traits (i.e., Neuroticism, Extraversion, Openness, Agreeableness, Conscientiousness; McCrae & Costa, 2008). The HEXACO measure only considers the virtues of honesty and humility; it is by no means an exhaustive measure of all virtues, nor was it intended to be. However, because the HEXACO assesses specific virtues, it is useful to consider how R/S is associated with the HEXACO. Indeed, researchers consistently find that trait honesty-humility is moderately associated with R/S (Aghababaei et al., 2014).

Psychology of R/S research in the late 1990s created trait conceptualizations of spirituality orthogonal to Big Five traits (Piedmont, 1999). Trait spirituality has also been reliably linked with virtues like forgiveness (Leach & Lark, 2004), humility (Davis et al., 2017), patience (Schnitker et al., 2017), and thrift (Ratchford et al., 2021a). As research continues to develop in the realm of spirituality, the definition of spirituality has broadened to encompass secular, nonreligious people who engage in self-transcendent practices (Koenig, 2008). This may pose an issue in conducting research on R/S and virtue, because under this broader definition, spirituality may overlap entirely with virtue. Further empirical inquiry is necessary to determine the extent of conflation between trait spirituality and specific trait virtues.

## Intersection on Cultural Ideals

Although it is tempting to consider virtues as universal, Snow (2019) has argued that virtues are culturally dependent, and researchers ought to be more sensitive to cross-cultural variability in the development, composition, and expression of virtues. This possibility is evidenced when assessments validated with Western populations do not generalize to non-Western cultures. For example, after failing to authenticate the six-factor VIA-IS structure in a Chinese sample, Duan et al. (2012) created a three-factor Chinese Virtues Questionnaire that more validly assessed virtues in Chinese culture. Likewise, virtues can be understood differently within a single nation. For example, in the U.S., *humility* is related to more liberal transcendent values (e.g., benevolence; universalism) or more conservative conformity values (e.g., conformity; tradition), depending on whom you ask (Schwartz et al., 2012). Indeed, scholars are finding that virtue conceptualization depends heavily on person–context relations (Fowers et al., 2021), and the influence of culture on virtue development and expression cannot be ignored.

Community, family, and culture—especially religious culture—are major players in virtue development. Religious institutions are influential cultural settings, and differences among religious cultures lead people to prize some values over others. For example, predominantly Hindu cultures such as India value thrift—the wise use and distribution of resources—more so than other cultures (e.g., in North America and Europe; Choenni, 2011). Additionally, social support from one's religious/spiritual context (such as being involved in a religious community) can be influential in virtue development as well. For instance, King and Furrow (2004) found that involvement in religious activities led to increased empathy and altruism among adolescents who had relationships with coreligionists (who shared beliefs and values in common with them).

## Intersection on Practices and Interventions

Although not the only contexts to do so, religious traditions and communities offer some of the most readily accessible, shared sacred practices and meaning-making frameworks (Park, 2005) that are regularly coupled with opportunities to develop virtue (Schnitker et al., 2019a). Many activities that promote virtue development are religious/spiritual and transcendent in nature, including religious/spiritual practices such as prayer, meditation, and service attendance. However, not all practices or strivings are created equal (King, 2008). *Sanctified* strivings—practices or goals imbued with sacred significance (such as sanctifying one's marriage)—lead to greater goal pursuit and social support for goals (Mahoney et al., 2005). Indeed, when otherwise ordinary habits or earthly relationships are imbued with sacred meaning (e.g., deciding to spend more time with one's partner because your

relationship is perceived as sacred), they tend to bolster virtue development (e.g., commitment, love, and fidelity; see Chap. 28, this volume).

Religious communities are particularly good at encouraging individuals to engage in behavioral practices (King, 2008) that regularly foster virtues. For example, *prayer* has been shown to increase gratitude (Lambert et al., 2009), *meditation* can increase compassion (Boellinghaus et al., 2013), and diet regulation—a behavior similar to religious *fasting*—can improve self-regulation (Muraven, 2010), a capacity some researchers consider the underlying mechanism of all virtues (McCullough & Willoughby, 2009; Root Luna et al., 2017). In fact, some argue that R/S leads to virtues, which in turn lead to well-being (see Krause et al., 2019).

Unfortunately, in a review of positive psychological interventions, Rye et al. (2013) found that very few positive psychology interventions explicitly incorporated R/S, even when doing so would have been relatively easy. Although some positive psychology interventions overlap with R/S practices in their activation of meaning-making, it is still unclear whether religious, spiritual, moral, or instrumental forms of meaning change the impact of the interventions (Schnitker et al., 2021). However, research has found that meaning that is self-transcendent (i.e., beyond-the-self) increases the efficacy of interventions (Yeager et al., 2014).

## Intersection on Self-Transcendent Positive Emotions

Self-transcendent positive emotions (e.g., awe, gratitude, and love) are associated with both positive psychology and the psychology of R/S and may serve as a bridge between R/S and virtue. They tend to activate and increase spirituality (Van Cappellen et al., 2013). For example, in one study, church attendance activated the emotion of love, which in turn activated spontaneous generosity, as participants were more willing to share a hypothetical lottery prize with others (Van Cappellen et al., 2016). Gratitude, perhaps the most often studied virtue in positive psychology, is also a historically religious construct. In longitudinal and experimental studies, Lambert et al. (2009) found the religious practice of prayer activated gratitude, and more frequent prayer led to subsequently increased gratitude. But self-transcendent positive emotions are not limited to activating warmth-based virtues like compassion and generosity. For example, higher levels of daily gratitude as a self-transcendent positive emotion (but not happiness) have been associated with higher self-control and patience (i.e., being able to wait well when necessary), likely by helping people recognize the benefits and benefactors in their lives (Dickens & DeSteno, 2016). Likewise, experimental manipulations to induce gratitude in comparison to neutral or happy emotions increase financial patience (DeSteno et al., 2014).

Self-transcendent positive emotions may also serve to motivate a person to engage both in spirituality and virtuous behavior, which may be why many positive psychology interventions seek to activate self-transcendent positive emotions. For example, loving-kindness meditation increases daily positive emotions, which in

turn increase meditation practices in an upward spiral (Fredrickson et al., 2017; see Van Cappellen et al., Chap. 20, this volume). This upward spiral of both the intervention and the experience of positive emotions is also found in gratitude interventions (Lambert et al., 2009). Interventions framed in a R/S context (e.g., prayer) have demonstrated greater effect in eliciting experiences of gratitude than interventions not framed in that context (Lambert et al., 2009), suggesting that contextualizing interventions as religious/spiritual may be particularly advantageous to virtue development (see Captari et al., Chap. 26, this volume).

## Intersection on Goal Pursuits

Goals—what people habitually are trying to do or want to accomplish—have been assessed in research in both subfields. In the psychology of R/S, much of the research regarding goals has focused on *ultimate concerns*, which are goals that in some fashion are concerned with R/S (goals such as deepening one's relationship with God or spending more time reading religious texts; Emmons & Paloutzian, 2003). The presence of explicitly religious/spiritual goals is associated with greater well-being and adaptive goal pursuit (Emmons & Schnitker, 2013). However, goals need not be explicitly religious/spiritual to be imbued with religious/spiritual significance, which is referred to as sanctification. For example, people regularly imbue parenting, marriage, and work with sacred significance. Research suggests that both theistic and nontheistic sanctification of goals produces better goal outcomes and higher well-being when the goal pursuit is successful (Kusner et al., 2014; Mahoney & Pargament, 2005), but in goal failure, sanctification can lead to greater decrements in well-being because the loss is perceived as a desecration (Pargament et al., 2005).

Examining the relative conflict and harmony among a person's various goals has proven fruitful in predicting the incidence of religious/spiritual transformation and change; in a longitudinal study on adolescents who were involved in a week-long religious service trip, goals were assessed prior to attending the trip. Researchers found that adolescents who ascribed less meaning to their goals and experienced conflict amongst their goals before the trip were more likely to have a religious/spiritual transformation experience (e.g., conversion or recommitment) during the trip than adolescents who found their existing goals more meaningful (Schnitker et al., 2019b). This finding suggests that R/S functions to organize the meaning-making system and offer a sense of meaning to people who do not have it already (Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume).

In much the same way, positive psychologists have recently investigated virtues through the lens of goal pursuit. A longitudinal study on university students found that people who are more virtuous (specifically patient) in the pursuit of their goals tend to exert more effort in that pursuit and find the goals more meaningful (Thomas & Schnitker, 2017). Additionally, goals that were more meaningful to people predicted subsequent virtuous goal pursuit. This finding suggests that, as people engage

strivings, meaning and virtue have an upward spiral effect on each other, similar to self-transcendent positive emotions. These findings regarding virtue, R/S, and meaning suggest the importance of meaning and meaning-making for both the study of virtue and of R/S. Additional work is needed to integrate goal-based approaches to assessing R/S and virtues. For example, experimental studies could test how manipulations to imbue the goal of developing virtues with sacred meaning affect virtue outcomes (Williams et al., 2021).

## Intersection on Narrative Identities

Narrative identities often undergird virtue development and expression as well. Narrative identity is an individual's ever-evolving life story about who they are and how they came to be who they are becoming (McAdams, 2006). Although not all narrative identities are religious in nature, narrative identities linked to religious traditions provide unique virtue-promoting, meaning-making frameworks (Park, 2005), wherein individuals are motivated to behave morally, transcend themselves, and find meaning (King et al., 2020). Although all narrative identities provide some sort of meaning structure for characteristic adaptations, religious/spiritual narrative identities (i.e., stories people have in their minds about the sacred meaning and formative transcendent experiences of their lives) provide people with sacred meaning and lead to the sanctification of their actions (Bronk, 2014). An identity shaped by transcendence, ultimacy, or sacredness is an especially powerful motivator for activities that are perceived to be virtuous in the moral framework of the person's religious tradition. Moreover, life narratives with redemptive arcs, which are promoted by many faith traditions, are related to higher levels of generativity in older adults (McAdams, 2006). Thus, when individuals embed their narrative identity into a religious tradition, it can take on a powerful transcendent component that is supported by that community.

## Applications for Clinicians and Practitioners in Secular and Religious/Spiritual Settings

Identifying points of convergence and divergence between the scientific study of virtues in the psychology of R/S and positive psychology is a useful scholarly exercise. This sort of targeted comparison also reveals potential applications in both secular and religious/spiritual settings.

**Applications in Secular Settings** As clinicians and practitioners (e.g., educators, therapists, and youth workers) integrate virtues into their methods, they must be strategic about where they attempt to intervene. Should practitioners try to influence the development of the traits that support virtues, focus on cultivating self-

transcendent positive emotions, or help people construct virtue-supportive narrative identities? It is likely that interventions will be most successful when they attend to all three (although the efficacy of this is yet to be empirically tested). Interventions at the trait level of personality are perhaps the most difficult because of high trait stability (even though trait-level changes are potentially long-lasting and deeply rewarding; see Roberts et al., 2017), whereas interventions at other levels of personality (such as narrative identity) are more readily accessible. For example, forgiveness and hope interventions tend to focus on changing emotion-regulation strategies and relational schemas at the level of what people are doing (e.g., specific behaviors, feelings, and thoughts; Wade et al., 2014).

Many current virtue interventions avoid discussion or use of R/S. This approach may stem from positive psychology's humanistic grounding (Waterman, 2013), but it may result in users' inability to integrate the intervention into their meaning systems, which could limit the longevity of the intervention's effects. It is hard for an intervention to be effective if it does not fit into a user's meaning-making and identity systems. Virtue interventions do not need to prescribe a meaning system, but they should attempt to map readily onto people's evolving narrative identities and already existing meaning systems. By doing so, these interventions could have more potent and persistence effects. Connecting virtue-relevant habits to a person's narrative identity can foster a purpose for motivating that habit, which may thereby promote virtue development (Schnitker et al., 2019a; see Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume). Of course, certain cultures will value some virtues over others, so what constitutes virtue in one culture may not be considered moral or virtuous in another culture (see Mattis, Chap. 9, this volume).

Hence, when working with individuals, practitioners should keep in mind that virtues are culturally derived and culturally embedded. Accordingly, clinicians and practitioners utilizing positive psychology interventions in a secular setting need to consider their patients' cultural and religious/spiritual background. Clients may value certain virtues over others, depending on their cultural background and religious perspectives. Biases toward certain virtues may also differ from the clinician's views. Furthermore, it is important to reiterate that most of the research on positive psychology interventions has been conducted in Western populations, so the cross-cultural effectiveness of them often has not yet been demonstrated. In short, virtue-focused clinical practice must be culturally sensitive and responsive. Let us take the case of the virtue of forgiveness and R/S. If a fictitious client Mark does not highly value forgiveness as a virtue, but his clinician Judy is of a Judeo-Christian faith that places great emphasis on forgiveness, then there may be conflict between Judy and Mark in cases where Mark has been wronged by someone in his life. To be culturally sensitive and responsive, Judy should ask Mark what his cultural values are and let those values take precedence in the clinical relationship and goals.

**Applications in Religious/Spiritual Settings** In their work with people, religious leaders (clergy, religious educators, etc.) may also find that positive psychology interventions are helpful tools. Religious leaders might find it helpful to tailor positive psychological interventions to their congregation's needs (see Chaps. 26 and

29, this volume). For example, a gratitude intervention that asks individuals to list three positive things that went well during the day could be tailored to ask congregants to write down three positive things for which they are grateful to God. Indeed, experimental research suggests framing gratitude journaling as a prayer leads to more potent effects among religious people (Schnitker & Richardson, 2019). Similarly, praying for a romantic partner or friend (in comparison to describing the partner to a parent or thinking positive thoughts about a friend) leads to greater forgiveness across time (Lambert et al., 2010). Ideally, additional research will test these sorts of virtue-development activity modifications for other virtues and religious/spiritual activities beyond prayer for efficacy and provide support for their use.

Many positive psychology interventions overlap with religious/spiritual practices, and leaders can look to the science to see what has been efficacious for most people. However, long-standing, effective religious/spiritual practices (e.g., prayer and meditation) should not be misappropriated for their virtue intervention functions. For religious leaders and adherents, religious/spiritual practices have religious/spiritual functions that extend well beyond their psychological effects. Science can help inform religious/spiritual practitioner choices but should not replace them. How to intervene is dependent on the values and goals of the intervention participant, which must be discussed within the context of the person's holistic needs and the relationship between the practitioner and participant.

Moreover, caution should be exercised to avoid common pitfalls, such as assuming all interventions can be used into a new setting without contextualization or culturally needed adaptation (Hendriks et al., 2019). Likewise, practitioners should be aware that positive psychology interventions touted to build virtue may have unintended and undesirable side effects. For example, mindfulness interventions sometimes reduce caring moral responses to harmful behaviors (Schindler et al., 2019) and can increase self-focus and self-enhancement bias (Gebauer et al., 2018). Despite these pitfalls, positive psychology interventions that are properly understood and tailored to fit meaning systems can become powerful aids for cultivating growth.

## Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this chapter, the study of virtue in positive psychology and the psychology of R/S run parallel to each other and often converge. Points of convergence and divergence provide numerous applications to clinical and applied work regarding the ways to intervene, the integration of virtue and R/S in interventions, the application of interventions to an individual's meaning system, and the overlap between R/S and virtue interventions. The research presented throughout this chapter shows a rich history of virtue research and highlights a fruitful line of integrative research to come. We found multiple areas of intersection for R/S and positive psychology on virtue, including trait taxonomies, cultural ideals, cultural

practices, goal pursuits, context-specific emotions, and narrative identities. Our hope is that the work presented within this chapter may illuminate conversations for individuals, families, and communities around the questions we posed at the beginning of the chapter, such as: *What makes a person virtuous, and what role can R/S play in the embodiment, expression, and enhancement of virtuous character?*

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# Chapter 5
# Theories of Health and Well-Being Germane to a Positive Psychology of Religion and Spirituality

**Douglas A. MacDonald**

The time for a positive psychology of religion and spirituality has arrived, for at least two reasons. First, scholarly interest in the influence of religiousness and spirituality on health and well-being has shown a marked increase in recent decades (Koenig et al., 2012; Miller, in press; Paloutzian & Park, 2013; Pargament, 2013). Second, empirical and theoretical developments in positive psychology have characterized religiousness and spirituality both as drivers and expressions of well-being (Lee et al., 2021; Vittersø, 2016). Because these two subdisciplines have similar aims (Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume) and have been said to go "hand in hand" (Barton & Miller, 2015, p. 829), movement toward the formalization of a positive psychology of religion and spirituality seems warranted (see Davis et al., Chap. 31, this volume).

For a positive psychology of religion and spirituality to make meaningful scientific progress, it is important to take inventory of the work that has been done. There is a particular need to consolidate knowledge and clarify possible directions for theory and inquiry. With this in mind, the purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of some available theories and models related to individual-level[1] religiousness, spirituality, health, and well-being. I emphasize theories whose core constructs are operationalized with measurement tools or have a strong empirical foundation tied to a naturalistic scientific stance. Due to space limitations, only

[1] For multilevel theories and research on religiousness, spirituality, health, and well-being, see King et al. (Chap. 17, this volume), Davis et al. (Chap. 18, this volume), Long and VanderWeele (Chap. 25, this volume), Dik and Alayan (Chap. 27, this volume), Mahoney et al. (Chap. 28, this volume), and Wang et al. (Chap. 30, this volume).

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select theories are discussed, but readers are encouraged to explore the many other promising theories out there (e.g., Dodge et al., 2012; Lee et al., 2021; see also Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume).

## Definitions

To facilitate clarity of expression, it is worthwhile to provide some working definitions of this chapter's main concepts. In this chapter, the term *religiousness* will be used rather than *religion*. As argued by Paloutzian and Park (2021), the term religiousness is more in line with a scientific psychology because it can be "understood as human behavior, including its affective, attitudinal, and cognitive aspects" (p. 3). Following their lead, *religiousness* is defined as "an individual's or group's understanding, enacting, and being vis-à-vis religion" (Paloutzian & Park, 2021, pp. 3–4). Spirituality is considered to be a broad, multidimensional, and unique domain of human functioning that is superordinate to, but inclusive of, religiousness (MacDonald, 2017; MacDonald et al., 2015). More precisely, *spirituality* is defined as

> a natural aspect of human functioning [that] relates to a special class of non-ordinary experiences and the beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors that cause, co-occur, and/or result from such experiences. The experiences themselves are characterized as involving states and modes of consciousness [that] alter the functions and expressions of self and personality and impact the way in which we perceive and understand ourselves, others, and reality as a whole. (MacDonald et al., 2015, p. 5)

There are numerous definitions and conceptualizations of health, well-being, and related terms (see Appendix 5.S1, Table 5.S1). In this chapter, health and well-being are framed in positive psychological terms and are defined as positive appraisal of one's quality of life and capacity for self-determination and self-fulfillment, as applied to all domains of functioning (e.g., physical, psychological, social, and spiritual). Although arguments might be made that health and well-being should be treated as distinct constructs, available factor analytic research suggests that measures of such concepts and related terms (e.g., wellness) tend to contribute to the same factors or components (see MacDonald, 2018). Thus, it appears defendable on empirical grounds to use these concepts as synonyms in this chapter, except where needed to describe a theory.

## Theories of Health and Well-Being

A perusal of the literature suggests that extant theories of health/well-being may be organized into two loose categories. In the first, the theories involve defining and elucidating health/well-being specifically within the domain of spirituality (i.e.,

spiritual well-being). In essence, these are theories that start with spirituality and then broaden the concept to include health/well-being, as it relates to the unfolding and manifestation of spirituality developmentally. In the second category, spirituality is conceptualized as an aspect or facet of broader conceptualizations of health/well-being (i.e., it is viewed as one of several expressions of health and well-being). The following discussion is organized accordingly.

## *Spirituality as Well-Being*

As noted by Moberg (1984), interest in spiritual well-being (SWB) effectively started 50 years ago thanks to the 1971 White House Conference on Aging. Participants in this conference and its technical committee aimed to provide a theoretical framework for SWB that could be used to facilitate policy development and support inquiry in a variety of areas including but not limited to religious research, quality of life, and holistic health (Moberg, 1971). At the core of this framework is the committee's definition of the term *spiritual*, which they defined as a person's "inner resources especially [their] ultimate concern, the basic value around which all other values are focused, the central philosophy of life—whether religious, anti-religious, or nonreligious—which guides a person's conduct, the supernatural and nonmaterial dimensions of human nature" (Moberg, 1971, p. 3). Extending from this definition, SWB was seen as a dynamic and lifelong process of spiritual growth that involves addressing basic human needs to cope with suffering, adversity, existential uncertainty, and psychosocial and personological change across the lifespan. Moberg (1984) elaborated that, within this framework, SWB is considered to be (a) multidimensional, (b) related to but distinct from religiousness, and (c) manifested in all contexts of life and not just within institutional religious settings. It is noteworthy that Moberg also affirmed the definition of SWB developed by the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging (1975). In this definition, SWB was defined as "the affirmation of life in a relationship with God, self, community, and the environment that nurtures and celebrates wholeness" (quoted from Moberg, 1984, p. 352). In both cases, Moberg (1984) opined that although these definitions may have some practical value, they are too broad to permit their use in empirical research on SWB. He therefore called for the development of assessment tools that would measure the various facets of SWB.

With respect to its facets, Moberg (1984) acknowledged that SWB has "possibly hundreds of components" (p. 352). Despite the construct's complexity, Moberg (1984) followed through with his call by using survey data (obtained in the U.S. and Sweden) to construct several indices he proffered could be used to study SWB empirically. In particular, he took items from the survey and completed an exploratory factor analysis. Based upon observed factor loadings and analysis of item content, he labeled the factors Christian Faith, Self-Satisfaction, Personal Piety,

Subjective Spiritual-Well-Being, Optimism, Religious Cynicism, and Elitism. In his interpretation, Moberg viewed the first four factors as having both theoretical value and empirical support with his data, whereas the latter three factors appeared conceptually and statistically weak and possibly mislabeled. Subsequent research using Moberg's indices has provided evidence supporting their convergent and discriminant validity (MacDonald, 2000a).

Although the development of empirical indices is noteworthy in its own right, Moberg made other contributions as well (e.g., Moberg, 1979; Moberg & Brusek, 1978). The most significant of these is a theory he developed that serves as the basis for one of the most widely used measures of SWB, the Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Ellison, 1983; Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982). In this theory, SWB is construed in terms of vertical and horizontal dimensions. The vertical dimension is referred to as *religious well-being*, which is defined as well-being manifested in one's perceived relationship to a higher power (i.e., God). The horizontal dimension is called *existential well-being* and refers to well-being expressed in the form of purpose, meaning in life, and life satisfaction—but without any overtly religious elements. In this model, SWB is operationalized as the combination of these two dimensions. The psychometric properties of the Spiritual Well-Being Scale have been studied extensively, and the measure has demonstrated good evidence of reliability and convergent and criterion validity (Paloutzian et al., 2021). However, evidence supporting the factorial validity of the scale—and by extension the two-dimensional model it purportedly measures—has been less favorable (Sterner et al., 2021).

Another more recently developed approach to SWB and its measurement has its roots in the 1970s, especially the National Interfaith Coalition on Aging's (1975) definition mentioned above. This theory is the four-domain model of spiritual health and well-being that serves as the conceptual basis for the Spiritual Well-Being Questionnaire (Gomez & Fisher, 2003), Spiritual Health and Life Orientation Measure (Fisher, 2010), and 4-item Spiritual Well-Being Index (Fisher & Ng, 2017). As its name implies, the four-domain model defines SWB as consisting of four facets: Personal (i.e., relation to one's self, with an emphasis on life meaning, purpose, and values), Communal (i.e., relation with others, involving morality, religion, culture, and a positive perception of humanity), Environmental (i.e., sense of connection, appreciation, and nurturing orientation toward nature), and Transcendental (i.e., relation of self to a transcendent power or dimension). These domains are seen as dynamic and interconnected, such that they change over time and mutually influence one another. However, the motivational core of the model, and the primary driver by which the fulfillment of SWB can be attained, is an intentional desire for self-development that is congruent with personal meaning and purpose in life. The successful realization of SWB is manifested through the experience of bliss and internal harmony (Fisher, 2010). The measures based on this conceptual model have been used in several studies and demonstrate acceptable evidence of reliability and validity (Fisher, 2010; Fisher & Ng, 2017).

## *Spirituality as a Component of Well-Being*

Theories in this next group tend to incorporate religiousness/spirituality as one expression of multicomponential conceptualizations of health/well-being. We begin with Stoudenmire et al.'s (1985) model of optimal functioning and the measure they developed to assess it—the Holistic Living Inventory. Motivated by the desire to address ambiguities in the definition and measurement of holistic living, Stoudenmire et al. (1985) drew from theories of holism and optimal functioning adopted by different organizations, such as the American Holistic Medical Association and the Institute of Religion and Health. They constructed a four-facet model of holistic living that includes physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual dimensions. Optimal functioning was defined specific to each component. The physical dimension was defined as enhancement of physical fitness through responsible lifestyle (e.g., diet, exercise) practices and self-monitoring and regulation of one's physical health and functioning. The emotional dimension was seen as enhancement of emotional self-satisfaction through positive and responsible behavioral choices and the avoidance or mitigation of negative emotions such as depression, anger, and anxiety. The mental dimension involved the enhancement of mental developmental potentials through intellectual pursuits, the increased appreciation of aesthetics, and the minimization of irrational attitudes. Lastly, the spiritual dimension involved fostering a sense of oneness with a higher power and actively developing and adhering to an ethical system.

Although the Holistic Living Inventory has demonstrated reasonably good evidence of validity and reliability (Stoudenmire et al., 1985), it has been criticized for its length and item complexity. This led to the development of the Mental, Physical, and Spiritual Well-Being Scale (Vella-Brodrick & Allen, 1995), which has demonstrated stronger psychometric properties and an improved theoretical foundation. For instance, the model underlying the Holistic Living Inventory does not specify how its four dimensions relate to each other to enable integrated, optimal functioning. Conversely, Vella-Brodrick and Allen (1995) not only provide clear definitions of their three identified domains of well-being but also state explicitly that holistic well-being involves "the balanced nourishment of mind, body, and spirit" (p. 661). Their introduction of balance into the conceptualization of holistic well-being makes it clear that holistic health/well-being depends on equally meaningful attention to all facets of well-being.

Another theory of interest is Adams et al.'s (1997) wellness model, which serves as the basis of their Perceived Wellness Survey (PWS). This model draws from prior theories of positive health, with an emphasis on Dunn's (1961) systems approach and Antonovsky's (1988) notion of salutogenesis (i.e., an approach to health that focuses on factors that contribute to well-being, particularly in the face of adversity and stress). Adams et al. (1997) conceptualize perceived wellness as "a multidimensional, salutogenic construct" (p. 209) wherein overall wellness is facilitated and maintained through the reciprocal integration and homeostasis of well-being's dimensions. There are six dimensions that comprise the model: physical wellness

(i.e., perception of, and expectations for, positive physical health), psychological wellness (i.e., expectation of positive outcomes in life), social wellness (i.e., perception of social support), emotional wellness (i.e., positive self-esteem), intellectual wellness (i.e., perception of optimal engagement in activities that are intellectually stimulating), and spiritual wellness (i.e., a sense of life purpose and belief in the existence of a unifying force). As an operationalization of the wellness model, the Perceived Wellness Survey has demonstrated evidence of acceptable reliability and validity and shown promise in research (Adams et al., 1997; Harari et al., 2005; MacDonald, 2018; Rothmann & Ekkerd, 2007).

A final set of theories are well-established in positive psychology proper and may be characterized as representing related but distinct research traditions within that subdiscipline. First are theories of eudaimonic well-being. With its roots traceable to ancient Greece and particularly the work of Aristotle (e.g., Aristotle, 2002), eudaimonia is an approach to well-being that is seen as analogous to notions of self-actualization. At its core, eudaimonic well-being is seen as living life in an authentic, self-directed, engaged, and meaningful manner. It is worth noting that in his formulation of the concept of eudaimonia, Aristotle placed primary emphasis on ethics, virtue, and wisdom and did not make overt ties to anything spiritual. However, some scholars have noted that the concept later underwent a "Christianization," resulting in it incorporating transcendence (a widely recognized spiritual concept; Boyce-Tillman, 2020).

In positive psychology, major theories aligned with eudaimonia include psychological well-being theory (Ryff, 1989, 2018; Ryff & Keyes, 1995; Ryff & Singer, 2008), self-determination theory (Ryan et al., 2008), and eudaimonic identity theory (Waterman, 2011; Waterman et al., 2010; see Appendix 5.S1, Table 5.S2 for summaries of each of these major theories). None of these theories include much by way of overt religious or spiritual content, but each of them incorporates meaning and purpose in life, albeit to differing degrees.

Meaning and purpose is a relatively common element in definitions and measures of spirituality and/or SWB as well (e.g., Paloutzian & Ellison, 1982; see Park & Van Tongeren, Chap. 6, this volume). Given this content overlap, care must be exercised when interpreting empirical relations between spirituality and eudaimonic well-being, because correlations are likely inflated when relying on instruments that assess meaning/purpose as part of each construct (for discussions of this issue, see Garssen et al., 2016; Koenig, 2008; MacDonald, 2017, 2018). Notwithstanding such problems, scholarly attention has been given to the relation and place of spirituality within eudaimonic theory (e.g., Pargament et al., 2016), and scholars have proposed broadening eudaimonic theories to incorporate spirituality in a manner that extends beyond meaning and purpose alone (e.g., van Dierendonck, 2004).

Next, there are positive psychological theories that frame well-being in terms of values, virtues, and character. Perhaps the most influential of these is Peterson and Seligman's (2004) Values in Action (VIA) nosology of character strengths and virtues. In developing this system, Peterson and Seligman completed an extensive survey of the literature with the intention of identifying strengths and virtues that appeared invariant across history and cultures and were universally seen as

contributing to the development of good moral character. Their efforts resulted in the creation of a classification system and several associated measures, chiefly including the 240-item VIA Inventory of Strengths. The system itself provides six classes of core virtues, under which are 24 character strengths. The virtues are wisdom/knowledge, courage, humanity, justice, temperance, and transcendence. Within the last virtue (transcendence), religiousness and spirituality are placed as character strengths. It is described as involving faith and purpose and as manifesting through the adoption of a belief system regarding one's life and the universe as having meaning. It more specifically entails having an understanding of one's place within the universe in a manner that informs one's conduct and serves as a source of comfort (Park et al., 2004). The VIA Inventory of Strengths and the broader scientific study of virtues and strengths have garnered a lot of attention in positive psychology (e.g., Stichter & Saunders, 2019; see also Ratchford et al., Chap. 4, this volume). There also is good evidence supporting the reliability and validity of the VIA Inventory of Strengths (Peterson & Seligman, 2004; Ruch et al., 2010) and its more recent revision (McGrath & Wallace, 2021).

One last theory deserves mention—the PERMA model of flourishing proposed by Seligman (2011). PERMA is an acronym that stands for **P**ositive emotions, **E**ngagement, **R**elationships, **M**eaning, and **A**ccomplishments. Although some scholars have interpreted the model as yet another definition of well-being (e.g., Goodman et al., 2018), Seligman (2018) has argued that the model's five elements are best understood as the building blocks of well-being and not as well-being itself per se. A measure of the elements, called the PERMA-Profiler, has been developed and exhibited satisfactory evidence of reliability and validity (Butler & Kern, 2016).

## The Need for an Integrative Scientific Theory

All the theories discussed so far in this chapter were selected because of their potential to contribute to empirical research. Based upon this sampling, one might have the impression there is a more than sufficient theoretical footing to guide a positive psychology of religion and spirituality. However, this impression would not be wholly accurate for at least two key reasons. First, extant theories are disparate in terms of their underlying emphases as to the place of spirituality within well-being and vice-versa, a problem that is exacerbated by the fact the definitions of spirituality and well-being often blend in ways that create confusion as to whether spirituality is a contributor to—versus a manifestation of—well-being. This is particularly the case when it comes to meaning and purpose (MacDonald, 2017, 2018). Second and more importantly, there are indications that the psychology of religion and spirituality itself is not wholly clear on what it should study and how best to study it (Linfield, 2021). There is discussion and debate about how the subdiscipline can be brought into greater accord with psychological science. Paloutzian and Park (2021),

two prominent figures in the field, have suggested that a multilevel interdisciplinary meaning systems approach holds promise for guiding such efforts.

The existing research on spirituality, religion, health, and well-being provides reasonably fertile ground for the development of testable theories that can guide a rigorous positive psychology of religion and spirituality. One current challenge is finding a way to rectify and integrate the myriad theories that are presently available. The research well-establishes the empirical links between religiousness, spirituality, and well-being. As such, we are now at a point where we need to move to the level of identifying causal influences and mechanisms that contribute to well-being outcomes. More specifically, there is a clear need to recognize and incorporate biological, social, psychological (including cognitive, affective, experiential, and personality factors), behavioral, and developmental factors into theoretical frameworks, in order to enable researchers and practitioners to understand the complexity, structure, and dynamics of religiousness and spirituality and its influence on health/well-being. Fortunately, there are some candidate theories that hold promise to serve as starting points for programmatic research. Due to space constraints, I mention three here, but the reader is encouraged to explore the literature for others (e.g., Davis et al., Chap. 18, this volume).

First, Koenig (2012) and Koenig et al. (2012) present impressively detailed theoretical models specifying causal pathways between religiousness and mental and physical health. Fig. 5.1 shows a simplified, adapted version of the model applicable to Western religions (i.e., Christianity, Judaism, and Islam) and presenting positive mental health as the outcome variable. Second is MacDonald's (2009) bio-social-psychological model (see Fig. 5.2), which was devised using the comprehensive, five-dimensional measurement model of spirituality that was developed by MacDonald (2000a, b). In particular, after a survey of available theory and research to identify what correlates with and contributes to each of the five dimensions, MacDonald suggested that the dimensions could be configured to create a directional causal model that starts with social (religiousness) and biological (spiritual experience) determinants, which in turn influence psychological development and ultimately well-being. Finally, VanderWeele's (2017) human flourishing theory (see Fig. 5.3) is a model of overall well-being in which well-being (which he uses synonymously with the term *flourishing*) is defined as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good… [because the person is] doing or being well in the following five broad domains of human life: (i) happiness and life satisfaction; (ii) health, both mental and physical; (iii) meaning and purpose; (iv) character and virtue; and (v) close social relationships" (p. 8149). (Since then, a sixth domain has been added—financial and material stability [Gallup, 2021].) VanderWeele's (2017) theory highlights four major causal pathways to these six facets of well-being: family, work, education, and religion/spirituality. VanderWeele (2017) derived this theory through a rigorous review of the longitudinal, experimental, and quasi-experimental literature, and he and Gallup (2021) have developed and refined a well-validated, cross-culturally applicable measure of it—the Global Flourishing Study Questionnaire (Gallup, 2021).

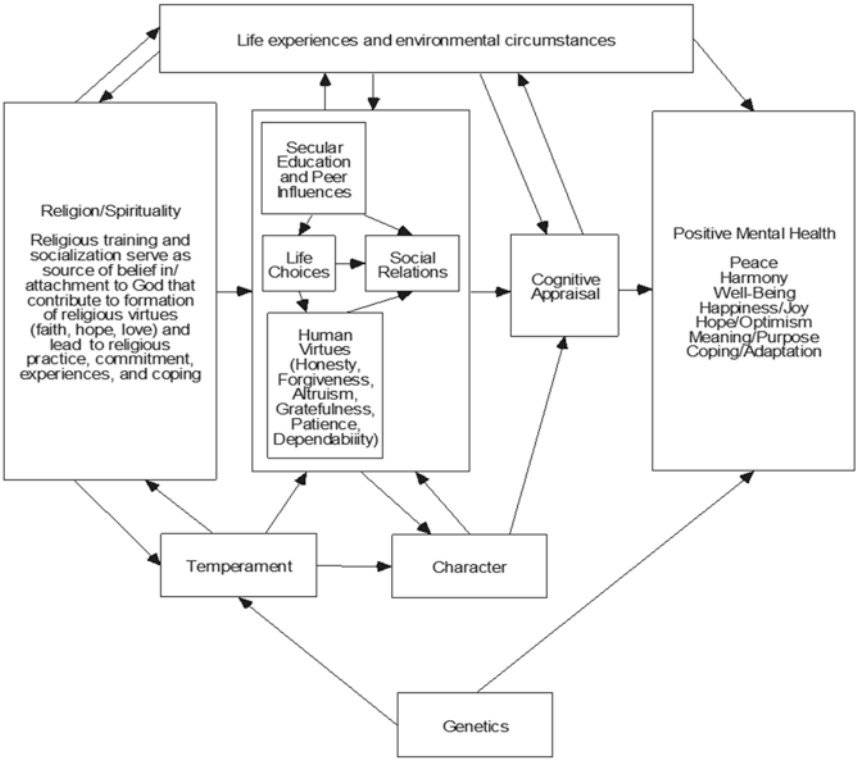


**Fig. 5.1** A simplified version of Koenig's (2012) model of religiousness and positive mental health *Note.* **Figure adapted from Koenig et al. (2012). This figure shows Koenig's model based on Western religious traditions. There are separate models based on Eastern religious and Secular Humanist traditions. All three models in their full forms can be found in Koenig et al. (2012)**

In each of these three models, there are some appealing features worth mentioning. For instance, each of these theories: (a) is copasetic with naturalistic science (e.g., their variables, mechanisms, and outcomes are construed in ways that do not require the use of nebulous or metaphysically loaded concepts that are difficult to define and measure with precision; Park & Paloutzian, 2021), (b) takes culture and cultural differences into consideration with respect to how the models operate and/or apply to different populations (Gallup, 2021; Koenig, 2012; Koenig et al., 2012; MacDonald et al., 2015; VanderWeele, 2017), and (c) is testable via the use of well-validated assessment tools (Gallup, 2021; MacDonald, 2000a, b; VanderWeele, 2017). At the same time, each model offers a unique approach to the study of religiousness, spirituality, and health/well-being. For instance, Koenig's model focuses specifically on religiousness and incorporates biological, psychological, social, and environmental influences and dynamics. By comparison, MacDonald's model is domain-specific. Its variables have been characterized as defining the content

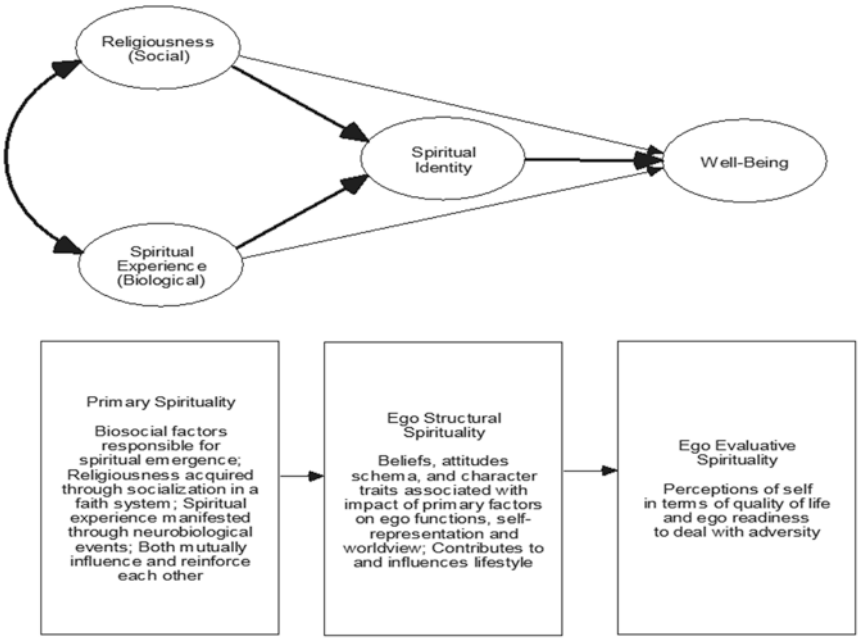


**Fig. 5.2** A visual depiction of MacDonald's (2009) bio-social-psychological model of spirituality and well-being

*Note.* **Figure adapted from MacDonald (2009). The top part of the figure shows a directional structural model, with the thick-lined arrows denoting the main directional pathways. The bottom part of the figure provides an alternative and more theory-informed version of the model**

domain of spirituality as unique from other functional domains, and the model's biological, social, and psychological components are construed as being embedded in the variables themselves. Last, VanderWeele's model is inclusive of many broad domains of human functioning and well-being (e.g., social, religious, spiritual, physical, psychological, and financial/material), has been developed and refined through rigorous empirical and cross-cultural research, and incorporates religiousness and spirituality as key contributors to overall flourishing and well-being.

## Conclusion

For the past few decades, shared interest in religiousness, spirituality, health, and well-being has been growing in both the positive psychology and psychology of religion and spirituality fields. Given the state of the science, it appears that both subdisciplines have a lot to gain through the formalization of a positive psychology of religion and spirituality (see Davis et al., Chap. 31, this volume). It is hoped that

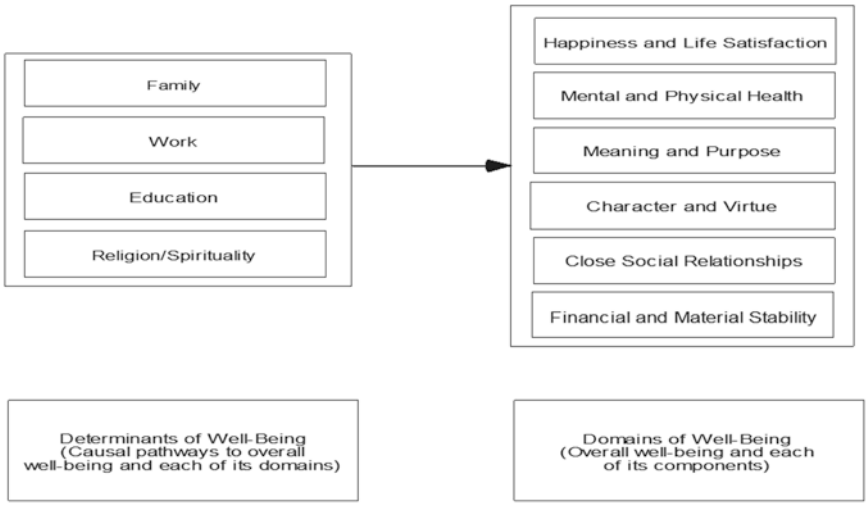


**Fig. 5.3** VanderWeele's (2017) theory of human flourishing (well-being)
*Note.* **VanderWeele's (2017) human flourishing theory is a model in which well-being (seen as synonymous with *flourishing*) is defined as "a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good" (VanderWeele, 2017, p. 8149). Specifically, the person is "doing or being well in the following [six] broad domains of human life: (i) happiness and life satisfaction; (ii) health, both mental and physical; (iii) meaning and purpose; (iv) character and virtue; … (v) close social relationships [and (vi) financial and material stability]" (VanderWeele, 2017, p. 8149; see also Gallup, 2021). Each of these domains is theorized as being desired universally (i.e., they are applicable to all cultures), and as typically serving as an end in itself. There are four main determinants of overall well-being and its facets (domains): family, work, education, and religion/spirituality (Gallup, 2021; VanderWeele, 2017)**

the theories and models discussed in this chapter aid in facilitating new developments in research, practice, policymaking, and public health.

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# Chapter 6
# Meaning as a Framework for Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religiousness and Spirituality


**Crystal L. Park and Daryl R. Van Tongeren**

Psychological science often reflects the contemporary trends and currents of culture. Two prominent subfields within psychology—positive psychology (PP) and the psychology of religiousness and spirituality (PRS)—appear especially relevant at this historical and cultural inflection point. The search for a deeper sense of mooring and a more authentic life is a persistent theme in human nature (Bland, 2020). Because PP and PRS are substantially invested in understanding meaningful human experience (Kim-Prieto, 2014), each may hold answers to this prevailing search for meaning. PP aims to highlight and capitalize on the strengths of individuals and communities to promote well-being, and PRS provides a critical perspective on individuals as they seek meaning and transcendent connection. The need for increased collaboration between researchers in these subfields (to integrate their respective bodies of knowledge) is clear (see Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume). Synergistic collaboration can propel both subfields forward, generate actionable advances in knowledge, and address pressing existential questions that could improve the human condition.

Unfortunately, to date, little collaborative research has brought the knowledge and perspectives of these two subfields together. In this chapter, we propose to apply a meaning systems framework to help integrate these subfields. Because both emphasize many meaning-relevant aspects in their theories and empirical work, meaning provides a unifying scaffolding. This chapter uses a global meaning framework to review the contemporary conceptual and empirical work on meaning in both areas, allowing us to identify convergences and divergences between the two subdisciplines, as well as promising opportunities for future cross-pollination.

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## Bringing PP and PRS Together: A Meaning-Focused Approach

By definition, PP focuses primarily on positive aspects of psychology (Schnitker et al., 2017), and from its founding, PP has been especially focused on applications, with the special emphasis on promoting well-being. PP's focus on the "positive" features of human functioning inherently narrows its areas of potential intersection with other fields. By comparison, PRS has generally been open to both positive and negative aspects of psychological phenomena. For example, Allport and his colleagues (Allport & Ross, 1967) sought to identify which aspects of religiousness promoted versus protected against prejudice. Taken together, these two subfields of psychology—PP and PRS—are quite distinct, yet they clearly overlap in many ways.

To bring them together, we consider these two subfields using the model of global meaning as a unifying framework. Meaning plays a central role in both PP and PRS (see Davis et al., Chap. 1, this volume), so it provides a natural bridge to integrate these complementary but largely separate subdisciplines. Meaning has been conceptualized as the constellation of an individuals' *general orienting systems*—the frameworks of knowledge and motivation through which people understand and navigate their lives (Park, 2010). Although there are undoubtedly cultural variations in the expression of orienting systems, meaning systems consist of three distinct aspects—beliefs, goals and values, and the subjective sense of meaning in life. *Global beliefs* are individuals' fundamental views of the world and other people and their identity in that world. *Global goals* are individuals' unique hierarchies of motives and values. The extent to which people feel their experiences are congruent with their global beliefs and goals gives rise to their *subjective sense of meaning in life* (see Park, 2010). In the sections below, we use this global meaning framework to compare and contrast the approaches of PP and PRS, including the topics, methods, and applications of their work.

We organize our chapter around three primary areas of overlap: content, methods, and applications. First, we discuss the meaning-related topics of study in both PP and PRS, explaining how each subfield approaches that area of inquiry and how each perspective is both similar and unique. Next, we discuss the various methods that PP and PRS researchers use to study meaning. Finally, we review applications of meaning-based research in PP and PRS, highlighting areas of convergence.

## Major Meaning-Related Topics of Study in PP and PRS

### *Beliefs*

PP tends to focus on people's beliefs about themselves and their (earthly) futures. In PP, two core beliefs that are often studied are optimism and growth mindset. Optimism refers to generalized positive expectancies (Scheier & Carver, 2018), and

it has been associated with a myriad of mental and physical health benefits, including lower depression, anxiety, and stress, as well as lower rates of cardiovascular disease and even mortality (for review, see Scheier & Carver, 2018). Growth mindset refers to the belief that individuals' abilities can be developed (versus the belief that these abilities are fixed; Yeager & Dweck 2020). Although initially focused on intellectual abilities, the study of growth- versus fixed-mindset beliefs has encompassed other domains, including health habits and interpersonal skills. Research has demonstrated generally favorable effects that stronger growth-mindset beliefs have on a wide range of academic outcomes and well-being indices (Yeager & Dweck, 2020).

Within PRS, conceptualizations of religiousness often highlight the importance of beliefs in differentiating religious from nonreligious individuals (and religious individuals who ascribe to different religions). PRS also frequently examines how people's religious beliefs affect various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral processes. In PRS, studies of belief tend to focus on people's metaphysical beliefs (e.g., existence and nature of God or the afterlife; Jong et al., 2019) and beliefs about God's role in their daily lives (Wilt et al., 2017). Religious beliefs have been studied explicitly (e.g., whether people endorse belief in God) and implicitly (e.g., God-related IAT, intuitive mindset; Park & Carney, 2021). Some research has been conducted on religious beliefs about suffering and God's role in it (Hale-Smith et al., 2012). However, although beliefs are considered central to religiousness, they have been studied relatively seldomly (Park, 2020).

### *Cognitive Processing*

Relative to cognitions (beliefs) themselves, cognitive processing has not been a large focus of PP research. PP has paid relatively little attention to how people process information. One relevant line of research within PP is the *broaden-and-build theory*, which avers that positive emotions can influence thinking processes (Frederickson, 2001). One aspect of this theory maintains that individuals' thought–action repertoires can be broadened through positive emotions (resulting, for example, from play or exploration). Through this broadening, individuals can discover novel and creative ideas, actions, and social ties, thereby building their tangible, social, psychological, and spiritual resources. These personal resources can serve as reserves on which individuals can later draw to enhance their coping and well-being (see Van Cappellen et al., Chap. 20, this volume).

Within PRS, the cognitive science of religion subfield has highlighted many aspects of cognitive processes and how religious meaning operates within these processes (White, 2021). For example, Pyysiäinen (2013) and Davis et al. (2021) have described how the two parallel processing systems—sometimes referred to as intuitive and reflective (or systems 1 and 2; Stanovich et al., 2014)—may support different types of religious and nonreligious thinking. Some research has suggested religious beliefs are positively associated with intuitive/irrational thinking and inversely associated with rational thinking (Pennycook et al., 2016).